



The Doctor's
Life
Support
3

Daily Devotional Readings
January to December



The Doctor's
Life
Support
3



The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart -1
- Samuel 16 : 7b

Teach me your way O LORD and I will walk in your truth. Give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name
- Psalm 86 : 11



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Introduction

Do you want to stay tuned in to God while you're on the run at work?

Is your life so governed by the urgent that you seem to have little time to see what is important, and rearrange your priorities?

This third edition of Doctor's Life Support is specifically designed to help you.

It is conveniently pocket-sized with a one page reading for each day.

It has been written by Christians in Healthcare from all over the world seeking to discern how Scripture speaks to us in today's healthcare scene.

Each reading begins with a verse from Scripture and contains the author's reflections on the theme for the day drawn from personal experience. Suggestions for daily practical application of Scripture are given.

It is a good example of what John Stott called 'Dual Listening' – to have the Bible in one hand and a newspaper (perhaps blog post or podcast today!) in the other, so that we may listen carefully to Scripture and to the world.

In this way our regular medical work can be both inspired and informed by Scripture.

I warmly commend it to you.

Kevin Vaughan
Chairman, ICMDA

Preface

Words come cheap these days and of the writing of books and devotionals there is no end. So why another? DLS has been a valuable resource for doctors over the years and it was time for another one. Many have attested to the inspiration that past volumes have been. DLS is unique in that all the articles are written by doctors. It takes one doctor to understand another.

Many of the articles are from patient encounters. Some are the result of pain endured in the crucible of life while others express the joy in serving Christ and humanity. A few are the result of engaging the Bible and others deal with their personal experience of God. All are based on the Holy Bible, which provides comfort on the one hand and challenge on the other. We pray that those who read will find solace in the Shepherd of our souls, be transformed in their walk with God and be strengthened to serve others.

Consistent with the digital age, the people who worked on this volume constitute a virtual team. We acknowledge Dr. Vinod Shah who constantly encouraged us. We owe a debt of gratitude to Sarah David in the ICMODA Office who applied herself to the task with quiet efficiency. Thanks to John Martin for his editorial assistance and to all the contributors for their time, effort and skill in helping to produce DLS 3.

Finally all thanks to God who has given us the privilege of serving Him. To Him alone be glory.

Abraham Ninan
Saskatoon, SK., Canada

Foreword

“Your Word is a lamp unto my, feet and a light unto my path.”
Psalms 119:105

Lamp for the feet, sheds light for our steps; the details of our life. The light unto the path gives us the overall direction to our life. In other words, the word helps us micro-manage as well as macro-manage our lives.

We were surprised by the number of people who know of ICMDA through the Doctor's life support. Sometimes, it is the only thing they know about ICMDA. We therefore decided that this was satisfying a real need and further publications along this line were needed.

We have a meal and we have snacks, we need both. Even when we miss a meal, we can manage for a while with snacks. This Doctor's life support is meant to be a snack. It is not meant to substitute for a regular and a methodical reading of the Bible.

An attempt has been made in this new version of the DLS 3 to make it more “health specific.” However, since health cannot be compartmentalized, this is not a strict phenomenon.

Three of us were responsible for editing this whole 12 month DLS 3. Sarah David anchored the work and edited it for the period July to December with help from Telma. January to June was mainly edited by Joyce Ponnaiya again with help from Telma. Vinod Shah played a secondary role in both the efforts. Joel Jashwanth Kumar played an important role in editing and formatting it. Mr. Subramani, the designer was chiefly responsible for converting it to a printable format.

We also would need to thank two others: John Martin who helped compile a lot of the articles from the UK which happen to be the majority. We also needed to thank Abe Ninan who contributed prolifically. Obviously, our thanks also goes to all who contributed to this whole edition of DLS 3.

The inserts between the months, are life stories of people who made a difference in their times and is intended as encouragement and inspiration for us to be committed in our calling as doctors and caregivers. There is also a page for gleanings, to note one-line learnings for the day.

It is our prayer that this will be a refreshing snack for all those who are racing against time each day.

Vinod Shah
Joyce Ponnaiya
Sarah David

Acknowledgements

The editors are grateful to all those who helped in the production of this devotional. *No less than 110 authors from 26 countries have participated.*

The Doctors Life Support was initiated by Dr. John and Dr. Alethea Reader of the ICMDA and it has been carried further by other leaders, men of God who took their place at ICMDA.

We thank all the authors who contributed devotional articles. Many have written from their life experiences and their walk with the Lord.

We thank Dr. Kevin Vaughan, Chairman, ICMDA for writing the introduction.

We thank Dr. John Martin of CMF, UK, has been very supportive throughout and helped collect writings from the UK.

We thank Debbie Skeil, Sudha K Das, and Beulah Chandrashekar, for helping with checking, Sub Editors Joel Jashwanth Kumar, Telma Pearson, Cover Design Darren Southworth, and Page Design Mr. Subramani for their contributions towards this devotional book.

JANUARY 1

A New Year

“He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making all things new!” Then He said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

Revelation 21:5

Each New Year in our lives is an opportunity to take stock of who we are, what we are and where we are going. It is a time when we can set right the mistakes of the past year, and adjust the course of our onward journey, in the light of God’s will for our lives. It is a time for change and renewal. This poem by Alfred Lord Tennyson reminds us that this is a time to rededicate ourselves and to turn our gaze from the past to the future.

Ring out, wild bells

1. Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,
 The flying cloud, the frosty light:
 The year is dying in the night;
 Ring out, wild bells and let him die.
2. Ring out the old, ring in the new,
 Ring happy bells, across the snow:
 The year is going, let him go;
 Ring out the false, ring in the true.

3. Ring out the grief that saps the mind,
 For those that here we see no more;
 Ring out the feud of rich and poor;
 Ring in redress to all mankind.
4. Ring out a slowly dying cause,
 And ancient forms of party strife;
 Ring in the nobler modes of life
 With sweeter manners, purer laws.
5. Ring out the care, the want, the sin,
 The faithless coldness of the times;
 Ring out, ring out, my mournful rhymes
 But ring the fuller minstrel in.
6. Ring out false pride in place and blood,
 The civic slander and the spite;
 Ring in the love of truth and right,
 Ring in the common love of good.
7. Ring out old shapes of foul disease;
 Ring out the narrowing lust of gold;
 Ring out the thousand wars of old,
 Ring in the thousand years of peace.
8. Ring in the valiant man and free,
 The larger heart, the kindlier hand;
 Ring out the darkness in the land,
 Ring in the Christ that is to be.

Prayer: God use us to bring in the changes you desire. Amen.

JPO

JANUARY 2

Rejoice in The Lord – Worship, Wonder and Delight

*“Rejoice in the Lord always
and again I say rejoice.”*

Philippians 4:4

One of the key questions in spiritual counselling is, “What sort of God do you worship?” Some people view God as a critical ogre – more to be feared than loved. One patient after he encountered Alcoholics Anonymous said that for him the Higher Power was now, “More loving and more mysterious.” What a great step forward!

Paul, as Saul the Pharisee, knew of God as the creator and sustainer of the world. He also knew God as

the God of his fathers, of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The God of promise who showed himself to Moses in the burning bush and on Mount Sinai. This was the God of the Law, which Paul kept to the letter. In that regard, Paul looked back and saw himself as blameless. Saul thought he was serving God more deeply by approving the stoning of Stephen and by persecuting the church. How wrong was he! It took a confrontation with the Risen Christ on the road to Damascus to discover his sin and how far he was from pleasing God. From then on Paul saw himself as the chief of sinners, yet touched by God’s grace and given the task of proclaiming the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles.

What sort of God did he delight in? The God who came in the person of Jesus Christ, who left the splendor of heaven, humbled himself to the form of a servant, became obedient to death, even death on the cross. This Jesus has now been highly exalted and given a name above every name. He will come in glory and every knee will bow to him and acknowledge the servant as King. Further, this God is active in calling on His people to promote the story of the Christ so that all may acknowledge Him as the Lord and serve Him in the same way as He served us.

The story of Jesus Christ is an awesome story worth telling and retelling. It is a story worth rejoicing in because sinners are transformed by this gospel of grace and when Paul sees that transformation in the lives of his beloved Philippians, he rejoices.

Reflection: What sort of God do we worship? Do we need to reflect again on the life of Christ as a corrective for our understanding of the Father?

Further Reading: The whole book of Philippians.

AG

JANUARY 3

Rejoice in All Circumstances

*“Rejoice in the Lord always
and again I say rejoice.”
Philippians 4:4*

Philippians is a very rejoicing letter. This may be surprising, considering the author was in prison for the sake of the Gospel. However, Paul says, his adverse circumstances have enhanced, not stifled the spread of the Good News of Jesus Christ (1:12), and that is worth the discomfort of being in prison. Paul is very confident that God does not make mistakes and that God is in charge

of his circumstances. It would not be the first time he was in jail. Acts 16:25 describes Paul and Silas praying and singing hymns at midnight in the jail. This contrasts with Jesus’ disciples in the boat in the storm (Mark 4:35-41). They rightly worried that the storm might overwhelm them but Jesus rebuked them for their lack of faith. In this letter, Paul expresses confidence that God is in charge of his life and that his circumstances are in God’s hands. Later prison epistles may not quite carry the same optimism Paul showed here, but his exhortation to rejoice is worth listening to.

As Christian health practitioners, we see more adversity than the rest of the population. Things do not always turn out well for us or for our patients. This can also be unsettling for those looking after these patients and for the patients themselves. Christian clinicians can be confident in God that whatever the circumstances, God’s presence and comfort means that He is in control and that all things will work out for good (Rom 8:28).

Paul also rejoices in his Philippian brothers and sisters. Every time he prays about them, he prays with joy, because they have received the good news of Jesus joyfully and they continue to share in the Gospel of God from the first time they heard it until now (1:5). This gives Paul confidence that God who has begun the good work in them will bring that to completion on the day of Jesus Christ.

Reflection: There is great joy in seeing the Gospel spread throughout the world – even when it is costly personally.

Further Reading: The whole book of Philippians – especially the first chapter.

Prayer: Lord, use me to share your good news in the same way you sacrificed yourself for my sake. Let me praise you in all circumstances, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

AG

JANUARY 4

Rejoice in The Lord – Ethics

“Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice.”

Philippians 4:4

Medical and dental students are taught consequentialist ethics, based on the obvious point that actions have good or bad consequences. Some ethicists prefer the terms “good” and “less good” to emphasize that ethics is often a choice between shades of grey rather than black or white. There is still concern about what defines ‘good’. Christians tend to gravitate towards deontology, which calls on us to do what is intrinsically right because that is the right thing to do. Good and bad or good and less good are regarded as self-evident, as the United States Declaration of Independence proclaims; although, for a Christian, God’s law helps to define the good however the law never saved. In fact, according to the law, all humans stand condemned for having failed.

Christians are even more drawn to the dimension of “virtue ethics,” ethics that arises out of a person’s character, an ethic from within. However, even here conscious of our own shortcomings, we stand before God tainted and ashamed. The Christian Gospel, however, is good news for sinners, for it proclaims the love of God in Christ for those conscious of their sin and shame. The gospel declares that God in Christ came into this world in humility and obedience and suffered there with us and for us. He triumphed over the forces of evil and showed us a new way to live. Christian ethics is a response of love to the richness and fullness of the gospel. Christian ethics calls us to live in the divine love and to emulate Christ who died for us. It further speaks of the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit to help us live for him within the community of his body, the church, serving the world to the glory of God.

In the book of Philippians, Paul rejoices because his hearers have heard and responded to this gospel of grace and are sharing this gospel. Paul is confident that this God who has touched their lives will complete what he has started and that one day they will stand together glorifying the Christ who came in humility and who will come again in glory. That is why Paul rejoices in the Lord.

Reflection: The riches of God’s grace in Christ motivating us to share that grace by word and deed.

Further Reading: The whole book of Philippians reflecting on the sort of life we are asked to lead.

AG

JANUARY 5

Rejoice in the Lord – Social imaginaries

“Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice.”

Philippians 4:4

What sort of world do we as medical clinicians inhabit? We have been deeply influenced by our history. For those in the West this includes the scientific revolutions that profoundly influence the way we see the world and therefore the way we practice our medical craft. When the laws of physics were being developed our forebears were delighted by the order they displayed in our world. We could follow the mind of God by discovering his laws. Mechanism and rationalism ruled, but there was something dissatisfying about seeing the universe as a giant clockwork mechanism ruled by disengaged reason. Romantics reacted by pointing to the wonder of nature and how that spoke intuitively to us about the beauty of the world. With the development of evolutionary theory, we see a further development. Basing the theory on “survival of the fittest” and on “change by chance”, the world has become for many a frightening place of meaningless disorder and aggressive triumph of the strong over the weak. Even Christians have developed a social imagery in which God is remote from his world. Our patients can be seen as either a mechanism that needs fixing or a meaningless product of random forces in the world.

Paul in the book of Philippians is confident in the God whom he so dramatically encountered on the road to Damascus, who intervened in the lives of his Philippian readers. The Lord was working out his purposes in Paul’s own life and in the lives of his readers and that is why being imprisoned did not dishearten him. God is in control of his life and his imprisonment has worked to spread the gospel, so he urges his readers not to lose heart. God will work out his inscrutable purposes and therefore they can rejoice in Him. Whatever happens, in little or in plenty, Paul relies on God who strengthens him. Paul’s imaginary is a deeply personal one in which God is active in his life and the lives of his readers and in the world at large, so he can rejoice and he urges his readers to do the same. Can we follow Paul’s example and exhortation? Can we see the world the way Paul sees the world?

Reflection: We live in a personal world created out of divine love that affects our clinical practice.

Further Reading: The book of Philippians to understand the personal worldview Paul describes here.

AG

JANUARY 6

First Things First

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be given to you as well.”

Matthew 6:33

“First Things First” is a common English phrase. Today the 3M’s -mobile, mail and meetings take control of our already crowded lives. We are pulled into the “tyranny of the urgent” from the moment we wake up.

Mark 1:25 informs us that Jesus got up very early in the morning for a personal quiet time to seek God’s priorities for his day. Jesus had a close personal relationship with the Father and knew what His father wanted. Yet Jesus took

fresh direction on an everyday basis. This consistent daily action equipped, enabled and strengthened him to complete a mammoth task in three years. What better example do we need to guide us?

We need to “On Purpose” make the time for this to be our first priority. Saying “Yes” to one thing automatically means saying “No” to another thing. Do not be enslaved by digital devices, they can be addictive. Ask God to enable you to develop a “tubular” hearing to pray and seek God’s direction for the day and the tasks ahead.

Consider God’s “Top 10” of which the very first is to put God first and to love Him with all of our heart, soul and spirit. Another way to spell Love is Time. We always make time for that / those we love no matter how busy we are. Time is our most valuable currency. Invest wisely and receive life-long dividends for yourself and all your descendants. We are all gifted with 24 hours each day. Choose and spend wisely!

If you are not set this way yet, please consider a “Reset” of your life priorities to get started right. Enjoy His power, presence, peace and provision at your point of need throughout the day and a new fresh infusion awaits you each day of your life.

Psalm 127:1 says, “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain.”

Start right and be directed by God. Just ask and you WILL receive!

Reflection: What are the hindrances to a regular quiet time with God? How can I deal with these?

Further Reading: Jude: 1:20-21.

MM

JANUARY 7

Lessons from The Vine Tree

“I am the vine; you are the branches.”

John 15:5

John 15 contains some of Christ’s last words before going to the cross. In it, Jesus compares Himself to a vine tree with his disciples being the branches. Just as the branch remains in the vine, so we must abide in Christ in order to bear fruit. There are some additional lessons that we can learn from this chapter.

The first lesson relates to purpose, the vine is a rather fragile and unassuming type of tree. It is not known for pretty leaves or beautiful flowers. Both its beauty and utility are directed towards its bearing fruit. This fruit, in turn, is the source of wine that “makes glad the heart of man.” Hence, the purpose of Jesus as the vine and we as His branches is not to look pretty, but to produce fruit. Without fruit, we are of no use.

Secondly, note that the grapes grow on the branches and not on the stem. Primarily, this means that God uses to bless the world is His followers. To use another metaphor, we are His hands and feet. Secondly, the fruit does not serve either the tree or the branches. Grapes are meant for eating and for making wine. Eating grapes, drinking wine – this tells us that we exist to benefit others.

Finally, Jesus the vine and we the branches together produce fruit. It is a co-operative effort, but the ultimate source of life of the branches is the vine. Therefore, if we are to bear fruit, we need to abide in the vine. The branch cannot bear fruit of itself, detached from the vine.

In short, a disciple is someone with a purpose who abides in Christ in total dependence, bearing fruit and spending his / her life for others.

Reflection: How does my life reflect this teaching of Christ?

Further Reading: John 15 meditatively.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, enable me to abide in you so that I can bear much fruit towards the establishment of your kingdom, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

AN

JANUARY 8

Study the Word

“Study and be eager and do your utmost to present yourself to God approved (tested by trial), a workman who has no cause to be ashamed, correctly analyzing and accurately dividing [rightly handling] and skillfully teaching the Word of Truth.”

2 Timothy 2:15

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

2 Timothy 3:16

where the speaker challenged us: ‘Many of you are studying for degrees, but you are doing elementary-level Bible studies’. I do not remember much about many of the other meetings I attended that year, but these words remained with me. The Bible makes it clear that our faith is not a passive process where we simply sit in church, hear good sermons and ‘receive’ from God; rather, we must work to understand and correctly apply the Word of God to all situations. If you are a medical student or a junior doctor, God has given you a sharp and able mind. We must use these abilities for God’s glory and this includes regular focused Bible study. In the words of hymn writer Frances Havergal, ‘Take my intellect and use every power as thou shalt choose.’

Further Reading: Psalm 119: 105-112.

Prayer: Lord, please use me to explain your truth to others, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

In the letters from the Apostle Paul to his younger disciple Timothy, he was eager to ensure Timothy reached spiritual maturity and was trained and equipped to continue the gospel ministry after his (Paul’s) death. This was a priority which required dedication: ‘No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer’ (2 Tim 2:4). Furthermore, Paul was eager that Timothy should not allow his youth to bring his ministry into question: ‘don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity’ (1Tim 4:12). All Christians should seek to be like Timothy in their generation, regardless of whether they are new converts or have been believers for many years.

I remember being at a meeting of our University Christian Union

CW

JANUARY 9

God First Above All

“You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you in a dry and parched land where there is no water.... Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands... On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night. Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. I cling to you; your right hand upholds me.”

Psalm 63:1, 3–5

Life can get busy. There can be many competing responsibilities, commitments, relationships and at times, pressures. How do you respond? Do you ever feel overwhelmed as though there are simply not enough hours in a day? Do you try to do everything or do you make positive choices to let some things drop? Do you put your head in the sand and hope that things will somehow work out? When life feels very full, it can be tempting to squeeze out the things of God. It can be easy to forget that ‘your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.’ (Matthew 6:6).

Here, the response of the Psalmist was very different – his soul longed for God as strongly as one might experience thirst in a desert. This echoes the ‘craving’ for ‘pure spiritual milk’ described by the Apostle Peter that anybody who has spent time with a hungry new-born

knows how desperate they become when hungry! Do you have that yearning within you for the things of God? Jesus, quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, reminds us that ‘man shall not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’

Martin Luther is quoted as having said, “I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer”. Rather than being inspirational, this can be discouraging, as it seems so impossible for us to find that amount of time, but the principle should encourage us: when life seems so full that you can barely think clearly, our first priority should be to commit everything to God and seek to live lives that honor Him in everything, including how we use our time and how we respond to our current pressures.

Further Reading: Psalm 42: 1-2.

Prayer: Lord, help me to put You first above all things and to long for spiritual nourishment even above my physical needs, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

CW

JANUARY 10

Learning to Trust God

“Though the fig-tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord.”

Habakkuk 3:17-18

There are times when life seems particularly hard, when circumstances can appear overwhelming. We feel let down – cornered and trapped perhaps when we forget that God is sovereign, our courage fails us. And no one is around to offer a lifeline.

The Bible gives us examples where God transformed perplexing and seemingly impossible situations. One such is found in Exodus chapters 12-14.

Under the leadership of Moses, God’s people had been released from decades of slavery in Egypt under Pharaoh’s harsh regime. However, the route away from Egypt was not, humanly speaking, the easy option. Moses led them into the desert towards the Red Sea. Then, horror of horrors, Pharaoh and his huge army began to pursue them. They were trapped and faced certain death or capture. The people were quick to blame Moses, their leader, despite having seen all the miracles that Moses performed at God’s command.

I imagine Moses was equally scared and bewildered. Why had this happened? He thought he was following God’s leading; Moses managed to find the right words to say. It must have taken much courage to say what he did.

In our own lives, we encounter situations when we feel that we are alone and helpless, even though we are seeking to do His will. We feel that we are unjustly accused and that God seems unresponsive to our cries for help. Yet the words Moses spoke hundreds of years ago can calm us down. ‘The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.’ We need to learn and experience that God is in control.

Further Reading: Exodus 14: 13-14.

Prayer: Lord, help me to remember that you will fight for me and all I need to do is be still trusting you, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

AP

JANUARY 11

Faith

“Does Job fear God for nothing?” Satan replied. “.....but now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.”

Job 1

Altruism is defined in the Oxford dictionary as the belief in or practice of disinterested and selfless concern for the well-being of others. When the apostle John in his letter says “God is love” he is saying that God does not need a reason to love. Love is in His DNA. This is Agape Love.

In the story of Job, the issue that the devil raises with God is that Job’s relationship with God is not altruistic. It is based on what God

offers him. If God was not protecting him and providing for him he would abandon Him in an instant.

As health workers, we live in a sphere of suffering; one would say we live off the suffering of others. What would happen if there were no diseases to treat? Would we become redundant? Yet as Christians, we must believe in a caring and almighty God who not only cares for our patients but for us too. We need to have confidence that He will continue to keep us active and useful in His service. We need to be confident that God will continue to provide for us whatever may lie ahead.

The quality of care we give is often based on the provision we get. It therefore takes faith in God to continue giving a caring service of quality despite the suffering we may undergo either by way of salary or in our own inadequacies. Our service should be based on our faith in God who cares for us no matter what and not on what we may get from him because that is secondary.

Further Reading: Hebrews 13:5.

Prayer: Lord, keep our lives free from the love of money and help us to be content with we have, because you have assured us that you will leave us and will never forsake us, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

DO

JANUARY 12

Vision

“Give your servant success today.”

Nehemiah 1:11

The book of Nehemiah presents the life of a leader with extraordinary qualities. One of the main characteristics of Nehemiah that led him to undertake a successful project was his vision. Every leader must begin their service with a vision. “Without vision the people perish.”

What were the characteristics of his vision? Nehemiah 2:20 reads “The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it.” This verse shows us five characteristics of a successful vision.

1. A clear and specific vision. Nehemiah had a clear image of the walls of Jerusalem that had been broken down long ago and of people passing by the need without responding. The vision inspired Nehemiah to contribute to restoring the broken walls.
2. Commitment to the vision. He believed that God could use him. He dreamed of seeing the walls raised, He was involved completely, “we will rebuild.”
3. Involvement of others in the vision. He shared his vision and asked for help. Nehemiah 2:20 is written in plural. Many people were involved in carrying out the vision. He also called for support from the king, who asked the governors to provide materials (wood) for the work. He did not go alone but with an army. Successful projects involve other people.
4. A realistic assessment of the difficulties involved: Nehemiah recognized that this vision would have many obstacles and encounter “giants” on the way. He clearly told the opposition, “but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it.”
5. Confidence in God: Nehemiah believed in the vision and that God would give victory. “The God of heaven will give us success.” It was a vision with the support of God.

In conclusion: The vision was the motor that motivated Nehemiah to lift the fallen walls and nothing stopped him, so we ought to have a clear vision from God to carry out His projects and plans through our life so that God may be glorified in everything! Amen.

Further Reading: Psalm 32:8.

JP

JANUARY 13

Integrity 1

“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Mathew 5:48

In 1986, seventy-three seconds into flight, the space shuttle Challenger exploded taking the lives of seven people and frustrating the aspirations of a society that placed its hopes in man’s technological achievement. The spacecraft had over one million parts. On that cool January morning, one part did not perform as planned. An O-ring allowed hot gases to ignite the fuel tank. Disaster resulted.

Such are the risks of any complex system. The failure of one component can lead to failure of the entire system. The flawed O-ring had worked several times before hiding the danger and allowing engineers to gain too much confidence in their achievement, eventually, weaknesses have the habit of revealing themselves.

Therefore, it is with our lives; we have weaknesses of character that typically lie below the surface, hidden in the routines of life, bolstering our confidence and then something happens to stress that weakness and our façade is fractured.

I am amused when I read letters of reference for job candidates that describe “a person of high integrity.” Integrity cannot be quantified. It is either present or absent. Scripture teaches us the sad reality that no one’s life produces integrity. Consider these verses: “The heart is deceitful above all things” (Jeremiah 17:9) and “There is no one righteous, not even one” (Romans 3:10).

Yet, Jesus says to us “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). Here is our dilemma: we know that we cannot be perfect, but that is precisely what Jesus requires of us. The solution is in understanding that perfection (integrity) is not of us; it is a gift of God provided through the sacrificial work of the only One who is righteous. Integrity becomes ours as we accept that gift through faith in Jesus Christ.

Further Reading: Titus 2:6-7.

Prayer: Lord, we for perseverance in our search for integrity, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

GR

JANUARY 14

Integrity 2

“The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity.”

Proverbs 11:3

us cloaked in Christ’s righteousness. Then, we have a critical role to play in our character development in this life.

Gordon MacDonald said it well, “God is easy to please, but hard to satisfy.” Consider a father taking pleasure as his child takes her first steps. He takes great joy in the accomplishment, but he wishes much more for the child. Likewise, our Heavenly Father wants us to grow into the likeness of His Son. The incarnate Jesus was our example: “And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men.” (Luke 2:52)

Like the flaw in the Space Shuttle Challenger mentioned in Integrity 1, one sin can sabotage the process. 1 John 2:16 outlines our most common sins: “For everything in the world - the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does- comes not from the Father but from the world. “While all three: sex, money and pride, will tempt us to breach our integrity, pride is our greatest threat.

C.S. Lewis describes pride as:

- *The one vice from which no man is free.*
- *We loathe it in others while we rarely see it in ourselves.*
- *The more we have the more we hate it in others.*
- *It is the “utmost evil,” the “anti-god state of mind.”*

Further Reading: Isaiah 2:12-17.

Prayer: Lord, keep me away from arrogance and pride as I seek to do your will, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

GR

JANUARY 15

Integrity 3

“Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself without comparing himself to somebody else.”

Galatians 6:4

In Integrity 1 and Integrity 2, we saw that our integrity comes only as a gift from God. There is the initial work of God’s grace in salvation, and then there is the power of God working to conform us into the likeness of Christ. However, there is a danger, a particular sin most likely to sabotage this process - the sin of pride.

Pride is so subtle that we seldom recognize its hold on our lives. Pride fosters the conclusion that we are good enough or sufficient on our own- without need of God or others. Pride produces a greater sin than “rule breaking”- the sin of “rulemaking”.

To help identify and avoid this sin, we should become aware of how comparison gives rise to pride. Kierkegaard said, “... comparison is the worst of all seductions...it is the parasitic growth which takes vitality from the tree...the hidden worm which consumes in secret and does not die, at least not before it has taken the life out of love.”

We are prone to selectively comparing ourselves to others who seem less righteous. The delusion of “better than” and “good enough” begins to frame our self-assessment. Proverbs 16:18 rightly warns, “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.” (Remember the space shuttle disaster?) Galatians 6:4 teaches us, “Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else.”

In John 21, we see Jesus restoring His relationship with Peter, the very one who denied Him. But in that settling, Peter became preoccupied with what Jesus might do for John in the days ahead. Jesus’ admonition was, “what is that to you? You must follow me.” Similarly, we must take our eyes off the world, off others, off self, and steady our gaze on Christ. Therein, we find integrity.

Further Reading: James 1:16-17.

Prayer: Lord, enable me to gratefully recognize, the contribution of those who share in my ministry, and to be aware that you value them as you do me, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

GR

JANUARY 16

Excellence in Life and Work

“His (Joseph’s) master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord caused all that he did to prosper in his hands.”

Genesis 39:3

Excellence implies an outstanding expectation from our speech and actions. Achieving excellence is not a onetime affair but rather a continuous process that comes from refining ourselves each day in accordance with the word of God. Excellence in life will reflect in the way we work and relate with others. Aiming for excellence for selfish motives will only give short-term results and will fail to be a blessing for others. Our ultimate aim to excel should only be to glorify God both through our life and through work. Gaining excellence apart from Christ can result in making us proud of our achievements and making us self-righteous, which will only be an obstacle for us as well as others.

Being consistent in all situations is an important part of excellence. Joseph’s life can be taken as an example of consistent excellence both, in life and work even in the most unpleasant circumstances that he faced. When he worked as a slave in Egypt his excellence was noticed by his boss. Even when he was wrongly put in the prison, both the warden and other inmates noticed his consistent attitude to excellence. Finally, when he was elevated next to Pharaoh in Egypt, his desire to excel saved the lives of the people of Egypt as well as his entire family. Joseph’s desire to pursue excellence came from the fear of the God whom he acknowledged and served.

Everyday thousands of people come to our institutions for various healthcare needs. With God’s help, Christian mission hospitals stand as a testimony for excellence in medical training and patient care. Such a testimony could have only been made possible over the years by the consistent commitment of the founders and other pioneering workers to excel both in life and in work for the glory of God. Our institutions face new challenges every day and it is very easy to lose the vision of the gold standard of excellence laid by our pioneers. May God help each one of us to humble ourselves and ask Him for guidance through His son Jesus Christ, that we may stay focused to excel in life and in our place of work for His glory as we serve in His mission field.

Reflection: Can we excel in work without excelling in life? What should be the ultimate goal of our pursuit for excellence?

SH

JANUARY 17

Teach Us to

Pray

“And it came to pass, that, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, one of His disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.”

Luke 11:1

Prayer is an act of communicating with God. Prayer answers to Faith. Faith comes by hearing the Word. How do I know God wants me to have what I am asking for?

There are three key steps in prayer. Firstly, find scriptures that apply to your situation. Secondly, pray and receive by faith. Thirdly, make positive confessions that you have received what you asked for.

God’s will is His Word. Speak the Word! Keep the Faith! Teach us to Pray!

Moreover, this is the confidence that we have in him that, if we ask any thing according to His will He heareth us: (1 John 5:14). When you pray believe and receive by faith. Let the Word of God be the basis of your prayer life. May God hear your prayer and grant your supplication.

Therefore, I say unto you, what things so ever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. (Mar 11:24)

Making positive confessions is a key element in prayer. Your tongue is a powerful tool. You can change your world. Speak the Word! Keep the Faith! Teach us to Pray!

Thou shalt also decree a thing, and it shall be established unto thee: and the light shall shine upon thy ways. (Job 22:28)

God can only do for you what your words allow Him to do!

We come against the spirit of slumber by fire and force! You are a prayer warrior!

Speak the Word! Keep the Faith! Teach us to pray!

For verily I say unto you, that whosoever shall say unto this mountain, be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. (Mar 11:23)

Further Reading: James 5:13-16.

Prayer: Lord let your word teach me to walk in faith and teach me to pray, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

TN

JANUARY 18

Maintaining Faith in Our Medical Profession

*“(Jesus said to His Father)
They are not of the world,
even as I am not of it. As
you sent me into the world,
I have sent them into the
world.”* *John 16:16-18*

Some time ago, I gave a talk to a group of Christian medical doctors on the same subject as the title of this devotion. I made an analysis on the problems medical professionals face in their practice nowadays. I thought it was an appropriate analysis, but when I finished, I kept thinking over this subject and I realized that the critical analysis was not enough, I needed to think honestly about how to act, and this is the most important point to continue working without making the same mistakes that the system makes.

It is necessary to be able to understand how the culture works and specifically in the context of the professional place in which we have to work. Then we need to go beyond and make a profound and prayerful analysis of the Scriptures and the teachings and demands presented by Jesus.

We belong to a culture in which we have grown up and been educated, and of which we are a part. As mature Christians, we have to interact with the same system but with a different attitude to that culture, that is the great task of the Christian professional: “To be in the world, but not to belong to the world.” To say this more precisely and in setting the correct priorities, we are in the first place Christians and then health professionals. In first place, we have Christ in our life and that is why our way of getting closer to the world around us has to change - our sensibility to our neighbor, our desire to help the suffering, our values towards material goods, and management of time. We must commit to following the example and model of Jesus.

Our profession is a tool we have obtained by study: it is a call to which we have answered. It is God’s call - which is put into our hearts to serve our suffering neighbors. Our profession will be a service instrument in following our priorities. First of all, there will be love and engagement to God and to our neighbor, then a different and correct way of doing it.

Further Reading: Philippians 4:4-5.

Prayer: Dear Lord, I want to be a doctor who searches for excellence in his / her professional work, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

RZ

JANUARY 19

The Art of Practicing Medicine as Priesthood

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” 1 Peter 2:9

When I was a medical student, a professor said “Medicine is priesthood.” I understood this sentence at that moment as expressing compassion for the patient. Probably, this was what the professor also meant. Now, I understand this sentence has a much more profound meaning.

The word “priesthood” comes from the Latin “pontiff,” that is to say, “one who builds or creates bridges.” In this case, a metaphor that express that those bridges are ways to approach and assist our neighbor with sensibility and care. In the religious order, the “priesthood” is used with a sense of engagement with an integral vision. The same approach is to be assumed by the doctor and with the same interest, regardless of whether the patient is rich or poor.

In the Old Testament, we have a good example of the doctor’s dual function as a healer and as a priest. This was the role fulfilled by the Kohen, who was the village priest, who also had medical knowledge and authority as described in Leviticus 13. Kohen, doctor and priest, had to watch with two eyes: with one eye he saw impurity, illness and infection, but, with the other eye, he had to see, the healthy person with his healthy resources, his strength and potential to grow and become stronger.

King Charles IX of France, in the XVI century, hired a Christian surgeon, Ambroise Paré (considered the father of modern surgery). In personal conversation, the King said; “I suppose you’ll take better care of this King than of the poor,” “Impossible, Majesty” said the doctor. “Why?” asked the King, to which Paré answered: “because I have always taken care of the poor as if they were kings.”

Ernesto Sabato, an Argentinian writer and thinker, says in his last book “The Resistance”: “The central failure that medicine has suffered comes from the false philosophical basis of three centuries before, from the wrong separation between body and soul, the naive materialism which led to look for sickness in the somatic. Man isn’t only a physical object, soul deprived; he isn’t even a simple animal, but an animal that not only has soul but also a spirit.”

As Christian doctors, we might see our profession as also being priests, taking the responsibility to care for our patients in a very special, merciful and sacred way.

Further Reading: Luke 4:18. Jeremiah 33:6

RZ

JANUARY 20

Created in His Image

*“So God created mankind
in his own image.”*

Genesis 1:27

Consider your creator God. What does it mean to you that, “you have been created in His image?” As doctors, we have the privilege of caring for many patients. While some patients will follow the living Jesus, others will have different worldviews – yet all will have two things in common, each one will be suffering in some way and each one of them is made in the image of God.

As Christian doctors, we know that suffering is a consequence of human sin. When God created the world, and all that is in it, He looked at what He had made and declared it ‘very good’ (Genesis 1:31). However, just like Adam and Eve in the garden, all of us have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory (Romans 3:23), and the consequences of our sin is suffering and death (Romans 6:23). What is the cure? J.W.C. Wand in his book on *The Greek Doctors* (1950) quotes Athanasius, an early Church Father, “if you have a likeness painted on a panel and that likeness has been effaced by stains - to enable the portrait to be renewed on the same wood the original sitter must come once more.”

As we care for our patients, we need to remember that health is not just about the body or the mind. It is also about the heart and the spirit. Caring holistically for our patients does not mean we force our faith on them. It does mean we need to care for them in ways, which demonstrate God’s love in actions and words. We can also pray that each of our patients will encounter and come to know the original sitter in whose image they have been made.

Reflection: Luke 19:10, For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost.

Further Reading: Psalm 8.

Prayer: Restore to wholeness whatever is broken by human sin, in our lives, in our nation, and in the world. Hear us, Oh Lord of Life, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

RK

JANUARY 21

Encouragement

“Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means ‘Son of Encouragement’),...”

Acts 4:36

We meet so many people - patients, staff, colleagues and family who need encouragement. The dictionary definition is, “to inspire the spirit with hope, to spur on.” This was the great feature in the life of Barnabas. He encouraged the early Christians with his generous gift from the sale of a fruitful field in Cyprus, a land of abundance of wine, wheat, oil, figs, and honey.

We next read of him welcoming Saul [Paul] to the church in Jerusalem when they were suspicious of his amazing conversion; when the church leaders heard of many Gentiles turning to Christ in Antioch, whom should they send? Barnabas, of course!

“When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts” Acts 11:23. He then sought out Saul in Tarsus and encouraged him to be active in God’s service. When they both responded to God’s call to missionary service, they set out for Cyprus and Antioch of Pisidian. Saul became Paul and took the lead and Barnabas (‘a good man, full of faith and the Holy Spirit’) was willing to humbly take the second place. The people appealed to them “Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement, please speak;” so Paul preached the Good News. “I want you to know that through Jesus, forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.” (Acts 13:39).

When they set out on their next journey, Paul was unwilling to take Mark who had deserted them before. Barnabas, however, gave his nephew a second chance. His encouragement led to Mark being greatly used in the Lord’s service so that even Paul later refers to him “he is helpful to me in my ministry.” (2 Tim 4:11).

We read that Barnabas was filled with the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus described as “The Comforter” or “Encourager” or “The One called alongside to help”. As we draw on divine resources, we have the power to influence others.

Further Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:11.

Prayer: As we meet those going through tough times and are depressed, worried, fearful and anxious about the future, we pray that we will be like Barnabas and bring encouragement to many, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

AV

JANUARY 22

The Evangelical Quadrilateral

“This is a true saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”

1 Timothy 1:15

“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in him will not die but have everlasting life.”

John 3:16

David Bebbington, in an attempt to define the core aspects of Christianity, coined the phrase, “the evangelical quadrilateral.” The Christian is one who is committed to the Bible, finds their center in the cross, is concerned with conversion, and is an activist. The Christian accepts the Bible as the definitive revelation of God. Any alternate belief system, while containing some truths is, in the final analysis, incomplete.

Secondly, the cross, as the single most important event in all of history is a defining mark of Christianity. All past history leads to the cross and all events

beyond it look back to it. It speaks to the dire predicament of humankind and provides the remedy. Nothing other than the atoning death of Christ can save. The cross witnesses graphically, eloquently and powerfully to the love of God. It secures the victory of good over evil and of God over Satan.

The cross is of no value to the individual if one does not enter into a personal relationship with Christ. Conversion, marked by repentance and faith enlists us into the kingdom of God. As redeemed sinners, bearing testimony to the Bible, holding to the centrality of the cross, we are ready to actively participate in the work of God. We further the purposes of God in the cosmos by worship, good deeds and evangelism – all calculated to usher in the kingdom of God. This brings glory to God, which is, of course, the ultimate purpose of all creation.

Reflection: Are the challenges to Christian witness harder in the healing professions?

Further Reading: Acts 4:11-12, related articles and references in Wikipedia

Prayer: Personally, at the Cross, we have received much from thee; as we walk in the way of the Cross; help us to share the good news to one and all, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

AN

JANUARY 23

To Judge or Not To Judge?

*“Neither do I condemn you”...
John 8:11*

A young woman, whom I had never met before came trembling and anxious as an extra patient at the end of my evening clinic. She told me that two years previously she had casual sex resulting in pregnancy. She had felt she needed a completely fresh start and without telling any of her friends or family, she went to another town and had an abortion. Now, two years later, she could not sleep, could not do her work and felt so guilty. “What can you do for me, doctor?” she asked.

She already acknowledged her guilt and didn't need to be reminded that she was responsible for the consequences of her bad choices. I pointed towards her with my index finger and said that if there was a finger pointing at her because she was guilty, there were three fingers pointing back at me because I was in the same place. We spoke of Jesus teaching from the Sermon on the Mount that a man who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart and that an angry word may have the same root of sin as murder. I acknowledged that, by these standards, I had the heart of an adulterer and a murderer and needed forgiveness as much as she did.

She began to relax, stopped trembling and was keen to talk more. God gave opportunity to explain to her that she could truly put the past behind her and find a completely new start in Christ. After we prayed together, there was hope in her eyes and she left ready to face the future and resolved to lead a completely different life with God's help.

Reflection: How quick am I to judge my patients because so many of their problems are a result of their own bad choices? What would Jesus do?

Further Reading: John 8:1-11.

Prayer: Lord, teach us to see our patients as You would see them with eyes full of compassion, yearning to restore them in You, in Jesus' name, Amen.

KV

JANUARY 24

A Cheerful Heart is Good Medicine

*“A joyful heart is good
medicine, but a broken spirit
drains one’s strength.”*

Proverbs 17:22

go about approaching the patient with a terminal illness. To my surprise, the meeting went on well; she was then scheduled for surgery the following week and was admitted for further workup.

On the day of surgery, as I walked through the theatre doors, she was lying in the passage with the anesthetist chatting to her. As I made eye contact, I could see fear on her face. This was one of the unusual occasions that I ran out of words and I took my time in the changing room, hoping that by the time I walked to theatre she would be asleep. Guess what? She wasn’t! I had no idea how to react and all I could do was smile. Surgery was uneventful. The following day she asked me to come back to her after rounds. She said to me, “you have no idea how your smile before surgery calmed me, and helped me to relax and know I would be fine.” May God bless your work.

During preparation for our dedication service, where we pledge to serve God through our medical career, my mentor asked, “Are you still going to be a Christian doctor, when at 3 am, after a very busy day, you are called to attend to a drunk guy who is insulting you?” I hope that I will be able to rise to meet these challenges as I prepare to practice as a Christian doctor.

Prayer: Lord, I pray that you will help us to remember our identity in you even as we face challenges in the daily work you have called us to do. Please continue to raise us above our circumstances and human limitations and cheerfully assist those whom you entrust to our care, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

AL

JANUARY 25

Success Can Be Dangerous

“The Israelites said to Gideon, ‘Rule over us-you, your son and your grandson - because you have saved us out of the hand of Midian... ..I do have one request, that each of you give me an earring from your share of the plunder..... He had seventy sons of his own, for he had many wives. His concubine, who lived in Shechem also, bore him a son, whom he named Abimelech’”

Judges 8:22-31

“One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing.”

2 Samuel 11:2

We have heard that failures are the stepping-stones for success; however, the reverse is also true and success can be more dangerous and lead us to destruction.

Gideon went through a period of phenomenal success, defeating the Midianites in a very decisive battle with an army of only 300 people. He forgot that God gave him success. He felt he had done it all by himself and therefore felt he deserved some gifts from his fellow men. He asked for golden earrings, which he received and much more, which he fashioned into a golden ephod. This ephod became a snare, deceiving many into idolatry. Besides having regular wives and 70 children, Gideon had relationship with a concubine in a place called Shechem. This was a luxury only those with wealth could afford something that the success in war had helped him with. This concubine bore him a son called Abimelech. Abimelech proved to be a monumental disaster as he butchered 69 of his half-brothers

and brought war and destruction to Israel.

David was, as we know, a man after God’s own heart. After becoming king, he won a string of battles and was firmly established on the throne. As he lay basking in his own victories and his successes, he decided to lower his guard. He saw Bathsheba bathing and then fell into a double sin of adultery and murder.

Pride goes before a fall, (Proverbs 16:18); however, success goes before pride. It would help us to remember that the problem is not success in itself, but how we interpret success; when we think we have done it on our own, and do not give credit to others and to God, we become prone to pride and danger.

Reflection: Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,.. Phil 2:5-8.

VS

JANUARY 26

Caring for Those Who Bear God's Image

"Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."

Genesis 1:26

'What is a human being?' It is one of the most fundamental questions we can ask. It is important because we are all given responsibility to look after our fellow human beings, whether in our own families, as part of our society, or in our work, which is especially true for doctors. So what answer does the Bible give? According to Genesis, we are all made in the image of God.

This means that, in some sense, we bear an imprint of God in a way that distinguishes us from the rest of the creation. All creation reflects its creator and proclaims his glory day after day, but we humans bear his image. This means that as we care for our patients we are caring for those who bear God's image.

Do we remember this in our world of budgets, stress and busyness? There is a Christian clinic in Dakar, Senegal, and one of the comments from patients, who often travel for hours across the city to come, is that this Christian clinic shows more care for each patient than other clinics. Rightly said, as all these patients bear God's image, they especially reflect their creator, and were made special by him.

Let us then remember this as we work as doctors, and resolve to show care to those whom God has made in his image.

Reflection: On Jesus' commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Further Reading: Genesis 1:26–28 and Psalm 8.

Prayer: Lord, help us to love and serve others as you loved and served all, in Jesus' name, Amen.

A&H

JANUARY 27

Helping Redress the Balance

The goal is equality...

2 Corinthians 8:14b

Recently, two families arrived at our clinic from the same rural village located in a remote part of India. One family brought their 5-year-old severely disabled boy. He was the third child of four. Tragically, the first two had already followed a similar course of severe developmental delay and eventually died.

Mum and Dad had spent all their money on their children to no avail. The other family had a delightful young boy with severe choreo-athetoid cerebral palsy from a birth injury. It happened after giving birth at home, rather than in the defunct nearby medical centre. This family had also lost a child previously to a completely preventable infection as an infant.

Both families were poor and desperate with severely disabled children; however, at various stages of their lives that were writ with despair, hope could have shined through. Their stories, like many around us, especially in the poorest parts of the world, can be completely overwhelming. For a Christian, hope still shines through.

On that day, we listened; we played, gave some toys and clothes, prayed for them and their families and arranged regular free follow up. It helped take the crippling financial burden of healthcare off them and will bring some hope and light into their lives.

At whatever stage, we meet a patient on their journey, whether in a hospital in the West or a rural clinic in the developing world, as carriers of the light of Jesus, we always have something to offer. What can we do to bring light into the darkness of every situation we hear about, no matter how overwhelming?

In a world with so much wealth and freedom, yet so much need and oppression, each time we speak a kind word, listen, give some material help or medicine, we are redressing the balance of inequality. Each time we help someone, we are bringing light and a small part of the Kingdom of God into their situation.

Reflection: How could God use you to bring light into someone's life?

Further Reading: Mathew 25:31-46.

Prayer: Lord, we ask you to use us to bring light into the life of people who are needy and oppressed, in Jesus' name, Amen.

CM

JANUARY 28

Love and Forgiveness

“I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – for she loved much.”

Luke 7:47

I did not realize they were so intertwined, but they are in Luke 7:47 – love and forgiveness. Jesus brings them together in the story of Simon and the woman. “Do you see this woman?”

Of course, Simon saw her. She had come to his house, uninvited. How could Jesus draw her into the centre of the conversation? He was an honored guest. Simon may well have thought, “Don’t

spoil the arrangements I have made.”

However, some things are important and, of course, Simon knew about love and forgiveness. He knew well that most important command in Deuteronomy 6:5. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” Of course, Simon knew about love, however, it was primarily head knowledge. That is why we also need experiences like Simon’s that question us, that challenge us to apply in life, in practice, all we know in our head. Even so, that was just the beginning of the lesson for Simon.

He knew the command “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Leviticus 19:18) Did he love himself? Maybe, but I think his love was primarily for the image he had of himself. He was a Pharisee; he had standards to keep and a reputation. What would others think of him in this situation? He had an image. Maybe he was unaware of it until, he was challenged in this situation.

Situations are used by God to help us see ourselves realistically. So I have found in my own life. Pray for grace to change.

Reflection: On situations where you have seen that love and forgiveness are closely tied together.

Further Reading: Luke 7:36-50.

Prayer: Lord, please continue to teach me to forgive others and to love others as you have commanded, each day of my life, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

FG

JANUARY 29

Stand Up Like a Man

*“Brace yourself like a man;
I will question you, and you
will answer me.”*

Job 40:7

he was, as God affirmed later. However, it was “rightness” that smacked of self-righteousness. When he did not get the expected vindication from God, he lapsed into self-pity. “No one understands me!” Thus, it seemed to Job and so it may seem, at times, to us.

God paid Job the ultimate courtesy. He spoke to him. Job’s attention is drawn to the wonders of nature, to the miracle of creation, to the intrinsic concepts of function and morality. Moreover, it is good advice to us to “seek endlessly for God and his hand in all of creation.” (Malcolm Muggeridge)

Then God tells Job to take responsibility for himself. There are times when we too have to let go of self-pity even when it seems justified, but often also so consuming. As someone has said, “it’s all right to wiggle your toes in self-pity, but not to wallow in it.” Look around at the marvel of creation. Get out of yourself. See what God has done, and is doing in the world and pray. Pray for your friends and those you work with.

The rest is up to God. We can trust Him. Can He trust us?

Earth’s crammed with heaven

And every common bush afire with God,

But, only he who sees takes off his shoes,

The rest sit around and pluck blackberries.

-Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Reflection: On God’s revelation of Himself in nature and creation.

Further Reading: 2 Peter 1:3-11.

Prayer: Lord, help me to be faithful in the calling you have for me and be focused on you, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

FG

JANUARY 30

Finding the Right Question

*“May he give you the desire
of your heart...”*

Psalms 20:4

A woman moved into the top council flat opposite our surgery building and came to see me as a new patient. She looked hopeless as she described to me how she had lost her job and her home and the people in the neighbouring flat were harassing her. On enquiry, it turned out that she had been abused by her father as a child, had married early to escape her home and her

marriage had ended in an acrimonious divorce.

She seemed closed and reluctant to open up but was clearly depressed, so I started her on antidepressants and referred her for further help. Over several months, she did not seem to make much progress despite the fact that social services, the mental health team, police victim support services and others were all trying to help her. Slowly as she continued to see me, she seemed to become less wary of me, and after a year had passed, on one of her follow up visits, I asked her ‘What would you really like to happen in your life?’

It was a relief for her to say to me with tears in her eyes ‘Doctor, what I would really like to do, is to see my sons again.’ I knew she had been divorced and had no contact with her husband or her family, but we had never managed to have a conversation like this before. Suddenly, she was ready to talk. I was able to say how sorry I was that she had not seen her sons for many years and I believed that God really cared about her situation. When I offered to pray with her, she was no longer defensive and welcomed the opportunity. With the help of lawyers (!), she regained contact with her sons and this became a first step in rebuilding her life.

Reflection: Do I give up easily when little progress seems to be made or do I keep looking for the key question that may unlock a situation that seems stuck?

Further Reading: Titus 3:3-8.

Prayer: Jesus may the desires of my heart be according to your will, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

KV

JANUARY 31

Obedience an Important Principle in God's Equation

“Namaan’s servants went to him and said, ‘My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, ‘Wash and be cleansed!’”

2 Kings 5:13-14

would have paid dearly and would have continued to suffer from leprosy.

Naaman being a wealthy man, sought to buy his healing with his money and treasures, but God’s man refused his money. Naaman thought his position would curry favor, but God’s man turned him away, without actually meeting him. Naaman thought some grand and great effort would save him, but God’s man being aware of the general’s trust in wealth, power and accomplishments, offers him a simple solution -to have a wash in the river Jordan. Naaman was not given the chance to believe that he has earned his healing.

Like the bacteria that cause leprosy, pride spreads throughout our lives, weakening our resolve to put the concerns of others before us. We become numb to their pain, blind to the poor around us and hardened to souls perishing for lack of love. The only way to kill pride is to die to self. The simple steps and lessons that Naaman was provided were to realize that God is the source of all good things –good health, position power etc. Humble yourself and obtain your need on God’s terms.

In life, the most important steps are simple and implicit obedience to God produces great benefits. Sin is like leprosy, it makes inroads in to our mind and body, rendering us insensitive and deformed. The recipe for forgiveness from sin is in obedience; to humbly ask for forgiveness. Through Christ, we receive the promise of new life, wholeness and cleansing. This is not our “right” but God’s grace.

Further Reading: 2 Kings 5:1-14.

Prayer: Lord, grant me a heart of obedience to your word, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

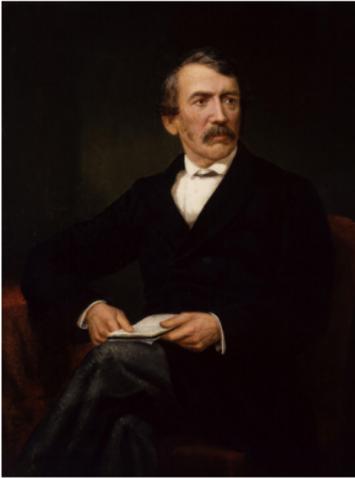
DJ

Naaman was a commander in the army of king Aram and was very successful and highly regarded. He suffered from leprosy, for which, in those days, there was no cure.

Leprosy was viewed as a curse from God. Therefore, often, people afflicted by the disease would be forced to introspect on how they had incurred the wrath of God. Naaman also may have introspected, but it is clear that he failed to identify some of his spiritual problems. In the context of this Bible passage, his pride and disobedience are evident. When the prophet instructs him to wash himself in the river Jordan, he is enraged. His pride made it difficult for him to follow this simple advise and but for the sage advice of his servants, he

David Livingstone (1813-1873)

Missionary doctor, explorer, human rights activist and crusader for the rights of workers and slaves



David Livingstone was born in 1813, the second child of Neil and Agnes Livingstone, in Blantyre, Scotland. David's father was a devout Christian who encouraged his children to study the Bible and to spread its message. David, himself started to work in the cotton mills from the age of 10, initially as a "piecer," joining the torn ends of cotton yarn in the spinning machines. He read widely in his free time, and also

developed an interest in exploring nature, studying plants and animals. Neil Livingstone tried to discourage his son's interest in science, which he believed was dangerous to his faith. However, David persisted with reading both theology and science. At the age of 26, he enrolled in medical school, with the aim of becoming a medical missionary to China.

The outbreak of the First Opium War in 1839, made China an unsafe destination. Influenced by Robert Moffat, an LMS missionary and abolitionist, David decided to go to southern Africa and to work to bring equality and try to end the slave trade. David subsequently married Moffat's daughter, Mary and had six children.

During his years in Africa, it is believed that Dr. Livingstone travelled more than a third of the geographical area, including a transcontinental trip from one coast to the other. This was possible because he travelled light, without a retinue of servants and soldiers. He related well with the local population, whom he treated as equals and with respect. Dr. Livingstone continued to preach his faith, but did not pressurize anyone to convert.

He also used his travels to explore the African continent, and is credited with making known to the outside world, many of its natural beauties. He renamed the great waterfall, Mosi-oa-Tunya (the smoke that thunders), the Victoria Falls after the reigning British monarch.

Throughout his time in Africa, he wrote passionately against the slave trade, trying to sensitize his audience in the west to the plight of the African people who were being exploited by the Arab slave –traders. In a letter to the New York Times, he wrote that if his work led to the abolition of the slave trade, it would be a greater accomplishment than all his geographical discoveries on the continent.

In 1850, he resigned from the London Missionary Society, accepting a commission from the Royal Geographical Society. He continued to travel and explore the African continent, and described many of the great lakes of Africa. He suffered serious illnesses, including cholera and malaria. On one occasion, he was mauled by a lion, and suffered a permanent disability of his right arm as a result.

Many times, on his travels, he was deserted by his helpers and robbed of supplies, but he persevered, often reluctantly accepting the help of the Arabian slave-traders to get to safety. He died at the age of 59, probably of dysentery. His body was discovered in an attitude of prayer at his bedside. Before his body was shipped back to the United Kingdom, his heart was removed and buried in Africa.

Today, there are numerous memorial buildings and statues scattered across Africa, in countries including Botswana, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Zaire and the Congo. He is equally honored in other countries around the world.

A Blessing for Equilibrium

Like the joy of the sea coming home to shore
May the music of laughter break through your soul.
As the wind wants to make everything dance,
May your gravity be lightened by grace.
Like the freedom of the monastery bell
May clarity of mind make your eyes smile.
As water takes whatever shape it is in
So free may you be about who you become.
As silence smiles on the other side of what's said,
May a sense of irony give you perspective.
As time remains free of all its frames,
May fear or worry never put you in chains.
May your prayer of listening deepen enough
To hear in the distance the laughter of GOD.

-John O Donohue was an Irish priest, poet and writer

FEBRUARY 1

The Race Marked Out for You

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.”

Hebrews 12:1-2

“So be careful to do what the Lord your God has commanded you; do not turn aside to the right or to the left.” Deuteronomy 5:32

Eleven times in the Old Testament, the children of Israel were exhorted to keep walking in the ways of God, looking neither to the right nor to the left. This phrase refers to stepping off what Jesus described as the ‘narrow path’ and getting distracted by things of the world. These things might at first seem harmless—pleasures, relationships, more indulgent use of time or money, choices regarding life-decisions; ‘the sin that so easily entangles’ as the writer of the Hebrews puts it.

When you consider your own life and the choices you have made over the past year, I wonder whether you can see any areas, which would fall into the category of ‘looking to the right or to the left.’ Life as a junior doctor brings abundant opportunities. It is an opportunity to show love and compassion to vulnerable people;

to act with integrity amongst colleagues; to share one’s wealth and possessions with generosity; to work amongst some of the neediest communities on earth. Yet it is also fraught with distractions. The weariness, which many of us experience, lowers our resistance; it can be easy to fall into bad company, to use our resources selfishly, to seek escapism, or simply to no longer make time for the things of God.

The apostle Paul would often use the analogy of an athlete as he describes the discipline and commitment of a child of God. Here in Hebrews, we are reminded that there is a ‘race marked out’ for each of us. God does not expect us to be superhuman, but rather gives each of us responsibilities and the strength and resources to do what he asks of us.

Further Reading: Joshua 24:24.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to remember that you are the God who ‘is able to bless [me] abundantly, so that in all things and at all times, having all that I need, I will abound in every good work, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

CW

FEBRUARY 2

Contentment in All Situations

“For I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.”
Philippians 4:11–12

I have been inspired by the stories told by many missionaries of times when they literally did not know where the next meal was coming from, and God provided supernaturally. We often pray for others in circumstances of great need. People often testify to how their faith flourishes at these times of complete dependence on God. However, as a doctor working in a wealthy country, I must confess that I have never known financial pressure. I have a lovely home, plenty of clothes to choose from, a choice of food every day and do not want for any basic material goods. How can I depend on God and serve him in this situation?

When we consider the apostle Paul, we often think of his hardships – shipwrecks, persecutions, hunger, illness – but when he wrote to the Philippians he stated clearly that he also knew ‘what it is to have plenty.’ Writing to Timothy, he gave specific instructions to those who are wealthy in worldly terms, that we must be generous and seek to use all things to God’s glory. Our treasure must be in heaven, but if you enjoy financial and material blessing, do not feel guilty about this. It is not wrong to have these things, but it is wrong to love them and to become dependent on them. As doctors, especially in the first few years following qualification when we start to earn, we may know different challenges and temptations to those who are acutely aware of their daily dependence on God for their ‘daily bread.’ Today’s encouragement is to thank God for all you have, and to prayerfully consider whether you are using your material blessing for his glory.

Further Reading: 1 Timothy 6:17–19

Prayer: Father, I thank you that every good and perfect gift comes from you. Thank you for everything you have provided me with. I pray that I never become dependent on these things. Help me to use everything I have for your glory. Search me and know my heart; show me where I am trusting in possessions and financial security rather than in you, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

CW

FEBRUARY 3

Forward- Looking Faith

“By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the Promised Land, like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” Hebrews 11:8–9

Hebrews 11 is a famous roll call of the heroes of faith. It begins telling us that faith is ‘being sure of what we hope for’ (as well as being certain of what we do not see); but what is the difference between ‘having faith in’ (which may alternatively be expressed as ‘believing in’) and ‘having faith for’? What we hope for must be, by its very nature, something that will happen in the future, something ‘out there,’ as yet intangible. This kind of ‘faith for’ pushes us beyond a mere theoretical ‘belief in’ God. Forward-looking faith puts trust in God for what we hope for, and through that faith in the living God of scripture, we can believe with certainty.

As doctors, we are inclined to focus backwards, applying logic, prior knowledge and experience to problem-solve in order to assist people suffering from illness or in a crisis. Years of training and examinations enable us to

deal with these situations, whether to bring cure, improved function or comfort.

I recently was chatting to a fellow church member troubled by symptoms, which sounded like sciatica. Did I have forward-looking faith? Did I believe that God could do something about her problems? How could I be sure that God would do it? Aware of my own faith limitations, I grabbed two others to pray with me for her after I had given her some general medical advice.

By faith, Abraham left his home: even though he did not know where he was going. Imagine yourself as a Christian medical student phoning home to say ‘Hi mum, I’m going on a mission trip.’ How might your mum react when you end by saying ‘I don’t even know where we’re going, or for how long!’

God is still looking for people like Abraham who will follow his call. Even on his travels, Abraham’s faith continued to be forward-looking, from the place where he ‘lived in tents’ to the ‘city with foundations.’ Forward-looking faith is exciting and challenging, carrying us beyond our own abilities and ourselves whether on this earth or to eternity.

Reflection: Let’s not settle with ‘having faith in’ but – trusting Him who is faithful, ask God for opportunities to ‘have faith for’ the day (and days) that lie before us.

Further Reading: Revelation 21:2–4.

MJB

FEBRUARY 4

Do Not Be Anxious

“Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” *Philippians 4:6*

Be anxious for nothing... the Greek word for anxious is “merimnate” and translated as ‘careful’ in the Authorized Version. Careful at that time meant attended with anxiety, rather than the more modern meaning of cautious or taking care with something. W.E. Vine defines merimnate as anxious or distracting care. The version above says ‘worry’. The same term is used by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount where he says to his disciples, “Do not worry about your life...what you eat...what clothes to wear...” For the Philippians, the worry must have been about Paul in prison, and hence about

their own future, and whether they faced the prospect of jail. They may also have been anxious to ensure their own status either in society or in the Christian community, hence Paul’s exhortation to prefer others better than themselves (Phil 2:1-4). It may also be that Euodias and Syntyche were vying with each other about some disagreement within the Philippian church. Even today, church communities are rich sources of interpersonal differences and therefore anxiety provoking. Our patients are naturally anxious when they prepare for their consultation with us. Hospitals are anxiety-inducing places. We too can be anxious about our clinical performances, or about our diagnostic dilemmas or the bad news, we have to share with patients or relatives. We can be anxious about many things.

However, for Paul, the antidote for anxiety is prayer. Not just prayer, but prayer with supplication and thanksgiving. The word for prayer, which represents a general address to God often, goes hand-in-hand with supplication. The latter expresses a specific wanting or a need expressed to God. Paul heightens this here by saying we can make specific requests to God. These three requesting terms surround the words, ‘with thanksgiving.’ For Paul asking and thanking go hand in hand. So prayer, addressed to God, expressing our needs in specific requests, and thanking God in the process is Paul’s answer to the anxiety we may have.

More broadly, the whole paragraph starts with joy in the Lord, a gentleness that arises out of our confidence in God. A confidence that the Lord is near both in time and in place. Therefore, we do not need to be anxious because we can make our specific needs know to the Lord who is near. No wonder we will be at peace (v7).

Reflection: Today, I will replace my anxious care with prayer and supplication with thanksgiving. I will bring specific needs before my heavenly Father, both for me and my family, and the patients I serve. I will surrender my concerns to Him, for I know He cares.

Further Reading: Jesus’ take on anxiety – Matthew 6:25-34.

AG

FEBRUARY 5

With Thanks giving

“Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” *Philippians 4:6*

Doctors and dentists are perfectionists as befits the nature of our work. We have a tendency to see how we can improve things. Ward rounds become places where senior staff only identify what the juniors have missed. We worry we have not done enough for our critically ill patient. Journal articles can be read to find out what the flaws are. Sermons listened to for analyzing where the preacher has missed the mark. End of day reflections become a list of all the things we have not done or the things we have done wrong. Our prayers can also be a litany of problems and complaints.

In his comments on prayer, Paul stresses the need to add thanksgiving to our requests. The letter itself is an example of thanksgiving. Even though he is in jail, he rejoices, the gospel is taken forward (Phil 1:12). Even though people preach the gospel out of envy, he thanks God that Christ is proclaimed (Phil 1:18). Prior to this he thanks God for his friends in Philippi, who have shared the gospel with him, and whom he loves (Phil 1:3). He is thankful for their generosity, which they showed practically by their generous gifts (Phil 4:10-20). He is so thankful that he can actually say he is ‘fully satisfied.’ (Phil 4:18).

Can we cultivate an attitude of genuine thanksgiving? It is not a false optimism that denies tragedy and pain but a realistic hope that rises above grief and loss. It is an expression of thanksgiving and confidence in the Lord. I write from the relative comfort of the West and I recognize that brothers and sisters in very trying situations will read these words. These include epidemics, starvation and lack of resources, too many patients, corruption and poor leadership. It is hard to be thankful under these pressures. I thank God that Paul wrote while imprisoned for the gospel. His words have been tested by life.

Reflection: What in my circumstances and tasks can I thank God for today?

Further Reading: Psalm 103.

Prayer: Dear Lord, let my circumstances not bind me to say thank you, help me to rejoice in you in all situations and circumstances of my life as Paul set an example, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

AG

FEBRUARY 6

The Lord is My Strength

“But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

Isaiah 40:31

the month. We survived!

In Mark 6:31-44, we read that Jesus and his disciples needed rest and he suggested they take time out. The disciples had just returned from what must have been a hectic but fulfilling time of outreach and Jesus was grieving the death of his cousin John the Baptist. They had a very legitimate reason for needing a break. However, the crowd followed them and Jesus had compassion and ministered to them despite his own physical and emotional needs. The result was that God worked a miracle through Jesus and his disciples.

Sometimes, we may find ourselves unable to get the legitimate time out that we need, but as we allow God’s compassion to flow through us, He can work a miracle.

Reflection: On the times when you have felt Him renew your strength and renewed your spirit.

Prayer: Dear Lord, let my hope be in you and may I wait upon you during my busy and exhausting day and pray for renewal of my spirit to continue to do your work, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

PaP

FEBRUARY 7

Yearning for God

“How lovely is your dwelling-place, O Lord Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.”

Psalm 84:1–2

love for them. I have never heard them ask why God allows them to suffer. They accept it as an inescapable part of living in this fallen world. On the contrary, they yearn for the courts of the living God and find their comfort and strength in his arms.

I am challenged by the humble love of God that I see in these patients, and by the overwhelming hunger for God expressed in Psalm 84. Surrounded by my home comforts, with a secure job and insured future, I forget I have need of God. I forget his amazing gift of salvation, his wondrous sacrifice on Calvary and the everlasting home that awaits us.

Reflection: If we pause to meditate on Jesus today, to praise him and to thank him, if we reignite our hunger and thirst for all that is kind, good, loving and just, how might our day be different?

Further Reading: The whole of Psalm 84 and Psalm 42:1–2. Use the verses that stand out to you to praise God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, keep us from taking these words artificially or mechanically. Help us to know they are a testimony given to us in the Bible to make us see that our lives can be rich and full. Teach us patience in this, Lord. Help us to realize that your process is to drop a seed and let it grow, to come at last to fruition. Teach us then to wait, Lord, upon you, and to know that you will bring us to a glory and a richness that is beyond our wildest dreams, more than we can ever express, in Jesus' name, Amen.

What do you yearn for? Where would you most like to be today? What do you desire with all your heart? In a secular society, bombarded by advertising and consumerism, where success is progressing in our career and having a sports car. It can be easy to lose sight of the eternally important and valuable.

In Ecuador, I observe patients who lose their child in an accident, endure fungating tumors covering their chest, or suffering terrible pain, who do not question God's

ANG

FEBRUARY 8

Grace to Persevere

“...we do not lose heart.”
2 Corinthians 4:1

Years ago, I met a doctor who in days, when this was allowed, had taken his higher examinations seventeen times. He finally passed and became the consultant we knew. In addition, he had once climbed Everest. Training for the second activity had possibly interfered with studies for the first, but both demanded perseverance.

In the parable of the sower, Jesus described different forms of discouragement that prevent a fruitful response to the word of God. He mentioned persecution, preoccupation with worldly cares, the pursuit of wealth and other consuming interests. Paul wrote on a similar theme to those in Galatians. They had started off by fully trusting Jesus' sacrificial death for salvation and received his spirit. Then they spoiled it all by trusting in their own efforts instead of the one whom they trusted at the beginning.

We probably know people who began well after being introduced to the word of God and the son of God; they then yielded to one of the temptations Jesus listed in his parable. Further growth stopped. What about us? A heavy clinical workload, the extra pressures of family life or the lure of private practice, a new time-consuming activity (or relationship) – any of these can distract us and limit spiritual fruitfulness. They are not necessarily wrong in themselves, but they can become so if they spoil connection with Christ as our 'head.'

What is the secret of survival under what can be unavoidable pressures? If possible, a good night's sleep and a mini-break can help restore focus. The writer to the Hebrews speaks first about throwing off sinful entanglements. Then, he continues, 'Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, who for the joy before Him endured the cross... Consider Him who endured such opposition, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.' (Hebrews 12:1-3)

We can be inspired as well by the example of suffering brothers and sisters worldwide. Many feel the pressure of persecutions we may not yet experience. Some die rather than deny their faith. How much they value our sustained prayer support!

Paul recognized the source of all spiritual opposition. We are to resist enemy bombardment, be dressed in the full armor of God and persevering in prayer. Many an embattled health professional has simply cried, 'Help!'- To find our Father's grace sufficient for every need. He specializes in granting the gift of perseverance.

Further Reading: Mark 4:3-20 & 6:31, 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, Ephesians 6:10-20.

JG

FEBRUARY 9

Do Not Envy

“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.”

Romans 12:15

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.”

1 Corinthians 13:4

Do you always rejoice when others receive good news? When a friend passes an exam, which you have just failed for the third time? When your sister gets her ‘dream job,’ yet you are not even getting shortlisted for your chosen specialty? When the other junior on your ward has a successful grant application, whilst you struggle to formulate a research question? I must confess, there are times when I have not felt like celebrating with a friend, but rather have felt a mixture of envy and self-pity, both of which can lead to a downward spiral of unbiblical thinking.

Envy often leads to bitterness and does not bring glory to God. ‘See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many’ (Hebrews 12:15). On reflection, I see that the times when I have struggled with envy have been times when I have not appreciated the grace of God in my own life. I have questioned God’s provision and have felt ‘hard done by’ in some way. As Solomon contemplated the futility of worldly achievement, he concluded, ‘This is what I have observed to be good: that it is appropriate for a person to eat, to drink and to find satisfaction in their toilsome labor under the sun during the days of life God has given them – for this is their lot’ (Ecclesiastes 5:18). As a junior doctor, you can probably relate to the expression ‘toilsome labor’! It is easy to look at others who seem to have things easier, to have greater opportunities, to have more supportive seniors, but trust God! He knows your situation and ‘your lot.’

If today’s reading resonates with you, pray that God will help you see his provision in your life. Pray that you know afresh the abundant grace he has poured out on you such that you do not envy the worldly blessings and privileges of others you may know.

Further Reading: 1 Peter 2:1-2.

Prayer: Lord, you know that there are times when I feel envious rather than joyful when friends and colleagues enjoy success. Please forgive my self-centered attitude. Thank you for all you have given me and that your plans are perfect. Help me rejoice even in trials and to truly rejoice with those who rejoice, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

CW

FEBRUARY 10

Servant Leadership

“But I am among you as the one who serves.”

Luke 22:27

leaders, like the one above seem to take up leadership with only one question on their minds: “What’s in this for me?” This attitude manifests in the way they set themselves up above others. When they visit a place - security teams, publicity and fanfare precede them. As they walk along, a long line of yes-men, bowing deferentially to their every gesture, follows them.

This phenomenon is not limited to politics. Across the world, we hear stories of leaders without integrity, embezzling funds, selling organizational assets for personal gain, misusing power to harass others sexually and so on. Even lower rung leaders do not fail to use every opportunity for ‘power-posturing,’ in the way they upbraid their juniors, take for themselves the most comfortable offices, furniture, parking and accommodation, and then pass on these benefits to their children.

When Jesus walked along the streets of Galilee, He was just one in the crowd. The religious leaders found it so difficult to differentiate Jesus from His followers that they had to hire Judas to identify who Jesus was. His disciples were so comfortable with Him that they could lean on Him while sitting together on the floor around a meal, and ask Him tough questions. Prostitutes and drunkards felt comfortable around Him, and thought of Him as a friend. Jesus picked up a basin and towel and went around washing their feet. His integrity was impeccable, and enemies had to hire witnesses to bring false charges against Him in court in order to put Him to death. His followers, too, did the same, like Timothy, who was known to look out for the welfare of others. (Phil 2:20)

The term, ‘Servant leadership’ is a mantra that is bandied about a lot in leadership books and programs these days. The phrase is used to describe a leadership approach, where one tries to look out for the interests of one’s subordinates, in order to get them to work better for the organization, and utilize their skills and resources more effectively. The phrase originates in the Bible, where it is very different from the ‘servant leadership’ that we see in public life today. Servant leaders of the Bible, like Jesus, do not seem to have a hidden agenda. Instead, they genuinely ask those around them “What’s in this for you? How can I serve you better?”

Reflection: On people whom you identify as genuine ‘servant leaders’ in today’s context.

PN

FEBRUARY 11

Work-Life Balance

“O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenants and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned.”

Daniel 9:4–5

We were situated in the Rift Valley and our daughters were day students in a large boarding school. The only interruption to family life was on-call duties. Family life and devotions were relatively easy to maintain.

Daniel has many things to teach us, but one, which stands far above the rest, is his faithfulness to God. He stood alone, confident in his faith amongst the wise men in Babylon and before the Kings of the Medes and Persians. Separated from his family and his homeland as a boy of fourteen, his was an unenviable position – a slave who was catapulted to leadership in a pagan kingdom. His wisdom and insight resulted in envy and jealousy from his contemporaries yet he remained steadfast and faithful to The Lord. The terrifying vision he saw resulted in this wonderful commendation from the Lord, ‘O man greatly loved, fear not, peace be with you; be strong and of good courage’ (Daniel 10:19).

Maintaining a work-life balance as a doctor will always be a challenge; however, we can take encouragement from reflecting on how Daniel coped in a foreign land for his entire adult life. His routine was so well known that it landed him in a den of lions, for he was a man of prayer (Daniel 6:10). No matter what our circumstances, prayer is the oil, which lubricates every nut and bolt of our being.

Further Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:17–18.

Prayer: Lord, keep us faithful in reading your Word and in prayer, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

During my life as a doctor, I have struggled in maintaining a balance between work and family life. My wife worked part-time as a nurse as we raised our four daughters. At times, it seemed, we were like ships in the night as one person came home while other one went off to work. Is it possible to maintain a balance?

When we moved to Kenya to work in a mission hospital, there were fewer distractions in the evenings than how things were back home.

RG

FEBRUARY 12

Facing Overwhelming Odds

*“Go in the strength you have...
Am I not sending you?”*

Judges 6:14-16

Do you ever feel that what you are called to in your job is just too much? I remember discussing this with Malawian district medical officers – most of them toiling as the only doctor responsible for several hundred thousand patients, with not enough ambulances, nurses, drugs or time and far too much burden of disease. Where do you start?

The temptation is to ‘do a Gideon’ and hide. Faced with the overwhelming odds of the Midianite hordes that raided his land, the endemic idolatry of his people, Gideon does the sensible thing and keeps his head down. Instead of threshing on top of a hill so that the wind blew away the chaff – he is in a winepress - literally a hole in the ground, trying his best to keep out of harm’s way.

Perhaps, we should not be so surprised when we feel we are up against it. I think scripture suggests that’s the way it often is. Think of Joseph, sold as a slave, or Moses against Pharaoh, or the Lord Jesus hanging on a cross – all facing insurmountable problems, overwhelming odds.

Most of us when faced with challenges like Gideon’s will do what he did and hide. The church is, and was, and always will be full of people just like Gideon – ordinary people with ordinary, average faith – in hiding, in retreat, in fear.

God calls ordinary people just like Gideon to do his work; to feed the hungry, to preach good news to the poor, to comfort the sick and the dying. He calls us to ‘go in the strength that we have’ but also He calls us to remember that he is sending us, so our strength is actually his strength.

As you think about the challenges you will face today, meditate on 1 Corinthians 12:9 and boast of your weakness before the Lord.

Further Reading: Philippians 4:10–13.

Prayer: Father, I come with praise and thanksgiving. Grant us your grace and strength to face overwhelming odds in our life, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

NK

FEBRUARY 13

Renewing Our Minds

“Do not be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

Romans 12:2

You may get angry with other people who apparently spoil your career prospects.

Sometimes, we need to stop and examine how we respond and act and ask God honestly to show us the lies we believe. We may say with our mouth that we believe something but our actions will show what we really believe in our hearts. So if we believe a lie, what do we do? First, we need to recognize it-and be honest with God about it. Secondly, we can repent, decide to turn in a different direction and believe the truth. Thirdly, we can choose to renounce that lie or refuse to agree with it when it tries to creep in again. Then we replace the lie with truth.

In practice this means finding what is true and believing it, even if it does not feel true, so the truth is that I am loving child of God who is a co-heir with Christ. On the bad days when I feel like a failure, this is still true. I find it helpful to find Bible verses to carry with me to remind myself of the truth at the times when it situation does not feel true. This is called ‘renewing your mind.’ Amazingly, as the verse says, as I choose to renew my mind I find that over time I am transformed and I start showing the truth in my behavior and actions. The truth really does set you free.

Further Reading: Romans 12.

Prayer: Lord, help me to desire a true renewal of my mind and my faith, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

MW

FEBRUARY 14

Lord, Give Me Patience

“Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Ephesians 5:19-20

‘Honestly! It’s like ordering a nuclear missile!’ I fussed and fumed as I trawled through the maze of digital pathways necessary to request a wheelchair. ‘What is the patient’s height?’ He has not stood up straight for years. ‘What is the patient’s weight?’ We will never know unless we can attach scales to his bathing hoist. ‘Does the patient need an interpreter?’ Probably, to fill in his part of this stupid form. ‘Why does the patient need this appliance?’ Why do you think? His blooming legs do not work!

We aspire to godly living and an attitude of humility, gratitude and praise, but a small inconvenience can really test our patience. Was my annoyance ‘righteous anger’ because God’s glory was at stake? Or was I really saying that I was too busy and important to be filling in forms?

Christians often agonize about God’s plan for their lives, but one instruction is perfectly clear: “Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1Thessalonians 5:18). All circumstances?

Matthew Henry, the famous English Bible commentator and pastor, was robbed on his way to preach. He wrote in his diary, ‘I thank thee first because I was never robbed before; secondly, although, they took my purse, they did not take my life; thirdly, although, they took my all, it was not much; and fourth because it was I who was robbed and not I who robbed.’

There will be times when we are stressed, unwell, or bereaved. Perhaps, we cannot thank God for the circumstance, but we can find something in that circumstance to praise God for. This is our ‘sacrifice of praise’ (Hebrews 13:15) which pleases God. I was very struck by words of a friend whose husband died in a drowning accident: ‘I never asked God, Why?’ But, I did thank Him for the years we had together and for our children.’

In desperate situations, we may be unable to pray, let alone ‘overflow with thankfulness’ (Colossians 2:7), but mostly our grumbles are about everyday irritations. How easy it is to come home and moan about one exasperating patient when we have been blessed with 40 nice ones! Mindfulness is all the rage these days but Christians can do a lot better than that. We can meditate on God and live in the light of his forgiveness and favor. We can cultivate a thankful heart, practice stopping grumbling (harder than stopping smoking) and sing songs of praise.

Further Reading: Psalm 34:1, Psalm 103:2.

RE

FEBRUARY 15

Shouting To God in Hard Times

“Hear O Lord, my righteous plea; listen to my cry. Give ear to my prayer – it does not rise from deceitful lips. May my vindication come from you.”

Psalm 17: 1-2

Every day, we aim to heal, and every day patients die. Every day, we make decisions and every day, bad things happen. Sometimes, bad things happen to us, sometimes to our patients. In addition, the questions begin: Why did this happen? What went wrong? Where did I go wrong? Why did God let this happen? Sometimes, we might become angry, other times depressed. Sometimes, we bottle this up inside, other times we shout at a close friend, but do we shout to God?

Job could not make sense of what he was going through. His friends stuck by him for a whole week, before they voiced their presumption that he was at fault. (‘They thought, where there is smoke, there is fire’). However, Job neither blamed them, nor caved in to their ‘prosperity gospel.’ Nor did Job keep quiet and turn on himself, blaming himself. Job looked to the One who had previously given him so much and called on him.

Do I look to God when I am struggling to understand? Do I shout to God when injustice occurs? Do I hold onto God’s faithfulness when I am desperate? Do I understand that through all kinds of trials God is refining me, testing me, proving my faith (1 Peter 1:6–7)? When humiliation or ridicule come because of my faith in Jesus, do I rejoice that I have been counted worthy to suffer disgrace for his sake (Acts 5:41)? Do I stick by friends and colleagues going through a dark place?

Job was able to see God’s good purpose and promise: God’s refining transforms you and me into people of purity and even greater value. ‘But he knows the way that I take, when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.’ (Job 23:10)

Reflection: Why are we reluctant to ask God to help us understand His purposes, when things go wrong.

Further Reading: Job 23:1-10.

Prayer: Thank You Lord that You are my refuge and my strength in hard times and an ever present helper in times of trouble. Help me to cling to You, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

AND

FEBRUARY 16

Living in a Broken World

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

John 1:14

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

2 Corinthians 5:21

Waiting to board, a plane to the city where I live another passenger asked me, why I, a foreigner, wanted to live in such a smog-filled, dirty place. Indeed, I do sometimes wonder why God called me to work there! When we arrived, the pollution was impressively bad, worlds apart from the beautiful village in which I grew up.

However, at that moment, the fact of Jesus ‘making his dwelling’ on earth struck me with new force. The one who was rich beyond all splendors, all for love’s sake came to live in our grimy world, from the cleanness of perfection into this visibly spoiled, dirty place. The toxic swirls of smog became a picture of the spoiled, sinful nature of our world.

What is more, Jesus came into my heart and yours, choosing to live in us, so that our impure hearts might be made clean. He clothes us with his own righteousness, the righteousness of God. Just as the smog clears with the wind, so our hearts are cleansed by the Spirit.

We encounter ‘dirt’ of all kinds, both in ourselves and in others. We enter homes and communities that are broken; we touch bodies that are diseased; we live with people who are unlovely. I would not want to suggest that there is no place for gloves or masks, but what does it mean for me to live as one who has seen God’s glory and has become the righteousness of God? What does incarnational living look like when I see my next patient? When I meet with my colleagues? When I return home?

Reflection: On the lives of God’s servants who have shown glimpses of his incarnation through their lives.

Further Reading: 1 Peter 2:11–12.

Prayer: Thank You Father for making me righteous by the blood of Your Son. May people see in me, a reflection of your holiness, justice, and mercy as I try to share with them your love and grace, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

AND

FEBRUARY 17

Love One Another

“A new command I give you: Love one another.”
John 13:34

Okay, so I was right. Lack of hand washing facilities is a bigger infection control issue than having a microscope in my consultation room for reviewing wet preps; so, we debated why I needed to remove my microscope, and I pushed at least for having soap at the hand washing facilities.

As I walked home afterwards, I thought about the frustrated exchange. And I prayed, was there some better solution, some other way of looking at the situation?

I was a little surprised when I felt that little voice in my heart: “I really love you! Your attitude was disappointing, but I do love you!”

When I got home and thought more about this, I realized it is not about being right. In fact, being right is not the most important thing. In my quest to be right, I was wrong, as my attitude was wrong. My cultural insensitivity was wrong. In being right, I was hurting the people I was working with; so, I asked myself “what am I here for then?” The response was very clear.

My calling is to love them! This even trumps being right, so I repented and got my heart right. I sought advice on how to tackle the situation in a more culturally appropriate manner. I saw my colleagues heart open up to our loving Father, with a desire to learn more about Him.

Now when I am having another, “but, I’m right” moment, I stop. Humility is better applied quickly. I remember the overriding goal is to love them, even the people around me, the nurses I work with who disturb my sleep, the difficult personalities.

Further Reading: Romans 12:12-21.

Prayer: Lord, help me to love others in the way you love me. Help me to love unconditionally. Help me to demonstrate my love with action - even when I don’t feel like it. Thank you for loving me unconditionally. Thank you for demonstrating your love in such marvelous ways, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

SLA

FEBRUARY 18

Celebrating The Gift of Marriage

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

Genesis 2:24

In the West, we are bombarded with many messages about sexuality, but the key message seems to be that we should try to get as much sex as possible if it is consensual and does not hurt someone. However, as doctors, we see a very different side. The patients who come to us with difficulties in their sexuality, disappointment at an unwanted pregnancy, or coming with psychological issues that in part are related to dysfunctional family or relationships. How are we to respond to those who come to us with problems, whilst the world around us

continues sending such messages about sex?

The Bible celebrates sex as God’s gift to us to be enjoyed within marriage, because it only makes sense to give someone else sexual pleasure when you are secure, public in a commitment to that person – that is, marriage. There is a danger that we can be embarrassed by this message, as it seems ridiculous to our cultures. However, there is nothing embarrassing about goodness, and the Bible’s message on sexuality is good for all people and us.

We ought to remind ourselves of this more often: God’s message on sexuality is good, and leads to our good. So, we need to remind ourselves that if we are married, sex is to be enjoyed in marriage, and that if we are not married we need to wait so we can have sex in the context of marriage. Both these groups are actually experiencing the goodness of God.

Reflection: On how the marriage relationship symbolizes the relationship between Christ and his church.

Further Reading: Genesis 2:24 and Ephesians 5:22–33.

Prayer: Thank you Father for the manifestation of marriage by the finished work of the cross and the divine intervention of the Holy Spirit. Lord, Help me to understand your plan on marriage in my life, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

A&H

FEBRUARY 19

Giving What We Have Received...

“Blessed be the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction.”

2 Corinthians 1:3-7

I love languages, but I am rubbish at learning them. I was not exposed to French as a child, so never really learnt it, but if you were to drop me in the middle of France for a few months, I know I would soon become reasonably conversant, because the language would surround me day and night.

So, it is with compassion – something that, despite a lot of popular thought, is not an innate human trait, but one we learn from childhood onwards by seeing it practiced by others around us. If you grow up in a loving, caring family, you learn to be a loving and caring adult.

Except that in my experience, those who grew up with the exact opposite often become the most caring, compassionate people I have ever met. My father, a man of huge kindness, empathy and gentleness is a case in point. My grandfather abandoned him and his siblings at an early age. His mother would neglect them, often leaving them in the street to fend for themselves while she sat in the pub all day. In the end, he and his younger sister were taken into care for the remainder of their childhoods. Yet, despite being shown so little love and care as he grew up, and despite having been so poorly parented, he grew up to value family more highly than anything. Why?

In his late teens when he joined the merchant navy, a family in the port town where his ships sailed informally adopted him. To this day, this family remain an important part of our family life, because they showed him what it meant to be part of a real family, showed him what a healthy marriage and healthy parenting looked like. Because he saw the contrasts so keenly, he understood the value of family, kindness, generosity and compassion and made them the mark of his life.

Paul draws a similar, but even more profound point in this passage. Only when we understand the mercy, kindness and compassion God has shown us in Jesus Christ; and see it contrast to what the world offers and the alienation from God that our sins created, can we truly begin to share the same love and kindness, compassion and comfort to others. It is not just enough to know compassion and see it modeled – we need to understand the devastating consequences of the opposite.

Further Reading: Matthew 9:35–38.

SF

FEBRUARY 20

Inner Resources

“We do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away inwardly we are being renewed day by day.” 2 Corinthians 4:16

As we get on in years, we are very conscious that we are gradually “wasting away;” as the hymn so relevant to dentists says, “Change and decay in all around I see!” As ‘healthcare professionals, we are often challenged by distressed patients with sickness and disabilities “Why has this happened to ME?” We can only be sympathetic and point out that this is a fallen world and God does not promise

that any of us will have trouble-free lives.

However, for Christian, we have much comfort from God’s word. Let us look at Paul’s message to the Christians of Corinth (2 Cor: 4). Firstly, God’s light has shined into our hearts. We are no longer blinded by “Satan,” groping in the dark with no guide or purpose in our lives (v.4). We have come into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We are still conscious. We are fragile and vulnerable as “jars of clay” but we are clay in the Potter’s hand. As we are sensitive to His promptings and obedient to His will, we are malleable clay to be shaped according to His purpose for our lives.

Secondly, Paul reminds us of the riches of God’s grace available to us (v.15)-the favor of God we cannot merit and do not deserve. God gives us His pardon, peace and power in our hearts. Thus, we have this inner renewal day by day, not dependent on outward circumstances. As we fix our gaze and trust on the unseen promises of God, we walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor 5:7).

Thirdly, in chapter 5, Paul uses the illustration of living in a tent, very applicable when we were at church camp! The tents were not always waterproof and the flaps blew in the wind - all reminders of the temporary nature of camping! This is in contrast to the eternal house in heaven, not built with human hands. Paul admits that in this life we may “groan”. We may all feel like that at times when the stresses and strains of professional life press down on us with the relentless pressure of patients’ expectations, colleagues’ demands and responsibilities at home and church.

How do we cope? We do not lose heart but rely on Christ’s resurrection life in us (v.14). The gloom will change to glory! (v.15)

Further Reading: 2 Corinthians Chapters 4 and 5.

AV

FEBRUARY 21

The Importance of Maintaining Your First Love

*“Nevertheless I have somewhat
against thee; Thou hast forgotten
thy first love.”*

Revelation 2:4

Our first love is so important to God that He is actually ready to take away our candlestick if we leave our first love. No amount of hard work can replace our first love. A key statement I want to make now is: maintain your first love. The church in Ephesus had a lot of works to boast of. They had labor, they were not lazy. They put a lot of effort into working for the Lord. They had

patience. They did not tolerate evil people around them. They tested those who claimed to be apostles and did not accept false apostles or teachings. They maintained their stand in the Lord despite difficulties. They patiently endured suffering for the sake of the Lord. Despite all these, they were found wanting. No amount of hard work can replace our first love. I believe the Lord has a message for us doctors in this statement. It is possible as a doctor to work hard, looking after patients and doing all the right things we must do, enduring suffering and pain, and yet forget our first love. We may forget the love we had for Christ at the beginning of our relationship with Him when we gave our all to Him. We may stop keeping Him as the centre of our lives. Other things replace Him with time and as circumstances change. As doctors, we have competing interests for our heart. They include fame, money, power, and being held in high esteem by others, our work itself, our family, and our spouses. These interests compete for the first place in our heart daily.

It is important as doctors to regularly examine ourselves and to ask: what really is my first love? Is it truly God or something else? It is only by maintaining Christ at the centre of our lives that we can constantly receive what we need from Him to accomplish His will. Then He can guide, lead and provide for us.

Reflection: On those things in our lives that compete with our love for God.

Further Reading: Psalm 91:1-2.

Prayer: Dear Father, I pray that you forgive my sins and remove all the hindrance that has distanced me from my first love, in Jesus' name, Amen.

AM

FEBRUARY 22

A One- Point Agenda

“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

1 Corinthians 10:31

nature, especially toward His children. The beauty of His Spirit and His glory is revealed in His creation, Psalm 19:1, in what He says and does and most of all in whom He is.

Jesus had a one-point agenda to bring glory to the Father (John 17:4). If you see the face of Christ, you see the glory of God (2 Corinthians 4:6). Serving Jesus means to glorify His Father. We love to give glory to famous people, great sportsmen, great scientists, actors and political figures. Perhaps, we like a little bit of glory for ourselves, that wonderful surgery, that great diagnosis, or wonderful patient care. Remember that Scripture tells us the glory of human beings is as transient as the grass or the flowers of the fields, Isaiah 40:6.

God will not share His glory with another, with people or gods or idols, Isaiah 42:8. We need to ascribe glory to the One to whom it truly belongs. It is our true purpose in life, for all human beings (1 Chronicles 16:24, Romans 15:8-9). It is what is best for us, what will fulfill us and lead us to eternal life (Romans 9:23 and 15:9). Remember only fallen angels and fallen human beings refuse to give glory to God, (Romans 1:20-23).

Reflection: What is your motivation for the time you spend in the hospital, in caring for others? Is it for your glory or His glory?

Prayer: Dear Lord, let all what I do be according to your will that brings glory and honor to you, in Jesus' name, Amen.

JF

FEBRUARY 23

A Call for Introspection

“And she said, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” So he awoke from his sleep, and said, “I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!” But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him.”

Judges 16:20

Samson was a child who was called apart to be a Nazarite unto God from the womb (Judges 13:5). A walk that was well begun strayed, owing to unwise choices, which we are all too familiar with. This verse brings home as to how steep the fall was and how distant he was from the Lord “he did not know that the Lord had departed from him”.

I woke up one morning, the stakes were high,

Certain was I of aid that came my way,

The day wore on and chores were undone,

Setting sun saw me weary and forlorn,

My strength was gone erstwhile while I slept,

The foxes, my friend, had ruined my vineyard yet again.

Often the snare of growing lukewarm in the Lord is so subtle that we seldom realize it. Small compromises for self, passing by the checks of the Holy Spirit, denial when confronted by a fellow brother; all this leads to a state of well-being on the outside while callousness of hearts sets on the inside. A time of exigency sent by the Lord is a strong awakener and in turning to the Lord, we painfully realize to our dismay, we too realize as Samson did that the Lord has departed from us.

Our Lord is gracious, slow to anger and abounding in mercy. Then Samson called to the Lord, saying, “O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God that I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes! – Judges 16:28. Samson’s plea to be remembered was heard graciously - Judges 16:29-30, so will ours be when it comes from a broken and contrite heart. Let us take a pause and think where we stand, if we have strayed from our goal, this is time to call on the Lord while He may be found.

Reflection: Where do I find myself this morning? A Nazarite unto God or in a state of apostasy wherein my love has grown cold and I am unaware of it?

Further Reading: And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me – Psalm 50:15.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to have a personal relationship with you, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

SKD

FEBRUARY 24

Walking in Abraham's Footsteps

“I will surely bless you, and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore....through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”

Genesis 22:17-18

What does it mean when someone says ‘My faith is in God’?

The patriarch Abraham is honored by three world religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – as a man of faith. What did he do to merit this? He was not sinless. Nor was his faith faultless. Yet he ordered his life believing God exists and trusting in God’s omnipotence. He was prepared to follow God’s leading even if he had no idea of its eventual outcome. Therefore, he is an example of faith in God.

There have been times during my 30 -year medical career in Africa when I have confronted difficult and confusing situations. I have felt bewildered and isolated.

Sometimes, I have felt betrayed. I have not known how to react, how to cope, or how to survive. I have not seen how a problem might be resolved.

Abraham never let his faith in God waver. He trusted implicitly in His promises. He believed that God could work things out despite unfavorable circumstances. This is perhaps why his name is in the list of the heroes of the faith found in Hebrews 11. The names of some faithful believers are there to encourage us to maintain ‘the life of faith.’ Moreover, we know that these people did not have an easy time. Nevertheless, they kept their faith on the Lord.

Reflection: On the lives of people whom you look up to as faithful to God in difficult situations, and who are mentors or role models.

Further Reading: Hebrews Chapters 11 and 12.

Prayer: Lord, you have given so many examples in the Bible who became heroes of faith; help me to walk in faith. Teach me Lord to be patient while I endure hardships in life as I run the race in faith, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

AP

FEBRUARY 25

Why this Waste?

“Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, ‘Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages.’”

Mark 14:4

In May 1933, in Urumqi, North-West China, Dr Emil Fischbacher, a Scottish missionary with the China Inland Mission, died from typhus at the age of 29. He had been in China less than a year. When news of his death reached the UK people were very shocked. They wondered what was the purpose of this man following God’s call to China, only to die after a few short months. It seemed like such a waste of his young life and skills after so many years of preparation.

As doctors, it is very easy for our sense of identity and self-worth to be tied up in our work; however, sometimes we go through seasons in life when our careers are on hold. Maybe it’s a period of full-time language study to facilitate working overseas, perhaps a prolonged illness or maybe raising small children; however, much joy they may bring. These seasons, even if planned, can be very painful, and may leave us wondering if we are wasting our time and skills. However, God can use these experiences to challenge us that our true identity is in Him, not what we do for Him.

God is not concerned with our productivity, but rather with our obedience. Are we grumbling our way through these seasons or are we allowing God to use these times to transform us into more of Christ’s likeness? Let us walk in joyful obedience, whatever we are doing, whatever season in life, even if it seems like an extravagant waste of our skills or time, it can be used as a fragrant offering to him.

Reflection: On periods in your own life, which you now see as preparation for service in His ministry.

Further Reading: Genesis 39-41 (God using Joseph in prison and preparing him for the future).

Prayer: I thank You for granting me the gift of salvation and accepting me as your child. Teach me to be obedient to your calling. Please deliver me from my problems. Fill my heart with your divine love. Use me as your divine vessel to spread the fragrance of your love everywhere, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

CR

FEBRUARY 26

Not Becoming Weary

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

Galatians 6:9

“And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”

Hebrews 12:1

Do you ever become weary in doing good? Do you ever wonder whether your attempts to serve God are futile? Do you question whether the choices you have made have really been worthwhile? Have you prayed for years for a friend or relative, but have not seen those prayers answered? Do you wonder whether you would be better missing church and Bible studies in order to study for exams or to sleep?

The concept of long, hard, faithful service is not popular today. Instead, people long for instant gratification. People expect to

lose weight after a week of healthy eating, to be able to run ten miles after jogging for a fortnight, to have mastered a new skill within a month. Our perspective is too short. We think ahead as far as the next deadline, the next exam, the next holiday, the next rotation. It can be difficult to see our present situation in the light of eternity; but that is not how God intends things to be.

Living for God can bring challenges and trials. Paul wrote, ‘in fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted’ [2 Timothy 3:12], but ‘we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope’ (Romans 5:3-4.). The choices we make regarding how we live today have eternal consequences. Paul reminds us to ‘fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal’ (2 Corinthians 4:18). He spoke of the ‘weight of eternal glory’ that will result. Writing to a persecuted church, Peter reminded them of the glorious and lasting inheritance in Christ that would result.

When you are tempted to give up, remember that ‘now we see only a reflection as in a mirror’ (1 Cor 13:12). Trust in God who sees the whole picture and do not become weary in doing well.

Further Reading: James 1:2-6.

Prayer: Lord, give me the strength to persevere in prayer and loving service especially when I feel I have little strength and energy, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

CW

FEBRUARY 27

But, I Failed

“Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, hardships, persecutions and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

II Corinthians 12:8-10

It was one of the hardest things I ever faced. I had to tell my patient that my mistake had damaged her heart and that she would probably die from the complication. I spoke the words and then worked for her and with her through the months that led to her death. I was never sued over the incident, but it was years before the husband spoke to me again.

Have you ever failed at something really important, something you were supposed to be good at? A patient? A project? A relationship? A business? A sin? If you have not, you will.

Failure is hard. It hurts us badly and it hurts people for whom we are responsible. Can any good come from failure? Sure: “With God all things are possible.”

1. Failure helps us discover the truth of who we are. We are fallen, sinful, imperfect human beings. Sometimes humans forget this truth.
2. Failure helps us change. If we approach failure properly, we put into motion new actions in our lives that will help us avoid the same mistakes.
3. Failure helps us reach for the God who can carry us through. When all is going well, we tend to reach for ourselves instead.
4. Failure allows God to work in us and through us. Reaching for God in our failures allows him to work in ways not possible when our self-sufficiency is in the way.

Failure is bad because it brings great pain. However, failure is not a total loss. When failure comes again, do not let its pain resolve until it has brought change in your life. Let the pain of failure allow God to meet you in ways you never allowed during your days of success.

Further Reading: Psalm 6.

Prayer: Dear Father, Let me not fail in ways that hurt other people; but when I do, please work in my life and change me to become more like Jesus next time, in Jesus' name, Amen.

GR

FEBRUARY 28

Be Alert

“Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith.”

I Peter 5:8-9a

On the morning of September 11, 2001, I was working in my home office when our daughter Bethany called from her work in the Watergate complex, Washington, DC, with news about an air attack on the World Trade Center. As I watched that New York scene on TV, I suddenly felt and heard a thud. That thud turned out to be a plane crashing into the Pentagon, a few miles from our home.

Bethany had departed the Pentagon Metro station on her morning commute shortly before the plane hit. A series of cell phone calls to her followed as the news unraveled about the terrorist attacks and rumors swirled about bombs exploding and fires in DC. We did not know what target would be next, and Bethany's office sat directly across from the Saudi embassy.

I loaded a bike and a moped into our van and headed toward the city to get her out - a daunting challenge with much of DC evacuating outward. We eventually met up in Vienna, Virginia, and I brought Bethany home safely. However, for thousands of Americans, of course, the news was much worse. We mourned the loss from that day of innocent citizens, rescue workers, and military personnel.

Although, we now may remain safe in our homes and workplaces, our soldiers still fight and give their lives on our behalf overseas. The war against terror rages on, even as time tempts us to neglect the memories and revelations of September 11.

Our war on terror is a picture of spiritual warfare. A crisis, an attack occurs in our lives, and we earnestly seek God for intervention and protection. As He does so, and as we regain peace and security, it is easy to forget that spiritual warfare still, in fact, rages and roars all around us.

Be alert!

Further Reading: Ezekiel 33: 7.

Prayer: Dear Lord as you said watch and pray, I ask you to help me to be watchful each moment and help me overcome my slumber, in Jesus' name, Amen.

JJ

FEBRUARY 29

Do Not Despair

“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed but not in despair; persecuted but not abandoned; struck down but not destroyed.”

2 Corinthians 4:8

you? Most of us are tempted to despair. Moreover, for many of us, the threshold for becoming angry is very low. A misplaced key, a colleague who has not come through with a promise, a few nights of sleep lost. What is God saying to us? When we look at the very beginning of His revealed word to us, we come across a spectacular message to his servant Abram. God said: “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.” (Gen 15.1b)

These are words for us today. “Do not be afraid.” How quickly fear clouds our thoughts. How quickly worries replace trust. How quickly the wonders of God’s work in our lives in the past are blown away by the waves and winds of today’s problems. God is comforting us and commanding us. Do not fear. Trust in Him. Do not trust in anything else.

God promises us protection, but He never promises us that we will live a nice easy life – a shield is used in war after all. We face real dangers – but He is totally and completely with us, let us not forget, but there is more than that. God promises Himself as our reward. Awards will come and go. That precious fruit that seemed so alluring from afar pales after a few bites. That degree, once achieved after so many years of sweat and toil, often ends up pale compared to the next goal on the horizon, the next toy parked outside your neighbor’s home.

However, God is offering His very own self. At the end of the day – even if we are driven away from our place of work by forces ‘outside our control’ – the Lord will never leave us. David was on the run when Jonathan came and helped him “find strength in God” (1 Sam. 23.16).

Nevertheless, even beyond this, what God has promised Abram – and you and me – is that He Himself will be our treasure. Beyond everything that we may yearn for, we have the promise of enjoying God Himself; and that not in the sweet by-and-by, but right now! What is the hope for us and what comforts us as we walk forward into today!

Further Reading: Psalm 46.

AE

Amy Beatrice Carmichael (1867-1951)

Founder of Dohnavur Fellowship, India.



Amy Carmichael was born in Millisle, Ireland, to David Carmichael, a miller, and his wife Catherine. The oldest of seven children. Amy was raised in a devout Presbyterian family which was active in the work of the church.

When she was 16, the family moved to Belfast, where her father founded the Welcome Evangelical Church. A few years later, Amy began a Sunday class for the “shawlies,” young girls who worked in the mills and who wore shawls instead of hats. As the group rapidly grew, she needed to find a place larger than the hall of the Rosemary Presbyterian church. She raised donations, in the form of a plot of land, and 500 pounds with which she built the first “Welcome Hall.” Thus began her life-long mission of concern and care for young women.

Inspired by the work of Hudson Taylor, Amy decided to join the China Inland Mission. She joined the Church Missionary Service (CMS) and began her training for mission work in China. However, poor health, (she suffered from a debilitating neuralgia) made her give up the idea of sailing to China.

Amy then worked for a short period in Ceylon (now Srilanka), and then moved to Bangalore, India, where she was commissioned by the Church of England, Zenana Mission. She began her work with women and children in India. During her work in South India, Amy became aware of the Devadasi tradition, in which young girls were dedicated to the goddess, but later forced into prostitution by the temple priests. She began to rescue these girls and rehabilitate them, earning the ire of the girls’ patrons.

Amy moved to what is now south Tamil Nadu and founded the Dohnavur Fellowship in 1901. This organization draws

its name from Count Dohna, who was involved in funding the work of German Missionaries in India. The Fellowship began as a sanctuary for girls who wished to escape from a life as temple prostitutes. In 1948, the Indian government outlawed the Devadasi system, but the work at Dohnavur continued to grow. The girls who entered the community were given good education, and many entered the healing professions as doctors or nurses. Later, boys who were orphaned were also taken into the community.

Out of respect for Indian customs, Amy wore the sari. To gain acceptance, she darkened her skin with coffee. She is believed to have said that she learned to thank God for her brown eyes, which helped her to blend in with the community - as a child she had longed to have blue eyes. Amy was known as 'Amma' or 'mother,' and was loved by her numerous children at the fellowship. The Dohnavur Fellowship is now run by the Church of South India, and continues its ministry among women and children.

In 1932, after an accidental fall, Amy progressively became bed-ridden, but continued her work, despite severe pain. She was instrumental in inspiring other young women to enter the mission field. One young woman wrote to ask her what the life of a missionary entailed. Amy wrote back, "Missionary life is simply a chance to die." This became the title of her biography by Elizabeth Elliot, "A Chance to Die."

In her later years, Amy founded a religious order "Sisters of the Common Life." She died in India at the age of 83. At her request, no tombstone was placed over her grave. Instead there is a bird bath, simply inscribed, "Amma."

Two quotations from Amy Carmichael:

"You can always give without loving, but you cannot love without giving."

**"Give me the love that leads the way, The faith that nothing can dismay,
The hope no disappointments tire, The passion that will burn like fire.
Let me not sink to be a clod: Make me Thy fuel, Flame of God."**

Prophets of a future not our own

This is what we are about:

We plant seeds that one day will grow.

We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development.

We provide yeast that produces effects beyond our capabilities.

We can not do everything

And there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.

This enables us to do something

And do it very well.

It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way.

An opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results,

But that is the difference between the master-builder and the worker.

We are the workers, not master-builders.

Ministers not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own.

- Archbishop Oscar Arnulo Romero, from San Salvador worked tirelessly for the cause of the poor and marginalized He was assassinated in 1980.

MARCH 1

Our Brokenness

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
For theirs is the kingdom of
heaven.”*

Matthew 5:3

*“The sacrifices of God are a
broken spirit, A broken and
a contrite heart - These, O
God, You will not despise.”*

Psalms 51:17

We live in a fallen world. Realization of our brokenness is the first step in our healing process. It is when, in utter humility before God, we acknowledge our bankruptcy of spirit and feel the need for Him that healing begins. It is only then that we realize that our so-called righteousness is like filthy rags. We need to name our sins and repent. Yes, a broken and contrite heart, God will not despise. He will then clothe us with the robe of righteousness and garments of salvation (Isaiah 61:10) and set us on His path of healing.

We must also acknowledge the brokenness in our family, in our churches, in our health institutions, in our community, and in our world. All our values are being eroded and we are conforming to the views and systems of the world, contrary to the Kingdom values. Self-centeredness and greed for money and power is engaging us and we are ‘building on sand.’ We are in the process of destroying ourselves - our homes, our institutions and our beautiful world. We need to acknowledge that our city walls are in ruins, and as Nehemiah did we need to take stock and repent and mourn and pray and fast (Nehemiah 1:4). Jeremiah 4:8 says: “For this, clothe you with sackcloth, lament and wail. For the fierce anger of the LORD has not turned back from us.”

In our individual and family life, study of God’s Word and prayer is now a low priority. The institution of marriage is breaking down and children are more rebellious. In the face of competition, our healthcare setups are more concerned with rich clientele and our mandate towards the poor is losing focus. We are also more caught up in the commoditization of healthcare rather than in providing compassionate care especially to the poor and needy. Lack of integrity in our stewardship of people, healthcare and churches has resulted in rampant corruption and destruction.

We need healing in our individual life, family life, and corporate life. We need to fear God and love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind. We need to diligently teach the same to our children and grandchildren. We need to write them on the doorposts of our homes and on the gates of our institutions lest we forget the Lord! (Deuteronomy 6).

We as prodigals need to fear the Lord, remember His love, and return to Him. Then, we will move from rags to robes, from ruin to restoration, from brokenness to healing. We need to make the ‘wounded healer,’ our Lord Jesus, known to those who are broken so that they can be healed in Him.

Reflection: On the ways, we have moved away from God in our individual lives, family and corporate life. How can we initiate the process of healing in all these areas?

Further Reading: Psalm 51; Deuteronomy 6; Nehemiah 1 & 2; Matthew 5:1-12. 2 Chronicles 7:14,

CMAI

MARCH 2

Perpetrators of Brokenness

“He (God) dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit.”

Isaiah 5:2

We live in the age of globalization in a context where human beings are turned into commodities and evil is passed off for good. God is not pleased with this. When ‘mammon’ is mistaken for God and evil for good, we are truly and deeply caught up in structures of injustice, gross violence and a broken situation. The prophet Isaiah fearlessly voices out the pain and disappointment of God against the people of Judah; especially, the rich and the ruling class who had forgotten about the love of God and the call and purpose of God in redeeming their lives from slavery. It is important to note that God is not only

pained and hurt when the people of God turn away from His purposes but God reprimands them, chastises them, and invites them to repent of their evil ways and return to God.

God is on the side of the poor and the broken and engages with those who perpetrate oppression and injustice on God’s people. The prophet is fearless in addressing these words to those in power, those who oppress the poor and those who turn a blind eye to situations of injustice.

In our broken world today, it is tempting to keep silence when things go wrong and injustice and corruption is everywhere and when the poor continue to reel under the structures of poverty. Very often, even the church turns a blind eye to the situations of oppression, injustice and poverty in society, and prefers only to pray for the suffering poor. The call of God, through the words of the prophet Isaiah, teaches us that we can neither be silent during situations of oppression and injustice nor can we continue to perpetrate poverty and injustice imagining that God will not act, that God will not mind if we falter, just a few times!

Anyone who is engaged in works of justice and peace ought to be prophetic in their daily life and live out their faith. We need to open our eyes anew, again, to the perpetrators of brokenness amidst us. If we are corrected by God’s word then we will begin looking into our own selves, our own institutions, our own homes and cleanse ourselves, correct ourselves of any injustice or support for injustice that may prevail. God wants us to be partners in the ministry of healing the broken-hearted in this world.

Reflection: How can we become more sensitive to the cries of the poor and the oppressed amidst us? How can we be the communities that live out their prophetic calling in everyday life?

Further Reading: Isaiah 5:2-23; Jeremiah 7:1-11, 23-24; and Ezekiel 34: 1-6.

CMAI

MARCH 3

God in Brokenness

“He (God) heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds.” *Psalm 147:3*

In this psalm, we see that God is identified as being close to the people that are broken-hearted and crushed in spirit. He shares the experience of being crushed in spirit and is always present in the midst of brokenness. The psalmist speaks with confidence when he proclaims that God will console the broken-hearted and ‘bind their wounds.’ He will deliver them, heal them, and

rescue them from their afflictions.

God’s deep concern and His faithfulness in saving the broken-hearted find their ultimate expression in Jesus Christ. Through the life of Jesus, we see that He chose to become one with those who were afflicted and broken. He cried with Mary at the death of Lazarus. Also as the prophet Isaiah foretold, Jesus himself was wounded and crushed; and by participating in this chastisement, he broke the dominion of sin and evil and brought us and all those who were broken peace and healing. In the Nazareth manifesto, Jesus states that he has come to proclaim good news to the poor (the Hebrew understanding of the poor includes those bent low or broken). At the last supper, he reminds us that even He was willing to be broken - “This is my body, broken for you.”

As we strive to follow Jesus as His Church and disciples, we are required to become vulnerable and to identify with those who are broken-hearted and crushed. Whether it is a family experiencing suffering because of sickness or people who are broken by the selfishness of others or by structural greed and evil and are facing extreme hardships. To begin with, we need to recognize that God is present in their midst. As we participate in their struggles and afflictions, we witness to the marvelous hope that we have in God, reminding them of Emmanuel - God is with us. In our brokenness, we experience alienation and the start of healing comes from the realization that God, seemingly distant, is actually beside us. He is faithful and on the side of the broken-hearted and so they are blessed. As Mary sang (Luke 1:52), “He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted the poor and humble.”

Reflection: Do we, who are called to the Healing Ministry, realize that we are also called to be broken like Jesus and to share in the brokenness of others? Have you felt that God was with you in your suffering? Have you shared this experience with someone else who was or is experiencing brokenness?

Further Reading: Luke 1:46-55 and Matthew 5:3-12.

Prayer: Jesus, I come into your presence now and give myself to you - body, soul, and spirit. May I share with the brokenness of others and share your love and peace with them. Come, Lord, shine your light through me, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

CMAI

MARCH 4

Like-Minded Living

“Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind... not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had...”

Philippians 2:2-6

Paul here discusses how followers of Christ are to relate to each other. A disciplined mind is required: to be “like-minded.” However, even Paul did not expect all the Christians in Philippi to totally agree with him (Philip 3:15). Nor is it realistic for us to agree on all matters when doctrines have split up so often in Christian history; especially, if we encourage freedom of individual reading and interpretation. And yet Christian groups, not least medical and dental groups, have to and do work together despite these differences. So what does being like-minded imply?

“Having the same love, being one in spirit,” suggests focusing on our common love for God and our desire to model and spread His love. Praying together in this attitude of mind prepares us to put aside our own agendas for the sake of this common love and goal. This does not mean that everyone dissolves their own opinions and values into worthless mush. Rather, it suggests relinquishing the need to dominate, to win an argument, even the right to be heard, when this puts our relationship and modeling of the love of God at risk. Let us pray, as Paul says, to think in the same way Jesus did, when he “did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage.”

Reflection: On the practices of the early church, that witnessed to their being like-minded.

Further Reading: Acts 2:42-47.

Prayer: Father, enable us to be clear minded in these last days. Help us to live wisely and with purpose. Show us those things that give us fuzzy thinking instead of clear mindedness. May we be able to focus on Your precious Word to define our thinking and decision-making. Make clear to us the areas where we are lacking in self-control and help us to resist the enemy in these areas so that he will flee from us! Help us to know how to pray what is on Your heart! We desire powerful, Spirit-filled lives of prayer that will bring You glory in these last days! Teach us to pray, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

PPM

MARCH 5

Confidence in Change

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

II Corinthians 3:18

“Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.”

II Corinthians 4:1-3

As we approach seasons of change in our lives or our ministry, it can be easy to become discouraged or even fearful. God wants us to maintain confidence in Him at all times and in all ways. In these few verses from Paul, we see an approach to maintaining our confidence in times of change. In 4:1, we are reminded that we have been charged by God with a ministry. The mind quickly recalls that “He who began a good work in you, will be faithful to complete it.” But the first word of verse 1 points us back to the preceding chapter where we have been taught that change is inevitable - in fact, it is a good thing as we are transformed towards our Savior. While He has charged us with a ministry and He works the transformation in our lives, there is an expectation of our behavior in this time of change.

In 4:2, we recognize that we are to be pure in heart and pure in the Word. Finally, the burden of the outcome is not ours to bear. As those who have unveiled faces, we are to be proclaimers of this truth. We are not charged with the unveiling for that is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Reflection: Am I assuming my responsibilities or His in this time of change?

Further Reading: “O Lord, You are our Father; we are the clay and You the Potter: we are all the work of Your hands” (Is 64:7).

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I look up to you in this time of change. Allow me to have the courage to change my life for the better. Teach me to love with an open heart and open spirit. Help with all the trials and give me the strength and energy to follow you. Bless me with love, strength, wisdom, health, courage, forgiveness, and a willingness to learn, in Jesus’ name.

LW

MARCH 6

Ministering Through Pain

“Dear woman, here is your son.”

John 19:26

“Of course, it’s so much harder for African women who can’t get pregnant than it is for you; Chinese women like to have children; but for you Westerners, a career is obviously more important.” Infertility is a lonely path; a long, slow grief without any clear focus. Walking this road whilst living cross-culturally has brought its own challenges; blunt statements and false assumptions cause much pain at times, but then so does the silence more commonly encountered from people of my own culture. When you don’t conform to society’s perception of what is ‘normal,’ it can be very isolating. Unwanted singleness, infertility, same-sex attraction, a broken marriage so many of us carry sorrows comprising our own broken dreams complicated by the misunderstanding of others.

‘Jesus was despised and rejected – a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief’ (Isaiah 53:3). He knows our pain and tears. And on the cross, in the midst of his greatest agony, and total isolation from the Father, He still reached out and ministered to others. He tenderly entrusted his mother into the care of John and gave the wonderful assurance of salvation to the repentant thief being crucified alongside him (Luke 23:43).

As we live with painful experiences, we might be tempted to cut ourselves off from others, particularly if we have been battered and bruised by hurtful comments in the past. But God calls us to share one another’s burdens. My greatest joy as I have walked this path has been new relationships in sometimes surprising places. Friends with whom I can pray, weep and rejoice as we see God at work even in times of grief. Are we being vulnerable with others and giving them permission to share their own deep sorrows with us? May we, like Jesus, be those ready to minister to others, even in the midst of our own pain?

Further Reading: Hebrews 4:14 - 5:10 and Hebrews 10:23-25.

Prayer: Lord, if I have displeased You in any way, kindly forgive me. I know that You are full of love and compassion. You are the Lord of healing and everything is possible with You. Thank You for answering my prayers, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

CR

MARCH 7

Dangerous Situations

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care.”

Matthew 10:27-29

Over the past few months, there has been the biggest outbreak of viral hemorrhagic fever caused by Ebola that the world had ever known, centered in West Africa. Daily there were headlines reporting new cases in new places, increasingly stringent measures attempting to contain the virus (such as cancellation of all international flights to some areas), and of the projected number of fatalities anticipated over the coming months. The World Health Organization had declared a global emergency and required many more trained volunteers to assist. Several missionaries were infected, and case fatality exceeded 60%.

In contrast to other global emergencies, there seems a real fear amongst potential volunteers. Few are seriously considering volunteering, and when we were asked to go, respected Christians suggested it might be better for somebody with fewer family responsibilities to respond. To us, it felt like saying, ‘send someone else.’ The Apostle James, somewhat scathingly said, “If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?” We are hearing reports of distressing deaths, isolated from any human contact, bleeding from every orifice. Who is there to show love, compassion, kindness? To quote the popular slogan of today, ‘What would Jesus do?’ I cannot believe He would turn away.

Throughout the Bible we are taught that serving involves sacrifice. ‘For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul (Matthew 16:25-26).’ Whilst it may be foolish to rush headlong into an inevitably fatal situation, I believe Christians must prayerfully consider choices which the world might view as unwise.

Reflection: Lord, help me to remember that you are sovereign. Help me to make today’s decisions in the light of eternity. There will likely come a time when my choices seem unwise in the eyes of the world, and perhaps even to other Christians. Help me live my whole life sacrificially, in your service.

Further Reading: James 2: 14-17.

CW

MARCH 8

Lord I Need Strength and Energy To Go On

“He gives strength to the weary and increases power to the weak.”

Isaiah 40:29

During my training as a resident in Ob-Gyn, we were only ten in my class. This meant that one covered Casualty duties for 24 hours and this was followed by another 24 hours of emergency Gynecological theatre duty. One day, I carried out a laparotomy for an ectopic pregnancy and this was followed by thirty uterine evacuations for incomplete abortions. I got a call from my intern reporting that I still had ten more evacuations and two laparotomies. I had not eaten and had an accumulated sleep deficit.

I just went to the changing room and prayed for strength, and then rushed for a snack. I got energized and by the end of my 24 hours I had cleared the list.

Later, I was reading Mark 1:35 ‘very early in the morning while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house to a solitary place where he prayed.’ Jesus, although He was God, got tired and needed re-energizing. He did not plan to reduce His work but looked for the energy to cope. He couldn’t get it from the disciples or from the crowd; he could only get it from God. This is the example He left us to follow.

As Christian health workers, we need to constantly keep our fellowship line with God - open and in use. We have a very demanding profession and have to make a positive effort to have a quiet time with God, as well as time for fellowship with other Christians (Heb. 10:24-25). And let us consider how we may spur one another towards love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing. The results are in Isaiah 40:30-31. ‘Even youth grow tired and weary, but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar with wings like eagles, they will run and not grow weary, and they will walk and not be faint.’

Further Reading: Galatians 6:9-10.

Prayer: Lord, create a deep hunger in me, for a daily fellowship with you, in Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

JK

MARCH 9

Created in His image

“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. Matt. 10: 29-31

passing judgement on the health care team, who saw the problem as beyond the reach of their limited resources. But this leads us to reflect on the value of a human life.

I lost a loved one three months back, we are still grieving – the value loss is still felt. How do I decide that this life is more valuable than the tribal girl whom I saw die? Is it based on the “Position” and “Status” a person holds? Based on the “relationship” I have with that person? Based on the dominant culture of the context, where life is valued less? Based on the caste, tribe and gender values our cultures give to different groups? Based on productivity?

We are of course of more worth than sparrows – that is what the Bible says. But we are of more worth than the sparrows because of “Imago Dei” – intrinsic worth due to the “Image of God” in us and not the extrinsic worth attributed to what we achieve or where and which community we are born into, or what we are perceived by the culture as!

Reflection: If that is so – is the worth of the 8 year old girl who died in front of me of equal worth to the loved one I lost few weeks back? If so – how should I see worth... in all the people whom I come across each day?

The value of human life is difficult to ascertain. Even after death, commercial value is assigned to the “remains”, as there is a thriving business of organ donation. Based on the condition of the body, the value may vary from less than a dollar to over 20,000 dollars!

Our question is “How much is a human life worth?”

While visiting a hospital in a remote tribal location, I saw an 8 year old girl die in the HDU, of a preventable viral infection that is spread by mosquitoes. Everyone, including the parents and myself, seemed to accept the death as having been inevitable. I am not

the parents who accepted this as “fate”, or the health care team, who saw the problem as beyond the reach of their limited resources. But this leads us to reflect on the value of a human life.

SMT

MARCH 10

Life Before

Death

“They will still bear fruit in old age...”

Psalm 92:14

Now that I am enjoying retirement myself, it is interesting to reflect on how I viewed my older and disabled patients. I would say to myself that so far I can still do everything I used to do, but I can do less of it, I do it more slowly and I take longer to recover!

So what do we think about getting old? We have so many inspiring examples in the bible of people

used mightily by God in their later years – Caleb went out to fight at the age of eighty-five. Moses left Midian and returned to Egypt to speak to Pharaoh when he was eighty. Daniel is thought to have been over eighty when he went into the lions’ den.

As age and infirmity set in, so many seem to turn inwards. Clearly as Christians, we can hold out the sure and certain hope of eternal life for those who are in Christ, but how can we give them hope for what remains of this life on earth?

It is good to exercise ourselves physically, mentally and spiritually as much as we are able. However, as limitations come along, with God’s help we can employ the three ‘A’s - Accept, Adapt, Achieve. As we accept our limitations and adapt as well as we can, we can then achieve all that God still has for us to achieve, and we may continue to bear fruit in old age.

What about when mind and body seem to have crumbled completely and we are utterly dependent on others? Perhaps the fruit that God would bring to pass in those circumstances is the work of grace that he can do in those who have to make extra sacrifices to care for us.

Reflection: Is there more I could do to instill hope in my patients for this life, as well as the life to come?

Further Reading: Isaiah 46:3-4.

Prayer: Father, it is good to give thanks to you, to sing praises to your name. For You, O Lord, have made us glad by your work. Your mercy flows over us like fresh oil. Because of your grace the faithful flourishes like the palm tree and grows like a cedar in Lebanon, they are planted in your house and flourish in your courts, bearing fruit in old age they are ever full of sap and life, we thank you Lord, in Jesus name, Amen.

KV

MARCH 11

Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.... Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Mark 12:29-31

‘She belongs to us.’ I went on to tell her that I was confident that she and the team would teach her all that she missed as she grew up. There was a long pause... by God’s grace we shall.’ Within a week, she was clean and able to control both urine and stool. We got someone to treat the jiggers and within two weeks she was healed.

As I pondered the contents of the above conversation, I realized how deep the meaning of love is. Humanly speaking it is difficult to serve some people with Christ’s love. This could be because they are dirty, poor, sick and generally speaking simply unlovable! For us as Christians, we are supposed to manifest the love of Christ who lives in us, irrespective of barriers between us and these neighbors. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, makes this clear ‘Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone and the new has come.’ Next time, God brings an unlovable person your way - call upon Him to give you grace and wisdom to know how to minister to him or her.

Further Reading: Luke 10: 25-27.

Prayer: Lord our Father, fill my heart with Christ’s love so that I can serve anyone you bring my way with Christ’s love and compassion, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

I got a distress call from our rescue center that looks after girls in crisis pregnancy. The problem was that the patient, who was eleven and a few months, was taken there for admission because she was about seven months pregnant and came from a very poor family. The house mother said ‘She is in rags, hears but does not speak, malnourished, feet are infested by jiggers. We gave her food and a cup of tea, she passed stool and urine on the chair! What should we do?’ I asked her ‘is she carrying a crisis pregnancy?’ She replied ‘Yes.’ Then, I replied,

She replied ‘Yes.’ Then, I replied,

MARCH 12

Brief Lives, Lasting Influence

“Wait for the Lord...and take heart.”

Psalm 27:14

In a country churchyard, there is a small headstone recording the death of a 3-week-old baby. Over a period of 20 years, I have sometimes passed that way and each time found fresh flowers on the grave. Intrigued, I traced the baby's mother and heard her story.

Little Philip, a firstborn child, had started to vomit soon after birth, suggestive of pyloric stenosis. If that diagnosis is correct, a simple operation could have saved him. Instead, he died in a country hospital a few miles from the home village. Sleeping in the next room, his mother was told the news and that she should knock on the wall if she needed anything. Next day, she was sent home by bus to await her husband's return from work. Fellow passengers, ignorant of her story, kindly enquired about the baby.

Alone, newly bereaved, and in such a public place, she had to tell them. The whole experience marked her so deeply that from then on, in addition to taking the flowers, she had noted newspaper reports of the death of a young child and written to the parents to express her sympathetic understanding. Brief lives can still bear fruit.

The painful grit that enters an oyster's tender flesh must be eased when covered by mother-of-pearl. Something is being formed that will eventually be of special value to others. Of course, in human terms, unrelieved mental suffering can produce a throbbing emotional abscess instead of a pearl. Yet, over the years, professionals have realized that the expression of love and support by others gradually brings comfort to a bereaved family. Like Philip's mother, many sufferers then reach out with special sympathy to others going through similar trials.

A fellow feeling is said to make us wonderfully kind, a possible blessing coming out of a time of intense personal suffering. Writing to the Corinthians about this, Paul comments how God, the father of compassion – ‘comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.’ The answer to our ‘Why?’ can be ‘Wait.’

After all, this is the message of our Savior's cross and resurrection; and one that in time, we may find applies to our lesser crucifixions.

Reflection: *“Be patient and await His leisure.*

With cheerful hope and heart content.

To take whate'er the Father's pleasure.

And His discerning love has sent.

Nor doubt our inmost wants are known.

To Him who chose us for His own.

- Georg Neumark

Translated by Catherine Winkworth

Further Reading: John 13:7 and 2 Corinthians 1:3-7.

JG

MARCH 13

Don't Let Evil Doers Get You Down

“Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.”
Psalm 73:1-3, Psalm 73:13-17

neglect. Have you ever wondered whether it is worth it at all? Have you looked at non-Christian colleagues and seen their apparent success and prosperity? Have you asked yourself whether you might be better to spend extra hours revising for exams, designing audit projects, keeping your paperwork up to date or writing research proposals, rather than in prayer or Bible study and fellowship?

I ask this because it is something I grapple with frequently! I remember the encouragement and relief I felt when I first discovered Psalm 73. I was not the first person who had experienced these thoughts. It was as though the Psalmist had read my mind. ‘All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.’ And this psalm did all of those things for me.

We are reminded to build with materials that will last. Treasure in heaven is of far greater value than treasure on earth. In the story of Martha and Mary, Jesus made it clear that there are more important things than work, however well executed. Without neglecting your duties and responsibilities, remember what matters most.

Further Reading: Jeremiah: 17:7-8.

Prayer: Lord, please help me to remember what is most important. Help me to prioritize building my relationship with you, and equip me to serve you better, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

CW

Spiritual discipline takes effort. Peter tells us to ‘be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray.’ Paul instructs Timothy to ‘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.’ The Hebrew Christians were reminded, ‘not to give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing.’ The Thessalonians were challenged to ‘pray continually.’

These are things that may not come naturally. When we are pressed for time it is easy to

MARCH 14

Follow Me

“Come, follow me,” said Jesus, “and I will make you fishers of men.”

Matthew 4:19

Jesus Christ wherever we go.

But there's another side to the story. That is, there is a spiritual gift of evangelism, which some Christians have and others don't. To be literal about it, it is the gift of being an evangelist. The people with this gift have a unique ability to share their faith with other people. Here is how we define this gift in the Spiritual Gifts Inventory - The special ability that God gives to certain members of the body of Christ to present the gospel message clearly to non-believers and lead them to put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and also to equip other believers to do likewise.

God asks us to make disciples of all nations. Just as we need equipment to be fishermen, we need equipment to be fishers of men. Putting on the armor of God is one way to be ready at all times with everything we need - **Ephesians 6:10-18**. Especially, important are the shield of faith with which we ward off the opposition from demonic forces who don't want to see men saved by the Gospel of Christ and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Without these two pieces of spiritual equipment, we will find fishing for men's souls impossible.

Not only must we have the armor of God as our equipment, but we must also know the fish we are trying to attract. Knowing the lost condition of the people around us will help us to understand that. No matter how good we are at fishing, we will never 'catch' the fish on our own. No reasoned argument will convert the soul of a darkened mind. But God can and frequently does penetrate the darkness with the glorious gospel, and He uses us to do it. He knows which "fish" are His; therefore, we are to seek His wisdom and His guidance on all our fishing expeditions. Prayer is essential. The gospel message has the power to change lives, shine light into darkness, and deliver evil men from hell. There is power in no other message and no other "bait" can catch the fish of God.

This was Jesus' message to Peter and Andrew - follow Me, learn of Me, know and understand My mission and My message. He is calling us as well. Only, then will we be able to be fishers of men.

Prayer: Lord, help us to expand your kingdom for your glory and your honor, in Jesus' name, Amen.

LDR

MARCH 15

Discovering Our Identity

“He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love, He predestined us to be adopted as His sons and daughters, through Jesus Christ according to his pleasure and will, to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the one He loves. In Him, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that He lavished on us.”

Ephesians 1:4-8

In the country where I work, doctors’ have high social status. Many come from powerful families. They command good salaries. People look up to them and they are invariably called ‘doctor’ at work, home, church ... everywhere. Is this you? If this is where your identity is, it needs feeding. Your identity is perpetually hungry for more affirmation from colleagues, more admiration from friends, more status to measure itself by, and more salary to add value. It is never satisfied.

But where is your identity as a Christian doctor? It is not dictated by social status or by money, by professional acclaim, by the opinion of the public about your profession. It is dictated by what God says about you.

What am I? I am chosen, predestined to be adopted as his child, redeemed, loved, forgiven - it goes on and on, and all through and in Christ, all through the amazing riches of his

grace! As Christians this is who we are.

Just like earthly identity, your heavenly identity needs feeding too. So take to heart this passage and the rest of Ephesians 1: feed on it, come back to it, and meditate on it. As the famous Anglican collect says, ‘Read, mark, learn and inwardly digest it.’ Then you will not be enslaved by the earthly identity. You will have a Christian identity that frees you from your profession, the opinion of others and your opinion about yourself.

Further Reading: Romans 12:1-8.

Prayer: Lord, I thank you that my true identity comes from you. Enable me to always be conscious of your presence with me, which frees me from anxiety about what others think of me.

RF

MARCH 16

Trusting God in The Pit

“You brought my life up from the pit, O Lord my God... Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.”

Jonah 2:6-8

we have done something wrong, then we have also let down God’s name.

We entered medicine to help people. Therefore, to be potentially causing harm or even just to be accused of it can really trouble our sense of worth and purpose. While God may allow us to be in the pit for a while, he does not want us to stay there.

Jonah had the insight to turn to God for rescue from inside the whale. While doing so he noted that many others in his situation might have invested their hope for salvation elsewhere and thus not experienced the rescue which came to him.

Whatever the reason for us being in a pit, we are wise to trust in God’s grace for our salvation. Whether our circumstances are connected with personal sin as in Jonah’s case or even if we are the innocent party, trusting in God is the best plan.

Our sense of worth and purpose should not simply depend on us being able to cure everybody, communicate perfectly or convert everyone we meet to following Jesus. Whether in a pit or not, let’s try afresh to trust God for who we are and what we do today.

Further Reading: Psalm 40:1-5.

Prayer: Dear Lord, you see me clearly and you love me unconditionally. Help me to trust you with the plan you have for me. Renew my Spirit and strengthen me. Thank you for hearing me, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

RW

MARCH 17

Word of Knowledge

“For his God instructs and teaches him properly.”
Isaiah 28:26

A patient underwent an uneventful drainage procedure for the ethmoids and maxillary sinuses as he had presented to the casualty with acute sinusitis and meningitis. However, he developed intractable epistaxis on the 2nd and 4th post-operative day, wherein he lost a few liters of blood. The surgeons were perplexed at the intensity of the epistaxis; and even as I scrubbed in along with the

senior consultant for the re-examination, the anxiety among the staff was palpable. I prayed to the Lord for understanding and there came a clear impression in my mind – the quiet whisper-to look into the sphenoid sinus.

During the procedure, no point of bleeding could be identified in the operated sinuses, and hence the time came for suggestions. At that point, I, the junior most in the team, suggested examining the sphenoid sinuses. This was received with skepticism, as this sinus was uninvolved with the disease and therefore no surgery had been done in it. Reluctantly, the senior surgeon opened the sphenoid sinuses, only to find the torrential burst of fresh blood shooting across the surgical field!!!! The subsequent angiography revealed a mycotic aneurysm of the internal carotid artery that had ruptured spontaneously into the sphenoid sinus and the patient underwent a successful embolization.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, when He spoke about the Holy Spirit mentioned that He will guide us into all the truth and will disclose to us what is to come (John 16: 13). The word of knowledge (1 Corinthians 12:8) is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in which believers can operate and gain understanding into realms which are not naturally possible. The Scripture records that the Lord will give us understanding in everything (2 Timothy 2: 7) and that the word of God is inspired by God, so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Reflection: He stores up sound wisdom for the upright (Proverbs 2:7). How do we make it a practice to trust the Lord for wisdom?

Further Reading: Isaiah 28: 23 – 29.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you have given us everything we need to live a godly life, through our knowledge of Jesus who called us by His own glory and goodness - praise Your holy name, Amen

RT

MARCH 18

The Call and The Criteria for Rest

*“Come unto Me, all ye that
labor and are heavy laden
and I will give you rest.”*
Mathew 11:28

As Christian doctors having experienced His inner healing in our hearts, we faithfully respond to His call saying “Lord, here I am, send me.” But often on this road of obedience, we find ourselves being overburdened laborers. On a personal note, I have found myself in such straits not only as a medical student, but whilst I worked in a mission hospital and thereafter as an academician - and this verse has come as a source of great comfort.

In recent times, I found myself:

Living in the valleys whilst one yearns for the mountain tops,
Days dulled by the call of duty and care that dampen spirits,
I called to the deep and the deep called to me,
I opened my eyes and the glory I beheld in the valley,
Friend, the mirth I shared, how can I not but proclaim,
There is wealth oh so much wealth in the valleys,
If you only care to see.

The wealth I found was in the verse to follow, “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” - Mathew 11: 29. I was to take His yoke and to learn from Him so as to find the rest He offered me. I paused to focus on Him and soon realized that Jesus focused on “Thy will be done” and in fact He did nothing apart from the Father, even the words He spoke, “For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken – John 12:49.” Looking on the inside it slowly dawned on me that along the years, I had slowly accumulated the load that was not mine to carry, expectations of self and of those around me had wearied me. The days to follow were of prayerful disentanglement bringing His yoke to focus and rest came as promised.

Reflection: C.S. Lewis quoted, there are only two kinds of people – One who say to God “Thy will be done” and the other to whom God says “thy will be done.” Where am I this morning? Is it His yoke I am carrying or is it my Will masquerading as His?

Further Reading: Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ. Galatians 1:10.

Prayer: Sit quietly in prayer for a few seconds. Dear God help me rest in the green pastures and beside the quiet waters of God’s tender love for me. Lord, May I know where I am today, whether in Your will or my will. Set me right to say Thy will be done in my life, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

SKD

MARCH 19

Dry Times

“Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I call to you.”

Psalm 61:1-2a

We all remember the joy we had at salvation - gratitude at the freedom of forgiveness, the excitement of free access to God, our insatiable appetite for the Word, emotional times of worship, our expectancy that God would answer our prayers. These are times we like to remember!

But like David, we don't stay on that exalted plane always. There are times of drought, when God seems distant and we are in the desert. Quite a few missionaries experienced this. When the honeymoon is over and stark reality sets in: there is a longing to see distant family and friends, there are difficulties learning a new language and culture. Interpersonal struggles when iron is sharpening iron, but sparks also fly! There is the pain of being misunderstood, unappreciated, and times when faith and fortitude are tried.

David calls out to a seemingly distant God, begging Him to hear his cry, to listen to his prayer. His heart grows faint, calling as if from the ends of the earth, remembering the former times, when God was his rock and refuge, his strong tower against the foe - the accuser, the deceiver. David longs to live with Him forever, to know again the shelter and security of His presence.

Many nights we, like David, cry out to God, weeping and seeking his help. All of us can identify with David's struggle. It is our struggle at times. But praise be to God, the psalm doesn't end there! The final verses reassure us that God is a God who hears and answers prayer. And that those of us who fear His Name have a rich heritage.

David's words remind us that this is not our home. Take heart - we are not home yet!

Prayer: Lord, give me the strength that I need to face today. If you just give me the strength to overcome this dryness today, I don't have to worry about tomorrow. Help me to keep my eyes on you. You are my rock and my refuge, and all of my hope rests in you, in Jesus' name, Amen.

SFH

MARCH 20

Peace

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:7

This is the climax of the section in Philippians which starts with Paul’s exhortation to rejoice in the Lord always. That joy spills over into gentleness, a sense of the Lord’s presence in place and imminence in time. That joy drives away anxiety, for anxiety is replaced by prayer, and prayer is filled with thanksgiving. In that context, the peace of God will guard our hearts and minds in Christ.

Restlessness of heart and mind is common in us and in our patients. There are many things which can cause disquiet. In Scripture, such emotions were usually attributed to the heart or to our minds and often these two words together. The heart in Scripture is where decisions are made; the bowels are where we feel our emotions! The word ‘minds’ in this verse is the word ‘thoughts.’ The role of the brain in feeling and thinking would only be found centuries later. But, we all have had racing thoughts and restless hearts, and we certainly will meet our share in our consultations. By contrast Paul, in prison, expressed confidence and peace. It is the peace of a man of prayer, a man who knows his God and who has confidence that God is working his purposes out in the midst of adversity. That is why he prays and gives thanks.

This peace is not just any sort of peace, but it is the peace of God, a supernatural peace which stills restless hearts and quiets racing thoughts. As Isaiah 26:2 says, “Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace – in peace because they trust in you.” Or again later (Isaiah 30:15), “In returning and rest you will be saved; in quietness and trust shall be your strength.”

Or in Vivian Kretz’s words: Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee, When the shadows come and darkness falls He giveth inward peace, O He is the only perfect resting place, He giveth perfect peace Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on Thee.

Reflection: Be confident in God, He is above our circumstances and our hearts can rest in Him.

Further Reading: John 14:1-4.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we ask You to give us peace in our mind, body, soul and spirit, in Jesus’ name, Amen

AG

MARCH 21

What Does Love Look Like?

“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Ephesians 2:10

“What does love look like is the question I’ve been pondering; what does love look like?” Misty Edwards, Arms Wide Open.

It was my second day back working in intensive care in Hong Kong, the young lady with severe pneumonia was struggling to stay still as her head was draped for a central line insertion. In training, I was beside, her watching the procedure. Compassion was stirred as she struggled to stay still and fight off fear. I took her hand, peeked under the drapes and reassured her. A simple gesture - to squeeze her hand.

In China, opportunities to express love take many forms. There are the obvious: history taking, prescribing, treating; but also the less obvious, to take a visiting family from the countryside to hospital, to visit someone in need, to provide accommodation or to sit and listen, to pray for healing.

A lucrative locum post came up, I was tempted and some cash is helpful sometimes. However, at the same moment there was a little girl with Down’s syndrome who needed foster care. She stayed with me. God graciously paid the bills! I was very blessed by such a precious opportunity. Sometimes in looking for the big things, we miss the little opportunities to love a smile, an encouraging word, a meal. Little kindnesses that show the heart of a Father who loves and is not afraid to come and enter our mess. In ICU, I was surprised when my patient said thanks for holding her hand. She remembered that small gesture.

Never underestimate the impact of a small act of kindness.

Prayer: Thank You, Father, that You have prepared beforehand good works for me to walk in. Grant that I might see these opportunities and take full advantage of them in the power of your Spirit, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

SSL

MARCH 22

He Didn't Let Me Speak!

“Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”

Proverbs 12:18

Effective communication is an essential element of whole-person and patient centered medical practice. It requires listening to patients with empathy, letting them speak, addressing their needs and concerns, and speaking to them openly and honestly in a way they could understand.

In my own specialty of vascular surgery most diagnosis are relatively straightforward and could be made in the first minutes of the consultation; however, sometimes it takes me over an hour to fulfill my duty and moral obligation of relating to patients not just as a (hopefully competent) technician, but also as a counselor and a friend.

Good doctor-patient communication and respect for the patients' concerns has been shown to improve both patient and physician satisfaction and reduce malpractice claims. Lack of time and increased workload are some of the pressures doctors face nowadays that disrupt communication. However, in spite of these pressures it's important to remember that ultimately effective communication with patients is our responsibility as careers.

The report, Tomorrow's Doctors (General Medical Council, 2003), lists some examples of circumstances when communication is particularly hard, such as breaking bad news, dealing with difficult and violent patients, communicating with people with mental illness (including cases where patients have special difficulties in sharing how they feel and think), communicating with and treating patients with severe mental or physical disabilities, and helping vulnerable patients.

For most physicians, these challenging situations are rare but improving communication skills is useful for the daily work of every professional. Communication and consultation skills can and should be learned - by training and practice.

As the God-inspired wisdom of the Book of Proverbs reminds us in 12:18. Speaking words that convey our care and compassion should be our aim in every clinical encounter.

Reflection: How can we develop the skill of listening - to God and to others?

Further Reading: Proverbs 12:14-28.

JC

MARCH 23

Hospitality

“A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.”

Proverbs 11:25

“Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.”
Hebrews 13:2

How do you view your free time? When you have been busy at the hospital all day? When you have exams, audits, and presentations to occupy some of your free time?

How do you feel when you have an evening to spare? Is this ‘me time,’ to be guarded jealously? How do you feel when there is an unexpected phone call or a friend calls spontaneously?

I must confess, I have been tempted not to respond. After all, if people realized just how many demands there were on my time, they would surely respect my ‘right’ to some peace and quiet. But on those times when I have, somewhat begrudgingly opened my door, I have known some of the richest times of encouragement, and some of the most God-given opportunities to serve.

This should not surprise me. Throughout the Bible, there are examples of people who offered the little they had to God, only to see him use this beyond their expectations. Two immediate examples are the boy with the five loaves and two fish which then fed the crowd of five thousand and of the widow who offered her ‘mite’ and was noted and commended by Jesus for her faith and trust. I believe such principles can be extended to how we use our time, perhaps especially when we feel there is so little of it. It may be a sacrifice of our own needs or desires, but God is lord of our time as He is of our whole lives.

There is certainly a time when the wise response is to say ‘No’ to competing priorities, Jesus makes clear that He knows our need for rest, but do so prayerfully. Ask God for wisdom and grace, and give your time to him as an act of worship and faith. May God surprise you with refreshment and encouragement as you do so.

Further Reading: Genesis 18:1-8.

Prayer: Lord, forgive me for being selfish with my time. I pray you give me wisdom each day regarding how I should use my free time, which often seems so very limited. Help me to be welcoming to others who are in need, and be able to share your love and truth with them, in Jesus’ name.

CW

MARCH 24

“Do This in Remembrance of Me”

“Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.”

1 Corinthians 11:27

Celebrating the Lord’s Supper is deeply significant and full of meaning. First held when Jesus kept the Passover feast with His disciples on the evening before He was betrayed, the Lord’s Supper or Christian Communion, looks back to the death of our Lord and His victory over death at the resurrection, as well as His coming again to earth at the end of the age.

What does God require from us before we can take the Lord’s Supper? Does he want us to promise that this time we’ll be good? This is the Word of God from the Psalm 51:16-17. For you will not delight in sacrifice or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a

broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

The apostle Paul describes the last supper in 1 Corinthians 11:23-32. All four Gospel writers also give us the details of this all-important event.

But what does the text mean? The phrase “in an unworthy manner” is just one word in the Greek. It’s an adverb. It’s not talking about who we are, but talking about how we come. There’s a world of difference between those two things. We’re not perfect. We’re never going to be perfect. It’s talking about whether we come with an attitude of openness and brokenness and say, “Lord, I’m not worthy but I am depending upon your grace.” Jesus broke the bread before He gave it to the disciples. This brokenness of the bread foreshadowed the brokenness of His body due to His flogging and cruel nailing to the cross. And the poured-out wine, which Jesus and His friends drank that night, was a fitting symbol of the blood that would be shed the following day. And since this was to be a feast of remembrance, it was to be carried out into future generations.

Finally, Jesus speaks of a New Covenant - **Luke 22:20**. The sacrifice of a lamb, required by the Old Covenant, was terminated, having fulfilled its purpose - **Hebrews 8:8-13**. The one-time sacrifice of Christ, God’s Passover Lamb, established a New Covenant. This new covenant, in which, we receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life through Christ’s shed blood and broken body, is celebrated as we remember Him in the Lord’s Supper. Amen.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, May I live each day remembering You and Your love for me demonstrated in your death. All praise be to you, Jesus! Amen.

LDR

MARCH 25

Father, Forgive Them.....

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Luke 23:34

What did Jesus mean? What happened that day at Skull-Hill was unforgivable. When we crucify the Son of God, we have done that which is beyond forgiveness. It is truly unforgivable. And yet Jesus said, in His first words from the cross, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do" - **Luke 23:34**. No one standing near the cross expected Him to say that. A dying man might scream or curse or utter threats, but they had never heard a word of forgiveness when a man was being crucified. Yet, that is precisely what Jesus offered to the men who were murdering Him. He offered them forgiveness. He prayed that they might be forgiven. He asked His righteous and Holy Father in heaven, the Lord of the universe, to forgive His murderers while they were murdering Him.

Consider how Jesus responds to his crucifixion, He doesn't offer a word in his own defense. The last phrase of **Isaiah 53:12** explains the significance of this cry from the cross: "**For He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.**" There is no time left for Him to instruct His disciples. Soon, He will be dead. As His life ebbs from His beaten and bruised body, as the blood drips to the ground, He does the one thing He can do. He prays.

His prayer is very brief and very specific. He prays for His murderers that God would forgive them "**for they do not know what they are doing.**" Among the many lessons, we may gain from this., none is more important than this - No one is beyond the reach of God's grace. If we have any concept of grace at all, we understand that grace extends to the worst of sinners. But that concept becomes very difficult when we have to forgive those who have sinned greatly against us.

Ponder those haunting words: "Father forgive them because they do not know what they are doing." Underline the word "what," because it is the key to the first saying of Christ from the cross. They do not know what they are doing. They know they are killing a man, named Jesus, but they don't know who He really is. They don't understand His true identity. They are guilty of killing a man but they are guilty of much worse than they know. They are guilty of killing the Son of God from heaven. When Jesus cried out, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do," He was really saying "Father forgive them because they need forgiveness more than they know and they are in desperate need of forgiveness and they don't even know it."

Prayer: Father, help me to forgive, even as you forgave others from your cross.

LDR

MARCH 26

The Meaning of Scars

“Let the redeemed of the LORD tell their story – those He redeemed from the hand of the foe.”

Psalm 107:2

I remember clearly the day I met Jack. Covered from head to toe in numerous ugly wide scars, he looked like a man who shouldn't be alive. In the battle of man vs. crocodile, not many survive. But Jack lived to tell the tale, a gripping story of how he was literally snatched from the jaws of death. His conclusion was profound: 'I like the scars; they make me grateful to be alive and remind me and all the kids to keep

away from the crocodile nest!'

Scars, we all have them. Physical scars may be those inflicted on us by others or what we have bought on ourselves through our own recklessness and stupidity. Emotional and mental scars also have the same causes. And far too often, rather than proclaiming 'I like the scars,' we try and cover them up. We try to hide the evidence for the fear of others discovering, what caused them. We try to deny the rejection and sin which has left us broken people. We feel the need to apply make-up and present ourselves as perfect flawless people.

Maybe we need to learn a lesson from the psalmist and from Jack. We are the redeemed. Let us tell our story! Maybe, we are ashamed of our youthful stupidity which led us into the crocodile nest, but it is in that context that we boast in the one who saved us. By definition, scars declare that the healing process has taken place. They're not a sign of defeat; they are a declaration of survival.

Reflection: How may your scars bear testament to God's redemption?

Further Reading: Isaiah 53:4-5 and John 20:24-31. Jesus also bears scars.

Prayer: Dear Lord, I have many scars on my body and in my soul. I pray that You will take these scars and use them for Your glory. I pray that You will give me the courage not to hide them, but to show the world the healing power of Jesus Christ in my life. Thank You for healing me and making me whole, in Jesus' name, Amen.

BL

MARCH 27

Easter

“Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, “Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, “Rabboni!” Jesus said to her, “Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.’”

John 20:15-17

It was only when Jesus called her by name, ‘Mary’ that she suddenly came alive and recognized Jesus.

Note also how Jesus gives to both Mary and the disciples, a strong sense of belonging. He says - Tell my “brethren” and also says “My father and your father and My God and your God.” Remember that this is also our identity: “brothers of Christ having the same Father.” What an encouragement!!

In a world where people are lonely and discouraged, this Easter story reminds us that we should know people personally and call them by their names as we care and look after them. We can do this since we have a very secure identity!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Son to earth as a baby so many years ago. Thank you that He paid the punishment for my sins by dying on the cross. And thank you that He rose again to prove that death was truly defeated. I place my trust in You to be my Saviour. Guide me through the dark times of my life and give me courage to live for You, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

In a society that depersonalizes human beings, this Easter story acts like a powerful reminder to the power of a “name.”

When I was a registrar in Pediatric Surgery, I was looking after a child who had a nephrectomy for a Wilm’s tumor. Her official name was Sobhupriya and I would call her that the first few times I did her dressing. Then one day I discovered, she was called ‘Gudiya’ or a doll by her family, a pet name. The next time I got to her bedside I called her ‘Gudiya,’ and she gave me a warm, wonderful smile that lit the whole room. The power of being called by your own name!

We see the same phenomenon with Mary Magdalene who came to the Garden tomb to see where the body of Jesus lay. She saw Jesus, but yet did not ‘see Him.’

VS

MARCH 28

The Mindset of The Kingdom

“Whatever were gains for me... I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ and be found in him... I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me... Their mind is set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven.”

Philippians 3:7-20 selected

Many of us enter medicine with ideas of serving, of caring, of saving lives “for God.” When we graduate our goals diversify, and sometimes we lose sight of those original ideas. We need to build up our practice, establish a research base, get cited and invited, appointed and promoted, get good student ratings, and develop our family life and home. None of these are bad, nor is it bad to pursue flawless observance of the Torah, as Paul claimed he had. But none of them are worthwhile ends in isolation from relationship with God.

When “Christ Jesus took hold” of Paul he became seized of a different priority, compared to which he considered his former priorities to be “garbage.” His goal was transformed to one of “gaining Christ.” Paul still recognized historical value in Torah (Romans 3:1-2), but “to know Christ” became central and it was not an emotive swing. It was a considered decision, a set of the mind and will, heeding to God’s calling, not pursuing earthly or even religious ambitions for their own sakes. He saw himself first as a citizen of God’s kingdom, rather than a Pharisaic Jew or a subject of Caesar.

We, too, need to revisit our priorities and ensure that God’s will remain central in our decision-making.

Further Reading: Psalm1:1-5.

Prayer: Lord, we pray for recovery of Your priority in our hectic life [Work & Personal]. In so doing, we commit all our other concerns to You. Let Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

PPM

MARCH 29

Guarding the Mind

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:6-7

Part of being a citizen of the kingdom of God is to apply the values of that kingdom to our lives. Those values are based on love, faith and hope; on restoration and forgiveness; repentance, reconciliation and acceptance based on grace. In a sense, however, our lives are lived out in “Caesar’s kingdom,” whether that is the constraints of the health department or authority, the hospital, the medical school, the medical, nursing or dental councils of this world. These are at once God-ordained, yet secular. Our acceptance with these bodies is not based on grace or trust, but increasingly on having to prove and re-prove our knowledge, ability, competence, credentials, certifications, continuing education, publication impact, national or international recognition etc.

Being a good or excellent student or health professional comes at an emotional cost and a fear that one day we may fail in these criteria and be reproved by our peers or teachers. This is on top of anxieties we may have about ourselves, how we have dealt with our patients, how we are balancing work with family life. When we present these worries to God, He responds with unconditional acceptance. Let us do so in prayer with thanks, and let the values of God’s kingdom transform us and keep watch over our hearts and minds. At that point, the peace of God will enter piercing even the firewalls of the secular professional bodies we serve, and transcending the boundaries of our anxiety and understanding. “Be still and know that I am God.”

Reflection: On the many occasions when God has helped me to deal with my anxieties, and to resolve problems in my work.

Further Reading: Isaiah 30:15.

Prayer: I confess, Lord, that I so often prefer worry over prayer. Thank you that you invite me to cast all my cares upon you. I pray that I may learn to do that with a heart of continual thanksgiving, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

PPM

MARCH 30

Channeling the Mind

“...whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things... And the God of peace will be with you.”

Philippians 4:8-9

love would discern what is best. Here, he advises them to focus their minds on the best in others - whatever is admirable, excellent or praiseworthy.

Healthcare requires high standards, and our training embodies the discipline of scientific critique - appropriate to apply to our research and practice. But it is all too easy to carry over our criticism to people, to think little of and disparage colleagues, behind their backs, at work or in church. However, if we discern and praise what is best about each other, we start to become like-minded, our minds set on God's calling and the values of his kingdom. Paul raises the stakes. Not only will the peace of God guard our minds but the source, the very God of peace, will be with us.

Further Reading: 1 Timothy 1:3-7.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for minds capable of understanding how to care for human need. Take and discipline our minds in your service, “...and let our ordered minds confess the beauty of your peace,” in Jesus' name, Amen.

Over fifty years ago, a computer engineer coined the phrase: ‘Garbage in, garbage out.’ The idea may have lost traction as Christians, reacting against an earlier perceived legalism, have progressively broadened what they watch, read, and say. It is common sense that what your mind spends time doing, starts to define its character. These verses may contain this idea. But, Paul is again discussing relationships - many of these adjectives describe peoples' character or actions. They recall 1 Corinthians 13:4-5: “Love is patient, love is kind... it keeps no record of wrongs.” Paul prayed earlier that the Philippians'

PPM

MARCH 31

False Accusations

“But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow in His steps: ‘Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth,’ who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.”

1 Peter 2:20–23.

“But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’” Matthew 5:37

Have you ever been falsely accused? Has it ever seemed that others have passed judgment without full consideration of the facts or without giving you opportunity to explain your perspective? I have been in that uncomfortable situation several times, usually relating to petty or trivial issues where I feel my integrity or motives have been questioned, rather than more concrete or serious matters.

Often my response is to want to ‘clear my name’ regarding whatever it is I have been accused of, to be given the chance to state my case, perhaps even to have a third party listen objectively and advise. Those things are not necessarily wrong. Indeed, there will be times when a formal plea is necessary and where a complaint may require escalation to a higher level. But in many situations, it may never be possible to actually prove matters one way or another.

Recently, when praying about this, I came to question what my biggest concerns were. Why did it matter? Was I worried about my reputation or standing within the department? Was I worried about how others might be discussing me behind my back? Was I concerned that it might be damaging to my Christian witness? Would this incident blight any future career prospects in a particular area?

As I considered this, I realized that many (or most) of these were self-centered worries. I was confident I had done nothing wrong; I had apologized for any miscommunication which may have arisen; I had done everything possible to reconcile the situation. Beyond that I could do no more. My conscience was clear before God, and I am confident He knows my motives and my desires.

If others chose not to believe my ‘Yes,’ or my ‘No,’ then it should not be my concern. Jesus is always our perfect example, and His response to false accusation teaches us a lot. Paul wrote to the Roman church, ‘If it is possible, as much as it depends on you, live at peace with all men’ (Romans 12:18). We can do no more than that and then commit the situation to God.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to trust you, and to know peace rather than turmoil, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

CW

Wellesley Bailey (1846- 1937)

Founder of the Leprosy Mission



Wellesley Bailey was born in Abbeyleix, Ireland in 1846. His early years witnessed the potato famine in Ireland, when many young people left Ireland in search of work and a better life in America and Australia. In 1866, he became engaged to his childhood friend, Alice Grahame. But before their marriage, Wellesley wanted to make his fortune, so he set sail for Australia and New Zealand.

Alice, a keen Christian, asked Wellesley to go to church whenever he could. When unable to sail from Gravesend, because of fog, Wellesley went to a church service. Afterwards, these words from the book of Isaiah kept echoing through his mind: “I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will lead them; I will turn the darkness into light before them, and make the rough places smooth. These things I will do; I will not forsake them” (Isaiah 42:16). He knelt by his bed and committed his life to Jesus Christ.

By 1868, Wellesley had returned to Dublin without the fortune he had been seeking. He decided to try India, where his brother worked in the police force. Wellesley joined the American Presbyterian Mission and was sent to Ambala in the Punjab to work as a teacher. In preparation for this work, he began to study Hindi, the local language. He also began to work with Dr. J H.Morrison, a missionary of the American Leprosy Mission.

Dr. Morrison had built some simple huts for beggars with leprosy. When Wellesley met people affected by leprosy for the first time he remembers: “I almost shuddered...yet at the same time [I was] fascinated, and I felt, if ever there was a Christ-like work in the world it was to go amongst these poor sufferers

and bring them the consolation, the hope of the gospel.” Dr. Morrison went on home leave, leaving Wellesley to care for those with leprosy. He visited them regularly, helping with food and shelter and sharing the gospel.

Wellesley and Alice were married in October 1871 at the Bombay Cathedral, after Alice went to India to join Wellesley in his work. However, just two years later they returned to Dublin due to Alice’s weak health. Wellesley spoke with such passion about leprosy affected people to their friends, that a public meeting was arranged so that the message would have a wider audience.

In 1874, the first support group of the Leprosy Mission was formed. They pledged to raise £30 a year. In their first year they raised £600! Wellesley returned to India in 1878, supported by the Scottish Mission, and commissioned to preach and teach. His continued involvement with the care of people with leprosy, as well as his writing and speaking about leprosy to raise awareness and funds, was seen as a conflict of interest. Despite this, he continued to be committed to the cause of leprosy. In 1886, he was appointed full time Secretary and Treasurer to the Mission to Lepers, a name that was subsequently changed to The Leprosy Mission. He continued to work in India till 1887, and then returned to the United Kingdom. As his work in India became known, the mission began to get requests for help from other countries where leprosy was a major health problem. Wellesley then began to focus on developing the mission, so as to be able to extend the work to other places in the world.

He travelled to raise funds and became well known as a speaker and preacher, as well as an expert on leprosy.

When Wellesley retired from TLM, aged 71, there remained a dynamic Christian mission: which he described as “born and cradled in prayer... prayer has been the foundation of its success.”

It is a mission that is still working today to bring about a world without leprosy.

Anoint the wounds of my spirit

Anoint the wounds of my spirit with the balm of forgiveness.

Pour the oil of your calm on the waters of my heart.

Take the squeal of frustration from the wheels of my passion

That the power of your tenderness may smooth the way I love

That the tedium of giving in, the risk of surrender

And the reaching out naked to a world that must wound

May be kindled afresh daily to a blaze of compassion.

That the grain may fall gladly to burst in the ground

And the harvest abound.

**-Dom Ralph Wright, The author is a writer and poet and is
a member of the Benedictine order.**

APRIL 1

Reconciliation

“For Christ’s love compels us.”
2 Corinthians 5:14

Many universities now offer a doctoral degree in the field of positive psychology. This field of study explores the factors that result in an abundant and joyful life. While most people think that achievement and money will bring fulfillment; on the contrary, these psychologists have learned there are two variables most linked with human thriving. These variables are universal which are found in every culture. And they both involve relationship: 1) a healthy relationship with transcendence and 2) healthy relationships with family and friends.

Where have you heard that before? Jesus taught us to love God first and foremost, and love our neighbor as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39). Following these “greatest commandments” are essential for proper relationships - relationships that lead to an abundant life.

But in our fallen world and due to our carnal natures, broken relationships are inevitable. That means reconciliation is necessary. God modeled reconciliation for us. His love motivated Him to allow His Son to be sacrificed so that we might be restored to a right relationship with Him (John 3:16). His idea; His initiative; and His great sacrifice.

Now, as redeemed by God and joint heirs with Christ, we are called to continue this ministry of reconciliation. Various passages of Scripture teach us how, but we find in 2 Corinthians 5 our primary motivation for reconciliation: “for Christ’s love compels us.” It is said in another way, “Christ’s love gives us no choice.” To fail to pursue reconciliation is a repudiation of the great act of grace and mercy made for us. We turn our backs on the sacrifice of Christ when we refuse to seek reconciliation with others.

Paul reminds us of the critical linkage between these two commandments. He writes, “we implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20b). But a right relationship to God is not possible if we fail to seek a right relationship with others. Jesus taught, “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you” (Matthew 6:14). And he gave us a practical command in Matthew 5:23-24.

Again, Paul encourages us, in *Colossians 3:12-14*.

Just as some people will reject God’s offer to reconcile, so some of our attempts will be rejected. But we must make a sacrificial effort. “For Christ’s love compels us.”

Prayer: Lord, enable us to love and accept one another just as You have loved and received us, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

GR

APRIL 2

Listening, the Most Needed Skill

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”

John 10:27-30

“So listen carefully, for whoever has will be given more, but whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him.”

Luke 8:18

The Lord Jesus, when he was on earth, kept teaching “he who has an ear, let him listen.” God’s word is a direct inspiration from the Lord’s mind applicable for every situation of the life we go through. The word ‘listen’ is mentioned 331 times in the Holy Bible and the word ‘hear’ is used 347 times in relation to hearing the voice of the Lord.

It is our duty and responsibility to develop a keen, listening ear to what the Lord’s mind is in any given situation. It’s only when we learn to practice the quietness of heart and mind and be still in the presence of the Holy God that we can hear him speaking.

In my decade of practice as a dental practitioner, I have also found that people want to be heard and they want their opinions and perspectives to be valued. The first impression made by a caring doctor on a patient is when the doctor listens to the patient’s story. Studies show that patients rarely speak for more than two minutes at a stretch.

There are two types of listening - active and passive. And it appears that doctors tend to be passive listeners when they do not participate in the conversation with patients either verbally or non-verbally. An active listener is one who shows his involvement in the conversation by gestures like nodding the head, eye signs and body posture (leaning forwards) or verbally by using interjections like ‘yes, I know,’ ‘I understand,’ ‘I agree with you,’ etc....

As children of God and representatives of Lord Jesus, can we even in the busyness of our schedules, learn to hear God’s will for each of our patients? Can we show them that we care and therefore that our Father in heaven does so too. I have heard patients say that just by meeting and talking to a particular doctor they felt better and healed because the doctor listened and gave them his attention. So the questions I need to ask myself in the workplace are, “Am I listening to God?” Second, “Have I developed the ability to listen to my patients and colleagues?” And in so doing, can I show them the true love of Christ?

Further Reading: 1 Samuel 3:8-10.

GW

APRIL 3

Don't You Remember?

“Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, ‘You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread?’ ...

Don't you remember the five loaves for the five thousand?” Matthew 16:8-9

The disciples are discussing the shortage of food and Jesus reminds them of the miracles they had experienced recently. He warns them against the sin of rejecting Jesus in unbelief, like the Pharisees had done. Through this passage Lord Jesus has urged us to remember and testify to His faithfulness.

Approaching the end of my career and life, I'm convinced that those of us who work in the healthcare field are in constant need of the great help of our Heavenly Father through Christ. The resources needed for healthcare are never enough anywhere. Where there are more finances available, the demand

and expectations seem to increase as well. Our knowledge is limited and often new inventions shine light on previous mistakes. Our personal knowledge and abilities are also far from being perfect.

Our attention, strength and time have limitations. Our various obligations often clash. On our own, we are unable to completely fulfill our duties at our workplace, family, or church; yet, the expectations of the world from us are endless.

Jesus' reminder of feeding the 5000 and 4000 can strengthen us in the faith, that our Lord knows us, sees our needs, and loves us. He has mercy for us and knows that only He can help us. The little that we have becomes enough in His hands and the excess will bring glory to God. Let us contribute our personal experiences for His glory!

In the 1960's, we were unable to effectively treat the extreme form of meningococcus sepsis, the Waterhouse - Freiderichsen syndrome. I still remember a little boy to whom we had given all we could and yet we seemed to be losing him. During the night shift, I was sitting by the bed of this child who was in shock and whose kidneys had already stopped working. I was constantly praying, the process of healing had started in him when I saw little drops of urine through the catheter.

Another boy, I had never seen before, after a temper tantrum ran out of the clinic leaving his young mother and me behind. We were running around the block looking for him and I was asking the Lord for help. When we finally caught him, I looked at him with confidence said to him: “God loves you very much.” All of a sudden he was changed and was a like a lamb for the rest of the visit. Dr. András Csókay, brain surgeon, inspired by the Holy Spirit, developed a simple process to save patients with brain edema. Our work and our words inspired by God can be small seeds in spreading the joyful message of life.

Further Reading: Matthew 16: 5-17

ID

APRIL 4

Tearing Off the Grave Clothes

“Jesus called in a loud voice ‘Lazarus, come out!’ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped... and a cloth round his face. Jesus said to them: ‘loose him and let him go.’”

John 11:43

Death stinks. Physically and figuratively death leaves an odour which persists. One day an elderly man died in the hospital where I work. Flooding and transport problems caused a two-day delay before the family could take the body away. We had no mortuary and the tropical heat caused fast decomposition of the body and started to smell, which pervades in my memory as much as it pervaded the room. Mary understood this as she tried to reason with Jesus: ‘He’s been dead for days – it’ll reek!’ (John 11:39).

‘Lazarus, come forth!’ The resurrection of Lazarus was an incredible miracle. It is also a beautiful reflection of the new life which we have in Christ. ‘And He gave new life to those who were dead in sins and trespasses’ (Ephesians 2:1). Dead, bound, and buried in the stinking grave of our rebellion. Christ calls our name, his word penetrates our deaf ears, and we are bought to new life. Despite receiving this life, far too often like Lazarus, we are still walking around in the stinking grave-clothes of death - guilt, rejection, lies, addictions, shame, and un-forgiveness. These are the grave-clothes that bind our living hands from doing God’s work. They are the burial cloth covering our eyes which stops us from seeing our Saviour clearly. We are alive, but the stinking cloths need to be removed. Note what Jesus said to the people around: ‘Loose him and let him go!’ He didn’t say to the resurrected man: ‘Lazarus, sort yourself out!’ It is the responsibility of fellow believers to get alongside and help each other in loosening these bonds, so together we walk in freedom.

Reflection: What help do you need in untying stinky grave-clothes which are on your life? How may God want to use you to help others walk in freedom?

Further Reading: Colossians 3:1–14.

Prayer: Lord, we pray that you will help us be free from the stinking grave of our rebellion. Let your word resurrect us from the valley of the dead, transforming us into an army of the Lord for your glory, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

BL

APRIL 5

Gentleness in All Relationships

“Let your gentleness be known to everyone.”

Philippians 4:5

Paul had just finished exhorting the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord always. Out of that joy, he now encourages them to be gentle to everyone. What a surprising comment from one who before conversion “breathed threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord!” (Acts 9:1). The word for gentle (epieikes) is a rich word. The Authorized Version translates it as “moderation,” the Revised Version states as “forbearance.” Clearly it is a relational word. In the Greek, the epi – is an intensifier and the word eikos means reasonable. Matthew Arnold therefore suggests the term, “sweet reasonableness”. Ralph P Martin in his Tyndale commentary on this passage suggests that the word means, “Seemly, fitting, equitable, fair, and moderate, forbearing, and not insisting on the letter of the law. It expresses that considerateness that looks humanely and reasonably at the facts of the case.”

He further quotes I Howard Marshall, “fair-mindedness, the attitude of a person who is charitable towards people’s faults and merciful in...judgments of their failings because the whole situation is taken into account. Perhaps graciousness is the best English equivalent. Willingness to yield under trial which will show itself in a refusal to retaliate when attacked.” The word is used in 1 Tim 3:3 of a church leader to be “not a striker but forbearing” (Greek RSV interlinear) or “not violent but gentle” (NRSV). The same word occurs in James 3:17 concerning the wisdom from above which is first pure then peaceable, gentle (forbearing), compliant (easy to be entreated) etc.

Our medical/dental profession calls on us to argue a lot. We argue with the system on behalf of our patients and we argue academically as we seek to commend our view of our science, our clinical practice or our administration. Christians argue a lot over points of doctrine and behavior, and we argue in committees. Christians in this passage particularly are called to be gentle to everyone – that would presumably include those of different faiths from our own. Have we followed the Christian virtue of sweet reasonableness? We can do so because we have just been reminded to rejoice in the Lord always. He is our rock and our security, therefore we can argue gently. Patience, gentleness, graciousness, forbearance: these are the marks of the person secure in their Lord.

Reflection: How do we argue for the truth yet let the truth of what we say commend itself, rather than the force with which we say it.

Further Reading: The book of Philippians, this time noting where disagreements occur and how Paul addresses these.

AG

APRIL 6

Exam Fears

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

Isaiah 41:10

Last Saturday, just before the biggest exam paper of a five-year medical course, I suddenly sank into “exam fear” - as quickly as Elijah ran away from Mount Carmel after God’s victory against the false prophets. I was worried about ‘what if I do not do well?’ This started to disturb me and I couldn’t focus on God or exam preparation.

But, I realized this is not from God - the fruit of the Spirit and the excellent things are far from the fears of exams. He reminded me again of the reason we live today - that we confess each day, that “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in this body, I live by faith in the son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me” Galatians 2:20.

He reminded me that it is not about being first and getting top marks in the exam, but about a life of love for God and for people and honoring Him by “doing it all for the glory of God.”

I realize how it is so easy to be bound by this fear - of not knowing enough. But let’s look to the Lord who is the Creator (i.e. knows all the answers in the exam) and do our best and surrender into His hands the outcomes. Let’s rid ourselves of this fear and instead be filled with His grace.

Let’s go to the Lord with all our fears and cast them at His feet. Let us recall what Moses tells Joshua and the Israelites in Deuteronomy 31:6 - “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you.” God bless!

Reflection: How do we express in our lives our confidence that God will be with us through our struggles and challenges?

Further Reading: Deuteronomy 20:2-5.

Prayer: Dear Lord, as the day breaks and fear sets in, teach us to look to Your word and let us anchor down to You knowing that You are in control of our life, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

PSW

APRIL 7

Working without Reward

“The Lord protects the simple-hearted; when I was in great need, He saved me. Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the Lord has been good to you.”

Psalm 116:6-7

my work. It took an intern to remind me that when a person is born he has nothing. All the accolades he earns he will leave behind. Yes, it is the physical world we live in and yet the spiritual world is the more important one. I would like to challenge you to look at the scripture and recall the outcomes for all who yielded to mammon.

Gehazi's greed and its results, the rich young ruler who chose material wealth over following Jesus, but who felt sad and unfulfilled as he did so. There are countless other instances in scripture when someone chose mammon over God. It is important to search your spirit and soul all the time to be sure you are making the right choice.

Mammon comes in the forms of: pride, heroism, lack of acknowledgement of others, lack of focus on God, putting blame on others, seeing only self and not the needs of others, not appreciating that the ones who care for you are trying to help you and not building them up instead of yourself, etc. Perhaps a pat on the back and an acknowledgement from the client needs to be genuinely appreciated.

Further Reading: Matt. 19: 16-22.

Prayer: Thank you God. Yes it is true that we have ministering angels, and you have put the measure of faith within us. Father, it is only by faith that we can please you. David said search my heart, purify with hyssop. We pray that you forgive us for the occasions when I have made the wrong choices in my life. We still say search our hearts O Lord, in Jesus' name, Amen.

PM

APRIL 8

Work Out Your Salvation with Fear and Trembling

“Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed - not only in but now much more in my absence-continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.”

Philippians 2:12

This interesting verse is sandwiched between two major themes - the theme of how great Jesus and His work in our life is, and the theme that God is the one who works in us and help us to fulfill His purposes.

Why do we work out our salvation? We do this out of gratitude and awe for what Jesus has done. We live out each day for the purposes for which God has taken hold of us out of this sense of gratitude. Our motivation to live each day and working out our salvation comes from this sense of gratitude.

How do we work out this salvation? Not in our own strength or abilities. The inner resources, strength and drive to work out this salvation

come from God’s enabling presence and power which has already saved us and started the work in us. We also work this out with “fear and trembling.” Fear - is “awe” of this great God who has taken hold of us, “trembling” because of the privilege and great responsibility that has been bestowed upon by this God.

As healthcare workers, how do we work out this salvation? By loving God and loving people. Through this love relationship we can come to, understand his character, purposes, and perspectives. By seeing people whom we come across through the eyes of God - who is full of compassion. By seeing the communities, we are engaged with through God’s perspective - a God of righteousness and justice. By being moved by things which move the heart of God. And by being the hands of this God who wants to bring healing and restoration to broken and fallen individuals, families, and the world.

Reflection: How can I live today, working out my salvation with fear and trembling?

Further Reading: Colossians 3:12.

Prayer: Lord, in humility I bow before your throne, winnow out the chaff in my life, let me bear fruit in keeping with repentance, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

SMT

APRIL 9

Family and End Times

“... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

Genesis 12: 3b

These days when families consistently suffer every kind of attack and discredit, the Lord has led us to think about how our family can be a blessing to all families of the earth. This mandate was initially given to Abraham, but now belongs to the Church of Christ and consequently the participating families in His body.

Our maid's brother, a 23-year-old man, was always drunk, wandering through the streets from bar to bar. We knew his history when we travelled to the small town of 3000 inhabitants, where he lived. Because of his condition, he could not have a decent job, as he failed to learn to read when at school. His sister was suffering a lot because of her brother's condition.

Our family took pity on this young man and invited him to live with us and work in our house taking care of the gardens. He promptly accepted the invitation as he said that he couldn't stand anymore. It was a hard time until his body was freed from the alcohol. He complained of difficulty seeing and remembered that when attending school, he could not see what the teacher used to write on the board. After consultation with an ophthalmologist, he began to use glasses with corrective lenses for hyperopia, +6 diopters. With the improvement of his vision, he was able to study again, became literate, stopped drinking, turned to the Lord, achieved a better job and got married. Again, we celebrate the goodness of God for us, through us and beyond us.

Reflection: Right now, how could you be the hands of God to bring peace, hope and salvation to a family near you in need of divine intervention?

Further Reading: Hebrew 4:15 states, 'For we do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin.'

Prayer: Lord, when you saw the need around, not only was Your heart moved with compassion, but you always followed compassion with action., Let it be so in our lives also, in Jesus' name, Amen.

SoD

APRIL 10

Forgiveness for Sin

“Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord; though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.”

Isaiah.1:18

Not everyone has seen it occurring. In winter in the far north, the snow falls and covers everything that is crumbling. It covers all, so everything looks beautiful. In connection with the snow, I think of these words from the book of Isaiah about having our sins forgiven.

When meeting with patients or others, there are situations where people are so burdened by their wrong actions, they feel it cannot be set right again. Their statement may be: “I hope that God will forgive me for what I

have done.” Likewise for us as doctors, whether it is something we have done wrong or something we did not do, which we have regretted afterwards, or just the fact that we know that we are sinners before God.

Then it is great to be able to lift up the promise of Isaiah. Come to me, says the Lord and confess your sins and make up with me. With Me is boundless grace and there is absolution for even the worst sins. Even the most “red” sins become as white as snow. Yes, they are not just covered with snow, they are simply cleansed white.

The reason for this, we read in the New Testament - Jesus died on the cross for us. He was sinless, but paid for our sins. That is exactly why our “red” sins may be as white as snow. And even if they are red like crimson, they can be as white wool.

When we have our sins forgiven by faith in Jesus, we are given a freedom that surpasses understanding. Let us pray and wish that we might transmit this freedom to our patients when they are also looking for this.

Reflection: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness. Lamentations 3:22-23.

Further Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:10.

Prayer: Dear Lord, it's Your kindness that leads us to the repentance that we have so abundantly received from you, help us to pass it on, in Jesus' name, Amen.

EK

APRIL 11

Problems to Be Solved or People to Be Loved?

“When they had finished eating, 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.’ Jesus said, ‘Feed my lambs.’”

John 21:15

The young man was referred to the Oral Surgery department. He complained of temporomandibular joint (TMJ) pains. I happened to be the dental surgeon attending to him. I could have prescribed analgesics and muscle relaxants and sent him on his way. I guess I was still young and curious and so I took some time to get to know him better. His TMJ pains were caused by bruxism (clenching or grinding the teeth, even when asleep). He didn't have this before. When I inquired further, I found out that he was about to enter the National Service. He was very anxious and his anxiety caused him bruxism, which led to his TMJ pains. As a Malaysian who had never gone through the National Service, I couldn't speak from personal experience but I did my best to encourage him.

I never forgot this incident because it was a powerful reminder that we are not just treating pathology. We are caring for people and that means viewing the people we are called to treat holistically, as they were made by God. I wasn't just called to fix the young man's TMJ pains. I was called to care for him as a person. The advance of medical science means we have many more tools to help us in our care for people, be it drugs, medical equipment or procedures. We thank God for all of them but we run into the danger of seeing our patients as “problems to be solved if I had the right tool.” We need to see people as God sees them.

All our patients are people made in the image of God, that alone calls for respect. Because we value them, we will use everything in our toolkit to help them, but we all know there are many conditions that take time to heal. And some conditions are beyond the power of medical science. We may not be able to “fix” some of the people that come to us. But we can accord them the dignity that is their due. And we must love them.

Reflection: Do my patients experience the love and compassion of Jesus in my interactions with them?

Further Reading: Matthew 9:35 and 36.

TSI

APRIL 12

Social Justice

He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

Micah 6:8

Since the church first came into being, Christians have sought to demonstrate Christ's love through acts of mercy, seeking justice for those who are oppressed or marginalized. Recently, our church has been considering ways in which we can serve God and give testimony to our faith through 'social justice.'

There have been lively discussions about the problems and challenges faced by our communities, and potential ways to serve practically whilst seeking to bring the message of hope. However, whilst appreciating the importance of this, I felt somewhat guilty. What with clinical and academic work, tasks that spill into the evenings and raising a young family, I don't have much capacity for getting involved in a completely new area. I wonder if you have felt this way?

There are times when it seems a struggle to maintain a personal devotional life and attend church regularly, let alone get involved in a major project to reach the homeless or some other needy group within your community. However, as a Christian doctor, your whole life can be an opportunity to work for those who are suffering, underprivileged, oppressed or abused in some way. It is easy to forget that daily we have unique opportunities to interact with patients and their relatives at times when they are most vulnerable. Be encouraged that God can use you each day as you seek to bring healing and comfort to your patients. Ask other people to pray for you in that role and seek fellowship that 'spurs you on towards love and good deeds.'

Our opportunities to show mercy, compassion and kindness are abundant, but it is important that we maintain our close relationship with Jesus, so that when we speak and act, we reflect His nature.

Prayer: Dear Lord, open my eyes to the needs of my patients today. Rather than long lists of tasks to be achieved, help me to see individual people who need to know your love, mercy and grace. Give me wisdom in choosing my words and help me to make the most of every opportunity. Thank you for the privilege of being able to serve you daily through my work, in Jesus' name, Amen.

CW

APRIL 13

Speaking the Truth in Love

“Let your conversation be always full of grace...”

Colossians 4:6

After a friendly chat with his 12 year old daughter, her father left the room. ‘Such a lovely person,’ said she. Her mother referred to her psychologist husband as ‘the kindest and most understanding man I know.’ Their two older children were equally affectionate and courteous. Both parents love the Lord and the whole family has learned to communicate well and be united in love. This may be rare, but that does not make it impossible.

In contrast, the behavior of many others follows the pattern set by certain television programs. People do not listen to each other, loud and angry voices predominate. Yet what harassed doctor has not responded ungraciously to a phone-call, only to find a dear friend on the line? In turn, letters have no tone of voice. Yet hastily, written messages (not only emails) can be misunderstood or cause offence. It may be better to reread some of them before mailing, or even to speak personally to the intended recipient.

Religious people in the Nazareth synagogue were amazed at Jesus’ gracious words yet still took offence and tried to kill Him. He later told His disciples not to worry about what to say or how to say it when under arrest themselves. The Holy Spirit would speak through them, not necessarily to free them but to be an effective witness to the unbelievers. Paul was a prisoner when he wrote his second letter to Timothy, advising him to avoid quarrels but gently to instruct others in the truth.

It can be hard to control the tongue when harassed or contradicted, but words can do lasting harm. We need to learn to listen before we speak (‘engaging brain before opening mouth’). It helps at these times to be familiar with God’s voice and reliant on His Spirit’s promptings. He will be with us as we hold discussions, express our beliefs, engage in ethical debate or undergo questioning in court. Tuning in to Him as well as to each other will pave the way to effective communication.

The Lord is the silent, attentive listener to all our conversations, so our tone of voice should consistently reflect His graciousness. Yet does it always do so? Let us think on these things.

Further Reading: Malachi 3:1; Matthew 10:13–20; Luke 4:16–30; and James 3:1–12.

Prayer: *“Lord, speak to me, that I may speak
in loving echoes of thy tone...”*

A word in season as from Thee -Frances Havergal
To weary ones in needful hour.”

JG

APRIL 14

Lord, Don't You Care?

"A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke Him and said to Him, 'Teacher, don't you care if we drown?'"

Mark 4:35-41

The disciples woke Jesus up asking Him a question that for us may seem impertinent, but it is one we have all asked in moments of desperation: "Do you not care that we are perishing?" We have all asked that question in a million ways, a million times. We never question the Lord's compassion when things are going well, but God's compassion is not measured by our circumstances nor is His kindness limited to our understanding. God cares just as much when the tempest is raging as when the seas are calm and the sun is shining. His mercy is not limited to the sunlight or to the stillness of the waves.

When he awoke, Jesus spoke three words: "Peace, be still!" "Awake now, He told the wind to pipe down and said to the sea, 'Quiet! Settle down!' The wind ran out of breath, the sea became smooth as glass," and just like that the storm ended. The text says Jesus rebuked the storm - not the terrified disciples. To them He simply said, "Why are you so afraid? You still have no faith?" Implicit in those words is a lesson we all need to learn. The disciples were afraid because they were men who were used to being in control of life. They knew how to handle hard situations. There wasn't a weakling among them. And yet, when put in a life-threatening situation beyond their control, their faith turned to fear. Instead of putting them down, Jesus simply says, "You still have no faith?" The answer is yes and no. They had faith in Jesus. They truly believed in Him. But their faith, though real, was not yet fully grown. And how do we get the faith that enables us to survive the storms of life? The only answer is to get in the boat with Jesus and ride with Him wherever He wants to go.

In those moments, we have a choice to make. Either, we choose to believe that the Lord sent the storm to us for His own purposes or we choose to believe that the Lord has abandoned us and left us to our own devices. Jesus is the Lord of the wind and the waves. When He calls us, we get into the boat. When He sleeps, we toil on. When the storm comes, we cry out to Him. When He awakes, He calms the storm. When the storm is over, our faith is stronger.

Reflection: Are we in a storm at this very moment?. We are not alone, although, it feels that way now. We may have lost everything, but we have not lost the Lord. The Master of the sea is by our side. When the time has come, He will say, "Peace, be still."

LDR

APRIL 15

The Doctor Becomes a Patient

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight.”

Proverbs 3:5-6

I recently had a hysterectomy. As a doctor, I have seen and taken part in many hysterectomies. I have looked after hundreds of women over the years preparing for and recovering from hysterectomies. But this was different - this was me!

I had come to the point where my giant fibroids needed to go, but the decision was hard to make - mainly because I believe God can heal. In Nigeria, I saw people who had been paralyzed healed and get out of wheelchairs and people with tumors just fell off when someone prayed. So I believed God could shrivel up my fibroids, but it didn't happen.

Then, I was concerned about things that could go wrong. What if I got infection or become incontinent or stopped feeling womanly? Questions that I think many have, but find it hard to ask. I decided to be honest with God and a couple of trusted friends. When I did this God showed me some surprising things. I realized it is not my womb that gives me identity as a woman. Rather my identity comes from God, as a beloved daughter and princess.

‘Whoever believes in Me, rivers of living water will flow from within them’ (John 7:38). God whispered to me that as I trusted Him, He would replace my physical womb with a spiritual one and those rivers of living water would flow. This sounded like a good exchange!

And so my football-sized womb was delicately dissected away from the bowel it was stuck to, I emerged feeling lighter and freer. I chose to speak God's words over myself, praying for release of his living waters from my new spiritual womb. I massaged my scar with oil and prayed for healing of the outside scar as well as the inner.

A year on I can say I felt I am a whole woman. Not a sudden healing miracle, but a new foundation of confidence that my identity and value and womanliness are rooted in him. So if you are struggling with illness or facing surgery or have been disappointed when prayer appears to fail, remember that things are not always what they seem. Remember that he can whisper in your ear and show you what to do. He wants us whole and not just healed. Trust him!

Further Reading: James 5:13-15.

Prayer: Lord, we pray for the gift of faith for all of us and may we experience rivers of living water flow from within, in Jesus' name, Amen.

MW

APRIL 16

Maintaining Eye Contact

*“Search me, O God, and
know my heart.”*

Psalm 139:2

Since the advent of computers in the consulting room, a recurrent criticism made by patients is that the doctor fails to make eye contact with them. The doctor is so immersed in the data on the screen that from the patient’s point of view, the patient, seems almost superfluous. We have probably all come across this and sought to address it in our daily practice.

How about ‘maintaining eye contact’ with God? An entry in a previous Doctors’ Life Support (DLS 2 – 17 March) coincided with my reading of Psalm 32 and set me thinking. ‘I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. Don’t be like a horse or a mule without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it would not stay near you.’ (Psalm 32:8-9). Like the horse or mule, my stubbornness seems to be ever more deeply entrenched as the years go by. How important to stay near you my master and my guide.

How do we do this? Principally, we do it through maintaining both an open prayerful heart and an open Bible. ‘Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts and see if there is any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting’ (Psalm 139:23-24).

Let’s not ‘grow weary in well-doing’ (Galatians 6:9) in this area and maybe our patients will notice the difference. Eye contact with Him will encourage eye contact with them. His eye is upon us; let’s keep our eye upon Him.

Further reading: Psalm 32, Psalm 139, and Proverbs 3:5-6.

Prayer: Lord, keep my eyes upon you today so that I may think your thoughts and speak your words with whoever I may meet today, in Jesus’ name.

PP

APRIL 17

Gifts and Bribes

“You shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of those who are in the right.” Exodus 23:8

“A bribe corrupts the heart.” Ecclesiastes 7:7

We were at a conference for young medics in Central Asia and the issue of corruption came up for discussion. At the time the ‘official’ salary for a young doctor was \$8 a month. It was impossible to live on that and it was common practice for patients to give ‘supplements’ to their doctor. This was understood by all and widely accepted. How should the young Christian respond and behave in such circumstances? When is a ‘gift’ a bribe? When is a ‘bribe,’ not a bribe but an appropriate gift?

As we debated the issue the following guidelines emerged:

- 1.A bribe is normally given before the service is provided; a gift generally afterwards.
- 2.A bribe says, ‘Please...’ A gift says, ‘Thank you.’
- 3.There is an element of coercion in a bribe. A gift is a freewill response.
- 4.In situations of bribery the quality of service provided is dependent on the level of the ‘gift.’ When the quality of service is not linked to the gift but is given from the integrity of the heart then a thank you gift may be accepted gratefully.
- 5.The Christian is particularly called to serve the poor who cannot give and to do so with compassion and integrity.

Those who were part of the discussion found the guidelines helpful. Maybe they will help you. If such issues are not a part of your daily experience, then pray for those who face such ethical dilemmas every day of their professional lives.

Reflection: ‘Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!’ (2 Corinthians 9:15), freely given on our behalf.

Further Reading: Psalm 15.

Prayer: Dear Lord, let my life be guided and founded on the everlasting principles of Your word, Amen.

PP

APRIL 18

The Doctor as a Servant

“Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under His power, and that He had come from God and was returning to God, so He got up from the meal, took off His outer clothing and wrapped a towel round His waist. After that He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples’ feet.”

John 13:3-5

Do you want to be a great witness for Christ? Be a servant like him. Help make a few beds, empty a few bed pans, and wipe a few bottoms. Make a cup of tea for your hard pressed nurses. If you are a student, start like this and go on like this when you are qualified and when you are a senior.

Be available to your patients. Where I work, the doctors hardly communicate with their patients or their families. It’s the culture. Listen to your patients. They will be amazed! And yes, if you see a nurse washing feet, give a hand.

Don’t lord it over your students, be humble, and admit mistakes. Love being a servant like your master, because that is what He did and that is what He is like.

Further Reading: Philippians 2:5-11.

Prayer: Lord, You are our example in every area of life. You came not to be served, but to serve, even though You should have been the One served. Thank You for showing us the way, so that we can become what You were – an example of love! Change our minds and hearts, and give us the grace to always consider others needs and interests before our own. In humility teach me to serve others just as You served, in Jesus name, Amen.

The great physician. How many times have you heard that phrase? I suspect that as doctors we subtly make use of our Lord to glorify our position as doctors. But how many times have you seen a doctor washing feet? It is the nurses who wash feet. In the culture where I work, the doctors are the masters, the nurses are the servants. They have no status; they clean up after the doctor and wipe bottoms. When the disciples were arguing about which one of them was the most important Jesus told them about how the world works, ‘but it shall not be so among you’ he said. Nor should it be.

Do you want to be a great witness for Christ? Be a servant like him.

Help make a few beds, empty a

few bed pans, and wipe a few bottoms. Make a cup of tea for your hard pressed nurses. If you are a student, start like this and go on like this when you are qualified and when you are a senior.

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RF

APRIL 19

In Jesus' Steps

"To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps. He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." 1 Peter 2:21-22

In the Christian life, there are only two ways to grow. One is through people and the other is through pain. Sometimes, we grow through the influence of others. We sit at the feet of teachers, friends, mentors, pastors, and gifted leaders who show us the way forward. "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" - Proverbs 27:17. We learn much from books, but we learn more from life. And the best kind of teaching is up close and personal; life on life. We learn a

little from a distance, we learn more as we draw closer, but we learn the most when we are face to face. Mark says that Jesus called the twelve apostles "that they might be with Him and that He might send them forth to preach." First they must be with Him and then they will be sent out to preach, so one way we grow is through people.

The other way we grow is through pain. Sometimes, the pain comes because of the sadness of life. That pain is often undeserved, yet it comes to us anyway and there is nothing we can do to stop it. To be a Christian is to suffer. That is not the full truth of the Christian life. Today, it is popular to talk about Jesus as the one who solves our problems, improves our self-image, and above all makes us happy. And it is true that our Lord said, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."

According to Peter, following Jesus means that sometimes, we will suffer even when we have done nothing wrong. The greatest honor for any Christian is to be like Jesus. When we suffer unjustly, we share in a tiny portion of what happened to Him. Though He did no wrong, He was betrayed, tried, denied, and crucified. Although, He never sinned, He was hated by the power brokers who plotted to kill Him. The same thing will happen to us. People close to us will disappoint us, and some will turn against us.

Following Christ means suffering patiently, And that's the real test of our faith. We find out what we really believe when others mistreat us. Sometimes, the real test of our faith is what we don't do. Sometimes, we'll be a better Christian by not saying anything at all.

LDR

APRIL 20

The Doctor in Mission

“Truly ... Whoever hears my word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”

John 5:24

Many will credit Jesus as a great teacher and moralizer, but cannot tolerate Him claiming to be the only way to God and eternal life. For them the gospel of Christ is only one expression in respect to salvation. As doctors living in a secular society, we need to consider who this Jesus is and how His claims affect our work and relate to our neighbors and family.

Jesus' claim to be the only way to God remains a major stumbling block for unbelievers. Yet, the

Bible is emphatic on this issue. There is a choice we all have to make in our walk with God and it is based on the person of Christ. There can be no middle ground on this issue. We must explain in love what Christ means to us and his mission in the world he is the only way to find God and eternal life (John 3:16).

C.S. Lewis articulated this by saying, ‘The man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil from Hell. You must make your choice: either this man is the Son of God, or else a madman or something else’.

Jesus has limited our ability to compromise on this issue. The maintenance of our own faith depends on our ability to explain our own position in a loving but faithful way. We always need to be ready and willing to explain our faith in a spirit of gentleness and humility (1 Peter 3:15-16). As doctors, we are in a privileged, but difficult position since we are fearful of giving offense and indeed of complaints. Yet the importance of our witness cannot be underestimated. It is a matter of life and death (John 3:18).

Reflection: John Chapter 3.

Further Reading: Mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis.

Prayer: Dear Lord, I believe in your word. Increase in me the faith you have given and sustain faith within me and make me ever loyal to You. I ask this through our Lord Jesus, Amen.

RG

APRIL 21

The Power of Your Words

“The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.” Proverbs 18:21

The message from this verse in Proverbs is, “Words kill, Words give life; they’re either poison or good fruit - you should choose.” In Mathew 7:17 Jesus said, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit, a healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.

As medical professionals, we are endowed with immense power in the words that we speak to our patients. I

have heard many testimonies of patients who felt so blessed to have spoken to doctors who are gentle and kind in the words they speak and the way they communicate.

Studies show us that an average number of words a human speaks are between 7000 to 13000 per day. How many of those are filled with hope, blessings, praise, thanksgiving, love, joy peace, kindness, gentleness, goodness? I wonder about the effect of the negative words used so often by us in our day to day conversation with each other.

I have begun to recognize that whatever is in the mind, heart and thoughts of person is what gets translated into the words that comes out of his mouth. If we are filled by the Spirit of God and are in communion with the Holy Spirit constantly, then the words that we speak are inspired by that communion.

Do take time and energy every day to go to the Father and receive manna for the day, to speak words of life into people’s lives as we treat them and trust that the Living God will work miracles in their life.

So often we say to our patients, “this may not work”, “we are not sure of the prognosis”, “it may or may not be successful.” I am challenged in my own professional life to have mix of words that are seasoned with faith in the Almighty and yet communicate to my patient with hope and trust. “We treat, but God heals” is one of the truest statements I believe and often use in my conversation with patients.

Reflection: So what is your heart filled with today? Are they words of life, hope, love, faith? Then you can be sure that is what your conversation will communicate and it will be a testimony to your constant communion with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Further Reading: Proverbs 15:4.

Prayer: Father, help me guard my mouth against any negative words, and help me to speak only words of life, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

GW

APRIL 22

Count Your Blessings

“Give thanks in all circumstances.”

1 Thessalonians 5:18

Living in a setting of much poverty and suffering, it continues to surprise me how thanksgiving plays such a major role in the life of the church in Uganda. A common prayer in the morning is ‘Thank you God that we are still alive.’ At first sight this may reflect innocent simplicity or that the significance of still being alive is greater as the relative risk of death increases.

However, if we allow it, the challenge is deeper. Many of us in similar situations would focus more effort on requests to God to keep us alive and intervene in our challenges. Such intercession is certainly wise and needed. However, I am struck that we who have a lot less significant daily life - threatening challenges, often spend more time on requesting God’s help, than on thanking Him for His provision.

Many of those I know with far greater daily challenges spend relatively more time thanking God for what they have. Of course God wants us to seek His help and intervention in our daily struggles; but however, good or bad our day is today, let’s also pay attention to Paul’s advice and give thanks to whatever our circumstances are. Paul knew well enough that giving thanks wasn’t just a trick to feel better or a recipe to remove our problems. By his experience, he knew that giving thanks in all circumstances was the best way.

This old hymn by Johnson Oatman encourages us to count our blessings. Why not use it as a tool to meditate on through today, to encourage you to be thankful in the midst of today’s blessings and challenges.

Count your blessings, name them one by one,

Count your blessings, see what God has done.

Further reading: Colossians 3:15-17.

Prayer: Abba Father, as I count my blessings each day, I thank You and believe in my heart that all the goodness I receive can only come because of Jesus’ finished work at the Cross. You are my Provider, my Jehovah Jireh. I pray that I will see the manifestation of your Grace in every area of my life, as I walk in union with You. Joy, peace, health, strength, prosperity and success are just some of the things that flood my mind, spirit and soul, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

RW

APRIL 23

The Family of God

“Whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.”

Matthew 12:50

A wise friend, who has travelled widely and lived at different times in different parts of the world, once made this interesting observation. He said that in different cultures the way people introduce themselves to strangers is different, and reflects what those cultures regard as important or valuable factors in shaping personal identity. He said that in the west, a man will introduce himself, describing his profession, place of work and his

rank or position. Most people from Asia and Africa, will state the names of their family or tribe, their parents and their village or town. In each case, the individual is setting out what defines him or her and what brings security and stability to life.

When Jesus was told that His mother and brothers were looking for Him, He asked, “Who is my mother and who are my brothers?” He then gave a new definition of family when He said that whoever did His Father’s will was His family. Often when we think of our families, we see them as closed circles, with a defined boundary. We may even draw this circle around God in the center, but always there is a definite perimeter.

When Jesus defines His family, God is at the center, but there is no outer limit. Anyone who is willing to be a child of God is welcome. Most of us will agree that this is an idealistic concept and can be hard to put into practice, especially when we live in societies that are divided on the basis of caste or socio-economic class. Even within Christian hospitals, we sometimes tend to perpetuate differences between different categories of professionals or between departments. In the family of God, people are not necessarily homogenous, but diversity is seen as enriching rather than divisive. God created us each as unique individuals, but expects us to work together in harmony, combining our individual strengths and complementing each other’s weaknesses.

Further Reading: 1 Corinthians 12.

Prayer: Lord, grant me grace to live as per Your plan and purposes. May I be a part of Your family always, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

JPO

APRIL 24

Forgiveness

“In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how My Heavenly Father will pay each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”

Matthew 18:44-45

What does it mean to forgive? I think the church has sometimes made it seem as if forgiveness is done with gritted teeth. It means the person who sinned is let off the hook or that sin is swept under the carpet. It is actually none of those things. Forgiveness is setting a captive free and finding you were the captive. It is choosing to release the person who sinned to God and let him be their judge. It is choosing not to hold the sin against them. It is perfectly reasonable to forgive someone, yet still hand them over

to the police or the authorities.

We can also forgive and yet set correct boundaries in relationships to protect us and others. However, forgiveness can be very difficult. But I think we don't realize the implications if we don't forgive. In Jesus' parable, there is the implication that we will be "tortured" if we don't forgive from our hearts. Anger and bitterness open a door for satan's attack on us, in our mind as well as our emotions.

Forgiveness has physical implications. I have seen many people physically healed after they forgave.

Remember that God's principles apply to all people and so it can be appropriate to raise the issue of forgiveness with our patients too and we can see miracles happen in their health as well as ours.

Further Reading: Matthew 18:34-45 & Hebrews 12:15.

Prayer: Father God, today I have gained a better understanding of forgiving others and with your help, I fully forgive from my heart just as you have freely forgiven me. I choose to forgive [the person's name] for [what they did] which made me feel [tell God how you feel]. I release [the person] to you and ask you to bless them, in Jesus' name, Amen.

MW

APRIL 25

Precious, but Expendable

“Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted on the earth.”

Psalm 46:10

I cannot count the number of times that I have had to remind myself of this well-known verse. It is easy in the middle of our sometimes hectic lives to confuse being busy with doing God’s will. No one had a more demanding lifestyle than Jesus. Yet we are told (Luke 5:15-16) that even when He was confronted with seemingly endless needy people He would spend time alone with God praying.

Another mistake, we all too often make is to think that I am in some way contributing to God’s work through being busy. The New American Standard Bible translates the first part of Psalm 46 as ‘Cease striving.’ It reminds us of the need to relinquish self-reliance.

The latter part of the verse reminds us that God will be exalted with or without any input on my part! His plans are so much greater than we can ever imagine (Isaiah 55:9) that we should focus on who He is and on walking according to His will. The only way we can hope to achieve this is through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Time that we spend with God in prayer is an essential part of this.

Today, as you go about your daily routine, try to remember that God chooses to use us not because He needs to, but because He wants to. That makes us both precious and expendable!

Further Reading: Isaiah 55:6-13 and Luke 5:15-16.

Prayer: Lord, You have predestinated us and called us by name to be a royal priesthood, to be a holy nation and a people belonging to the Lord, which makes us both precious and expendable. Thank you, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

SS

APRIL 26

Living with Bad Bosses

*"Praise be to the name
of God for ever and ever,
wisdom and power are His."*

Daniel 2:20

During my more than a quarter century of medical practice, I have been fortunate to have many good seniors. The few difficult or even bad bosses still leave unpleasant memories. The surgeon who hit me on a ward round because he was angry at life and I was a hapless target and the obstetrician who endangered women and their babies through his desire to play the hero by saving the day in emergencies, which could have been averted with a less cavalier approach. These and a few others were not good men (and one woman) to be working for or be their patients.

Nebuchadnezzar was not a particularly caring chief either. He was capricious in making totally unreasonable demands: 'He demanded his senior staff tell him what he had dreamt'. No doubt this is similar to the way many bosses expect their juniors to read their mind all the time. Nebuchadnezzar had a hot temper too (Daniel 2:12). This fault is not entirely unknown amongst healthcare bosses.

Daniel's handling of these challenges is insightful and instructive for us. With a somewhat wry understatement, our text records that 'when Arioch... came to kill them, Daniel handled the situation with wisdom and discretion' (Daniel 2:14). He had practiced these virtues in his everyday routine so that in a crisis, they were ready to kick in instinctively.

He fearlessly goes to see the boss straight away and instead of telling him how unreasonable he is, which other colleagues had done in their panic (Daniel 2:10-11). He merely asks for some more time to sort the problem out. He then asks his trusted friends to pray about the situation and he does so himself. When God responds, he gives thanks to him (Daniel 2:20-23); and when he presents the solution to the boss, he ensures that he gives public credit to God (Daniel 2:28-45) for the outcome.

At the time of writing, I have a manager who to be frank I would rather not have but I cannot change. Whilst that situation remains, my calling too is to adopt the same approach as Daniel. To be as up front yet reasonable with the boss as I can and more than that to go out of my way to help him especially when the welfare of other staff is at stake as a part of the equation. If you are in a similar situation today don't despair, rather 'praise the name of God forever and ever' (Daniel 2:20), because he is your Chief's boss as well as yours and the situation is ultimately in His control no matter how it may appear on the surface.

Further Reading: Romans 13 and Daniel 2.

TS

APRIL 27

Let's Pretend

"All of you, clothe yourselves with humility..."

1 Peter 5:7

Small children love to dress up. In imagination they become nurses, soldiers, or spacemen. Older people can still enjoy presenting a different image from their norm. Some of them are proud to wear the distinctive long robes and blue stole that, in their church, indicate their authority to preach.

Some of us may clearly remember the first day; we self-consciously put on a white coat or entered the operating suite in an unfamiliar green gown. For most people a stethoscope hanging round the neck spells 'doctor,' but even that can be part of play acting. My interpreter, in Uganda, managed to set up a small private practice in town, having 'borrowed' a white coat and stethoscope. His game came to light when he asked a qualified doctor to sign one of his prescriptions. True identity can be hidden behind a convincing disguise.

The very name 'hypocrite' comes from the Greek word for 'actor.' Jesus applied this description to those who were proudly putting on an external show of religious observance, including conspicuous robes, indicating their status. He said that, despite pious appearances, they were as full of pride; greed and hypocrisy inside as there were decaying bones in an outwardly beautiful tomb (Matthew 23:1-29).

Jesus' disciple, Peter, knew what it was for pride to be exposed. After swearing to his Lord that, he would be faithful to him to the death, three times he denied that he had kept company with Jesus at all. Later, his disloyalty was forgiven but only after bitter tears and a fresh encounter with the risen Lord. This lesson was one he would hand over to others, old and young, urging humility whatever their status and seniority. Elders were not to lord it over others, younger people should be humbly submissive. God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

The devil is ever ready to trip any of us, but the truly humble will not have very far to fall. God is ever ready to lift us up, affirming our true identity as His beloved children.

Further Reading: Mark 14:66-72, John 21:15-19, 1 Peter 5:5-9.

Prayer: "Though what I dream and what I do
In my poor days are always two.
Help me oppressed by things undone,
O Thou whose dreams and deeds were one."

-John Hunter

JG

APRIL 28

Not Ashamed!

“So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He has promised.”

Hebrews 10:35-36

Myaga was a strong Christian and a deacon of the church in the forest community in equatorial Congo. His non-believing family were not happy about his marriage and more so when they failed to have children. They encouraged him to divorce his wife but he refused saying this was not right.

Later, Myaga and his wife were able to adopt a young girl who grew up with them. Several years later, I met this girl when she was admitted to hospital with bleeding

from what turned out to be a molar pregnancy which evolved into choriocarcinoma. Over the succeeding months, she was readmitted on several occasions as she deteriorated because of secondary spread. It seemed that his family had been proved right.

I was called one Sunday afternoon when Myaga decided to take her home to die. We gathered round the bed with her adopted parents to pray for her. Outside the hospital ward, the non-believing family was wailing. We put her on a trolley to wheel her into the village. As we opened the door, and the wailing grew to a crescendo, Mayaga stepped out, singing powerfully, “I’m not ashamed to own my Lord.” As they proceeded to the village, the singing of the believers drowned out the sound of the wailing.

What did they have? Apparent total failure, but such a strong witness that has left a powerful impression on me and those who witnessed it. As Hebrews 11 reminds us, ‘these all were commended for their faith, yet none of them received what they have promised (Hebrews 11:39).’ Where is it that you need to persevere in faith today?

Further Reading: Hebrews 11.

Prayer: Father, forgive us for being ashamed of the Gospel; forgive us for those times when we have not shared the very truth that has saved us. We repent of all fear of witnessing to our faith in the Christ. May we be such lovers of the Gospel that we are eager to share it both in word and deed, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

SG

APRIL 29

Doubting Our Way to Glory

“Stop doubting and believe.”

John 20:27b

all about their doubt (Luke 24:38). The very men that Jesus had invested so much time teaching these same men had problems with doubt.

But it is not only them. We, too, struggle with doubts. We struggle to believe the things we cannot see. Can we trust God to be Who He says He is?

Satan will use doubt as a tool to harm our relationship with God (Genesis 3). But doubt is also the natural state of man that must be continually overcome to grow in relationship with God. Too often we run from doubt for fear that it is sin. But doubt is sin only when it leads to denial or disobedience. By the power of God living within us, we can avoid these consequences. Rather, we grow in faith when we embrace occasions of doubt as opportunities to grow in faith.

The liability for all people, particularly those trained in the health sciences, is to think we can overcome doubt through knowledge. We asked God to let us walk by sight, while He continually invites us to walk by faith. Knowledge of God and His ways is helpful, but it is not the ultimate solution to doubt. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” Isaiah 55:9. We cannot rely on our intellect to resolve doubt.

The solution for doubt is faith. “Faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ” Romans 10:17. And this faith grows as we experience relationship with our faithful Heavenly Father. When doubt arises, it is an opportunity for faith to grow. Doubt resolves into faith as we spend time in God’s word and in His presence.

Prayer: Father God, guard my heart by the power of the Holy Spirit. Shelter my faith and prove it genuine in my life. I lift up my heart and I choose to greatly rejoice that you will increase my faith! In the name of Jesus I pray, Amen.

GR

APRIL 30

Peace Making

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

Matthew 5:9

soon the IPKF was drawn into the conflict and was dubbed as Indian Peace Killing Force.

Peace can never be imposed through force. The biblical term for peace is ‘Shalom.’ It is more than a mere absence of conflict or strife. Shalom means a state of completeness, soundness, harmony and welfare in all domains of life.

During some very dark hours of Israel’s history, God revealed Himself to Gideon as Jehovah-Shalom. The Israelites were living in mountain clefts and caves because they were scared of the raiding armies from Midian. Gideon himself was afraid of them and was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. In such a situation, the Lord appeared to Gideon and declared “Peace! Do not be afraid.” Gideon built an altar and then called it ‘Jehovah Shalom’ (meaning - The Lord is peace).

Peace has two dimensions. One has to do with the vertical relationship with God and the other the horizontal relationship with fellow human beings. God Himself took the initiative of mending the relationship with each one of us through the death and resurrection of His son Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:1). The realization that we have been reconciled with our God gives us a great sense of satisfaction and confidence.

The second, horizontal component is more difficult to achieve. God instructs us: ‘If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all’ (Romans 12:18). This is humanly impossible, but God can help us to do it. “For He Himself is our peace, (Ephesians 2:14-15).

Men and women make a variety of attempts to obtain peace including rituals, sacrifices, meditation, etc... However, true lasting peace can be achieved only through Christ. “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” Philippians 4:7.

Reflection: What can we do to be peace makers, especially in our workplaces?

Further Reading: Judges 6:11-24.

BM

The Scudders: A Family Committed to Medical Mission

Dorothy Jealous Scudder, in her book, "A Thousand Years in Thy Sight" published in 1984, records that 42 members from four generations of the Scudder family contributed more than 1100 years of service to medical mission in Asia.

Rev. Dr. John Scudder Sr. (1793-1855)

He was the first medical missionary to India. A graduate in Divinity and Medicine from Princeton and the New York College of Physicians and Surgeons, he began his mission service in Panditeripo in Jaffna district of Ceylon (now Srilanka). For nearly twenty years, he served as priest and physician, establishing a large mission hospital as well as several schools. He then moved to South India to open a printing press to make Scripture available in the Tamil language. He continued to be active in mission work in South India, till he died in 1855.

All his six surviving children also became missionaries:

Henry Martyn Scudder (1822-95) worked in south India and established the Arcot mission. Like his father, he too was a doctor and pastor. He published Christian literature in the Tamil, Telugu and Sanskrit languages, and also was involved in translating the Bible into Tamil. Returning to America because of failing health, he served as a pastor in San Francisco, for about 20 years. He then went to Japan as a missionary for two years.

Rev. William Scudder was a pastor who worked in India for 22 years before returning to America. **Jared Waterbury Scudder** was also a priest and a doctor. He, too, served in the Arcot mission.

Dr. Silas Downer Scudder started medical work at a small hospital at Ranipet in South India in 1860 opening the hospital in 1866. Impressed by his work, the state government handed over the local dispensary to him to run. The hospital and dispensary provided free medical care and food to the patients. His brother, **Dr. John Scudder II**, took over the hospital in 1872. After 13 years service Dr. Silas returned to America due to ill health.

William Waterbury Scudder, Joseph Scudder, Ezekial Carman Scudder, Harriet Scudder and Louisa Scudder also served the Arcot Mission in various capacities.

Rev. Dr. John Scudder Jr. was the youngest son of Dr. John Scudder Sr. He and his wife, Sophia Weld also served in the Arcot mission from 1860 to 1900.

Ida Sophia Scudder the third generation of the family, was born to John and Sophia Scudder in 1870. She began her work in Vellore in South India in 1900, starting with a clinic and a 1-bedded hospital. She felt called to serve the women of the area, as local customs did not permit them to be treated by male doctors, which included her father. From these small beginnings Ida S. Scudder's work has grown into the renowned Christian Medical College in Vellore. In the 115 years of its existence it has established a reputation for excellence in medical work, education and research.

Dr. Henry Martyn Scudder Jr. worked at the Ranipet Hospital for a few years. Dr. John Scudder was a transfusion specialist who worked to get plasma for the war wounded in Britain. **Lewis Rousseau Scudder** and his wife **Ethel** also worked as missionaries of the Reformed Church of America. Their daughter **Ethel Talcott Scudder** and her husband **Dr. William Wells Thoms**, spent the greater part of their lives as missionaries in the middle east - in Iran, Bahrain and Oman. The same is true of Dr. Lewis R. Scudder and his wife Dorothy, a nurse.

The fourth generation of Scudders included **Dr. Ida B (Belle) Scudder**, who followed her aunt Ida Sophia Scudder to India. Qualified as a radiologist, she was instrumental in setting up diagnostic radiology and radiotherapy services in Vellore. She also served at Miraj in Western India for some years.

Dr. Marilyn Scudder (1939-2005), daughter of Dr. Lewis Scudder was an ophthalmologist who has been recognized for her outstanding humanitarian work in Tanzania.

Her brother, **Dr. Galen Fisher Scudder** worked at Ranipet for many years, and was responsible for improving and expanding the hospital to the present Scudder Memorial Hospital, Ranipet. Another brother, **Rev. Lewis R. Scudder III** served in various counties in the middle east.

The fifth generations of Scudders are just beginning their careers. Through the Scudder Association, they continue to support medical missions in India and other parts of the world.

The outstanding contribution of the Scudder family to mission service through health, education, pastoral care and evangelism, is truly inspiring. It stands as witness to the fact that God has blessed and will continue to bless the efforts of those who respond to His call.

Spirit, spirit of gentleness

**Spirit, spirit of gentleness, blow through the wilderness,
Calling and free.**

**Spirit, spirit of restlessness, stir me from placidness,
Wind, wind on the sea.**

You moved on the water, you called to the deep.

And you coaxed up the mountains from the valley of sleep

And over the eons, you called to each thing,

“Awake from your slumber and rise on your wings”.

You swept through the desert, and you stung with the sand.

And you gifted your people a law and a land.

And when they were blinded with their idols and lies,

You spoke through your prophets and opened their eyes.

You sang in a stable and you cried from a hill.

Then you whispered in silence when the whole world was still.

And down in the city, you called once again,

When you blew through your people on the rush of the wind.

You call from tomorrow, You break ancient schemes.

From the bondage of sorrow, the captives dream dreams,

Our women see visions, our men clear their eyes,

With bold new decisions, our people arise.

**- James K Manley is a pastor of the United Church of
Christ, and hymn writer**

MAY 1

The Old Doctor Says...Healing

“Not to us, O Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness.”

Psalm 115:1

Ambrose Pare (1510-1590), the French barber surgeon, said: “I dressed him and God healed him.”

Throughout the ages, medical students and doctors learn these famous words, but how many of us really believe them in our hearts? After all, we worked and studied hard to accumulate the knowledge, skills, experience that we apply to our practice and our care of patients. Surely, we

must get some credit?

Some credit, yes. The patient may be healed by the physician’s medication, the psychiatrist’s words, the dentist’s drill, the surgeon’s scalpel, etc... Do we therefore credit the healing to the surgeon’s scalpel or his scope? We say that the surgeon healed the patient via his scalpel, not that the scalpel healed the patient. By the same reasoning, the surgeon is just an instrument in God’s hands, as the scalpel is just an instrument in his hands. He cannot claim to be the originator of healing, just as the scalpel cannot.

The fact is that God is the originator of all healing. How easy it is to claim that I, the doctor, heal! In fact, I, the doctor, am only a link, an instrument, in the process of healing by God. It humbles us, as we ponder upon this.

Reflection: “It is not good to eat too much honey nor is it honorable to seek one’s own honor.” Proverbs 25:27. “I am not seeking glory for myself.” John 8:50. Words of Jesus, the great physician.

Prayer: Lord, I know I am just an instrument in medical mission and healing comes from You Lord; remove the pride, if any, which is in me. All the glory and honor belongs to You alone, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

LTT

MAY 2

The Old Doctor Says....Medical Knowledge

“Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil.”

Proverbs 3:7

Medical knowledge progresses at a phenomenal pace, especially since the advent of the internet. Even printed journals lag behind, let alone printed textbooks. Doctors who wish to keep up are often reduced to reading abstracts, review articles, or even just browsing the internet. A perfect example is the author who graduated some 10 years before the clinical use of HbA1C measurements as a marker of diabetes. Having spent 40-plus years in a mechanical surgical specialty, he suddenly found HbA1C mentioned in public transport advertisements, and knew almost nothing about it. Continuing medical education is important for all of us, from the clinical specialists to the missionary doctors.

The fact is that the doctor is not a know-all-person. He is, just another human being to the patient, who may come armed with a list of printouts from the internet about what he/she perceives as the problem. Often, this is a good but humbling experience for the consulting doctor. In ancient Greece, the doctor was perceived as being three faced in sickness - he appeared as God, in wellness, as man, and in collecting fees, as the devil! No doctors in this day and age can perceive himself as a god anymore. But the, paternalistic feeling of superiority often lingers on and sometimes a paternalistic relationship may even be expected by the doctor and the patient.

The old doctor speaks from experience. Not because he is necessarily wiser, but because he has failed many more times. Through many failures he has learned the hard lesson, that doctors and doctoring are limited, even in the present scientific, high tech times. Healing, after all, is in the hands of the Almighty.

Reflection: How often have I acknowledged before my patients that God is the true healer?

Prayer: God, we thank you for the wisdom and knowledge you have given to us as medical professionals. We thank you for using us each day to help in the process of bringing healing and health in people’s lives. You alone are the true healer and there is no true healing without you, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

LTT

MAY 3

Never Too Late!

“All those the Father gives to me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.”

John 6:37

Isn't it easy to give up talking about Jesus when people don't seem interested?

For several years, I visited a woman patient with steadily deteriorating Multiple Sclerosis. Her husband cared for her lovingly but was angry with what had happened to her and how it had affected his life too. Over the years, we got to know each other and as I was visited around Christmas and Easter time, he came to know what I believed about God and Jesus. He used to say such things as 'I could never believe in a God like that - not after what has happened to my wife.'

After some time, he developed an aggressive lung cancer himself. His health deteriorated rapidly and both he and his wife had to be admitted to a nursing home for full-time care. When visiting him in the Nursing Home, I remember being occupied with analgesia and oxygen therapy and I recall thinking that his physical condition was always distressing, but I had no particular recollection of talking to him about the Lord at that time.

A few weeks later, he died in the night and I was called to see his wife and certify the death. I was just beginning to express my condolences and ask her a few questions about his last hours, when she interrupted me and said "Doctor, before he died, he said to me 'Make sure you tell the doctor that I'm ready to go now' - he made me promise to tell you that.'

What a glorious moment!

Although, she had just witnessed her husband dying, there was a remarkable serenity on her face. What an encouragement for me that my patient was now ready to meet the Lord and he wanted me to know because somehow something that I had said to him along the way had helped prepare him for this moment.

Reflection: How easily do I give up talking about Jesus because the person with me does not appear to respond positively?

Prayer: Dear Lord, empower us to tell the Good news. Pray that we will make use of every opportunity you provide us to share Your word. Thank you, in Jesus name, Amen.

KV

MAY 4

Conflicts: Cause and Prevention

“You want something but don’t get it.” James 4:2

Maybe it is just me, but I suspect you have this problem too. When we have conflict with someone, we usually focus on what is wrong with them; but the words of James make it clear. We will find the root of the problem within ourselves.

Verse 1 tells us the problem comes from desires within us - desires that are not fulfilled. The desire might even be good, but too often, they are selfish desires. When we want something and cannot have it, conflict arises. It is that simple! We should not consider what might be wrong with the other person until we have examined our desires and motives. As this is the root of conflict between individuals, so it is with groups and nations.

In Verse 2, James links killing with coveting. These are the consequences of not getting what we want. Coveting means simply wanting something that is not rightly ours. Coveting can be linked to each of the other Ten Commandments.

But James gives us a solution; we must take our desires to God (verse 2). But that also presents a problem, we ask of God with the wrong motive (verse 3). We do not ask for the good of others or for the good of God’s Kingdom. We ask for our own selfish interests. Later (verse 6) James links these desires, conflicts, and wrong motives with the root problem, pride. The solution involves submission to God, resisting the devil, drawing near to God and pursuing holiness (verse 7-8). That is not a small task. It cannot be done in our own strength. But as we humble ourselves, God will lift us up (verse 10).

The concept of submitting is the key. Not only is it the first step in resolving conflict, it is the means of preventing conflict. Paul makes this clear when he challenges us to, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” Ephesians 5:21.

Lastly, here is a practical tool to assist us in submitting. Simply ask the question, “How can I help you?” The offer must be genuine, but it can be motivated by discipline, not positive emotions. That will often come later and we must be willing to sacrifice. Remembering His sacrifice for us, we do this “out of reverence for Christ.”

Further Reading: Colossians 3:17.

GR

MAY 5

The nearness of The Lord

"The Lord is near."

Philippians 4:5

Having encouraged the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord always, and to exercise gentleness in their relationships, Paul slips in this short sentence. "The Lord is near." Does Paul mean the Lord is near in place or near in time? Or should we enjoy this ambiguity and embrace both ideas?

RP Martin prefers that the Lord is near in time; although, he first provides evidence for the Lord being near in place. He quotes Psalm 145:18, "The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth." This is strengthened by Psalm 119:151, "Yet you are near O Lord, and all your commandments are true." In this verse, we can rejoice in the Lord because the Lord is near. In fact the companionship of the Lord is a common theme in the Psalms; we do not fear the valley of the shadow of death because the Lord is with us (Psalm 23:4). The presence of the Lord guided Israel through the desert. Moses struggled with God to ensure that God would not withdraw his presence from his people. He drew from the Lord that wonderful promise, "My presence will go with you and I will give you rest." (Exodus 33:14).

In the New Testament, Jesus' other name, Emmanuel, which means 'God with us.' One of Paul's shortest summaries of the Gospel is "Christ in you, the hope of Glory." (Colossians 1:27). God now dwells with His people through the Holy Spirit who was poured out on His church and on individuals in the church at Pentecost. The presence of God in our daily interactions with patients and colleagues is a source of great poise and comfort. It allows us to rejoice and it allows us to be gentle to all.

Reflection: On the presence of the Lord in your office, study, surgery, theatre, laboratory, and on your ward rounds.

Further Reading: Psalm 23.

Prayer: Lord, You make known to me the path of life; You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand, thank you Lord for being near to me, in Jesus' name, Amen.

AG

MAY 6

The Nearness of The Lord

“The Lord is near.”

Philippians 4:5

His reward are near. This is a common New Testament theme, especially, to a persecuted church and infuses urgency to the work of the early church. Paul picks up this theme in Romans 13:11. Salvation is now nearer than when we first believed. The night is far gone, the day is near. Therefore, we put aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. We are ready for His coming and when He comes we will welcome Him gladly.

The Christian hope of the coming of the Lord does not make us so heavenly minded we are of no earthly use, but on the contrary it strengthens our commitment to do right so that we are ready for His coming. That is why we excel in the work of the Lord because we know we do not labor in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58).

But do we have to choose between nearness in time over nearness in place? Why not rejoice in the presence of the Lord in our daily work and look forward with eager expectation that the Lord will come soon? Let us be busy for the Lord who is with us and who will come quickly.

Reflection: On the imminent return of the Lord. How will that change the way we care for patients and do our work?

Further Reading: I Corinthians 15.

Prayer: Dear God, help us have humble strength to draw near to You today as we understand that the end of all things is at hand, teach me to watch and pray, in doing so let me be the watchman you intend me to be, in Jesus' name, Amen.

AG

MAY 7

Servant Leadership

“And whosoever of you will be the chief, shall be servant of all...”

Mark 10:44

My little son once said he would not have a servant when he grows up, “Why?” I asked. Because my Sunday school teacher said, ‘to be great you must be a servant.’ This is actually the biblical concept of leadership, while the world sees leadership as an opportunity to be bossy. Scripture says it’s an opportunity to minister.

A servant leader leads by serving others. In other words, servant leaders place the interest and needs of their followers ahead of their own interest and needs. It operates leadership from a sacrificial position. At the tail end of his ministry, we saw Jesus wash the feet of His disciples to drive home the point that it was a call to minister. It is a call to humility. He may have in fact picked up the trash or cleaned up the table as a way of setting an example for service. Our Lord enjoins him who is raised above others to conduct himself modestly and humbly so as not to lord it over those beneath him.

A servant leader values others opinions and he does not see his ideas as all in all. Once, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the son of man is?” Matthew 16:13. This attribute actually helps a leader to evaluate the impact of his work.

Developing others, cultivating a culture of trust, thinking about the led not just self are the other features that characterizes the servant leadership. He is one who would rather sell his ideas instead of compelling it i.e. the opposite of a dictator. He persuades rather than commands.

Servant leadership is what we have been called into. It is the only way to the top - this we must understand if we have the top in view.

Reflection: On Jesus’ example as a servant leader.

Further Reading: Mark 10:42-47.

Prayer: Lord, as we discern the meaning of our call to servant leadership, help us to recognize the ways you seek to minister through our lives. Inspired by the knowledge of your abiding presence, may we have the courage to reach out and support one another, to decrease when others should increase, and to lead with vision and compassion, as faithful followers of Jesus, in His name, Amen.

AO

MAY 8

Being the Real You

“I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”

John 15:15

perspective of the awesome identity that belongs to God’s children in being counted as partners with the Great Physician.

“Then He said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field.’” Matthew 9:37-38

You cannot faithfully live out an identity that you are not aware of. How can you reap the rewards of being a friend of God, if you choose to confine yourself solely to the realm of ‘servant hood?’ For you to be effective as a conduit of divine healing in the Master’s Kingdom, you have to accept His invitation to put an ear to His chest and meditate on the rhythm of His heartbeat. Each beat radiates waves of life-giving inspiration that will spur you on each day. You will consequently receive ‘downloads’ of heavenly strategies that will supersede the limited reach of human wisdom.

It us up to you and I to, moment-by-moment, breathe in the abundant life that Jesus freely gave us and by so doing, we will radiate his life-giving fragrance in whatever circumstance we may find ourselves.

Further Reading: Revelation 3:20, Acts 17:28, 1 Peter 2:9.

Book: “The Supernatural Power of a Transformed Mind” by Bill Johnson

Prayer: Dear Lord, I surrender my life to you. I ask you to send me out for the harvest which is plentiful. in Jesus’ name, Amen.

MO

MAY 9

Lessons from Gardening

“Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be healthy, even as your soul prospers.”

3 John 1:2

Patients and doctors are often deceived into thinking that by eliminating the symptoms we have succeeded; but if the root remains, the issues will surface elsewhere. A really interesting area to me is the group of autoimmune diseases. The immune system is an amazing God-given defense against invaders. And yet in these illnesses, it apparently attacks different parts of the body. For example, in colitis the body turns against the bowel, in thyroiditis the body turns against the thyroid, in Type 1 Diabetes the body turns against the pancreas. Why? We don't often ask why!

There is some interesting research in America that shows that the root can be a lack of love for self. ‘I say can be, not is!’ I found that fascinating to think that if we don't love ourselves at a root level as a person, then our physical body can follow suit and turn against itself in some way. God loves us completely. He has designed us and made us in his image. So if we start hating ourselves or condemning ourselves, we are going against what He says about us.

We are all different. Each one has a unique story. But there are some God given keys that can help us. In the verse in 3 John, there seems to be a link between physical health and the health of our souls. In James 5, it says ‘confess your sins one to another so you may be healed.’ So sometimes our physical healing depends on adjustments in the deeper layers.

We can learn from gardening. We can get so focused on the appearance of the plant we forget about the roots. We can get so focused on physical healing we forget about the state of our souls, our mind, emotions and our will. God wants us to be whole. The hard work of gardening is worth it.

Further Reading: 3 John.

MW

MAY 10

Setting an Example for Children

“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.”

Proverbs 22:6

‘Oh, no! Not you again!’ It was not the sort of greeting I expected as I hailed my colleague across the surgery car park. Tessa came towards me grimacing and holding her hand to her forehead. ‘Sorry. It’s just that I felt so guilty after our last conversation and I was dreading seeing you again.’ What on earth had we talked about?

Tessa is a Christian. Her husband is a Christian. They are blessed with five gifted children. I remembered our conversation: ‘How’s the family?’ As with many bright children of medical parentage, Tessa’s brood excelled at school, in the orchestra and on the sports field. ‘How wonderful!’ I said. ‘And how are things at church?’ ‘Oh... err..., um, well you see, we don’t go to church anymore because on a Sunday morning Jake has swimming and Toby has rugby and Alison has youth choir, and...’

I bumped into Tessa in the supermarket some years later. ‘How are the children?’ Yes, doing well. They are young adults now, still bright, still achieving. But, Tessa tells me, it is a grief to her that none of them are walking with the Lord.

Now, we all know from Scripture - and from life - that good and godly parents can have rebellious children. We know too that each family must make their own decisions about Sunday observance - we are not all strict Sabbatarians. But what lesson did these children learn as they grew up? They learnt that their prowess at tennis and football and clarinet were more important than joining with the church of Christ to worship God. Should it surprise us that they reject such a faith, such a church, such a God, so low on the parental agenda?

It is hard to juggle the demands of work, church and family but we have a responsibility, if blessed with children, to ‘bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord’ (Ephesians 6:4). Children from other families are also watching our example and are aware of our priorities. Let us, with God’s help, live a life worthy of our calling (Ephesians 4:1) and have godly priorities, both for our young people and for us.

Further Reading: Mark 8:36 ,Matthew 6:33, Hebrews 10:24–25.

RE

MAY 11

Free from Fear

“For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, Abba, Father.”

Romans 8:14

“For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.”

2 Timothy 2:7

Whom am I partnering with? I was discussing why some people choose to hold on to their problems rather than really entering into the freedom Christ has won for us. That night I woke up to the challenge, so ‘why are you partnering with fear’. The message was clear. So I did what was needed, I repented for allowing fear to grip my life in so many areas. I received the amazing forgiveness that comes through the cross. As fear is a spirit, I told it, in Jesus name, to leave.

A few weeks later, I was in a car winding up a torturous high mountain path, the driver with his foot to the floor. I was feeling rather nervous, when I remembered the above prayer. Fear would not help, couldn't prevent the car hurtling down the hill. So I told fear once again to leave me, and enjoyed the rest of the roller-coaster ride in safety.

I am still practicing, but the changes are big as I embrace the challenge: “what does a fear-free life look like?”

- *Trying new things*
- *Embracing change*
- *Having an open heart to people*
- *Talking to strangers*
- *Hiking steep mountains*
- *Learn new things in medicine*
- *Not backing down from difficult problems*

Your list may be different. But the power we have is the same, that Holy Spirit power within us, through Jesus's death on the cross.

Fear-free living!

Further Reading: 2 Timothy 1:7.

Prayer: Lord you have called me to be strong and courageous. May the Holy Spirit power me within and help me to proclaim your name boldly, in Jesus' name, Amen.

SSL

MAY 12

Faithfulness

Trumps Results

“Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice”

1 Samuel 15:22

words suddenly came to me as if God Himself speaking to me, ‘I didn’t call you to be successful, I called you to be obedient. The results are my affair.’

It was a heart-quickenning moment. Immediately, my thoughts went to Jesus’ ministry. If anyone was to be successful surely it would be the Son of God! And yet, as the world would see it, he ended as an abject failure. I imagined the look of triumph on satan’s face as Jesus finally gave up His Spirit. How that look then changed to utter despair when he understood Jesus’ final words, ‘It is finished.’ At that point satan realized that Jesus’ apparent failure was in fact a total success.

There is so much pressure on us to be successful, even in mission service. I realized that God wants my obedience and faithfulness; the results are His affair! What am I striving for? Am I being faithful and obedient to God?

Further Reading: 2 Corinthians 11:22–30.

Prayer: Lord, let my desire be to hear when You say “well done, good and faithful servant,” let nothing else take priority or shift my focus other than your kingdom, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

It was my second year in the mission hospital. Things weren’t working out as I had envisaged, and I was struggling with the local administration. I was getting frustrated and depressed and asking questions about what I was doing there. My wife and I were sure of our calling and we and the children were happy. But I felt I wasn’t achieving anything.

Mulling over another run-in with the administration one morning,

MAY 13

Living with Denial

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for Me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? Whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when He comes in His glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.”

Luke 9:23–26

I was watching a well-known UK celebrity on TV doing his act recently when he revealed in front of his live audience that he was a homosexual. He said how much he regretted having denied that part of himself for so many years and how good it was to not be living in denial anymore.

Of course it is important to come to terms with elements of our personality over which we may feel conflict, but to assume that denying ourselves the indulgence of our passions and desires is always harmful flies in the teeth of so much of the teaching of the Bible. In our reading today, Jesus stresses that self-denial is an essential hallmark of our discipleship.

Conversion may be the work of a moment but sanctification takes a lifetime. How much misery and pathology do we see in our

patients’ lives because they ‘could not deny’ themselves another drink, another puff, another sexual partner, another shoot up, another lie? The idea that we are the prisoners of our passions is not new - the skeptical Scottish philosopher, David Hume, was certainly propagating it in the nineteenth century. But this is not true for those who take God at his word.

Further Reading: If you are struggling today with denying the pull of desires which the Bible clearly urges us to resist, meditating on the following verses will help you today: *Ephesians 2:3-5*

Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul (1 Peter 2:11).

Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh (Romans 13:14). 2 Corinthians 10:5

TS

MAY 14

No Regrets

“Let the beloved of the Lord rest secure in him, for he shields him all day long, and the one the Lord loves rests between his shoulders.”

Deuteronomy 33:12

Sometimes I ask myself, “Who am I? What am I doing here? For what am I throwing away, a good medical career? To work with people who don’t even appreciate all I have given up for them? To eat food I don’t like? I am sure insects weren’t intended for human consumption. What kind of a God would expect his children to do such things?”

I am a little sad to confess I have had such thoughts about my dad, my incredibly loving Father. Who in His love has given me the opportunity to know Him and his mercy in a foreign land. To live in a place where I need Him desperately, and then find from the hardest of circumstances that I have fallen in love with Him even more.

I can’t say enough about how good he is!

Relationships fell apart, accusations, misunderstanding, unrequited love, hope deferred...that was not a good year and it got worse! A life of faith is not for the faint-hearted. But the sweetness of His power enables me to forgive, heal, and restore. The intimacy of His love and acceptance lead to a new joy that comes after weeping- fruit that is sweet!

Of course, one must go in obedience to His call. To China, Africa, Nepal, India... or to your local clinic and hospital. But before you do anything for Him, hear Him call your name, “beloved, my child, my adopted one.” Then wherever he places you to work is a place to fall deeper in love.

No regrets! A risky life, but without regrets for holding back. His love is too great to miss. Stop and be still and feel his embrace again today and hear him whisper, “Beloved.”

Prayer: Father, I ask that You renew my strength so that I can wait patiently upon You. I ask that my ears and eyes are opened that I might see, hear, know and understand Your Word so that I can walk in obedience to Your commands, and share with others. I ask You to make me alert, awake and attentive in Your thoughts and ways, so that I’m not easily deceived by the enemy. I ask that you help me to be disciplined and a good steward over all that You’ve entrusted to me for my consumption, to bless others and for the Kingdom’s purpose. I pray with thanksgiving, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

SSL

MAY 15

They also Serve Who Only Wait and Pray

*“The last will be first and
the first will be last.”*

Matthew 20:16

What is the meaning of Jesus’ puzzling parable about the different workmen in a vineyard? Why should those who joined the workforce at the eleventh hour be paid the same as those who had labored all day? Matthew finishes the parable with this topsy-turvy comment by Jesus, ‘The last will be first...’ Jesus’ values were not market-driven.

Picturing the scene, we watch the employer go to the market place in the early morning. He first selects those who look fit and strong, capable of working throughout a hot day. The less able, old or disabled are left aside. Yet they do not give up hope. They still wait, despite the heat, hoping to be needed later.

The day passes. For hours, strong and capable workers, with a good reach and perfect balance, keep on picking bunches of grapes. Important tasks remain that are more suited to the less agile, but still strong. Between them, two in this category may carry in the full baskets. The rest should be able to sort out good fruit from bad, or clean up fallen leaves. The master summons each group in turn to do what they can manage. Their patience and their efforts were finally rewarded.

Some of our patients, and even some of us, can for various reasons feel fairly useless. We can no longer do what once came easily. We see others working hard at jobs we once loved. Yet, a constantly recurring word in the Scriptures is ‘Wait on the Lord.’ As long as life lasts, our master will find us tasks suited to our current ability. Perhaps we’ll become more prayerful for his hard working servants, all over the world.

We will always be on call for him, never permanently retired. The aged John had a revelation of the life to come. Although, at the time of his vision, the old man was put aside from his previous activities, he recorded for others the wonders he had seen. If any reader feels sidelined, take courage and be patient. Our hope is anchored in the Lord, and he has not finished with us yet.

Further Reading: Matthew 24:44-47, Isaiah 40:28-31, and Revelation 22:3-5.

Prayer: Use me, Lord; use even me, for the tasks you have kept for me. Just as Thou wilt and where and when; until Thy blessed face I see, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

JG

MAY 16

Keep it Simple

“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”

Psalm 46:10

I recently returned from a summer holiday camping in the Austrian mountains. It is such a change to be in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by natural beauty and with no access to technology. There was no internet, phone, news or other English people. The local people seemed to live a very simple life - farming, meeting in the village square to chat and content with a limited range of food and provisions in the shops. They all seemed to be very healthy!

As the days went by, I felt myself relaxed. My brain was less cluttered with information, meals were simple, we spent time chatting to people as we washed up. There was time to appreciate the surrounding beauty. I slept well, my indigestion settled, my body felt stronger and I didn't get any headaches. I started thinking about the health benefits of simplicity and how complicated and busy our lives can be. We have become used to being always accessible. We take phone calls, check emails and communicate technologically day and night. We are bombarded with news from around the world and information about people's lives on Facebook. We work long days and feel responsible for our patients and staff as well. We come home and try and fit in church, friends and family. We don't realize how exhausting it is until we don't have it.

The challenge is to apply what I learnt on a holiday like this when I came back home! So I decided to check Facebook and my phone less, to read the news summary only once a day. I decided to take time to appreciate the autumn leaves, to stop to talk to my neighbor for a few minutes and cook more simple food. Most importantly, I determined to remember that godly order is best; my order of priorities needs to reflect this.

God is to be my first love, then my husband, then my children. After this come the rest of my family, then friends. Church activities and work should be way down the list.

Simplicity has great benefits, including benefits for our bodies and emotions, our relationships and communities. Take some time out to be still and listen to God whispering His words and His ways to you then do what he says.

Further Reading: Psalm 46.

MW

MAY 17

Thoughts and Voices

“Take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” 2 Corinthians 5:3

Have you ever thought about where the thoughts we have come from or whose voices we are hearing? Sometimes, I see patients who tell me they are hearing voices. It can be the voice of someone they know, God’s voice, or their own ‘self-talk.’ It may even be demons. In Psychiatry, it is not generally considered that the spiritual world exists and so the idea of demons talking is ignored.

As Christians, we don’t like to think that we might be listening to demons, but I have come to the conclusion that most of us do. Voices that are condemning or violent or threatening death are not from God. The bible tells us that satan is the ‘accuser of the brethren’ (Revelation 12:10). He stands before God’s throne accusing us day and night. He comes to steal and kill and destroy. He is the Father of lies. So, we are also told to ‘take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.’ Some thoughts need capturing!

Ten years ago, I was struggling with an erratic heart beat that made me feel faint and ill. In my head, I could hear a voice saying I was going to die. It made me very frightened. My life became restricted and closed down. Now, whose voice was that? It definitely wasn’t God - I knew that in my heart. It wasn’t me or anyone else. The characteristics fitted perfectly with something evil.

I started to learn that not every voice, I hear or thought; I heard is from me or from God. The biggest battle we have is in our heads. I realized that I had to take my thoughts captive and bring them in to line with God’s truth. As I chose to agree with truth and spoke it over myself, the voices lessened. As I started to act on the truth and do things in spite of the fear, they lessened even more. They hardly ever happen now and when they do I know the authority I have in Christ to tell them to go.

So if you or a patient – are struggling with thoughts or voices, ask God who they are and why they are allowed to be there. It may be that you need to repent for agreeing with them. Tell someone you trust and pray together. Focus on the truth of God’s word: think about who Christ really is and who you really are in Christ. You have a choice which thoughts and voices you allow to stay with you. We have the mind of Christ.

Further Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:1–10.

MW

MAY 18

What Defines Us?

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

1 Peter 2:9–10

A Christian doctor was on maternity leave and decided to give the local ‘Mums and Tots’ a try. How did it go? ‘Terrible! I have completely lost my identity! I kept being introduced as ‘Luke’s mum.’ Someone even dragged a retired health visitor over to chat and told her. ‘This is Claire; she used to be a doctor!’ Used to be? Used to be? It’s bad enough losing your figure and your freedom, but now I’ve lost my status and my job as well!’

We can perhaps sympathize with our friend – she felt demoted and rebranded. But in reality, she was more concerned about social standing than with her true identity in Christ.

Yes, we are individuals; we have different nationalities, abilities and temptations. We have our own family, friends and possessions. But these do not define us. Nor does our job title.

The Bible says we are ‘strangers in the world’ (1 Peter 1:1). Just as God’s ancient people were described as ‘strangers’ and ‘aliens’ (Hebrews 11:13), so Peter reminds his readers that they are foreigners, scattered by persecution but also as citizens of the kingdom of Heaven (1 Peter 2:11). Christians should identify with the stranger, the immigrant and the refugee since we, too, are far from home. We are temporary residents. Our priorities, values and lifestyles should make us radically different from the surrounding culture: former friends will ‘think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation’ (1 Peter 4:4).

Re-read those verses from 1 Peter, Who am I? A doctor? A nurse? A midwife? Not primarily. If I am a Christian, I am in Christ: I am chosen, a royal priest, a member of a holy nation, a person belonging to God. I have received mercy; I have received light; I have a new citizenship and I have a purpose - to declare the praises of God. Hallelujah!

Further Reading: Philippians 3:20 and Hebrews 13:14.

RE

MAY 19

Wisdom

“Wisdom is supreme, therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. Esteem her, and she will exalt you, embrace her and she will honor you.”

Proverbs 4:7-8

I first heard the story of King Solomon in Sunday school as a young child. I remember thinking how easy life must have been for Solomon. He became wise by just asking God for wisdom, and after that, everything he did just had to turn out right! It was only years later that I realized that Solomon too made his share of wrong decisions. At the end of his life, as he looked back, there were choices and decisions that he regretted. How could a man

who started out with God’s blessings and such noble intentions go wrong? The answer is that even with prayer, good intentions, and God’s blessings, the ultimate choices Solomon made were based on his own selfish ambitions and desires.

God expects us, to exercise our minds and to study our own motives and intentions before we make decisions. When we pray for guidance, we are looking at those motives and intentions, through God’s eyes. In the book of Proverbs 2:2-4, Solomon describes the search for wisdom in these words, “turning your ear to wisdom,” “applying your heart to understanding,” “call out for insight, cry aloud for understanding, search for it as for hidden treasure.” The process of growing in wisdom is an active rather than a passive exercise. And wisdom itself is described as “the fear of the Lord” and “knowledge of God.”

As we pray each day for wisdom, we need to remember that we are, in fact, inviting God to challenge us, by leading us to those situations and people which force us to pray and to think before we act. Wisdom is the learning that comes out of experience. Even when our decisions do not give the results we hope for, there are lessons learnt that add to our wisdom. The greatest lesson of these is the knowledge that God is with us, both in success and in failure.

Reflection: What are the situations or people that challenge me most in my present place of work? How does God want me to respond?

Further Reading: Proverbs Chapter 2 & 3.

Prayer: Father, let my ear be inclined to hear Your voice and correct me when I have gone astray, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

JPO

MAY 20

Are Our Churches Welcoming?

“But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love.” Luke 7:47

Many have prayed along with me, for my sister, for over twenty years. Although, a Christian from her early teens she divorced in her twenties and gradually strong spirits rather than the Holy Spirit became her comforter. She lapsed into alcoholism and denial.

Then suddenly, not long ago, I felt a strong prompting to confront her about it over the phone. It did not go well and the usual retreat in to silence and tearful defensiveness ensued. Then a text came. I was shocked at its suddenness but so sure of its significance that I saved it. I still have it on my phone. “Hi, made a positive step yesterday. Went to an AA meeting. What an amazing bunch of people there. It has made me realize I am actually an alcoholic and I need to stop completely. That is now my aim and also to return to Jesus.”

She has done this and is making good steady progress. Not long after, she told me about the welcome she received at that first AA meeting. It was so warm, affirming and genuine. It left her wondering why the church does so badly at welcoming. Quite a contrast. I suggested, ‘Perhaps it’s because most church people have never sinned properly in their whole lives.’

This surely relates to the point Jesus is making in our reading. Every single person in an AA meeting knows why they are there. They wouldn’t be there if they didn’t know their addiction had taken over their lives to point of destruction. They understand each other’s vulnerability and weakness. In church, although, there will be some who have recently been dramatically saved by Jesus from imminent disaster, most have been Christians for ages. They tend to think they are doing rather well in a cosy church cocoon. Outsiders may well be viewed as a disturbance to this cosiness rather than needing to be embraced and welcomed in.

What is our attitude to newcomers to our church events? As healthcare professionals, we are likely to be gifted at dealing with all sorts of people and be amongst those best gifted as ‘people persons.’ Are we alert and awake enough spiritually to be welcoming to visitors? It’s the least we can do as those who claim to follow Jesus.

Further Reading: Luke 7:36–50.

TS

MAY 21

Tragedy May

Come!

“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.”

Psalm 116:15

Wouldn't it be nice if everything went well! It is not easy to cope when things go wrong - especially if tragedy comes suddenly and unexpectedly.

An alcoholic patient of mine - let's call him John - responded to the call of Christ and began to get very involved in his church, particularly with the worship band. There was an elderly lady in the church who saw John

frequently, took a special interest in him and prayed for him regularly. I was involved in his care and rehabilitation and after one brief relapse he appeared to be stable for a couple of years and was growing in faith and beginning to look for ways of helping others.

Suddenly, one day I heard that John had died in the cell at the local police station. This was devastating news for all who knew him and were involved with him. When I had opportunity to discover what had happened I heard that an old friend whom John had not seen for several years turned up unexpectedly and invited him to go out for a drink. After a few hours of drinking following a couple of years of abstinence, John finished up drunk and helpless in the street and was picked up from the gutter by the police and kept in the cell for questioning the next morning. Sadly, he died in the cell overnight.

How do we react to news like this? There is something inside me that wants to scream, but I'm hardly able to say anything. Easy answers are not forthcoming for the questions I want to ask. And yet.....

I will not give up. Jesus, who died and rose again, is still on the throne. He has taken John to be with him forever. I fully expect to meet John in eternity even though he ended this life by making a terrible mistake. I will still have hope for the next alcoholic patient who walks through my door.

Reflection: Do I really have an eternal perspective?

Prayer: Lord of all compassion, we pray for all of those caught up in the midst of tragedy or disaster.

Lord Have Mercy, in Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

KV

MAY 22

We Need God's Love and He Seeks Ours

*"We love because He first
loved us."* *1 John 4:19*

'I can't stop looking at him.' Even as she spoke, the young mother's loving gaze was on her tiny baby, sound asleep in his father's arms. Another new mother commented, 'I now know what it's like to be willing to lay down your life for someone else.' Being loved helps babies to thrive. From the start they gaze back at a loving face, strengthening the growth of two-way affection.

But it's not always like this. A Ugandan infant with kwashiorkor turned her head away to avoid the visitor's sympathetic eyes. After being breast-fed for over a year, she had been abruptly weaned by being sent away from her mother. The bereft infant's once sparkling eyes filled with hurt bewilderment. Malnutrition set in and barriers went up. It was too soon to risk loving again. Someone described the staring, unresponsive eyes of such children as 'little lamps with the light gone out.' Many of them seek to relieve their inner pain by ceaseless rocking, head banging or, later on, attention seeking.

Jesus loved the loveless. His self-giving love laid down his life to save them and remove all barriers to a new, fulfilling relationship with his father. God accepted the offering, bringing Jesus back to life. Yet those who neither know nor respond to such love vainly try, like the hurt children, to fill up their emptiness in ways that cannot satisfy. When we turn our eyes towards Jesus, we meet his loving gaze. We will love him because he first loved us. In return, he says that tells us to wholly love the Lord our God and our neighbor as much as we love ourselves. Such love comes from his Spirit, who will help us to channel God's love to loveless ones of all ages, wherever we may meet them.

Before he left them, Jesus told his disciples to go into the whole world with His message of love, thereby encouraging others to respond to Him. His instructions still hold good. As we obey, we may sometimes look into the shining eyes of newborn children of God who have found their emptiness lovingly filled. To meet the love of God is to find that He will never leave or forsake us. Let us never forsake Him.

Further Reading: Mark 16:15, John 1:9-14, Hebrews 13:5.

JG

MAY 23

Health Workers as Burden Bearers

*“Carry each other’s burdens,
and in this way you will fulfil
the law of Christ.”*

Galatians 6:2

‘Phantom Pregnancy Scandal.’ The newspaper headline caught my eye as I waited at the supermarket checkout. ‘Dad-to-be signed off with morning sickness.’ Never heard of Couvade Syndrome? Me neither. But this was the diagnosis when a 29-year-old security guard was struck down with back pains and food cravings. Harry Ashby, whose fiancée Charlotte was expecting their child, took time off work after suffering nausea and weight gain and was reported to be ‘taking medication.’ British newspapers were full of the story because the Duchess of Cambridge had just announced her second pregnancy and was missing from official royal engagements with hyperemesis gravidarum. Harry said he sympathised with the Duchess: ‘I know how she feels.’

Healthcare workers are professional ‘burden-bearers’ and we have to be careful not to be so emotionally involved with our patients as to make ourselves ill. How much use is Harry when his girlfriend feels terrible? Hairdresser Charlotte said: ‘I do get a bit tired of having to look after Harry when he should be looking after me.’

So, we need a certain detachment in order to remain objective and supportive and we need resilience to cope with suffering and death. But, we need a balance - too much emotional investment at work can break us; too little, distances us from patients and makes us less caring. We do not need personal experience of every ailment to sympathise - we just need to use our imagination and look to the interests of others (Philippians 2:4). Harry had a sympathetic pregnancy which was a bit irritating for his other half (especially when he said he was worried about the birth in case he had labour pains!) but she did reveal that she was pleased he was sharing her experience and identifying with her.

How much do we sympathise with others? Do we convey empathy in the consultation, but care little in our hearts? We may be adept at appearing concerned but God sees the truth. His Spirit alone can protect us from compassion fatigue; his power can keep us functioning with both kindness and integrity.

Read Philippians 2:1-11 to remind yourself of Christ’s love and humility, the exhortation is to have the same mind set - to take the very nature of a servant, to identify with others and to give ourselves for them. Christian doctors should pray for their patients - for their physical, mental, and spiritual health. It is a good habit to do this regularly, perhaps on the journey home each day.

Caring is costly and taxes our time, money, and emotions. Give this tax willingly - not just to the other person, but to God, fulfilling the law of Christ.

RE

MAY 24

Living with Paradox

*“The Lord has established
His throne in heaven, and His
kingdom rules over all.”*

Psalm 103:19

gleaming teeth. True, there may be a few tense moments as they leap onto his chest with the defibrillator but within seconds he will be sitting up and asking for a cup of tea.

We know that real life is not like that. When I was a junior doctor on the crash team, I felt upset when we attempted resuscitation and it failed. I was talking to my dad about this one day and he looked puzzled. ‘I don’t see why you think like this,’ he said, ‘You did your best didn’t you? You acted appropriately and administered aid? But it is God who gives life and God who takes it.’

The sovereignty of God is a stumbling block to unbelievers. We, too, can struggle with the paradox of human answerability and divine supremacy. How easy it is to sing ‘Hallelujah! for the Lord our God the Almighty reigns!’ on Sunday and by Monday will be back at work thinking we are the last authority. Doctors certainly have a tremendous duty of care but we must not carry that burden alone. Discharge your duties professionally but do not cling on to personal responsibility, especially in life-and-death crises. Be honest about mistakes but never forget who is ultimately in control.

King David recognized the omnipotence and dominion of God in a prayer at the end of his life: ‘Yours, LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all’ (1 Chronicles 29:11).

Pray that you will be able to acknowledge God’s sovereignty, especially in bleak situations. Remember Job who did not sin against God by charging him with wrongdoing: ‘The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised’ (Job 1:21).

Further Reading: Proverbs 16:33; John 19:10-11; and Revelation 19:6.

Prayer: Lord, enable me to acknowledge God’s sovereignty, especially in bleak situations, and to remember that God will make a way and God is good all the time, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

RE

MAY 25

God Intended It for A Good Purpose

“Now, do not be upset and do not be angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me ahead of you to preserve life.”

Genesis 45:5

“As for you, you meant to harm me, but God intended it for a good purpose, so he could preserve the lives of many people, as you can see this day.”

Genesis 50:20

We are hurt by comparison, competition and criticism from our colleagues. We become frustrated and depressed. Sometimes, our initial calling and passion for witnessing our faith in our medical profession may also have cooled or even died down. We lose our hope in work and love for our colleagues and patients.

Our faith, love, and hope should be rebuilt in prayer in seeking deeper understanding of God’s intension for a good purpose in the midst of our suffering and injustice. It is this strong conviction and commitment that we are empowered to sustain our passion in our medical vocation and profession.

Reflection: This strong faith in God is best illustrated by the American missionary who hoped to work with the Muslims in China. However, he died in Egypt at the age of 25 while he studied Arabic. In his Bible, we found the following encouraging words, “No reserves, No retreats, No regrets.”

Prayer: Lord, as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are Your ways higher than my ways and Your thoughts than my thoughts. Help me to realize that anything you bring into my life and anything you reveal to me is for my good. Give me a spirit of acceptance and a heart open to your move in my life, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

Joseph faced a lot of injustice in his life particularly when sold by his brothers to Egypt. It was acceptable and justifiable to harbor hatred, anger and revenge against his brothers. It was also understandable if he had complaints and doubts about God.

However, Joseph named his firstborn son Manasseh meaning forgetting his troubles. He named the second son Ephraim meaning fruitfulness in the land of suffering. He chose to forget, forgive and enjoyed fruitfulness in the midst of his suffering. He had even a deeper understanding of the plan of God. He acknowledged that God intended his sufferings, harm, and injustice for a good purpose to preserve the lives of many people.

We may face a lot of injustice in our work place especially in big academic institutions or hospitals.

SHE

MAY 26

The Lord is With Us

“The Lord was with Joseph. He was successful and lived in the household of his Egyptian master.”

Genesis 39:2

“But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him kindness. He granted him favor in the sight of the prison warden.”

Genesis 39:21

After Joseph was sold to Egypt, it is mentioned twice that the Lord was with him. The Lord was with him while he served the Egyptian master. The master observed that the Lord was with him and that the Lord made everything he was doing successful. When Joseph was sent to prison, after he was accused of committing a crime against Potiphar’s wife, the Lord was with him.

The Lord was with Joseph in both his ups and downs, as He is with us. Our normal life consists of ups and downs. As we climb up to high mountains in our life such as work, family, status, academic achievements and financial situations, we are bound to drop

down to valleys as this is a normal landscape and nature of life.

We pray that our pride and arrogance will not soar in our successful times. We remember and praise God with a grateful heart for all our success. We will not forget that God is with us in our difficult times. He will protect us from hurts, provide us with strength, guide us along the right path and empower us with confidence to overcome difficulties. He promises to walk with us in our difficulties and in our suffering. We pray that our togetherness with God is evidenced to other people so that God’s name is glorified and magnified.

Reflection: “Be sure you do not feel self-important and forget the Lord your God who brought you from the land of Egypt, the place of slavery” - Deuteronomy 8:14.

“You must remember the Lord your God, for He is the one who gives ability to get wealth; if you do this He will confirm his covenant that He made by oath to your ancestors, even as He has to this day” - Deuteronomy 8:18.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I worship and bless You. Like Joseph, let me experience Your presence in my life. Let all things be according to Your will, in the name of Jesus, Amen.

SHE

MAY 27

Being in Community

“Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

2 Corinthians 13:11-14

hospital, examination room, or office needs a portion-sized or eternity-sized helping / serving of His peace.

May we cultivate His peace for ourselves and with and for each other so that we can pass that on daily at work, at play, and at home!

Further Reading: Psalm 133.

Prayer: Thank you God for giving me another day, another chance to become a better individual, another chance to give and experience love. God, show me how to love others. God, make me a channel of blessing to others. I thank you God, in Jesus' name, Amen.

One night at a small group Bible Study, we poured out our thoughts on 2 Corinthians, particularly verses 11-14. We appreciated Paul's exhortation to cultivate community and unity with each other as believers (verse 11); and in our case as physician believers, to reflect the unity of the Triune Godhead (Trinity; verse 14).

It reminded me of the wonderful virtues of being equally yoked with believers in (un) common community, as we carry out the Christian walk authentically together in ICMDA. Verse 11 points out that God's peace is one of the outcomes. And that is an element we need every day, God's peace to permeate us as we approach His children as patients.

Often, each individual in the

SAB

MAY 28

Encouraging Hope

“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old he will not depart from it.”

Proverbs 22:6

One morning, I visited a 74-year-old woman. After initial greetings, I noticed a book on her table. The cover of the book read, “One Year Bible.” I asked, “So, do you read through that every year?” She said, “As a matter of fact, I do!” She opened the cover and showed me where it said she had started using that Bible in 2000 after buying it for herself. We talked about how reading the same scriptures anew can be afresh, and how God always has something to show us. And about the fact that sitting in church often gives us the opportunity to let the preacher and those around us confirm what God was showing us through His Word.

We talked about how her children initially didn’t follow the Lord when they became adults. She told me her daughter’s testimony about a frightful experience that led her to seriously consider the role of God in her life. And how that brought her back to Christ, I encouraged her about the Scripture that says, “Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it.” Her children did not depart from it permanently. She agreed with that. She said to me, “I am thrilled to hear you talk this way.”

I responded, “I am thrilled to hear you talk this way!” I offered to come and visit for conversations about faith or for prayer any time she would like. My conversation with her reminded me of God’s timelessness and unfailing faithfulness. That God is bigger, more meaningful, and more divine than anything we face. We are comforted that He calls, equips, empowers, enables, and exceeds us.

May we continue to excel as His ambassadors wherever He take us!

Further Reading: Heb.4:12-13.

Prayer: Heavenly father, I am your humble servant, I come before you today in need of hope. There are times when I felt helpless and weak. I pray for hope. Help me to walk in your light, and be ambassador of Your kingdom, in Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

SAB

MAY 29

Making the Most of Opportunities

“Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”

Colossians 4:6

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”

Ephesians 3:29

impatience, arrogance, unkindness or apathy through our day to day speech and actions.

Often when you ask a person how they came to faith, they will describe a relationship with somebody who demonstrated a genuine love for Jesus that permeated all aspects of their lives. Sometimes it is the way that a Christian responds to trials that proves their faith genuine to those who were once cynical. When I was seventeen, I spent a summer working with missionaries. It was the love, joy and hope they communicated that made me realize their faith was real and it was something I lacked. It was through day-to-day conversations about many different things that I came to know Jesus and had the desire to read the Bible for myself and find out more. More recently, somebody told me how something I had said to them in a casual conversation had helped them understand more about God and make a major decision. I didn't even remember the conversation; what may have seemed like a passing comment to me had clearly had a great impact on another person.

Today, whatever you are doing - clinic, ward-round, operating lists, research, teaching, even administration - let me encourage you that through your words and attitudes you can illustrate the truth about Christ to those who do not know Him.

Further Reading: 2 Kings 5: 2-3.

CW

MAY 30

Care with Compassion

“The expert in religious law said, ‘The one who showed mercy to him. ‘So Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do the same.’”

Luke 10:37

When Jesus was tested by an expert in religious law about the inheritance of eternal life, he told the parable of a Good Samaritan.

A priest and a Levite were going down the same road, but when they saw the injured man, they passed by on the other side. A Samaritan who was traveling came to where the injured man was; and when he saw him, he felt compassion for him. He went up to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them.

The priest, the Levite and the Samaritan all saw the injured man on the road, two passed by on the other side, only the Samaritan went up to clean the wound. What makes the difference of their behaviour? The Levite and the priest decided to leave after their rational assessment of the situation. It is a matter of giving importance to themselves rather than others. They left because they would avoid some inconvenience or even disaster to themselves rather than focusing on the life and needs of the injured man. The Samaritan stayed because his heart was full of compassion and mercy for this man.

We also face many dilemmas while making decisions for our patients. What guides our decisions? Our own priorities or the patient’s benefit? Our rational thinking or our compassion for our patients? Everyday, we see the needs of the patients and help them to make decisions of choice of therapy. We pray that our compassion for the patients is our primary motive for taking care of them.

Reflection: Jesus answered, “The most important is: ‘Listen, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:29-31).

Prayer: Lord, I desire so much to be compassionate. I want to be aware of those in need. I want to have the means to help. Let me give to those who are not as privileged as I am. Lord, use me as a vessel of compassion to a world in need, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

SHE

MAY 31

Thanksgiving and Sharing

“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after giving thanks he broke it, gave it to his disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat, this is my body.’”

Matthew 26:26

Jesus said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me” (Corinthians 11:24). For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes (Corinthians 11:26). As Jesus died for us on the cross, He expected us to follow His example to bear witness to the extent that we give up our life.

As doctors, we are all trained and equipped with the medical techniques of healing. These medical gifts and skills are given by God. We should use our healing gifts with thanksgiving heart. Our medical achievements are not because of our talents or hard work but by the grace of God only.

Our profession as doctors is a vocation, a calling to serve our patients with all our heart, skill and effort. It is a commitment of our life to put the benefits of our patients as our first priority before seeking our own good. It is a commandment from God to share what we have learned with the sick and needy to the farthest part of the world.

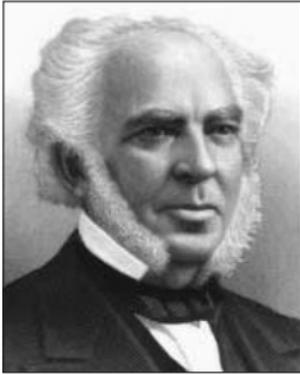
Reflection: The heart of sacrifice is best illustrated by the life of the American missionary, Jim Elliot, who was killed in Ecuador at the age of 35. He said, ‘He is no fool to give what he cannot keep to gain that what he cannot lose.’

Prayer: Thank you Lord for Your love and sacrifice which is poured out for us. Thank you for your amazing grace. We pray that we share these blessings with others, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

SHE

Peter Parker (1804- 1888)

First medical missionary to China



Peter Parker was born in Framington, Massachusetts, USA. He studied both medicine and theology at Yale. He was ordained by the Presbyterian Church and in 1834 was sent to China by the ABCFM (American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions).

He began his work in Canton and became known as a skilled surgeon and ophthalmologist. He played an important role in the formation of the Medical Missionary Society in China, supported by missionary colleagues from America and Britain, as well as by Chinese businessmen. The Society was founded in 1838.

Forced to leave China during the First Opium War (1840-42), he spent these years building support in America, France, England and Scotland for his work in China. He returned to China in 1842 with his wife Harriet. Peter continued his medical and evangelical work, and was part-time secretary to the mission, but was also called by the government to serve as an interpreter to various visiting diplomatic delegations. In 1847, his appointment with the mission was terminated on the charge of being insufficiently involved in evangelism and more committed to medical and diplomatic work.

He continued to work in Canton and is believed to have treated more than 50,000 patients in 2 decades of service. After a short home visit in 1865, he returned to China as US Commissioner Plenipotentiary, returning to America in 1857. He retired in 1859.

Peter Parker's most valuable contribution as stated by Christopher H. Grundmann in "Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions" was the reclamation of medical services for the mission enterprise.

The Physician's Daily Prayer

Almighty God –

You have created the human body with infinite wisdom.

In Your eternal providence,

You have chosen me

to watch over the life and health of Your creatures.

I am now about to apply myself to the duties of my profession.

Support me in these great labors that they may benefit humankind.

For without Your help, not even the least thing will succeed.

Inspire me with love for my art and for Your creatures.

Do not allow thirst for profit, ambition for renown and admiration
to interfere with my profession.

For these are the enemies of truth and can lead me astray
in the great task of attending to the welfare of Your creatures.

Preserve the strength of my body and soul

that they may ever be ready to help

rich and poor, good and bad, enemy as well as friend.

In the sufferer let me see only the human being.

Enlighten my mind that it may recognize what presents itself
and that it may comprehend what is absent or hidden.

Let it not fail to see what is visible

but do not permit it to arrogate to itself

the power to see what cannot be seen

for delicate and indefinite are the bounds

of the great art of caring for the lives and health of Your creatures.

May no strange thoughts divert my attention at the bedside of the sick
or disturb my mind in its silent labors.

Grant that my patients may have confidence in me and in my art
and follow my directions and my counsel.

When those who are wiser than I wish to instruct me
let my soul gratefully follow their guidance
for vast is the extent of our art.

Imbue my soul with gentleness and calmness.

Let me be contented in everything
except the great science of my profession.

Never allow the thought to arise in me
that I have attained sufficient knowledge
but vouchsafe to give me the strength and the ambition
to extend my knowledge.

The art is great,
but the mind of a person is ever-expanding.

I now rise to my calling

*- B.J Hoff, Faces in the crowd, Warner Press
Maimonides (Moshe ben Maimon 0 was a Jewish scholar
who lived in the twelfth century)*

JUNE 1

Follow Me

*“And Jesus said to them,
“Follow me...” Mark 1:17*

Our son was graduating from high school and soon we would be empty-nesters. Finally, the time was coming when we could let go of our normal life responsibilities and serve God in a more complete way with our lives.

When could we get started? What will He have us do? How can we make it work with all of our ties to the normal life? Which direction will God take us? If our retirement income is not enough, should we wait awhile?

My wife and I probed the darkness, asking God to answer our questions so that we could fulfill His call. Every probe came back empty until we were different people, and then God flung the door wide open.

Many of us feel restless at times in our lives and begin listening hard for God’s whisper. When it comes, we think we are ready to follow Him wherever He leads and then we begin to ask our questions. Following after God always involves change. Whatever that change may be, before we follow we usually want to know how we can work it all out, so that we can do it well for God (and minimize the damage to ourselves). We look at our world and the questions start to fly.

When? What? How? Which? If...?

These are legitimate questions but they may become the nails that hold our feet to the floor when God calls us forward.

As doctors, we are accustomed to evaluating and understanding the problem before we step out to fix things. Our inability to understand our future sometimes makes it difficult for us to step into God’s future. Sometimes, we may be immobilized by our questions to God. God’s questions to us are different. God’s questions to us are:

Will you trust me, whatever?

Will you obey me, whatever?

Usually, God’s questions are not answered with intellect only. Usually, God’s questions require action. Very often, the only way to answer God’s questions is to step into the darkness in the direction we hear Him calling.

Prayer: Dear God, Whatever, whenever, wherever, however, ...Amen

GR

JUNE 2

Walking and Leaping and Praising God

“He jumped up, stood and began walking around, and he entered the temple courts with them, walking and leaping and praising God.”

Acts 3:8

The miracle of healing of the man who was lame from birth and who sat begging at the Beautiful Gate and asked for donations gives us a lot of food for reflection.

Firstly, we learn from this miracle to identify with Peter to equip ourselves with a heart of discernment about our patients. Although, our patients come with specific symptoms or requests, we should have sensitivity and to be objective so as to find out their true physical problems and needs.

Secondly, we should have compassion for our patients and act according to our love. Peter took the right hand of the lame man and raised him up. This bodily touch not only expressed warmth but also imparted the feeling of acceptance and rebuilt his self-esteem. Peter had to lower his body in order to take his right hand. This reminds us to be humble and be empathetic with our patients. This also reminds us that in order to have holistic healing, we should be aware of the psychological need of our patients.

Finally, the lame man walked, leaped and praised God. This encourages us to convey the good news of God to our patients.

We have all experienced holistic healing from God as the lame man did. We have all received the warm and divine touch of our God. Unless we remember our weakness with a thankful heart for the saving grace of God, we will not have the motivation to treat our patients with compassion, so that our patients and relatives will be astonished and amazed by our love from God and God's name is glorified.

Reflection: “So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; what is old has passed away - look, what is new has come! And all these things are from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and who has given us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:17-18).

Prayer: Lord, this morning I realize, at times I too am blind to see the way, deaf to call to repentance, often paralyzed with fear to obey when it's bound to offend, at such times, heal me and make me whole Lord, in Jesus' name, Amen.

SHE

JUNE 3

Equally Yoked

“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?”

2 Corinthians 6:14

My third patient for the morning was a 63-year-old woman who was flustered about not being able to remember her Apple Store password.

“I have been doing my Bible studies on this laptop, ‘she said,’ and I’m trying to buy a concordance that goes along with my Bible on here, but I can’t remember my Apple password!”

Well, I began, “Time is on your side, while you are here in the hospital. You have lots of time to remember it! What would you like to look up in the concordance?”

So she responded, “My friend and I were trying to figure out, is it ‘unequally yoked’ or ‘equally yoked?’” Ah, I can help you with that one! I am very sure it is ‘unequally yoked!’

We talked about the concept of yoking animals back then. We talked about being yoked in relationships, in marriage, and about being on the same page, spiritually and otherwise. Then we discussed being on the same page with her medical care.

After a lovely visit, I wished her a blessed day and was off to see more patients.

Time was on my side so that I could have that lovely visit with my patient. She’s not really mine. She’s not anyone’s, but God’s. And God chooses to give us opportunities to be stewards of His children as patients.

May we always be sensitive to faith flags as the God of time is always on our side, while we are wholeheartedly on His!

Further Reading: Acts 8:26–38

Prayer: Lord, help me to be sensitive to Your Spirit, that I should know how to speak a word in a season that is weary, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

SAB

JUNE 4

Standing Up For Those in Need

“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

Proverbs 31:89

It matters not in which country we live or the type of medicine we practice. We all can think of similar stories of people who need someone to advocate for them. I think of the little girl who was dropped off at an orphanage after her parents died in a natural disaster. There is the man with cerebral palsy whose only family is the team of caregivers at a group home. What about the woman who was dismissed each time she sought medications for pain, which ultimately stemmed from an undiagnosed cancer that cut her life short?

As physicians, we have been given the opportunity to work with many patients and their families. We should count this a privilege. God has entrusted us to reach out and care for the sick and the vulnerable. We have a role to play in their lives, but this is not an easy task. Thankfully, we are not left to do this alone. We can put our faith in the One who provides for us.

God ultimately does not require us to carry out His work, but He invites us to participate. As followers of Christ, we are called to be obedient to God, to do our part, and to trust Him to carry out the rest, according to His will.

Further Reading: Psalm 146.

Prayer: Let us praise God for His sovereignty and His grace for each of us. Ask Him how we can do our part to show love and compassion to those of us who are vulnerable and to advocate for those in need, in Jesus' name, Amen.

JUNE 5

Doing What God Has Commanded

“Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the cause of the widow.”

Isaiah 1:16-17

We are to lead all the nations in the ways of Jesus; teaching them how to live as He commanded us to live. That means teaching the nations how to care for the poor, respect the worth and dignity of every person and in the God-inspired words of the prophet Isaiah, “seek justice, encourage the oppressed, defend the orphan and plead for the widow.”

Scripture teaches that God has established government “as a minister of God to you for good” and as “an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil” (Romans 13:4). The biblical truth is that God and government are not separated, and that means that we should not exclude government from our pursuit and advancing of God’s kingdom. So from government, we “seek justice, encourage the oppressed, defend the orphan and plead for the widow.”

Yes, we can and should also pursue these goals apart from government, but God has established government here on earth as a primary agency of providing justice and restraining evil. Absent Christian influence makes the government descend into ruthless power and disregard for those who do not or cannot support its power. We engage with the government, not for power, but to defend and protect those who have none.

Reflection: On the ways in which we can influence public life and policy with the values that Jesus taught.

Further Reading: Matthew 12:13-17.

Prayer: “Lord, Thy kingdom come and Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” help me to disseminate your kingdom values wherever I go, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

JJ

JUNE 6

Living in These Times

“Christian, do you know what time it is? It’s time to wake up and get dressed!”

“This is all the more urgent, for you know how late it is; time is running out.”

Romans 13:11-12

passing away - Galatians 1:4. Why does Paul say that the long night is over and the day has come?, because the coming of the Lord is at hand. How near is it? Very near indeed.

Secondly, something we must put off, - “So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarrelling and jealousy” - Romans 13:12-13.

Thirdly, something we must put on, - “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires” - .Romans 13:14. What do well-dressed Christians wear? They wear the Lord Jesus Christ. What should we wear to work tomorrow morning? After we put on our outward clothes, make sure we put on Jesus! He’s always appropriate for every occasion. Put on His Holiness. Put on His beauty. Put on His humility. Put on His purity. Put on His compassion. Put on His wisdom. Put on His forgiveness. Put on His righteousness. Put on His zeal. Put on His patience. Put on His love. Let us clothe ourselves with Jesus early in the morning and we will be well-dressed all day long.

But there is one thing we need to know, Christ must be in us before He can be on us. He must live in our heart as Lord and Savior before we can take him with us to work. It’s not enough to know about Jesus, we must know him in our heart and trust him as our Savior and Lord.

Prayer: Father, enable us to be clear minded in these last days. Help us to live wisely, and with purpose. May we be able to focus on Your precious Word to define our thinking and decision-making. We desire powerful, Spirit-filled lives of prayer that will bring You glory in these last days, in Jesus’ name we ask, Amen.

LDR

JUNE 7

Are We Thoughtful and Caring Doctors?

*“And now these three remain:
faith, hope and love, but the
greatest of these is love.”*

1 Corinthians 13:13

As ordinary people, how do we see doctors nowadays? What image do we have of them in these times in our cultures? It is obvious that in today's healthcare industry doctors work under pressure and at an accelerated pace. This helps to generate income as we “produce” health in people. However, this is at the expense of developing a personal and caring relationship with the sick and the needy person.

This way of working is a failure when taking care of people in suffering. It creates frustration, both, in the doctor, and the patients, who feel that they aren't cared for and respected as persons. This is the real situation nowadays, doctors working as part of a production system, purely from a scientific and economical perspective, in which “time is money.”

This is medicine that treats the patient as a customer rather than as a neighbor in need, a medicine that creates “existential emptiness,” as Dr. Victor Frankl remarks. This situation leads a person, at the end, to frustration, stress and depression.

How do we act as Christian professionals? Are we different from others? Are we merciful and thoughtful people who care for our neighbor in suffering? Jesus called us to be doctors, this is our vocation, but we must work as Christians first and secondly as doctors. It is good that we can use our profession to serve our neighbor in need and, at the same time, to serve God.

Further Reading: Proverbs 11:25.

Prayer: Dear Father, teach me to love my patients as neighbors in need, so that I can take care of them with thoughtfulness. Teach me to be a Christian doctor, putting my love for You and to my fellow man than my technical knowledge. I pray in Jesus name, Amen.

RZ

JUNE 8

Are You In The Word Of God?

“Jesus said, “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

Matthew 4:4

physical health than my spiritual health.

Let me challenge you, as I challenged myself. Is your scripture reading on the sidelines? As you are on the playing field of life; and one of your coping mechanisms fails, do you then bring in a substitute player - scripture reading? Maybe scripture reading is the last thing on your list of things to do. Is it only an option and not a necessity?

One of the contributors to “Practice by the Book” (1), Dr. Andy Sanders, notes that it was “one simple change” in peoples’ lives that moved them from self-satisfaction with their life to being hungry for God himself. That simple change was time in God’s word.

Scripture is full of insight about the value of the word of God in our lives. Psalm 119 alone contains over 30 references to the word of God. Here we read, “I have hidden thy word in my heart that I might not sin against thee” (v 11). Why is the hiding important? Because every day of our life, we are facing the same question that was asked in the Garden of Eden, “Did God really say?”

The psalmist also says, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” We make decisions every day. These may not be moral decisions, but they will become part of our destiny and the destiny of those who intersect our lives. Hence, the more time we spend in the Word of God, the better able we will be to make God - honoring decisions.

Further Reading: Psalm 119.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, to be the Bread of Life for the world. Forgive us for elevating earthly appetites above devotion to you. Feed us with the knowledge of Christ so that we recognize our sin and gladly repent in His name, Amen.

RJ

JUNE 9

Jesus Models the Physician-Patient Relationship

“Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out - the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, “Don’t cry.” Then he went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. They were all filled with awe and praised God. “A great prophet has appeared among us,” they said. “God has come to help his people.” This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.” Luke 7:11-17

The intimate relationship between patient and physician is continually threatened by many of the “advances” in modern medicine – sub-specialization, group practices, hospitalist practice, the electronic medical record, etc... At its foundation is a compassionate one-on-one relationship modelled by the Great Physician in his interaction with the widow of Nain.

- “The Lord saw her,” First Jesus perceived the situation and recognized the emotional and social distress of the widow. We must be aware of and sensitive to suffering in our clinics and offices and even when we are not wearing our white coats.

- “His heart went out to her,” He not only saw the situation for what it was, He felt her distress. The “detached concern” that I was taught to seek in

medical school is not enough. Once the patient’s distress is recognized, we must be compassionate. Compassion does not mean to have sympathy or empathy, but ‘to suffer with.’

- He said “Don’t cry,” He offered comfort. A simple thing. Rather than just eliciting the patient’s story, we should stop and say something like “I’m sorry this has happened to you” or some other fitting acknowledgement that we want to try to make the situation better.

- He touched the bier and said “get up,” He did his healing act. Once, we have recognized the situation, felt the patient’s distress and offered comfort, we can then proceed with our healing acts: exam, investigate, treat.

We may not have in our armamentarium the supernatural powers that Jesus had, but we do have the power and ability to see, feel, comfort and reach out to our patients.

Prayer: Lord, who else but You the great physician can teach me the nuances of healing ministry, Lead Thou me on, I will follow You, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

RD

JUNE 10

His Palpable Presence

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:6-7

She felt that they did, but she hadn't been able to go to church recently, because of working on Sundays.

I offered support in any way we could, including chaplain services. Later that day, her face lit up when I offered to pray with her as well.

What most concerned her was dying and leaving her two sons behind. She raised her head slowly and looked at me. We held hands and prayed about Jesus dying on the cross after suffering and about how God understands. Then I prayed that the peace of God that transcends all understanding would guard her heart and mind through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Peace and God's presence were palpable in the room that day. She smiled afterward and said, “Thank you for coming back. I encouraged her to pray for His peace every day, no matter what happens. I walked out of her room filled with happiness, because I was used by God for the spiritual care of a second patient today. May, she rest in His embrace. May we all be encouraged to avail ourselves to address spiritual needs!

Prayer: Jesus, I come into your presence now, and I ask you to surround me. I come under your authority and your claim upon my life. I give myself to you – my body, soul, and spirit. Let Your face shine on me O Lord, in Jesus' name, Amen.

I squatted down in front of a patient and asked about how she was handling her new diagnosis. “I think I'm in denial,” she responded. I assured her that this was normal and that she was going to go through a whole lot of other emotions too. She told me that her family and friends were her support system. We turned and smiled at her family, sitting on the couch, who nodded in response. Her family chimed in to let me know that their local church was praying for her. I told her I would add her to my prayer list too.

Then I asked, “Do church and faith play a big role in your life?”

SAB

JUNE 11

Mighty To Save

“Finally, all of you have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.”

1 Peter 3:8

The lyrics from the song ‘Mighty to Save’ ring true for me this week. ‘Everyone needs compassion...’

I am relearning that my fellow doctors and nurses, patients and church members, family and friends all need compassion. Even when we don’t know how to talk to someone or even who to talk to; but know there is always someone with compassion waiting to hear and willing to care. First, God is always there and there will also be a friend or colleague,

family or a church member. Then once we turn the tables and listen to them, we realize that they also need compassion. And that gives us the opportunity to share the kindness of our Savior with one another.

‘The hope of nations...’

We have patients coming to us from diverse backgrounds and nations. We have rich heritage in our own lives. We all make mistakes. We all need forgiveness, and it is available when we seek.

‘My God is mighty to save...’

We can’t save ourselves from imperfection. Neither, can we truly save our patients. God gives us the ability, training, talent, and wisdom to use medicine. Yet, it is God who reaches inside the patient’s heart, soul, and mind and draws them to Himself to effect eternal change.

‘...take me as you find me...’

So let’s continue to be real as we give ourselves to God and to our patients, albeit not entirely in the same way. As we grow closer to who God and our hospitals and clinics want us to be, we can trust in Him to take care of us.

‘Shine your light and let the whole world see...’

Just as Moses saw a burning bush, may others look at us and only see the light of Christ. May you go out there and burn for God!

Prayer: Lord, may the Light of Your Love shine in the midst of the darkness. Jesus, Light of the World, shine upon us and set us free by the truth You now bring us. Lord, shine on me ...so that I may go out there and burn for You, in the precious name of Jesus’ I pray, Amen.

SAB

JUNE 12

The Good Lord Gives & Takes Away

“For I know the plans I have for you, “declares the LORD,” plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Jeremiah 29:11

One morning a patient said, “My head really hurts, and... I’m afraid I’m going to die. Those doctors...”

I pulled a chair up and sat next to his bed. I asked him whether he was afraid of what was happening in his brain, or if he was afraid of what his doctors might do. His note had mentioned he was afraid of dying in surgery. He continued, “I know they’re good doctors. I just... I’m just afraid I’m going to die.”

I asked him about what helps him get through difficult times and, in life, what gives him hope. He mentioned, “If the Lord chooses to take me and it’s time, He’ll take me, I’m ready, but I’m afraid to die.”

He told me that the Lord plays a big role in his life. I shared with him that we wanted to support him in every way we could. I offered chaplain services and prayer.

Not knowing if his brain surgeons would take him to the operating room before my return, the patient and I closed our eyes and prayed. I prayed thanking God for His mercy, grace, love, and presence with him. I also thanked God that all the hospital staff was in His hands, and that He guides us as we care for those He brings to us. I prayed for a special peace that is higher than we can understand to encompass the patient. He was appreciative of the prayer, and his nurse smiled and nodded in support, having been in the room doing the daily tasks.

After rounds, I returned to visit the patient. A chaplain was in with him. The nurse and I smiled in agreement. What a beautiful sight. What a beautiful way to care for our patient, before his brain surgery that day.

Prayer: Lord, help us to encourage one another with Your words of life, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

SAB

JUNE 13

We Need Each Other.....

“They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.”

Acts 2:46

Taking care of adolescents living with HIV routinely is both a joy and a challenge. The joy is being available to help adolescents who perinatally acquired the infection from their mothers when there were no established interventions. The challenge has got to do with managing a chronic illness which is deeply stigmatizing. The adolescents in my clinic are at different levels of

the academic ladder - junior and senior high schools mainly. The biggest problem is taking antiretroviral tablets daily for the rest of their lives. This involves multiple medications which most often have to be taken twice daily, concealing the tablets so that no one sees and coping with the side effects of drugs.

Another major obstacle is missing school to attend clinic and blood sampling to monitor clinical progress. This is compounded by the fact that most of the adolescents have lost biological parents and are being supported by families who are financially unstable. It is therefore very common for them to miss laboratory work up for up to 2 years, which has grave implication for monitoring compliance.

It therefore came as a pleasant surprise when Christian Medical Students (Members of CMF-Ghana) who rotate through the clinic took it upon themselves to raise funds to support adolescents living with HIV. This idea came up through their interaction with the adolescents during clinic visits. The medical students organized a musical gospel concert which raised seed money to organize support for the patients.

Very little was expected of medical students who are themselves financially challenged. With unity in Spirit and focus they were able to support a clinic run by their consultant. Everyone counts in building the Kingdom of God among men. The widow's mite (Luke 21:1-4) is very significant to a marginalized group such as adolescents living with HIV.

Reflection: Like the parts of the body, everyone matters. Let us all unite to work together in His ministry.

Prayer: Heavenly Father: thank you for sending your Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, to be the Bread of Life for the world. Forgive us for elevating earthly appetites above devotion to you. Feed us with the knowledge of Christ, the way He served and the way He cared for the oppressed and needy, in Jesus' name, Amen.

AnE

JUNE 14

I Will Not Go With You

“Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way.” Exodus 33:3

“The Lord replied, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” Exodus 33:14

Moses had just spent 40 days on Mount Sinai communing with the Lord. During those days on the mountain, God revealed to Moses His law and wrote the Ten Commandments on the tablets of stone with His finger. While Moses was with the Lord, the children of Israel grew restless, so Aaron gathered gold earrings from the people and constructed a golden calf. They danced and shouted and proclaimed, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.” The people offered sacrifices to the golden calf and began to engage in wild revelry. The Lord knew all about it and told Moses that He was going to destroy Israel and start over with a new nation that would worship Him and not turn to idols. But Moses interceded with the Lord for his stiff-necked, rebellious people. He reminded God of the promise, he made to Abraham and he also said that the pagans would say he brought them into the wilderness just to kill them. So the Lord relented and did not destroy the people.

When Moses came down from the mountain, he dealt sternly with those who had abandoned God. Three thousand people died that day. The next day Moses pleaded with God for forgiveness for his people. He even asked God to blot his own name out of his book in order to save the people of Israel. God told him to lead the people away from Mt. Sinai and toward the Promised Land, but with one significant condition, “I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way” Exodus 33:3.

What a terrible punishment! Having to go on in to the unknown without being accompanied by God. It happens more often than we think. In our haste to get on with life, we take control of the situation and the results never work out as we hoped. The tragedy of going on without the Lord is that we generally don’t discover it until it’s too late to do much about it. Wrong decisions can’t always be undone. So Moses intercedes with God again. This time he says, “If you don’t go with us, we aren’t going to go.” That’s the right attitude to have. If God has led us out of Egypt, we would better not leave Him behind at Mt. Sinai. We’re going to need his help to navigate the wilderness.

Once again, God relented and assured Moses that His presence would go with His people into the Promised Land. That is the same promise that He holds out to us today, that if we confess our mistakes and truly seek to change. He will forgive and continue to walk with us.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for your assurance that you will continue to go with us, help us to seek your grace in all that we do, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

LDR

JUNE 15

Lord, Show Me Your Glory

*“Then Moses said, “Now
show me your glory.”*

Exodus 33:18

Moses had an unenviable task – to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt into the Promised Land. Many times, on the journey, he had to face rebellion and discontent from his people. On more than one occasion, they turned away from God, and they forgot the many miracles that God had accomplished through Moses.

Moses prayed, “Show me your glory,” only after the children of Israel began to worship the golden calf. And he prayed this way after he had broken the tablets of the Ten Commandments and after 3,000

Israelites had died, and after he had interceded with God several times. And this prayer came after he had saved the nation from destruction, and after he had received God’s promise not to abandon his people.

God’s answer is a qualified yes. “I will show you my glory,” he says, “but not all of it.” No one can see God’s face and live. Moses will see God’s goodness but he will not see God’s face. Then God offers to hide Moses in the “cleft of the rock” while he is passing by. Moses will be able to see his back as he passes by. That is more than any man had ever seen before. That is the most Moses could see and not die.

God told Moses he would answer his prayer but, not in the way he expected. In a sense, Moses had no idea what he was asking for. He wanted to see God’s glory, but that meant seeing God in his essence. No man can see God’s essence and live. The light would blind us and then it would consume us. So God told Moses, he would hide him in the “cleft of the rock” so he would see God’s back as the Lord passed by.

Sometimes when we pray, we ask for things that we cannot bear alone. We want certain blessings but we have no idea of the cost involved. And certainly when we pray, “Lord, show me your glory,” like Moses of old, we are asking for something that goes far beyond our limited abilities to receive. Moses received his answer, but not in the way he expected. And it did not come without a revelation of his weakness. The same is true for all of us. We say we want to know the Lord better, we want to come closer to him in prayer, we want to grow in grace, we hope to move forward in our spiritual journey. But there is a price to be paid. No pain, no gain. We must see our own weakness in a personal way before we can behold his glory.

There is great encouragement for all of us from this ancient story. In a time of crisis, Moses dared to pray a magnificent prayer to the Lord. He asked for more than any man had asked for before, and he received more than any man had ever received. Yet both the prayer and the answer came in a time of crisis through a revelation of Moses’ own weakness. And the answer was seen by others before it was seen by Moses. These things are here for our encouragement. Our trials are not meant to destroy us. God intends that we should use the hard times to draw near to Him. If we are willing to be made weak, we will learn things about the Lord that we never knew when we were strong. This is always God’s way. The strong have no need of God - or so they think. But the weak are hidden in the cleft of the rock - and they are the ones who truly see God.

LDR

JUNE 16

Because of Him

*“Surely goodness and mercy
shall follow me all the days
of my life, and I shall dwell
in the house of the LORD or
ever.”*

Psalm 23:6

Because of Him,
The One,
Who set all worlds in motion,
Whoa spoke, and it came to be,
Who created all living things,
Who made all things good,
Because of Him,
The Source of love,
Love that gave everything,
His Own Son for the life of the world,

The One they called “Good Teacher,”

(But no one is good but God alone)...

Because of Him,

We were chosen

Before the foundation of the world,

Predestined to know

The hope of Christ

And praise His glory!

Because of Him,

We heard the Word of Truth

And were included in Christ,

Having believed, we were marked with a seal,

His Own Spirit,

The Spirit of Goodness and Mercy!

Because of Him,

And Only Him,

Will goodness and mercy will follow us,

All the days of our life,

And we will dwell in the house of the Lord--forever,

And He will dwell in us!

SFH

JUNE 17

Because He Lives

“Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.”

Mark 8:34-35

an uncertain future, patients for whom we cannot predict a favorable outcome beyond a few months or years.

One such patient was a praying man, and so was his wife. As I carved out some time during daily activities to sit and talk with the couple, they would ask a ton of medical questions and throw in a thought or two about trusting God.

One day, his wife said, “Honey, which hymn were we singing on Sunday? And I squeezed hand, crying?” He smiled and whispered, “Because He lives.”

“That’s right,” she said. “Because He lives, I can face tomorrow. Our lives are in His hands. We do our best. He does the rest.”

I left the patient’s room, singing softly, “Because He lives....”

I entered the room a few days later to discharge the patient. His wife interrupted, “After you’re done, can we say a word of prayer before you leave?” My heart sang with joyful surprise. I let her know how much her spirit, by God’s leading, had ministered to mine.

As we pursue holiness with incredible trust and dependence on God, let us lay down our lives for God and for our patients.

May we sing His praise in our spirits each day!

Prayer: Lord, To hear with my heart, To see with my soul, To be guided by a hand I cannot hold, To trust in a way that I cannot see, That’s what faith must be I pray Lord, in Jesus’ name.

SAB

JUNE 18

Do Not Envy

“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.”

Romans 12:15

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.”

1 Corinthians 13:4

rather have felt a mixture of envy and self-pity, both of which can lead to a downward spiral of unbiblical thinking.

Envy often leads to bitterness and does not bring glory to God. ‘See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many’ (Hebrews 12:15). On reflection, I see that the times when I have struggled with envy have been times when I have not appreciated the grace of God in my own life. I have questioned God’s provision and have felt ‘hard done by’ in some way. As Solomon contemplated the futility of worldly achievement, he concluded, ‘This is what I have observed to be good: that it is appropriate for a person to eat, to drink and to find satisfaction in their toilsome labor under the sun during the days of life God has given them - for this is their lot’ (Ecclesiastes 5:18). As a junior doctor, you can probably relate to the expression ‘toilsome labor!’ It is easy to look at others who seem to have things easier, to have greater opportunities, to have more supportive seniors. But trust God! He knows your situation and ‘your lot.’

If today’s reading resonates with you, pray that God will help you see his provision in your life. Pray that you know afresh the abundant grace he has poured out on you, such that you do not envy the worldly blessings and privileges of others you may know.

Further Reading: 1 Peter 2:1-2.

Prayer: Lord, you know that there are times when I feel envious rather than joyful when friends and colleagues enjoy success. Please forgive my self-centered attitude. Thank you for all you have given me and that your plans are perfect. Help me rejoice even in trials and to truly rejoice with those who rejoice, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

CW

JUNE 19

Thankfulness

“Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Ephesians 5:20

wandering around in the wilderness (Numbers 11:4-6). It was their thankless attitude that prevented God from doing what He intended for them.

Complaining actually opens the door for the devil to enter into our lives. We need to learn to thank God in everything. Talk about your Red Sea moments. Remember the manna He gave you last week. Remember the resurrections you have had in your life. The Bible says to fix your mind on those things that are worthy of praise (Philippians 4:8).

All things will work together for our good (Romans 8:28). That’s a 100 percent, ironclad guarantee, that no matter how much messed up our life gets, God will make something good out of it. If you can manage to be thankful in every situation, really believing that God is working everything out for your good, you will end up with victory every single time.

We are asked to constantly and at all times offer up a sacrifice of praise (Hebrews 13:15). At times, it is a sacrifice because we may not feel like it, but if we focus on what we can be thankful for, we can praise God whatever the circumstances. It is so easy to forget how blessed we are! Maintaining an attitude of gratitude is something we need to do on purpose.

Why is it important to be thankful? To begin with, being thankful from the heart is necessary for receiving God’s continued blessings in our lives. Secondly, choosing an attitude of thanksgiving not only honors God, it is good for us, because it recharges the soul. Anyone who is grateful is focusing on what is good, and ultimately all good things come from God. This means that the thankful person is aligning himself with the Creator of the universe and is drawing strength from Him.

Reflection: What are the different ways of showing thankfulness to God?

Further Reading: Psalm 47: 7-11.

BI

JUNE 20

Hospitality

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.”

Hebrews 13: 2

Hospitality is one of the fundamental expressions of the love we have for our creator. In both the Old Testament and New Testament, the Bible encourages the people of God to show hospitality to their neighbors. The importance of hospitality is demonstrated positively in the story of Abraham (Genesis 18). In the New Testament era, hospitality was a practical issue; travelling believers relied upon

other believers for lodging and food.

Christine Pohl says, “Often we maintain significant boundaries when offering help to persons in need. Many churches prepare and serve meals to hungry neighbors, but few church members find it easy to sit and eat with those who need the meal. When people are very different from ourselves, we often find it more comfortable to cook and clean for them than to share in a meal and conversation. We are familiar with roles as helpers but are less certain about being equals eating together. Many of us struggle with simply being present with people in need; our helping roles give definition to the relationship but they also keep it decidedly hierarchical. But Jesus was taking grace to the unloved by eating and sharing the table. In that Jesus left us a powerful example of taking God’s grace to others - hospitality - our willingness to share a meal with people who need love.

When we share a meal something happens. Sure, a lot can happen over a coffee, but there is an even greater transaction over a meal at home. Sharing a meal is telling the other person that I am willing to allow you into my inner circle and that I want you to be my friend. More than we reaching out to others, hospitality is allowing God to reach out to us. A deathblow to our ego, broad minded hospitality is grace in action. It is Jesus-likeness. It is a powerful expression of the love of a person who has truly understood grace.

Further Reading: Genesis 18:1-8.

Prayer: Lord, as I surrender this morning, let the living waters flow out of me as You intended it to, may I follow Your footsteps, in Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

RCA

JUNE 21

Kingdom Values

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?..... Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." Matthew 6: 25-34

"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

Matthew 6:33

King's Presence. We are asked to seek God and his Kingdom, and all these things we are striving for will be provided in His time and His wisdom. Coming into the King's Presence does not mean that we stop working but we find peace and purpose in the midst of our toil and efforts. We should streamline our efforts and see the blessings which God waits to bestow upon us when we live according to His values. When this happens, we truly live according to God's plan and purpose. Surprisingly, this leads to a much better output in the work and effort we put in.

Reflection: Am I conscious of God's presence with me in my daily work? Is his presence with me reflected in my words and deeds?

Prayer: Lord, may we learn the lessons of not worrying, "Give us today our daily bread." Help me to depend upon You Father for all my needs[physical and spiritual]. Let me be willing to do my part to work hard & share the blessings You give me, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Today's world is caught up in a trap of amassing wealth, accumulating possessions, and acquiring knowledge. In this spree, we forget the Source of all what we long for and work towards. The popular nursery rhyme depicts this truth well.

"Pussycat, pussycat, where have you been?"

"I've been to London to visit the queen."

"Pussycat, pussycat, what did you do there?"

"I frightened a little mouse under her chair!"

MEOWWWW

This pussy cat had the opportunity and privilege to be in the queen's presence and soak in the hospitality at the palace. He could have focused his attention on the queen and not be bothered about the mouse under the queen's chair. Prior to his invitation to the palace, he possibly spent most of his life in this exercise of chasing the mice. The invitation to the palace also meant he could stop striving to provide food for himself. He, however, continued in his old habit of chasing mice and forgot about the Queen who towered over the mouse.

Similarly, we are called to be in the

DA

JUNE 22

Showing Greater Love

“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.”

Romans 12:15

When my daughter died, people would often tell me they could not ‘begin to imagine’ our circumstances. I would often wonder whether those words really meant, ‘I do not want to imagine what things must be like because it is painful territory.’ Indeed, it was a rare occasion for somebody who had spoken thus to seek to understand by discussing the matter further, and the isolation was, and continues to be, difficult and painful.

In our professional lives, we often will be faced with patients whose situations we cannot fully appreciate, but we can attempt to understand more. We can listen and ask open-ended questions. We can ask for clarity. Patients often welcome questions and will usually make it clear if they do not wish to talk. I have known depressed elderly patients brighten up as they speak of an event from their youth, lonely widows who love to describe their courtship in wartime Britain, middle aged women who fondly recall having a home full of children, and others.

Talking about one’s personal life is not always joyful. At times, there may be a cathartic outpouring followed by an expression of gratitude for having cared enough to ask. Through listening, we can come to understand our patient as a whole person and from this understanding, seek to show greater love and compassion. It is not always comfortable, and there may be times when we literally ‘weep with those who weep.’ This sharing is a great privilege. As we listen, we can pray that we can bring the light of Christ to the person before us.

Prayer:

Let’s, pray the way St Francis of Assisi prayed:	O Divine Master, Grant that I may not so much seek
Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace;	To be consoled as to console;
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;	To be understood as to understand;
Where there is injury, pardon;	To be loved as to love.
Where there is error, truth;	For it is in giving that we receive;
Where there is doubt, faith;	It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
Where there is despair, hope;	And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life,
Where there is darkness, light;	in Jesus’ name, Amen.
And where there is sadness, joy.	

CW

JUNE 23

Grace

“For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.”

Ephesians 2:8-9

The concept of Grace is arguably the most distinctive aspect of the Christian faith. Most religions emphasize “earning” one’s salvation, as a right, through good deeds and penance, but the Christian doctrine of Grace is counterintuitive. Let me explain using this story in CS Lewis’ book, “The Great Divorce.”

A bus service which journeyed from Hell to Heaven consisted of ghosts hoping to migrate, if of course, they liked it there. There they met several ‘solid’ citizens of Heaven. One of the ghosts saw and recognized a heavenly citizen who was tried, found guilty and executed on earth. Surprised and indignant, the ghost shouted “How come you a veritable murderer are here, while I am languishing in a pigsty all these years in hell?” The man replied and said, “I have been forgiven and the person I murdered has been reconciled at the throne of Grace.” The ghost could not quite accept what he thought was utter miscarriage of justice. He shouted “I must have my rights, my rights” obviously believing that he was deserving of Heaven. The forgiven man said and explained, “If I had to be given my rights, I could not have been here. We don’t get our rights here, we get something far better.”

Two other things need to be mentioned here. There is not one who deserves Heaven. We have all fallen short. As the Scriptures say, “No one is righteous-not even one” (Romans 3:10). However, when we are broken hearted, or come to truly understand that we are unworthy, and then plead for God’s mercy, Grace is shown to us and indeed to anyone, however, sinful he or she may be.

Grace releases from the bondage of legalism. We are freed by Grace, to love and serve both God and man. As you go through today, celebrate this freedom and feel joy.

Further Reading: Romans 5:1-5.

Prayer: Lord, give us the grace to put off our old self, which is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

VS

JUNE 24

Indwelling of the Spirit and Christ in You

“To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

Colossians 1:27

Carpenter ants can be zombified and controlled by an indwelling parasitic fungus, *Ophiocordyceps*, through the release of chemicals capable of controlling brains. The fungus uses this ability to force the insect to attach itself to a moist plant, where the tiny animal dies. *Ophiocordyceps* can then spread through the body of the dead ant to the vegetation, where it can reproduce and exude spores, infecting other ants.

All these zombie facts sound interesting till one realizes that this indeed is the parable of the human condition. Human beings by default are parasitized by the spirit of the world, slowly zombifying them till they dead spiritually and can choose freely no longer. However, when a person chooses to be indwelt by the spirit of God, he is slowly but surely brought back to full life, restoring complete freedom.

God during the exodus lived in the midst of the camp with his people. He then lived in the Holy of Holies in the temple in Jerusalem again in the midst of His people. Now, the Living God indwells through His Spirit within us, helping the ‘I’ to die and thus resurrect us to a new life and freedom. However, for this to happen, a choice has to be made.

Reflection:

“Spirit of God, descend upon my heart,

Wean it from earth, through all its pulses move.

Speak to my weakness, mighty as though art,

And let me love Thee as I ought to love.” - George Croly 1780-1860

“But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.” Romans 8:11

A zombie is a will-less human being who is dead but controlled and animated by supernatural means. There is a movie “28Days Later,” a zombie movie, where a virus turns humans into zombies and focuses upon the struggle of four survivors to cope with the destruction of the life they once knew.

Carpenter ants can be zombified and controlled by an indwelling

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VS

JUNE 25

Serving or Striving?

"Martha, Martha, the Lord answered, 'You are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed - or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.'"

Luke 10:42

visiting them? And after all, the proverbial good woman of the house was expected to be industrious and diligent (Proverbs 31).

Jesus who was the visitor to their home was not, however, impressed by Martha's busyness. Perhaps, he could see beyond the surface into the depths of Martha's heart and detected a sense of competition and self-pity. Martha seemed to be putting her trust in her good works to please Jesus rather than putting her faith in the man who had proved that even feeding 5000 hungry men was not a problem. Mary, however, had got her priorities right for that moment; seeking the master when he had made himself available, that is why Jesus said that Mary had chosen what was best.

In our daily lives, we feel compelled to be performance oriented-achieving targets and having high expectations of ourselves and others. In the process, we often find ourselves driven to subtly prove ourselves better, smarter, and more hardworking than others. We may think we are bringing glory to God through our work, but God is not pleased when we cease to depend on Him to accomplish the work He has called us to do.

Through the incident in the life of these sisters, God is reminding us to trust in His ability to meet all our needs including our professional commitments. Even in our busy work schedules God wants us to quieten our anxious hearts' in His presence.

Reflection: What does it mean to do "God's work" in "God's way?" How do we handle self-pity in the work place?

Further Reading: Luke 10: 38-42.

Prayer: Lord, May I go about my daily tasks, conscious of ability, to meet every rightful demand, seeing the larger meaning of little things, and finding beauty and love everywhere and in the sense of thy presence. May I walk through the hours breathing the atmosphere of love rather than anxious striving.

(from Dr. Ida Scudder's favorite prayer)

RCO

JUNE 26

Challenges in Christian Mission

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Luke 4:18-19.

Jesus began His brief earthly ministry of three years by standing up in the synagogue and reading these words from the book of Isaiah, the prophet. This was, in effect, His mission statement. Over the next three years he then showed how these words could be lived out, so that their meaning remains relevant more than 2000 years later.

The circumstances and environment in many parts of the world today make it a challenge for us to follow Jesus’ example. “Preaching the good news” by Christian organizations is viewed with suspicion, and “conversion” is a bad word. Christian organizations are often accused of using education and medical work as a front for evangelism. In some parts of the world, the Christian faith is seen as

western, and therefore threatening to the prevailing culture and nationalism. How do we then remain true to Jesus’ example, while respecting the limits imposed by local authorities?

I believe that we should not get mired in controversies about conversion. Conversion or the point where people make a decision to commit their lives to Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit. Our role is to create the environment where people may encounter the person of our Lord, and experience the joy and power that He brings into our lives and work. As Jesus did, we need to do this through sharing His teachings, and through our service. In Jesus’ mission statement, there is a clear bias for those who are poor and marginalized. As we witness through our words and our work, the Holy Spirit will do the rest.

Further Reading: Acts 17

Prayer: Lord, may my life and my work reflect your love and grace, so that others will see that you are Lord, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

JPO

JUNE 27

Euthanasia

“Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.” Joshua 1:7

In Canada euthanasia is going to become legal, the politicians are working on figuring out the details. Our provincial colleges are looking at taking away physician’s right of conscience. Patient autonomy may trump our beliefs. We are being told to keep religion out of the office. What they mean is keep the part out that may disagree with the patient.

The love, the care and compassion that Jesus teaches is okay to keep in the office. The Bible is clear in the Joshua statement - obey all the law - not just the part that is socially acceptable. The business side of things - I am about to sign another 5-year contract. I feel in conflict with this as I don’t know if in a year or two years, maybe the college I am registered under will not support my freedom of conscience. Will I be forced to refer or actually perform euthanasia? My daughter now 13 years old is interested in medicine as a career. I struggle to encourage her, though my husband says it is fine. Yes, she will need to fight to keep her freedom of conscience too but we must not give up or back down.

Presently, I feel so blessed. I have a healthy family, a nice home, friends, good job. I am grateful God has blessed us. I want to keep His blessing upon us. I want to obey His laws. I want to serve Him in medicine. I struggle with the new way of thinking in our culture. I pray routinely my college and my government will protect my right of conscience. I pray that Christians will educate themselves about what is going to happen when euthanasia becomes available and not buy into the death culture. May the elderly, the disabled not feel like a burden on their families and feel compelled to die. May people not fear long-term care facilities as if they are death camps. May palliative care still be able to practice without patients thinking that is the death squad.

I will sign the 5-year contract and continue in medicine and obey the law, love my patients and continue to pray for the effects of euthanasia to be ineffectual. I will continue to support organizations that help education churches and people on this important topic. I will be strong and courageous - only because I know God is triumphant and he is the one to obey.

Prayer: Lord, make me strong and courageous, to continue to follow your laws, despite outside pressures to conform to cultural demands, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

ST

JUNE 28

At Such a Time as This....

“...And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”
Esther 4:14b

Last year, I had the privilege of traveling to the United States of America on a research related visit. This was to present preliminary results of a study we had done in my home country.

During the interactive sessions with my USA colleagues, a new idea came on board with a potential concept to improve the lives of adolescents living with HIV. We, therefore, put the proposal together and to the glory of God we had the funding to undertake the pilot study. We needed to think about how it could be replicated on a larger scale if the pilot proved beneficial. At the time of the grant for the pilot, we had no clue how to get the necessary partnership for the future bigger grant application, but I looked up to God.

When the time came for the training for the pilot study to commence, the trainer, Dave, came from USA to Ghana to help start the study. On the first day of the training, I picked him up from his hotel earlier than expected, around 7.45 am. When we got to the training site, the regular workers had not reported and I wanted to show him round. Unexpectedly, we saw four Europeans who also found themselves at the same venue. They had come looking for the head of another clinic that takes place at the same venue but that clinic head had not reported. Dave and I were the only people they found. We had never known each other previously nor had any appointment.

As we interacted, we learned that one of the visitors was seeking to collaborate on a study of HIV in adolescents. This was exactly what I was interested in too. This was the start of a new joint research proposal.

Why did we fix our training on that day? Why did I decide to make an early start that day? How did the other team arrive at the same time? God works in mysterious ways. It is just a matter of time. God will answer your prayer at the right time.

Reflection: On occasions in your life when you experienced God’s intervention.

Prayer: Father, we thank You that our steps are ordered by the Lord. Thank You for this great revelation that takes all the fear and doubt and questioning out of life. We pray in Christ Jesus’ name, Amen.

AnE

JUNE 29

Consequences of Brokenness

“They (Egyptians) made their (Israelites) lives bitter with hard labour... used them ruthlessly’ ‘The Israelites groaned in their slavery...’ Your servants are being beaten.”

Exodus 1:11-16 & 2:23-25

Exodus is a Latin word derived from the Greek exodus, which means ‘exit’ or ‘departure.’ This understanding of exodus raises several questions such as why do people want to exit and depart? ‘Who are these people? What were their conditions?’

A search or an attempt to respond to these questions brings disturbing realities to our conscious mind that Exodus was a narrative of departure of a broken community which encountered and experienced several dimensions of brokenness. A careful examination of their narrative and interpretation of the text reveal the

following consequences of their state of brokenness.

They were a disconnected people - disconnected from their own land and people, and from other communities.

- *Psychologically*, they were shattered - lost in their desperation, frustration, haplessness and smitten, afflicted and wounded; they were stressed to the extent that they were bitter about their own lives.
- *Economically*, they were oppressed - experienced injustice in wages, beaten as labourers, treated by the authority ruthlessly, their human rights were violated.
- *The healthcare system* was denied to them; midwives were even asked to kill the new-born. Thus their very survival was in jeopardy and was threatened.
- *Politically*, they had lost the power to organise themselves into a collective voice; lost the power to question the injustice; their voices were in fact not heard by the politically powerful.
- *Spiritually*, they were disconnected from the place of worship - on several occasions they doubted even the ability and power of God to liberate them.
- *Ultimately*, they were dehumanized and the brokenness was their very ‘humanness’ they were no people (1 Peter 2:10).

It is in this context that God heard their groaning, saw their misery, was concerned about their sufferings and came down to rescue them (Exodus 3:7). God intervened and acted in their broken lives and the ‘exit’ and ‘departure’ from their ‘brokenness’ became a reality. The narrative of Exodus was a journey from brokenness to liberation - a healing from the consequences of their brokenness. Hence, there is ‘Good News’ for the broken communities; there is hope of a departure from their brokenness to healing. God is listening to their painful cry and groaning and is able to respond positively and powerfully. He will do justice to the broken communities.

Further Readings: Esther 4 to 6 and Nehemiah 1 to 3.

CMAI

JUNE 30

Spread Out

“Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes. For you will spread out to the right and to the left; your descendants will dispossess nations and settle in their desolate cities.”

Isaiah 54:2-3

We serve a fruitful and limitless God. Instead of settling for the bare minimum, God’s heart’s desire is that we soar to the heights of that which our Bridegroom paid dearly for. What does it mean to be fruitful? Commonly, analogies in line with sowing and reaping as illustrated in the Agricultural context, come to mind. One would expect that after putting a seed in fertile ground, and ensuring that it is well nourished, a return on one’s labour, in the form of a harvest, will surface at an appointed time. This is true also in the spiritual realm.

As we partner with the Great Physician in our daily work, it is crucial that we labour with this attitude of Godly fruitfulness. There are several components to this:

- *The Sowers - You and I.*
- *The Seed - the Gospel of the Kingdom.*
- *The Soil - the hearts of those with whom we rub shoulders with daily.*
- *Nurture - the Holy Spirit, Prayer.*
- *The Outcome - Lives propelled out of darkness into Light.*

When we cultivate a lifestyle of actively planting the seeds of God’s Word in hearts and minds (ours and others), guarding jealously, and nourishing them, fruit naturally emerges - a glorious return for labour in the vineyard of the Great Physician.

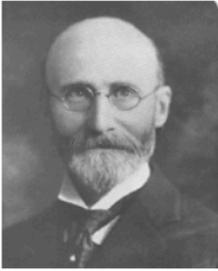
I am currently being challenged to regularly check myself - Am I merely being ‘busy,’ as I work or am I actively pursuing fruitfulness? Am I ‘spreading out’ and in so doing reaching beyond a suffocated view of fruitfulness? God’s definition of fruitfulness may appear completely at odds with our limited definition many times. The Seed must be sown strategically and at the right time. This is where total reliance on the Holy Spirit is crucial. He gives the words, the timing and the much needed grace to persevere.

Further Reading: Psalm 1:1-3.

MO

Horace Allen (1858 -1932)

First medical missionary to Korea



Horace Allen was born in Delaware, Ohio, and studied medicine at the Miami Medical School in Cincinnati, Ohio, graduating in 1884. A year later, at his request, the Foreign Mission Board of the Northern Presbyterian Church sent him to China. The following year he moved to Korea as part of the United States legation, to serve as a physician. The

Joseon dynasty was then in power, but there were many political factions, some who wanted to accelerate the pace of reform and modernization, while others were resistant to change.

Soon after his arrival, the Gapsin Revolution occurred. This was a failed three-day coup d'état, when a pro-Japanese group tried to take control, but were suppressed by a Chinese garrison. During this uprising Ming Young Ik, one of the royal family was stabbed. Horace Allen was called in to treat the patient, and for the first time, modern western medicine was used in Korea. The patient recovered, and this helped to establish Horace's medical credentials. He then established Gwanhyewon (House of Extended Grace) in Seoul, with royal patronage and finance. This was the first modern medical facility in Korea, and the forerunner of the present day Severance Hospital and Yonsei University College of Medicine in Seoul. He was also able to influence government policy to soften its anti-Christian stance and allow missionaries to evangelize and to build schools and hospitals.

Horace also continued with his diplomatic activities, and he was appointed Secretary to the American legation. He worked with the governments of America and Korea to facilitate the development of railways, electric power plants and water works in Korea.

In 1932, he was awarded Taeguk, the highest civilian decoration of Korea. In his later years, he was recalled from Korea because of his criticism of America's policy of non-intervention in the Russo-Japanese war. He died in 1932, in Toledo, Ohio.

Grace

Hard is the pathway of training
Stern is the way He may use
To take our dim eyes from the earth things,
To make us his own will to choose.

How often our hands seem to cling to
The baubles and toys of this sphere,
But a wonderful wise overseer
Will give us of things far more dear.

He seats us in Heavenly places,
Enfolds us around with care,
Bestows on us gifts for His glory
That we may be used everywhere.

He lets us see failure in others,
Permits us to weep over loss,
And does all this while He is turning
Our eyes from this world to His cross.

-Unknown

JULY 1

A child of the King

To all who receive Him ...

He gave the right to

become children of God

...John 1:12

Who am I? A Doctor? Wife? Failure? Worrier? Professor? We often define ourselves by work, relationships, achievements or appearance. But who am I really? If health, relationships, work and titles are removed what is left?

I am actually a spiritual being, made in the image of God. Consider John 1:12-13. I am a child of God. I am a child of the King, with resources

and an inheritance available to me now. I can read God's Word but do I believe it in my heart? I will always live out what I believe in my heart rather than what I know in my head. So if I believe in my heart that my identity and value come from my professional title and work, that is what I will live out- whatever I say I believe. However if I believe my identity comes from God's Word about me, then that changes everything.

My real identity is as a child of the King - As this truth settles in my heart I can work from a place of rest. When I intimately know and trust the One who loves me and tells me who I am, I am secure, accepted and safe.

I learnt this myself when I burnt out as a doctor, wife and mother. I tried too hard, worked too hard, juggled too much, disliked myself and became ill. I spent a year not working during which time God graciously revealed the lies I believed and the truth about His love and my identity. I realised I was loved for who I was not what I did and that nothing could separate me from His love. I slowly began to recover physically and emotionally and I now look back on that time as a gift-it was the time when I started to have a heart relationship with my Father God.

So who are you? Take time to let your loving heavenly Father, who knew you from before the creation of the world and who knit you together -show you what He says about you. And when someone asks who you are at the next medical meeting - you can say "I am a child of the King!"

You too...

Further reading: John 1: 9-14

MW

JULY 2

A God of consolation

*"In the year that King
Uzziah died, I saw the Lord..."*
Isaiah 6:1

Isaiah the prophet was a cousin of King Uzziah who reigned in Jerusalem for 52 years. Uzziah was a good king who "did what was right in the eyes of the Lord" (2 Kings 15:3). He led successful military campaigns against his nation's arch-enemies the Philistines and fortified Jerusalem.

Success went to his head. He usurped the role of the priests, burning incense on the temple altar and God's judgment was swift and severe. Uzziah was struck down with leprosy and lived out his days in insolation, excluded from temple worship and from his throne (2 Chronicles 26:19-20). The spectacle of a great king cut down in traumatic circumstances must have sent shockwaves through the tiny nation of Judah, not least among his blood relatives. His cousin Isaiah without doubt felt bewilderment and pain.

But human extremity is God's opportunity. As John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, once said, 'God buries His workmen but carries on His work.' God's consolation for His young prophet Isaiah following the death of his great cousin is a breath-taking vision of Divine glory. Isaiah is commissioned for his life's great work. Perhaps until then he'd lived in the shadow of his great cousin Uzziah. Perhaps that left him feeling reluctant to speak out and tell the nation that judgement was coming as surely as night follows day. Perhaps he needed a dose of God's 'tough love' to propel him into action.

Are there people or projects in our lives holding us back from being the person God expects us to be or from going where He wants us to go? Are we in danger, even, of making our medical calling an idol? What needs to go in order for us to see a vision of the majesty of our God and be ready to obey His call?

Further reading : Isaiah 6:1 -13; 2 Chronicles 26:1-22.

On calling: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31.

JM

JULY 3

A passionately loved lover

“Follow God’s example... as dearly loved children.”

Ephesians 5:1

raised up and seated with Christ, have access to the Father, are members of God’s household (Ephesians 1:3-7). Wow!

In the later chapter (Ephesians 5:3-5) the focus is on how we live now: we are secure in who we are: being humble, gentle, living as children of light, imitating God, guarding our mouths, getting rid of bitterness, no sexual immorality etc.

So as a disciple, my first call is to know Jesus and the Father in an intimate relationship and to let the Holy Spirit guide me into all truth about them. I am also to know who I am, my position in Christ and the resources available to me. My attitudes, my thinking, my character become more and more like Jesus as I align myself with truth, throw out the lies and let Him into every part of life including my work.

Then I find that I want to spend time with God, read the Bible, to be like Him. I find that I can be patient with people, trust when others don’t and persevere when things are tough. I can be full of hope when I am surrounded by despair. I no longer want to be proud, self-seeking, rude or bitter. I am able to love! And as others receive that love, they will want what we have; they too will want to know the God who loves them and Jesus who opened up the way to Him.

So are you doing discipleship or are you actually a disciple - a passionately loved lover?

Further reading: Ephesians 1:3-7, Ephesians 5:3-5

MW

JULY 4

Abba Father

“Because you are His sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.”

Galatians 4:6

Alienation, whether real or imagined, is a common malady. There is a sense of abandonment, of not belonging. The Christian, however, does not need to share this sentiment. She is not an orphan. She has a Father whose main concern is His child. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He told them to say “Abba”, the Aramaic word for father. “Abba” is one of the first words a child utters when learning to speak. The word expresses the dependency, delight and intimacy inherent in the relationship between father and child. It breathes endearment, love and trust. She need not worry or care about anything as long as she has a daddy. The child has yet to learn many things, but this she knows by intuition - she is the child of the Father. It encompasses all that the child knows and needs to know at this stage of life.

The conscious relationship that we have with our heavenly Father begins at the new birth. We are a new creation, a child bearing the image of God and sharing the nature of our father. Adoption is another word picture that expresses our relationship to God. Adoption graces us with the same privileges as that of a natural born child. Thus grafted into the family of God, we are enabled to cry “Abba Father”.

The concept of fatherhood should remove all fear from our hearts. We need not suffer the feeling of strangeness, isolation and remoteness from God common to our race. May God enable us to understand the full depth and breadth of what it means to be the child of the heavenly Father.

Reflection: We need to remember that our Heavenly Father is perfect and has none of the faults our earthly parents may have had. He knows me and watches over me. He listens to me.

MW

JULY 5

Abraham wrestling in prayer

“Abraham said, Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there? ‘He said, For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it. “Then he said, May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there? He answered, For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it..”..

Genesis 18:31-32

prayer is essentially bargaining - typical of many Eastern bazaar transactions. Fifty, twenty, ten maybe there are ten in Lot's family.

From a human point of view, God reconsiders His course of action and Abraham's prayer is the means by which God's mind is changed. There is no metaphysical discussion about whether God really changes His mind or whether God always knew what the outcome would be. Such theological speculation is outside the story. Within the story God listens, and God responds.

To think about: How seriously do we take intercessory prayer? Or is it just an optional extra in our busy life?: Genesis 18

Intercessory prayer is foreign for many medical people. Many of us are unconscious semi-deists believing in a mechanistic universe started by God but now running by itself with occasional miraculous interventions by God. We find it difficult to see how God could be active in this world. Yet the Scriptures particularly teach God's constant activity in the world. In this story Abraham actually bargains with God and appears to change God's mind by his persistence. It is a strange story, for Abraham is invited to become part of God's intentions.

Abraham finds out that Sodom and Gomorrah are about to be judged for their wickedness. Abraham is shocked, and proceeds to plead for the life of his nephew, Lot and his family, who have decided to live in Sodom. The resultant

JULY 6

An underrated virtue

"Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."

Galatians 5:25

(Galatians 5:22), which reflects the very character of God to the world through our actions, words and attitudes. God's kindness sent Jesus, brought about our salvation, inaugurated the kingdom of heaven, and will bring all history to its final fulfilment. Pretty world-shaking stuff, this kindness of God!

And we are called to be kind to others as God has been kind to us. By that we can mean merciful, helpful, compassionate, and thoughtful. Kindness comes in word, in action and in attitude. You can be practically kind to someone, but fail to show kindness in word and attitude, at times being grumpy and impatient.

In my household I am the first to be up almost every day, and especially on working days I make my wife tea and breakfast in bed. Some mornings, because I am running late, it is just a grumpy dutifulness. I was not being kind.

Medicine is a profession where kindness, practical care and helpfulness to others are vital. It is about taking the initiative to meet need without prompting, hope of reward or of even being noticed, but willingly, joyfully, not dutifully or grudgingly. And once you start down this path, it is surprisingly easy to keep going, because people respond to kindness. It warms cold hearts, calms troubled ones, gives hope and comfort. We see people change for the better when we show them kindness, in a kind of 'un-vicious circle' as an old friend once described it.

In acting with kindness and a kindly attitude, in some small way today you can reflect the character of God to your colleagues and patients, helping them catch a glimpse of the God whose kindness turns the world upside down!

Further reading: Galatians 5:22-25. Romans 11:22

SF

JULY 7

Asceticism and stewardship

"..give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me my daily bread.

"Proverbs 30:8

Among Christians, this tendency is given legitimacy by the health and wealth gospel, twisting, as it does, the plain teaching of Scripture.

In the overfed, overindulged world we live in, there ought to be a bias towards doing with less and tempering down the hankering after riches even if we do not embrace asceticism.

In seeking a perspective on this prickly issue, we need to look at Jesus. He worked as a carpenter, which though not a lucrative trade, kept Him from being among the very poor. During His years in ministry, His material needs were supplied. On the other hand, He did not own a home and poignantly said, "Foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." In His teaching, He spoke of the blessedness of the poor, preached on the necessity of self-denial and instructed the rich young ruler to sell all that He had and follow Him. Jesus gave us a balanced perspective. He was not an ascetic like John the Baptist, but neither was He rich and He lived simply among simple folk.

How do we apply Jesus' message to our circumstances?

We are stewards of our means and of the way we live. While there is no clear call to asceticism applicable to all of us, there is certainly a call to simplicity, prudence, stewardship and generosity. We are to hold loosely to our earthly possessions.

Reflection: How do you balance the need for adequate means with injunctions regarding stewardship?

Meditate on Matthew 19:16-30

Talk of asceticism strikes a discordant note in the hedonistic world we inhabit. We have become accustomed to soft living. We are uncomfortable with concepts such as duty, endurance, self-sacrifice and, certainly, asceticism. Limiting their sights to the merely earthly, the only pain we moderns seem to welcome is that of hard physical exercise. We covet hard bodies and physical well-being.

AN

JULY 8

Be Careful How You live

“watch yourselves very carefully that you do not become corrupt...

“Deuteronomy 4:15b

so easily entangles us and Peter calls Satan a roaring lion that seeks to consume us.

Our genetically flawed flesh, the world, with its flashy allurements and Satan, the sworn enemy of God and His people bring enticements that imperceptibly, but surely, trip us up. Temptations come upon us unawares. They sneak upon us. They seem innocent at first, but the deceiver who from his days in Eden knows how to conceal his intentions, knows how to blind side us.

Whatever our level of Christian maturity maybe, we are always vulnerable. This is because, sequestered within our hearts are residues of corruption which can be resuscitated.

How can we be careful? First, keep short accounts make examination of the self and repentance as daily habits, asking God to cleanse our hearts. Second, knowing our weaknesses and guarding our Achilles' heel. Understand Satan's tactics and seek God's assistance to overcome. For example, if lust is a problem stay far away from situations that invite this you know what they are. Stay close to Jesus, read and meditate, pray without ceasing. Seek the company of saints. Stay active in His vineyard. An idle mind is the devil's playground. With God's help you can.

It was written about Eric Liddell, twenty years after the 400 m run when asked how, he said “The secret of my success over the 400 meters is that I run the first 200 meters as hard as I can. Then, for the second 200 meters, with God's help, I run harder.”

Reflection: Take time to examine yourself before God, identify weak spots, commit these to God and pray for overcoming strength.

AN

The Bible is filled with loaded two word phrases such as, “Fear God” and “Praise Him”. Deuteronomy has a one such refrain: “Be careful “.

As our parents often told us when we were younger, in the minefield of the world we cannot be too careful. Temptation and troubles lurk around every corner. Jesus said that in this world we will have trouble. Paul warns of the sin that

JULY 9

Beginning the day with God

“At dawn, Jesus appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around Him and He sat down and taught them”

John 8:2

As the “early bird catches the worm”, so the early riser finds God. God neither slumbers nor sleeps and He encourages us to wake up early to meet with Him. Many psalms speak of the early morning as the time to meet God. Jesus Himself rose early to speak with His Father.

Various reasons have been adduced for not seeking God in the morning. Some, legitimately, find the evening more conducive for the practice of quiet devotion.

Others, citing the fact that we have been freed from the law, react to any suggestion of routines and rituals. They seek other more spontaneous, seemingly liberated modes of communion with their Maker. They risk the danger of not finding a suitable substitute causing them to abandon the endeavor altogether. Finally, sadly, some forego any regular meeting with God reasoning that, they are too busy. Needless to say, moving away from the source of life causes the life of God in us to die by sad neglect.

It is said of Hudson Taylor, “It was not easy for Mr. Taylor, being busy, to make time for prayer and Bible study, but he blew that it was vital. He with his friends traveled in northern China, by cart and wheel barrow staying in the poorest of inns at night. Often with only one large room for coolies and travelers alike, they would screen off a corner for their father and another for themselves, with curtains of some sort; and then, after sleep at last had brought a measure of quiet, they would hear a match struck and see the flicker of candlelight which told them that Mr. Taylor, however weary, was reading his Bible, as 2.00 to 4.00a.m. was the time he usually gave to prayer; to wait upon God.

The day is for work, the night for rest. Before the rush and tumble of the day, before being immersed in problems and hearing alien voices, it is essential that we listen to the voice of God.

Suggestion: Use Psalm 108 today to praise God.

AN

JULY 10

Being in demand ...or not

'Whenever the living creatures give glory, honour and thanks to Him who sits on the throne and who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they were created and have their being.

'Revelation 4:9-11

is worthy to receive glory, honour and power right here, right now. He sits on the throne, and sustains my being from minute to minute. His will rules. Am I ready to submit mine?

Reflection: What are the rivals for my attention today? What would it mean practically today to lay my crown before the throne?

Further reading: Philippians 2:3-11; 1 Peter 5:5-6

'You know, doctors struggle here at Bible College,' the interviewer said.

'I can imagine. We are scientists, and not trained to write theological essays and....'

No, no it's not that. It's just that you doctors, find it hard not to be doctors....'

I wasn't prepared for this. I was expecting all kinds of academic challenges. But perhaps the biggest challenge was not being a doctor. Perhaps the status. Perhaps the not being needed. I don't know. But it was a stark reminder that my identity as a doctor can so easily become an idol.

How important it is for me to remember that I am not at the centre of reality, even when my bleep is going off incessantly. There is a bigger reality that will subsume this one. Soon we will join all the other creatures who will surrender crowns, and even white coats, to honour the Uncreated, who lives forever. He

JULY 11

Between The Times

“You need to persevere...

“Hebrews 10:36

each morning, go to work and return to eat and sleep. Some Christians, expecting ease or non-stop celebration lose their faith when the excitement ceases.

Though Jesus’ life verged on the spectacular, much of it was common-place and, even, wearisome. Three full decades of His life are hidden from us. His years of active ministry were limited to three. Even in those days there was a lot that was humdrum. He walked everywhere, slept in boats and in open fields, was hungry and tired, had to rebuke friend and foe alike. Finally He endured excruciating pain and sorrow as He died a criminal’s death.

We are certainly no better than Jesus and can expect a similar life. There will be many dry days and even painful ones. There will be times when our prayers seem to reverberate from the ceiling. We appear to be mouthing lifeless words. We do not “feel” the presence of the Savior.

This is not abnormal; God has not left us. These come to test our faith, to see whether we can endure hardship. This was the experience of David whose frequent refrain, “how long?” plaintively questioned God.

We need to hang in there. Waiting is a spiritual discipline. Faith in the midst of lackluster living and oppressive odds will be rewarded. We too will receive our reward if we “hold unswervingly to the hope we profess.” (Hebrews 10:19).

Reflection: Read and meditate on the persevering saints in Hebrew 11

Some exponents of the Christian life paint it in glowing colors of never ending joy and exultant victories; an existence totally devoid of pain. This is false. While God graces us from time to time with ecstatic encounters and episodes of pure bliss, much of life is ordinary. We live “between the times” so to speak. We get up

JULY 12

Being obedient children

“Be obedient to God, and do not allow your lives to be shaped by those desires you had when you were still ignorant, instead be holy in all that you do, just as God who called you is holy “

..1 Peter 1:14

Add to this the frequent instructions to submit or “be subject” for the Lord’s sake (1 Peter 2:13, 18 and 3:1 including the marriage relationship) and it begins to sound very much like “Because I say so!” All of this is reinforced by the hierarchies of many of our societies and especially in professional relationships: consultant to juniors, doctor to nurses, professionals to patients to name a few.

Is this REALLY what Scripture teaches? Part of the problem lies in English usage: ‘obey’ and ‘submit’ both derive from the Latin. There are parallel problems in many other languages, not only European ones. ‘Obey’ and ‘submit’ both carry the connotations of vertical relationships, reflecting the realities of highly militarised Roman society. The original Greek words in the New Testament are much gentler: they emphasise relational living in horizontal planes.

‘To obey’ in the Greek is to listen responsively; the same word is used for answering a knock at the door. ‘To submit’ in the Greek is the voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating and complying with the wishes of the other. Both words express a warm relational experience.

Is this perhaps why in John 15:15 Jesus says, “I have called you friends”? Could a recalibrating of our understanding here transform our medical practice... and our homes?

For further reading: John 15:1-17.

‘Do what you are told’!

My father’s oft-repeated words still echo from my childhood...and if asked “Why?” the answer would come, “Because I say so!” I suspect I am not alone in such memories.

For many of us our understanding of the relationship with our heavenly Father is shaped by such influences from our childhood. Is not the hallmark of the disciple obedience? Are we not exhorted to be “obedient children”? Is not “obedience to the truth” commended? (1 Peter 1:13,22).

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PP

JULY 13

Beware the Little Foxes

*"Catch for us the foxes,
the little foxes that ruin the
vineyards, the vineyards
that are in bloom"*

Song of Solomon 2:15

It is not the big things in life that trip us up. Those big things loom large, send out warning signals and are hard to miss. In many of the scandals affecting celebrity Christian leaders, we wonder how they could have been so stupid. They sacrifice their reputations, their families and their ministry for a "mess of pottage". Their failures likely started with trivial oversights.

Little things are thought to be inconsequential; we ignore them and sometimes embrace them. A small lie here, a partial truth there, a brief whisper, small errors on the tax return, cutting a doubtful backroom deal, a tiny indulgence in self praise are examples of little things that we choose to ignore. But sin is sin and needs repentance, forgiveness and atonement.

The problem with small sins is that they immunize us against big ones. As we get away with one small sin after another, we become repeat offenders. At first the failures are similar, reflecting one's particular besetting sins. With continued indulgence, the net widens, more small ones appear and finally we fall for the big one. Sin has a way of sprouting and sprouting fast and wide.

Jesus warned us of this - the lustful glance, nursing anger, foolish speech, self-praise and a covetous attitude. He warned us to speak clearly, eschew anger and watch what our eyes linger on. Paul told us not to let the sun go down on our anger. It is wise counsel to repent often, keeping our eyes on Jesus, so that the sin that so easily entangles has no power over us. We need to add the virtues and character that build us up, which in turn lessen the possibility of falling.

Suggestion: Deal mercilessly with little sins. Keep short accounts with God.

AN

JULY 14

Beyond burnout

“Come with Me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest”

...Mark 6:31.

The community health work was doing well. There was an improvement in the awareness of health. The health indices of the people they had come to serve were getting better. They had worked hard along with their team, and they were committed to see the people know the Lord.

The years took their toll and as problems arose, they were spent. Almost burnt out, but not out.

“If only people knew what I really am and feel”, this nagging self-doubt, the basis of so much depression in the lives of people who struggle in our competitive rat race.. The need for affirmation and praise... and the lack of it leads to self-rejection, and our actions become more an expression of fear, than inner freedom.

Burnout is an experience many face. One of the most disastrous consequences is a hardened heart that does not allow refreshing from the Lord. Tiredness and weariness can bring it on. The disciples also faced it and Jesus called them out to just rest - with Him and by themselves- an invitation to withdraw from the noise and hectic pace of daily life, to be still before the Lord and rest.

Within one’s heart, one would know the gentle voice, the prompting as the Lord’s invitation calls us aside. Blessed is the one who responds.

Suggestion: Keep designated days in your calendar for times to quieten down with the Lord and rest. From a rested heart to work.

“The Lord will fulfil His purpose for me; Your love, O Lord, endures forever...” Psalm 138:8

“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful”... Hebrews 10:23

SD

JULY 15

Beyond ourselves

If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

Matthew 5:39b

Recently I had a patient leave my clinic room, because he was tired of getting care that he did not want: he came for a prescription and also got his blood pressure done. I did not even see him before he left. His wife was not pleased with him when I spoke to her another day but it still goes to show that regardless of how hard you try to “Love your patients”, some refuse it.

Continuous patient relationships are hard in this day of fast food medicine, expectations and patients’ incorrect trust in the internet for answers. This is a challenge for the Christian doctor who wants to make a difference in their patient’s lives via strong positive relationships. One of my unbelieving colleagues said their solution to difficult patients is to fire them. Yes, that would make life easier but looking at Matthew 5,1 feel it is the role of the Christian physician to allow the strike, more than once and remain involved in that patients medical care, even beyond what that patient expects. I don’t like to make appointments with patients that are difficult.

But it is this verse that humbles me and lets me know to keep my pride out of the interaction and listen to the cry for help from the patient, no matter in what form it is expressed. I pray continually for God’s presence in those situations, as I know by myself I am insufficient. But with God’s presence, He can help the difficult patient that sits across from me. I find it an awesome experience when I see how His Spirit can move and settle the most stressful of cases.

Reflection: A positive attitude can be chosen to make situations better knowing it is God and us together in everything we do.

A sure prescription for gladness!

JULY 16

Called to serve

“... whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

“Matthew 18:4

fatigue and family demands, it can be easy to forget this prime calling.

Service is not a popular topic in many contemporary societies. In medicine, academic success and material wealth are more frequent aspirations, and even in the church, the number of seminars and courses on ‘leadership’ easily outweigh those on ‘service’. It is assumed that everyone knows how to serve. And yet, as Christian doctors, we are called to follow Jesus’ teaching, and His example of humility and service.

So what does service look like in our workplace? What do we want from those working in our teams, departments or tutorial groups? I think there are four key characteristics, integrity, the commitment to work hard, flexibility, and a willingness to take advice and to learn.

Integrity is obvious; all societies expect and deserve that doctors should be honest and transparent at all times in their professional and private lives. A commitment to work hard is essential, and may involve going the extra mile. Examples may be volunteering to do an extra shift for a colleague who needs the time off more than we do, or taking an extra half hour after our shift has ended to spend time to explain a procedure or a diagnosis to a frightened patient or their anxious families. Flexibility may mean being prepared to change our working patterns to suit a particular set of circumstances, such as a colleague needing to take sick leave. A willingness to take advice and learn is essential if we are to grow more like Jesus. Criticism, when it comes our way, as it will inevitably, is always hard to receive. But we can take it to Jesus, who understands, and ask Him “Lord, what do you want me to learn from this?”

Further reading: Matthew 18:1-4, Ephesians 6:7-8

RC

JULY 17

Can we do too much ?

Scripture: "Come to Me all who labor Learn from me...my yoke is easy and my burden is light"

-Mathew 11:28-30

Most doctors are caring people who work very hard. This habit is learnt in our student days which are crammed with classes, homework and exams. Internship can be a 24/7 workathon. The early years of practice are busy as one "learns the ropes". The pattern is set.

So, can we do too much? The answer depends on what is meant by "too much". Early on, in order to be proficient at what we do,

extra time and effort are necessary. Later, family priorities enter the picture, and work and family have to be balanced. There is a growing tendency, though, to adjust the hours of work to fit in other things, some necessary and some discretionary.

This is perhaps an understandable reaction to a previous generation's workaholicism and the toll it took on individual health and family well being.

Is there a proper balance? As in all things, our model is Jesus. He worked hard, spending long days in healing and teaching and many nights in prayer. Despite this, He was never impatient nor did He appear harassed. How did Jesus do it? In John's gospel, He revealed His secret (See John 6-8). He worked in concert with His Father, listening to Him and obeying Him.

Thus He found rest, joy, peace and satisfaction despite His busy-ness.

In the final analysis what counts, is work done according to God's will. Wherever we are placed and whatever our work, we are engaged in Christ's mission. This requires us to "come apart" with Jesus periodically and become familiar with His Presence.

God never drives us, so that our work is never onerous under His supervision. He gently leads and powerfully enables.

It is not hard work, as such, but pointless, frenetic activity that should be eschewed.

Reflection: Reflect on your work. What is our motivating factor in serving others? Do you consider your work to be part of Christ's mission?

AN

JULY 18

Carpe Diem

“This is the day the Lord has given. Let us rejoice and be glad in it”

Psalm 118:24

As a future-oriented species, dreaming, planning and executing our plans come to us naturally. Indeed “eternity is in our hearts”. Thus we rarely factor in the possibility of failure because of poor health or an early death. We all know of people who have made seemingly reasonable plans for the future only to be disappointed.

Hence planning for the future needs to be tempered by the stark reality of our mortality. The Bible warns us against the bravado of making extensive plans. For example, James tells us that we do not know what the future holds and hence cautions us regarding grandiose schemes.

Of course there is an innate drive within us to want to excel, to achieve and to do something that lasts beyond our lifetime. Without planning and taking action, life stagnates; there is no progress.

So how do we harmonize legitimate plans for the future with the uncertainty of life? The answer is to live each day under the sovereignty of God. Jesus advised us not to worry about tomorrow, but in dependence on God, live out our daily lives. While we live one day at a time, we may plan, provided they are crafted and executed under the sovereign will of God.

Furthermore, life does not end with death but continues beyond the grave. In fact, true life is the life of heaven and we enter that reality not at death but today. God’s day is today. As we come under the umbrella of His care, as we breathe His life that is eternal, we can engage in His work, envision great things, strive to achieve, knowing that our “labor is not in vain in the Lord.”

Suggestion: Has fear or frustration prevented you from planning? Make your plans under the guidance of God.

AN

JULY 19

Instant Success vs. waiting on the Lord

"Ship your grain across the seas, after many days you may receive a return."

Ecclesiastes 11:1

Living, as we do, in an instant society, we expect immediate results in all our engagements. Impatient for results, we rarely take the long view. We give up easily, leave the task at hand and go to the next project. We have been tempted into thinking that success, and better still instant success, is all that matters.

The Christian cannot adopt this stance. We are not called to be successful, but to be faithful. We take ourselves too seriously and

feel the onus is on us, not only to perform, but to succeed. This leads to frustration, burnout and despair.

An important realization that does not occur to us immediately, but results from sober reflection, is our dependency on Almighty God. A recognition of the supremacy and lordship of God is essential when we work with Him. This is not just in the general sense of God's sovereignty over all creation, but also with regard to the small details and specifics of our own undertakings. He who rules the spheres knows the number of hairs upon our head.

This should not be taken, though, as an excuse for laziness, non-involvement and retirement. God calls us to do valiant things and He does want us to succeed. We each have a distinct, if limited, role in the grand tapestry of God's ventures and we must do this obediently, faithfully and efficiently, all the while relying on God the Holy Spirit. Without His oversight, we dare not either plot grand schemes or micromanage His work. God can be trusted with the results. We thus avoid frustration and retain our sanity. In His own time, God will work out His purposes, with our involvement, to the fulfillment of the mission such that He is glorified.

**When I go half-cocked, Lord,
And overplay my role.**

Remind me once again who's in control - Fred Bauer

Reflection: Do you engage in God's work autonomously or in submission to His will?

AN

JULY 20

Clothed In Compassion

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

‘Colossians 3:12

Clive was a frequent attender in our A+E department. As I sat at the computer, writing my patient’s notes, he wandered up and down the corridor, shouting and swearing; demanding to be seen. He was unkempt and drunk.

My heart sank when I realised he was the next to be seen and would, therefore, be “my” patient. I felt intimidated and scared; ill-equipped to do anything to help this vulnerable man. He would undoubtedly return to his previous way of living on leaving the department and be back within a few days.

As I approached the cubicle, the pungent smell of body odour and alcohol growing stronger, I reminded myself that God loves Clive, just as He loves me. I prayed that God would help me to show His love, patience, compassion and kindness towards Clive.

I also remembered the wise words of an A+E consultant: “Spend twice as long with patients that you don’t like” or you think are wasting your time. “

Love is patient, love is kind... ‘1 Corinthians 13:4

I didn’t solve Clive’s problems... in fact he discharged himself before I had finished seeing him. But this encounter challenged me to try to see patients through God’s eyes rather than the eyes of the world, to love as God loves and to show Christ-like compassion to everyone I meet.

I was reminded that these standards are impossible to achieve in our own strength, and therefore we must pray that God would be at work within us, equipping us and changing us, as we serve Him in the workplace.

Father, Thank you that you are “gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love”. Help me to reflect your love and compassion to everyone I meet today-in all that I do and say. Amen

Further Reading: 1 Corinthians 13; Luke 10:25-37

SM

JULY 21

Christian Deism

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are My ways your ways’, declares the Lord.

“Isaiah 55:8

Deists, who came into prominence in the 18th century, believed that God created the world and then left. He wound up the clock and then left the world on auto - pilot. He is an absentee God.

Deism is the philosophy by which many Christians live today. Having come to faith, we live as if God does not exist. Christian life consists of perfunctory habits such as occasional church attendance, casual prayer and

reluctant tithing. Faith has not substantially changed the core of who we are and how we live.

We are not very different from our unredeemed state or from those who do not purport to be Christian. We have the same attitude to work, recreation, entertainment, family, money and politics. In our work in church or church affiliated bodies, we are guided by business principles, corporate insights, psychological formulae, societal expectations and/or political considerations.

Prayer, Scriptural perspectives and the guidance of the Holy Spirit are tangentially acknowledged but we do not see the practical workings in personal, professional or church life.

What we need is to be so transformed by Christ that we begin to think “God’s thoughts after Him” and live as He would have us do. This begins at conversion, but continues with consecration, abandonment to God and filling of the Holy Spirit. It is nurtured by sustained Bible study and prayer. It requires submitting all our activities and attitudes to God and living in obedience to Him. It requires habitual examination of our daily lives and a periodic inventory of our goals in the light of God’s will.

A servant of God once said, “ When we give our rights to God, He gives them back to us as privileges. “

Reflection: Romans 12:1-2. Consider how a transformed mind applies to practical living in the home, at work and in church life.

AN

JULY 22

Come East ...Go South

“Then He said to His disciples, ‘the harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few...

”Matthew 9:37.

children, made in God’s image, suffer needlessly and perish for lack of care.

It is both humane and logical to expect that the privileged will act to redress the situation. Compassion for the downtrodden was exemplified by Jesus and is explicitly taught in the Bible. James warns of the danger of turning away from our brothers and sisters in need. Money, know how, technology and intellectual capital can all be shared easily in a globalized world. Professionals of every sort will find their skill put to good use.

Our Lord’s poignant statement, “the harvest is plenteous but the laborers are few” is as relevant today as it was centuries ago. As faithful servants, we ought to listen and work with Him in His harvest field. Thank God that many have responded sacrificially, but there is more to be done. The cry of the American frontier was, “go West young man”. The call today may be re-phrased, “come East, go South”, to the desert sands, the silk route, the shanty town - a call not just for young men, but for all- young or old, male or female, preacher or professional.

Challenge: In light of Matthew 9:35-38, reflect on how you are using your gifts and opportunities to obey His explicit command.

Further Reading: “The New Global Mission” by Samuel Escobar

AN

JULY 23

Confessing Jesus

if you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved"

Romans 10:9

that day. Most of us would find it very hard not to mention to friends and family if we received an invitation to dinner from the President, Prime Minister or the Queen. How much more significant it is to have accepted the invitation to be adopted into the family of the King of Kings.

A friend was a member of a high-powered government delegation to China, accompanying the British Prime Minister. At a dinner their extrovert Chinese host asked those on his table if they were members of the Communist Party. When no-one answered, he opened his question wider to other similar groups, mentioning the Labour Party. Still there was no response, so the host asked if they were members of any society. My friend then publicly exclaimed, "I belong to Jesus Christ. I am a Christian." The effect of this was to encourage another Chinese lady at the table to open her mouth. "I am also a Christian."

What can be better than to follow the glorious Lord of the universe and to be His representative?

Further reading: Ephesians 6:10-20.

We have a tradition in our church that when adults are baptised, they give a brief explanation for their decision. Some find this harder than others. One young lady was obviously finding this very hard indeed. She hesitantly began, looking to the floor. "I find this so hard, but there is one thing I am not ashamed of- that is, the Lord Jesus who came and died for me."

I suspect the large crowd listening were more moved by her short explanation than any of the other more erudite explanations

JULY 24

Constancy In Prayer

"Pray without ceasing."

1 Thessalonians 5:17

The story of the unjust judge is given to us to teach us constancy in prayer. We should never give up. It might be grueling, sometimes boring and seemingly unrewarded. But the answer will come if we wait for it.

Keeping a prayer list and praying for certain people, situations, communities and countries on a

regular basis is helpful. I do this, but it sometimes doesn't work. This happens when I am "post-call", tired or travelling. And sometimes, I must confess, the habit lapses for no good reason. But God in His grace enables me to persevere.

I rarely tell people that I pray for them. I find that doing this contributes more to my ego than to their blessing. I once wrote to a Christian leader boasting about my prayer life. The very next day I fell into a prolonged dry spell. God had judged my pride.

Sometimes the prayer is accompanied by great faith, even tears. Sometimes we may sense God's presence. Occasionally, we may have the distinct impression that the prayer has been answered.

But this is not always the case. Many times the prayers appeared insipid. I wonder how God can listen when I myself seem to be unconvinced- lispng, limping along, sometimes distracted.

But God answers prayer - they may come quickly or they may take a long, long time. God is no man's debtor. He answers prayer, occasionally spectacularly, often without much fanfare. Against all odds, He comes through. Only in heaven will we know the results of our prayers made on earth. In heaven God keeps a bowl filled with our prayers (Revelation 5:8). The angels pause their worship while God listens to our prayers. So pray on. Pray daily. Intercede constantly. You will be heard.

Bible Reading: Luke 18.1 -8. Do you have a prayer list?

AN

JULY 25

Contentment In His will

“ I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation.”

Philippians 4:12

come there.

It was not the first time I felt out of place here; one of the reasons why I don't often attend such conferences. Later that day speech after speech extolled the virtues of the latest cutting edge technology, stuff I knew our hospital and its patients could not afford.

These meetings have advantages; you get to make friends, pick up a few disposables at discounted prices and so on. But for us working in smaller places it's important to keep our perspective.

Don't be swamped by false guilt; wherever we are, in a rural clinic or in an opulent hotel we are there in God's will to enjoy what He gives us every day.

Don't be envious either; sure, we should use the best technology if it is available to us, but remember, the latest gadgets do not always result in the best 'outcome' for our patient and his family. There will always be somebody out there a little ahead of us. Often technology and expertise have to do with 'power and security': and we know where ours comes from.

Finally, the Lord has called us to a place to do the best with what we have there. Is that not what 'missions' are all about-doing what we are sent to do?

Read: 1 Timothy 6:6-9

We were dining on a five-course meal under a canopy of glittering chandeliers. On the side table, a choice of three mouthwatering desserts awaited us. As I looked around I could see the walls of the banquet hall were festooned with colorful posters advertising products of the sponsors - instrument and pharmaceutical companies.

As I tucked in on the gourmet food, my mind reached back to another world-our rural mission hospital and the poor patients who

JULY 26

Daily Bread, God's Glory and Human Welfare

"Give us this day our daily bread"

-Matthew 6:11

these. Moreover, as global citizens, we stand in solidarity with people, societies and nations with many problems, interceding for them.

Asking God to provide us with our daily bread is, also, not a selfish petition. The predominant note struck by the Lord's Prayer is God's glory. We seek His kingdom and His will. It is in this context that we are to view our petition for daily bread. Through this prayer, Jesus invites us to participate in the overarching purpose of the Father. We ask to be freed from the anxiety of chasing after physical needs thus freeing us to work with God in enhancing His glory.

Finally, this petition subtly yet gently moves us away from ourselves to the needs of others. We live in a world of desperate need. When we pray for others, we cannot be merely passive onlookers. Intercession is crystallized into action. We are God's hands and feet. God uses us to see that the needs of others are met. Helping others receive their daily bread is part of the enterprise of ensuring that God's kingdom comes to earth, that His will is done and that He is glorified. Thus in using this simple petition, we are in tune with the primary purpose of the Lord's Prayer.

Thought for the day: God first, others second, me last.

Praying for our daily bread is neither an individualistic prayer nor a selfish one. On the contrary, the petition seeks both the glory of God and the welfare of others.

Though we are encouraged to depend on God for our every need, the Lord's Prayer focuses on "our" daily bread. This is a gentle reminder that our individualistic concerns take second place to the needs of our community. As a community, we have many needs and God invites us to seek Him for

JULY 27

Daily ‘Synching’ With Heaven’s Agenda

“... very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing by Himself; He can do only what He sees the Father doing, because whatever the Father does, the Son also does.”

-John 5:19

Peter would have been shocked when he got up at dawn to see that was Jesus missing. He and his friends searched for Him all over. He was not in locations where one might expect to see Him. He was truly missing! They began to panic as the dawn turned into morning and crowds came looking for Him.

Finally, to his great relief, Peter found Him at a distance and all alone. He seemed to be talking to someone that no one could see. Peter addressed

Him rather brusquely, “Jesus, we have been searching for you all over. The crowds are waiting to meet You!” Unperturbed, Jesus replied, “Let us go to the other villages... I have many things to do today.” Peter was bewildered, but he followed Him any way.

The lesson for us is that Jesus never allowed managers, crowds or popular demand dictate His day. He followed a heavenly agenda, the Father’s will. He seemed to have a calendar wherein what He did each hour of the day was ordained by His heavenly Father. Every appointment was divine, every healing miracle was from His Father’s heart. He testified that He was compelled by His Father’s agenda even on the Sabbath.

As busy medical professionals we rarely appreciate that each day has a divinely ordained agenda and every appointment is a divine opportunity. Each patient who comes to our chamber has been ‘sent’ to us. How often we have missed seeing the Father’s will for that day as we hurried to our work places and succumbed to the pressures of our circumstances and even reacted inappropriately. Jesus slipped away each morning to ‘sync’ His calendar with the agenda of His Father. He was sure of what He had to do each day. He is an example to us as to how to begin each day with God’s agenda and act as our Heavenly Father dictates.

Reading: Mark 1:35-39

JZ

JULY 28

Daniel: Coupling The Fear Of God And Wisdom

“B “To these...God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning.... In every matter of wisdom and understanding.. ..[they were] ten times better...”

Daniel 1:17-19

him with abilities that placed him in a leadership position that would benefit the inhabitants of a vast empire.

Daniel’s distinctive attribute might be described as his “fear” of God, which Solomon said was “the beginning of wisdom.” There is no doubt that in our world where leaders fail in politics, academia, professional life or, indeed, in the church, we need more people like Daniel and Moses. Moreover in a church culture that spurns intellectual attainments as unspiritual, and elevates a simplistic piety, we need the corrective that men like Daniel provide. “Dare to be a Daniel” not necessarily in facing wild beasts, but in pursuing learning and following God.

Thought for the day: Many Christians contrast knowledge and piety. What can be done to correct this misapprehension?

Reference: “The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind” by Mark Noll.

Daniel is unique both in the annals of holy writ and in the larger body of world literature. Like Moses, Daniel was schooled in the best of current learning. He combined superior wisdom with exemplary piety thus placing him in a class of his own. He interpreted dreams that were opaque to the wisest in the realm, was made a confidant of the emperor and given a position of singular honor. He is a role model for us.

The particular characteristic, though, that distinguished him from others was his relationship to God. He kept the law of God scrupulously, refused to compromise by dining on the “king’s meat” and prayed daily to the Lord of heaven and earth. He pleased God, Who in turn, blessed

AN

JULY 29

The Doctor As A Leader

“But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.

“Matthew 5:43

colleagues - previously fed up with the status quo - went to great lengths to dig in and protect their positions. Outbursts and incriminating emails led to a tense working atmosphere.

I spent sleepless nights and had little peace, feeling puzzled and hurt. I wanted an audience to complain to, to justify myself and to be understood. I wanted people to receive their just desserts for their behaviour. In Scripture, though, I found an alternative response; not of bitterness and revenge, but, rather, love. How could I manage to do this?

In Ephesians, Paul says *‘I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith rooted and grounded in love (3:16,17)*. Through faith Christ dwells in us, giving us power. This power enables us to forgive and to let go of our hurt, thereby preventing us from acting out of anger and empowering us to obey Christ’s command, ‘Love our enemies’. This is nothing less than the supernatural power of God at work.

My gut response to challenge is perhaps no different from that of my ‘not yet’ Christian friends. However, through prayer, the witness of our lives should be to God’s power at work in us, enabling obedience to Christ in the face of opposition. The outworking of this power in our workplaces can change our colleagues’ lives and usher in His kingdom.

Bible Reading: Matthew 5:43-48

MJB

JULY 30

Divine Compassion

“Then Jesus called His disciples unto Him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue now with Me three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint on the way.

-“Matthew 15:32

sorrow, broken heartedness, etc. In that place of connection with the patient, compassion will move us to minister and be used by God to bring healing.

It was through compassion that Jesus continually reached out to those in need and healed those who were hurting. Many times in Scripture, it says that Jesus was moved with compassion and from that place He was able to do great things.

Challenge: Are you willing to allow God to use you to show His compassion to His people by meeting them where they are and experiencing their distress with them? Are you willing to let the compassion of God flow through you, to reach those in your life and at your workplace?

Prayer: “Father, I pray that you impart to me your divine compassion so that I may minister to your people and show the love of Christ through my life as a physician. I ask you to use me to bring healing to your people.”

As Christian physicians, we have the privilege of meeting people with real needs. Our busy schedules and our limited capacity may prevent us from ministering to them in their distress. We need divine compassion to be the physicians that Christ is calling us to be. Our own limited human compassion is not enough.

What is divine compassion? The Greek word for compassion in the verse above is *splagchnizomai*, which refers to the bowels yearning, to feel sympathy or pity. We need to feel what our patients feel. We need to experience their fear, anxiety, rejection, isolation,

JULY 31

Does Prayer Work?

“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you.

“Matthew 6:33

Him, even if that something is “spiritual”. Approaching God in this manner betrays a utilitarian mind set and is a recipe for disappointment.

The overwhelming message of the Bible is that we were created to glorify God. Hence His will takes precedence over our personal desires and needs. Therefore, when we pray, we should acknowledge God’s lordship in our lives, align ourselves to His will and seek His agenda. As we do this, “all these things [namely all our needs] will be added to us”.

It might surprise you to realize that, there is only one petition in the Lord’s Prayer that addresses our material needs. We ask Him to supply “our daily bread”. And as we consider the flow of the prayer, we will realize that this and other physical resources are given to us so that we may be successfully employed in fulfilling God’s over arching purposes.

Does prayer work? Yes, but it works as long as we are consumed with a passion for God and seek to perform His will. It works when we, together with God, labor towards fulfilling His agenda. We must ensure that we are working within the parameters of that will and not making demands that are outside of it.

Exercise: Say the Lord’s Prayer, slowly and deliberately. Meditate on God’s holiness, kingdom, and will and align yourself with His purposes before mentioning your needs.

AN

Dr. Paul Brand

- “In awe of the Master Designer”



Born to missionary parents Jesse and Evelyn Brand in 1914, Paul Wilson Brand spent his early years in the mountains of southwest India. The Christian principles imparted to him as a child, along with his early studies of the natural world, became a strong foundation for his life. At age nine, he went to London, England for his education and later completed medical school at London University, where he met his wife, Margaret, a fellow medical student. They married in 1943 and, together, returned to

India in 1946, where Paul taught surgery at the Christian Medical College and Hospital in Vellore.

It was in India that the Brands first became aware of the acute anguish and isolation of persons suffering from Hansen’s disease, a bacterial infection more commonly known as leprosy. He dedicated himself to relieving their suffering. In the late 1940s, he became the first surgeon in the world to use reconstructive surgery to correct deformities of leprosy in the hands and feet and developed many other forms of prevention and healing from the disease. Before Brand, it was widely believed that those suffering from Hansen’s disease lost their fingers and feet because of rotting flesh. Instead, Brand discovered, such deformities were due the inability to feel pain. With treatment and care, he showed, victims of the disease could go on indefinitely without such deformities.

Brand’s work with Hansen’s disease met with his theological reflections on what he viewed as “the most problematic aspect of creation: the existence of pain”. Brand believed that “God designed the human body, enabling it to survive because of pain,” he later wrote. As Dr. Brand studied the science of the human body and its intricate workings, his faith in God grew stronger. Dr. Brand often talked about being absolutely in awe and inspired by God’s complex and delicate design of the human body. “I have come to realize that every patient of mine,” he once said, “in every cell of his body, has a basic knowledge about how to survive, and how to heal that exceeds anything that I shall ever know. That knowledge is a gift of God, who has made our bodies more perfectly than we could ever have devised.”

After 18 years and more than 3,000 surgeries at the Christian

Medical College, Brand in 1965 accepted a position at the U.S. Public Health Service's National Hansen's Disease Centre in Carville, Louisiana, where he became chief of rehabilitation. He later served as Clinical Professor of Orthopaedics, Emeritus, at the University of Washington, and president of the London based Leprosy Mission International. Still, he remained actively involved with international Medical Missions by serving on the Expert Panel for Leprosy of the World Health Organization, serving as President of The Leprosy Mission International based in London, England, and co-founding the All-Africa Leprosy and Rehabilitation Training Centre (ALERT) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Dr. Paul Brand authored 100 scientific papers and seven books, including *Clinical Mechanics of the Hand*, which is the premier handbook for hand surgeons, physical therapists and other hand specialists. Three of his books

In His Image, Fearfully and Wonderfully Made, and *The Gift of Pain*, were co-written by best selling author Phillip Yancey. In his 1998 book *God's Forever Feast*, Dr. Brand wrote: "My active life is mostly behind me. Soon I will no longer occupy space. But I pray that my life and the principles that God has helped me to live by will continue to influence young lives. When we die we not only leave seed, but we also leave an effect on the soil in which future children grow and future spiritual seed will be nourished. Good soil is the legacy of pioneer grasses and plants now long gone."

Phillip Yancey wrote in his foreword to the book 'Ten Fingers for God': The life and work of Dr. Paul Brand, "I look with deep appreciation on the privilege of learning from a great and humble man. I came to know him (Dr. Brand) as an actual living model, a man of God I could see in action at Carville with his patients, in rural villages of India, as a husband and a father, as a speaker at both medical and spiritual conferences." He also said, "God brought Paul Brand into my life so that I could learn what God had in mind with the whole creation experiment. No one has affected my faith more. You need only meet one saint to believe, and I had the inestimable privilege of spending leisurely hours on visits, trips, and phone conversations picking apart a saint piece by piece. He stood up to scrutiny."

In a 1990 sermon titled *The Wisdom of the Body*, Dr. Brand said, "I pray that when my time comes I may not grumble that my body has worn out too soon, but hold on to gratitude that I have been so long at the helm of the most wonderful creation the world has ever known, and look forward to meeting the designer face to face." He died on 8th July, 2003 aged 89. His life was an example of one wholly surrendered to God.

Giving Quietly

The snow finally stopped about eleven that night
When I went outside to shovel, the air was crisp and clean.
Invigorated, I decided to continue
Onto my neighbor lady's path and steps.
Finished, I wrote on my business card: "Happy Winter!"
The next morning her gratitude was so extravagant
That she embarrassed me.
"Really, it was nothing," I said.
And, really, it was.
But, why then, had I made such a big deal
Of it by claiming authorship with my card?
If I had done my little deed quietly.
Then You and I, Lord could have been silent partners in it.
And my neighbor would have felt good
About our whole community.
Instead of just about me.
Next time I do a kindness, Lord,
I'm going to keep it a warm little secret-
Just between You and me.

-Anonymous

AUGUST 1

Responding to need

*The wise heart will know
the proper time and procedure...*

Ecclesiastes 8:5

Jesus in His life on earth demonstrated the quality of flexibility. His time had not come when His mother asked Him to help her with the shortage of wine in Cana. Yet He responded to the need. He broke protocol to perform miracles on Sabbath in response to people's needs. He welcomed the crippled man who was lowered through a roof, breaking the queue. The only time he was inflexible was when He was tempted by Satan to challenge God's sovereignty and when He saw the temple of God being misused as a trading place. The rigidity of rules and regulations never prevented Jesus from doing good for the needy. Because He came to give life, He had to be flexible.

We must thank God for the unique human privilege of using our discretion and being flexible in difficult situations. In our professional life, we come across so many situations where rules prevent us from doing good. We must break the shackles of those unfriendly rules to enable us to grow and help others. Every difficulty must be viewed through the prism of 'how can I help'.

Let flexibility be part of our thought, word and deed as we work and administer in our hospital settings. There will be lot more smiles and less problems to solve. Jesus did this. Why can't we?

Breathe on me, Breath of God

Fill me with life anew.

That I may love what Thou dost love,

And do what Thou wouldst do.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, remind me often that You give me Your grace and wisdom step by step, each in its proper season, all my life long.

SC

AUGUST 2

Don't you dare give

I am the Vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing.

John 15:5

Under pressure at work we're prone to give from diminishing internal resources without first stopping, turning to "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (John 14:6), and waiting expectantly for Him to empower.

Jesus, while having life *'in Himself'* (John 5:26) chose dependence on His Father at every moment. As He told His critics: "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by Himself; He can do only what He sees His Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does." (John 5:19).

There's the pattern: power in word and action from Father to Son on earth, and now from Father and Son - in glory - to us, mediated always by the Holy Spirit.

Growing in maturity means we grow in dependence on God and interdependence with other believers. Acting as if independent, in unbelief or pride, is to step beyond His protection and provision - not good. First receive, and then give. Isn't that a relief?

Meditation: 'Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!'

Luke 11:11-13

Further reading: John 15:1-8

'Don't you dare give, until you've received.' That was the rebuke I sensed from the Holy Spirit one morning at a church summer camp. What a relief. It meant there was something available for me to receive. Yes, I still had something to give, but its value and its effectiveness would be from heaven, coming as overflow from what I knew painfully to be a currently rather empty 'jar of clay.' (2 Corinthians 4:7)

JC

AUGUST 3

Election And Free Will

*Whosoever wil, let him
come in. "Revelation 22:17
"Chosen in Him... before the
foundation of the world"*

-Ephesians 1:4

There are few doctrines that create more angst than that of divine election. A misunderstanding, based perhaps on hyper Calvinistic iterations of the doctrine, is the cause of our discomfiture.

To believe that God has arbitrarily condemned some to hell is an extreme and joyless thought. It allows no room for human freedom, will and choice. It detracts from the inherent dignity of a human being. On the one

hand, the teaching is blithely accepted by many in the church and, on the other hand, has caused some to bitterly reject the faith.

While the Bible certainly speaks of election, there is also much in it about free will. Numerous passages in the prophets and direct statements by Jesus speak of God wooing humanity, which, in stubborn rebellion often rejects Him. The fact is that both election and free will are biblical doctrines. Accepting the limitations of the human intellect and the fact that God has chosen not to unravel the paradox, we can humbly leave the resolution to Him.

An illustration that hints at a resolution is as follows. *At the gates of heaven, one sees inscribed on its archway, "Whoever wishes to may enter in ". On crossing the threshold and looking back one reads, "You were chosen before the foundation of the world. "*

Rather than chafe at the seeming injustice of something we cannot fathom, we ought to humbly thank God for the grace of election. It should be clear to any honest person that while we may have freely placed our trust in Christ, in the final analysis, we have not chosen Him but He has chosen us.

Suggestion: Take time to reflect on your own salvation and thank God for His grace.

AN

AUGUST 4

Divine Election and Justice

Far be it from you! Will not the judge of all the earth do right?"

Genesis 18:25

Human beings have an innate sense of justice. In light of this, the doctrine of divine election seems unjust. It does not feel right that some are condemned to hell and others preserved for eternal life based solely on a divine fiat. On the face of it, our discomfiture would suggest that we, faulty humans, have a better sense of justice than God does.

But we need to ask, ‘Where does the concept of justice come from?’ Surely it comes from God Himself who created us. Since God is God, He is perfect in every way. Hence He is just and will always do what is just. It cannot be any other way.

Indeed, the whole system of the cosmos would go into disarray if injustice were found to be at the heart of the universe. God, being just Himself, is the author of justice and our understanding of this virtue comes from Him. To then question the doctrine of divine election, however problematic it may seem, would be to claim that we are better than our Creator.

To be fair, though, we must admit that this can be a difficult doctrine to embrace. But, in all honesty, the resolution of the election/freewill paradox is truly and ultimately beyond us. We need not despair, though. Considering the perfection, justice, wisdom and compassion of God, we may leave this impossible conundrum to Him. He is more just than we can ever be. The One from whom we derive the concept of justice will Himself act justly. He cannot do anything else.

His mercy and justice cannot be separated and is way beyond our comprehension.

Meditation: “He is the Rock, His works are perfect, and all His ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is He.” Deuteronomy 32:4

AN

AUGUST 5

Ezekiel's Vision - Restoration For Transformation

*"Whoever believes in Me..out
of his heart will flow rivers of
living water"*

John 7:38

Ezekiel lived in a period like ours - a dark time during Israel's captivity under Babylon. Against this cheerless background, Ezekiel had a vision of a glorious future.

First of all, He saw what the temple, now in ruins, would look like when it was re-built. Secondly, he saw that the functions of the temple would be restored. Justice and mercy, reflecting the character of God, would be evident again.

Sandwiched between these two pictures was the vision of glory as God's Spirit returned to the temple. The bare bones of the structure and the values that embodied the systems were made alive by God. Finally, the delightful outcome would be "streams of living water" flowing from the temple to fallow fields, transforming salty water to fresh water, creating an environment where fruit bearing trees could grow.

This is a beautiful picture of what God can do in a world gone awry and a church in ruins. God wants to instill His very own attributes in us, especially justice and mercy. He wishes, by His Spirit, to fill us with His glorious presence. Then, streams of living water will flow from God through us to bless others, transforming individual lives and society. Savor the vision, pray and work towards its fulfillment in our needy world.

Martin Luther King entered college at the age of fifteen and became an ordained minister at nineteen years. At thirty he saw the signing of the Civil Rights Act, and five years later received the Nobel Peace Prize. He died at the age of 39. He did so much in so little a time. When asked how long it would take to win the reforms he was fighting for, he said, "How long? Not long, for mine eyes have seen the glory of the Lord."

Further Reading: Ezekiel's Temple Vision: chapters 41 -47

SM

AUGUST 6

Faith And Common Sense

*"Say to wisdom, 'you are
my sister...'"* Proverbs 7:4

Paul had escaped a plot to kill him in Jerusalem by appealing to Caesar. The Roman authorities, using their might to get him there, had put him on a ship bound for Rome.

Even though he was going as a prisoner in chains, the voyage suited Paul very well. It would fulfill his long held ambition to preach in Rome. Moreover, this was in the will of God.

They hit a snag though. A storm was brewing. Paul advised the captain of the ship not to proceed. They set sail, nevertheless, and disaster struck. They were shipwrecked though their lives were spared.

Now it is clear that Paul was anxious to get to Rome and it seemed to be in God's plan as well. Why then did Paul try to deter the captain from sailing? Surely if God had willed it they would be safe, did Paul get cold feet? Did he not have enough faith?

The reason is that Paul, despite his great faith, was also endowed with common sense. The winter was a dangerous time to sail and they had already faced a storm. Paul, a seasoned traveler in those parts, knew of the capricious nature of the Mediterranean Sea. His pragmatism did not allow his faith to cloud his reason. It is usually the other way round, is it not?

This is a lesson for us. Our faith should be wedded to reason, common sense and, indeed, pragmatism -not pragmatism as a philosophy but pragmatism as practical wisdom. Our lives are certainly in God's hands, but we should use our mental faculties and make wise decisions.

Indeed God honored Paul's decision by assuring him, and through him his sailing companions, that they would safely reach Rome.

Reference: Read the whole story in Acts 27:1-28

TT

AUGUST 7

Fear of others

".. .they would not confess their faith for fear..."

John 12:43

the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God" (John 12:42-43)

Is this not true so often today? How many leaders in society have had a Christian education or upbringing, yet now are ashamed to talk about the Lord Jesus? It is even true for many Christian ministers or clergy. They may occasionally mention God but seldom explain the necessity of everyone having a close personal relationship with the Lord Jesus.

A leader from another church visited one of our church services. I went up to speak with her. I started by saying how good it was to see her with us. Her reply shocked me: "The trouble with your church is that you talk too much about Jesus!"

I didn't know what had initiated this outburst and wondered how best to reply. I had just been studying Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, so I showed her the first ten verses of the opening chapter. The Lord Jesus is mentioned in every sentence. Paul was clearly concerned that the troubled church in Corinth should come back to being Christ-centred. The other epistles are all full of Christ. Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, summarises the gospel thus: "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).

Reflect: Why have so many churches and Christian organisations drifted from this fundamental doctrine? Why have so many Christians stopped talking about the Lord Jesus with their colleagues, patients, friends and families?

Further reading: Matthew 10:5-39

BP

AUGUST 8

Feeling alone

'Live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect' (1 Peter 1:17-19).

One of the biggest challenges junior doctors may face is loneliness. Friends move on to new places, or we move on ourselves. Significant life events pass by, and we often miss out on special occasions due to on-call rotas or simple exhaustion.

It is easy to feel alone and to become discouraged. Returning from four years overseas, I struggled to know where my 'home' was, and eventually realized I was looking in the wrong place. As Christians, our true, eternal home is with God in heaven. That is not a platitude, but rather a promise which gives us hope and confidence through the lonely days and nights.

If we look for security and acceptance in this world, we may well be disappointed. We must instead remember the words written to the Hebrews, 'Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart' (Hebrews 12:1-3).

Seek to remember the greater purpose in your life here on earth. Pray that you can know great confidence in your status as a child of God, and a pilgrim and stranger here on earth.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, help me to remember that You also knew loneliness as you walked on this earth. Help me to follow Your example, and run with perseverance. Help me today to know strength and encouragement from You. Amen*

Further reading: Isaiah 41:10-16

CW

AUGUST 9

Feeling overwhelmed

"Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind Him and touched the edge of His cloak. She said to herself, 'If I only touch His cloak, I will be healed.' Jesus turned and saw her. 'Take heart, daughter,' He said, 'your faith has healed you'. And the woman was healed at that moment"

Matthew 9:20-22.

Do you wonder whether Jesus ever felt that way? Many times in the gospels, we are told that people brought "all their sick" to Him. After the death of John the Baptist when He took His disciples away by themselves in order to rest, the crowds still followed Him on foot. Crowds surrounded Him often. The friends of a paralytic man were so desperate that they bypassed the crowds and broke through the roof lowering the patient into the room.

The Bible never mentions Jesus feeling overwhelmed, but neither does it suggest that each person in the crowd was instantly healed. Instead, we read of individuals. Matthew, Mark and Luke all refer to the "woman with the issue of blood", a poor, desperate woman who would have been despised by many in society. Jesus compassionately healed her, restoring her status within her community. This will be remembered for all time.

We may not have the same miraculous powers but we can choose to focus on the individuals who we can help. Rather than being overwhelmed by what you cannot do, choose to thank God for what you can do, and seek to see each individual as God sees them. This approach helped me remain focused and positive whilst working with limited resources amongst patients with potentially overwhelming needs.

Further reading: Psalm 142

Do you ever feel overwhelmed by the amount of need that surrounds you? You may be responsible for large numbers of acutely unwell and complex inpatients, and feel unable to devote sufficient time and attention to each.

Your outpatient clinic may be running several hours late, with both patients and staff becoming tired and irritable. Patients and relatives may have unrealistic expectations, or you may simply have limited resources with which to investigate and treat. Particularly whilst working overseas, there have been times when I have felt despair at the continual and overwhelming needs of patients contrasted with my own inability to meet that need.

Do you wonder whether Jesus ever felt that way? Many times in the

CW

AUGUST 10

Finding Strength In The Lord

"David strengthened himself in the Lord"

1 Samuel 30:6

David was at a low point. The Amalekites had razed the Israelite camp, killing the men and abducting women and children. The remaining troops, consumed with sorrow, threatened revolt. David himself wept, but quickly recovered. Rather than wallow in self-pity, pronounce threats, justify himself or retaliate prematurely, he "strengthened himself in the Lord."

When we encounter troubles, it is natural to give expression to our emotions. Not to do so, can lead to hidden anger that manifests itself in unhealthy and harmful ways. But to remain in a state of grief makes us ineffective and redundant. David is our example in such situations.

David's solution was to seek God. He perhaps sought a lonely place-away from the din, confusion, threats and chatter. He even avoided well-meaning friends. However, he did not just withdraw into himself; he went to God - the Lord of heaven, Creator, Savior and Friend. He remembered the past, knowing that God provides not only succor, but success. He meditated on His Word. He prayed and pleaded, reminding God of His character, covenant and promises. He especially recounted God's singular act of salvation - the redemption of His people out of bondage in Egypt.

It is the same today. Rather than mope around uselessly or strategize vengefully, we should go to God in faith. On the cross Jesus destroyed the power of sin, death and Satan. The recollection of His victory will bring us out of the doldrums into the pure air of heaven with its joys, assurances and victory. Thus are we strengthened in God.

David went further. He sought God's plan of action. He did not solve his problem using his own wisdom, the collective intelligence of his advisers or instructions from a rulebook or manual. After refreshing himself in God, he moved forward with Him.

Meditation: "There is a place of sure release near to the heart of God." Read 1 Samuel 30:1-6

AN

AUGUST 11

Following the example of Jesus

“Now that I, your Lord and teacher have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet”

John 13:14

with little or no previous training. In these circumstances, how should doctors respond to the requirements of such positions and the expectations placed upon them?

Doctors are inevitably called onto fulfil a number of leadership roles during their career. Such roles may include tutoring a group of medical students or recently qualified graduates, leading a cardiac arrest team, managing the emergency medical or trauma unit, running a research group, leading a department or managing a hospital or community health centre.

These leadership roles are generally undertaken, or sometimes imposed, alongside busy clinical positions,

In leadership, as in clinical practice, Christians are called to follow the example set by Jesus himself. This is illustrated in the passage above, which demonstrates the necessity of servant leadership.

If we are tempted to think that such a leadership style is only appropriate within a Christian or church community, and not on the ward, in the boardroom or the lecture theatre, we should be aware that leading business schools worldwide have increasingly come to emphasise the value of distributed or shared leadership.

So what does servant leadership look like in the contexts in which we may be called upon to lead? There may sometimes be an immediate need to provide clear guidance, direction or authority, such as when managing critically ill patients in the emergency room. However, we should never lose sight of the need for humility and genuine care for those under our leadership. In busy, pressured jobs we need to remember to take time out to find out about the individual members of our teams.

We should learn to take the time to listen to people; their hopes and aspirations, their frustrations and challenges, and be prepared to offer help to them in the tasks that they face. Thus, we will not only exemplify the love of Jesus, but also, paradoxically, improve their performance.

Further reading: John 13:1-15.

RC

AUGUST 12

Forget Not God's Wisdom

*"Do not be yoked together
with unbelievers "*

2 Corinthians 6:14-17

In the modern physician office environment there is a need to work with fellow physicians to build an office, share the costs of staff and computers and integrate with allied health professionals such as counselors and dietitians. Very rarely does a physician venture solo. Equally rarely are these physician groups all Christians. The verse quoted above, however, challenges us to

be independent. This includes the area of finances. We need to maintain our identity in Christ. Becoming unequally yoked can be harmful to the Christian. Proverbs 22:7 states "The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is the servant to the lender." Verse 26 adds, "Do not be a man who strikes hands in pledge or puts up security for debts."

The Bible challenges us to not get in debt, not to lend or become dependent on others since all this may actually affect our relationship with Christ. One can see how this can happen. For example, our province mandates how many after hours clinics our team must run in a given week. I now must do my share of Sunday clinics. I am yoked to the body that pays me. The building in which I rent an office required money to start up and so I lent them money and continue to pay more than my rent to keep the building going. I could stop giving the payments, but the consequences to stopping affect too many jobs and people. Had I not joined my team I could not offer good patient services. Patients, not finances, were first on my mind when I decided to move into the building and be a part of the team.

This is the struggle we as care givers face: God cares about how we do business - the financial part not just the patient care. I want to challenge those who are in transition, deciding on office space and partnerships: I pray that you remember God's wisdom and make Him master over all office arrangements included!

Reflection: How much do I draw from the wisdom God provides in His Word for daily living?

TT

AUGUST 13

From A Wasteland To The Garden Of Eden

"This land so recently a waste is now like the garden of Eden."

Ezekiel 36:35

I distinctly remember my first visit to one of the mission hospitals in India. An overnight train brought me to the city that had the distinction of being the home to one of the prime ministers of the land. Jetlagged, sleep deprived and covered in grime, I alighted in the misty haze of the early morning. Taking a cycle rickshaw, we navigated the unpaved dusty, main street, crowded with unkempt children and careening traffic. Decrepit houses leaned precariously onto the street. The ubiquitous cow calmly chewing

its cud in the middle of the road, oblivious to the murderous vehicles whizzing past, cast a supercilious glance our way. We swerved around monstrous contraptions that passed for trucks, spewing diesel fumes and brazenly honking their horns as they hurtled by. Miraculously we arrived unscathed at the hospital.

As we entered the hospital grounds I had a surreal feeling. Were we really in the same city? Green space, pretty flowers, well tended plants and shrubs greeted us. Carefully maintained paths were lined with neat, whitewashed houses. The staff, neatly if simply dressed, smilingly greeted us, made us comfortable and ministered to our needs -going well beyond the call of duty.

The hospital staff was ethnically no different from those outside. The gospel though, had changed their outlook. They cared for creation, were courteous, gentle, disciplined and compassionately served the sick and the poor. Such facilities display the power of the gospel.

Through faithful witness, by word and deed, aided by persevering prayer, parts of our world are being changed for the better. Moving beyond what is narrowly viewed as a spiritual task, society is transformed and the earth conserved- reclaiming the original glory of Eden.

Thought: Our work should go beyond the mundane or even the "spiritual" to seek holistic transformation of our world.

AN

AUGUST 14

From Anxious Thought To Trusting Prayer

*Do not be anxious for anything,
but in every situation, by prayer
and petition, with thanksgiving,
present your requests to God."*

Philippians 4:6

All of us carry on an internal conversation. Our minds whirl around incessantly. Ideas dart around at a frightening speed. Thought interacts with thought -intersecting, overflowing, cascading, complementing, contradicting, spiralling upwards or downwards in a dizzying array.

The mind is a glorious gift from God. We think, we plan, decide and act. Many of us have trained our thoughts so we have more control. However, at times of stress, when multitasking or faced with multiple challenges we can become overwrought. When

anxiety super imposes itself on rational thought, we become ineffective; paralysis sets in.

The problem lies in thinking that we are alone and that our lives and decisions depend entirely on our own cleverness. Even when we receive good counsel, we feel that we are finally left to sift this out and rely on our own fallible judgment.

Contrary to contemporary wisdom, though, we are not alone in the universe. We have a Father in heaven; He is the one who fashioned us in our mother's womb. He knows us intimately. We also have Jesus, our Elder Brother and High Priest who, as a human being, has experienced our vulnerabilities and challenges. In fact, Father and Son have come to make their home with us (John 14.23). Moreover, God the Holy Spirit indwells us and teaches us.

What we need to do is to consciously transform worry into trusting prayer. We lose time, suffer unnecessarily and fall short when we pine away in the silo of anxious thought. We should, rather, "redeem the time" by praying our thoughts to God. Thus we become transformed by the renewing of our mind. God calms our fears, enlightens our mind and girds us for action.

A weary Christian lay awake one night... .. worrying. Then he heard the Lord say gently to him, "Now you go to sleep Jim; I'll sit up."

Exercise: Spend the day sanctifying your inner conversation.

AN

AUGUST 15

Gentle and Lowly

"... Learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest.. "

Matthew 11:29

with him as guide, philosopher, and friend from earliest years till his death led me to believe that he was of all men, Christ like in his life and his attitudes".

His biographer concludes by saying, "It is singular how all who were with Dr. Osier felt his likeness to Christ. They could not see the one without thinking of the Other".

The Bible is saturated with the delightful thought of God's gentleness and humility.

At Creation, God placed Adam and Eve in a garden, gave them authority over the earth and its creatures and walked with them in the cool of the evening. After man sinned, God made clothes to cover his shame. A story suffused with grace and gentleness.

Mary, the gentle maiden, kindly Joseph, humble Zechariah, saintly Anna, elderly Simeon, a cow shed, humble shepherds, and our Lord Himself bundled in swaddling clothes. We see the subtle humour in Jesus' stories, observe His kindness to the outcaste, His grief at Lazarus' tomb, His forgiveness reaching out to the adulterous woman, wonder at His entreaty from the cross, "Father forgive them" and heed His gentle summons to us, "Come to me all who labor and are oppressed and I will give you rest"; at the cross, an innocent Lamb led to slaughter.

Finally when heavens curtains open wide, amidst the loud worship and peals of thunder, we see that the reigning King is the gentle Lamb of God.

Thought for the day: He calls us to learn from Him, the hardest of lessons yet so simple.

Humility leading to His working from within us, teaching us, bringing out gentleness and other fruit of the Spirit thus transforming us into His likeness. Philippians 2:1-18.

AN

AUGUST 16

Glory and Goodness

‘The heavens declare the glory of God’ Psalms 19:1 ‘Moses said, ‘show me your glory’. And the Lord said, ‘I will cause all my goodness to pass before you.’

Exodus 33:18-19.

The Old Testament retains and enhances this sense of the spectacular. At Sinai, the presence of God was associated with flashes of lightning and rolls of thunder. In the desert, God led them with a brilliant cloud by day and a fiery pillar by night.

However, in Moses’ experience, we are introduced to a singular understanding of glory. In response to Moses’ plea to demonstrate His glory, God said that He would “cause all My goodness to pass in front of you and will proclaim My name...” He did just that and described Himself as compassionate, gracious, loving and faithful. Thus, in addition to splendor and majesty, the glory of God resides in the person and character of God succinctly summed up as His goodness.

In the book of Revelation, the curtain of heaven is opened ever so slightly and we are granted glimpses of a sublime vista where splendor and goodness are both displayed and where worship is offered continuously and effusively by an array of heavenly host. Here again, glory is clearly portrayed as being inherent in the person of the triune God.

In our earth-bound experience, however, the clearest expression of the glory of God is seen in Jesus. As we gaze at Him we ourselves begin to share in His glory and are transformed into His image, His goodness.

Meditation: How does your understanding of “glory” compare with Exodus 33:12-34:8

The word “glory” transports us beyond the commonplace. It generally evokes words such as honor, wonder, praise, mystery and the divine.

Glory, from a Biblical perspective, is the visible representation of the splendor of God. The glory of God is revealed in creation - in mountain landscapes, pastoral scenes, sunsets and star-lit skies, thundering waterfalls, mighty oceans and a myriad other vistas.

AN

AUGUST 17

Glory, goodness and the cross

"We beheld His glory "

John 1:14

His miracles - mighty ones like the calming of the sea, mercy-filled ones exemplified by the healing of the blind, expansive ones such as feeding the five thousand and spectacular ones epitomized by raising Lazarus from the dead. While tinged with wonder and glory, they were all marked by goodness.

The miracle of the empty tomb, Jesus' post-resurrection appearances to His disciples and the singular marvel of the ascension are patently glorious. Can the same be said of the cross?

In answer we may say, "Yes, indeed!" As we think of the cross, we need to pierce through the pain, the blood, the gore and the nails to the heart of Christ as He hung there in shame and ignominy. Words and explanations fail as we ponder the painful details and the extravagant love of our Savior. It is the most dramatic and eloquent display of the love of God, which in essence is equivalent to saying that it is a manifestation of His glory. In the Cross, glory and goodness meet. The Cross is a demonstration of the true nature of God. God is love, God is goodness and God is glory. Glory is another name for God.

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died
My richest gain I count but loss
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it Lord, that I should boast
Save in the death of Christ my God
All the vain things that charm me most
I sacrifice them to His blood

- Isaac Watts

Meditation: Meditate on references that speak of the glory of the cross: John 12:23-28; 13:31-33; 17:1-5

Further Reading: "The Cross of Christ" by John Stott

AN

AUGUST 18

God calls and prepares Ezekiel for “faithfulness” not success

” Now when I looked, there was a hand stretched out to me; and behold a scroll of a book was in it. Then He spread it before me; and there was writing on the inside and outside, and written on it were lamentations and mourning and woe”..

Ezekiel 2:9-10

will be killed by the sword.

• Finally God took away Ezekiel’s wife and asked him not to mourn as a sign of His own unspeakable grief. Ezekiel 25:15 The word of the Lord came to me: “Son of man, with one blow I am about to take away from you the delight of your eyes. Yet do not lament or weep or shed any tears...”

If success was measured on the responsiveness of his congregation, we would have to say that Ezekiel would go down as one of the greatest failures in all of history. In spite of obeying faithfully, Ezekiel did not live to see his reward; people did not repent and the city was destroyed. Many have labored and not seen any reward in time; however we are called to be faithful not necessarily to succeed.

Further reading: Ezekiel 3:10-11. Jeremiah 26:15.

Ezekiel was asked to do humiliating things to make a point:

• “Then lie on your left side and put the sin of the people of Israel upon yourself. You are to bear their sin for the number of days you lie on your side.” Ezekiel 4:4

• Ezekiel 4:15- Then He said to me, “See, I will give you cow’s dung in place of human dung over which you will prepare your bread.” This is how Ezekiel was asked to predict the famine which would accompany the siege.

• Next Ezekiel shaved his head, burning his hair, striking it with a sword and scattering it to the winds, indicating the fate of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Ezekiel 5:1 This is how God proclaimed through Ezekiel that, one third of them will die by disease or be destroyed by hunger, and a third

VS

AUGUST 19

God-given moments

"For where two or three gather in My name, there am I with them. "

Matthew 18:20

The Consultant sidled up to me as I was standing at the nurses' station. I had spotted the palm cross above his desk and had discovered he was a lay minister at a local church. He told me he had spotted my name in a CMF UK publication he had been reading on a train journey. He made reference to an earlier edition of *Doctor's Life Support* that had encouraged him as a Junior Doctor and he carried it

around in the pocket of his white coat.

There were many unspoken words: two Christians coming together in the workplace recognising and rejoicing in each others' faith. A moment of joy and mutual encouragement. I walked away uplifted. Excited.

These encounters frequently occur at the most unlikely times... whilst performing a difficult procedure at a patient's bedside or amidst the busy-ness of a bustling, rowdy A+E department. I make reference to the Christian book on the bedside table, the well-used Bible by the patient's bed, or the "friend from church" that had been mentioned in passing.

And thus begins a beautiful and hugely uplifting conversation, as God reminds us both that He loves us and that He is in control through illness, pain, loneliness, long hospital admissions and busy night shifts. And I praise God silently, in my heart that the cannula has gone in first time, despite the tiny, tortuous veins.

These special, God-given moments have often surprised me. It takes boldness and courage to say - even in a very subtle way - "I'm a Christian". But without fail, I have left the bedside, the office, the cubicle, or the ward with a spring in my step; inspired; and with renewed energy and passion for the next step of the day.

Heavenly Father,

Help me to be a shining light for you in the work place. Please give me courage and boldness to live out my faith and show me who lean encourage today. Amen.

Further Reading: Matt 5:14-16; Hebrews 10:19-25

SM

AUGUST 20

God Is Love

"He who does not love, does not know God, for God is love"

1 John 4:8

describes Him. This is perhaps the most profound statement in the Bible.

This love is expressed in His mercy, patience, kindness, grace, gentleness, compassion, empathy and humility. The cross is the prism through which we get the clearest glimpse into the heart of God. Accepting the deepest humiliation, God gave His life for the unlovely, dying for us while we were "yet sinners". It is a love whose height, depth, length and breadth are immeasurable.

We should cherish the thought and wonder at the wonder that God in essence is love. However, we often minimize the impact of this simple statement by saying that though God is love, love is not God. This is true. God is not an abstract attribute but a living person. But this qualification has the effect of dampening our appreciation for the marvel of His love. John, speaking as the beloved disciple, was not saying that love is one of the numerous attributes of God, but that the defining quality of God is love.

This facet of God's being does not negate all the other descriptions that characterize Him. All of these paint a comprehensive picture of our gracious God. However, love is supreme and the other attributes are subsumed under the one glorious fact of the love of God.

Love Divine, all loves excelling
Joy of heaven, to earth come down
Fix in us Thy humble dwelling
All Thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus Thou art all compassion
Pure, unbounded love Thou art
Visit us with Thy salvation
Enter every trembling heart. - Charles Wesley

Reflection: Bask in the sunshine of His love. Do not let Satan rob you of it, do not let your own thoughts dilute the fact, do not let the world pour scorn on this very precious, gentle, beloved yet expansive thought.

Reading: 1 John 4:7-11

AN

AUGUST 21

Christ our intercessor.

"... Christ Jesus who died more than that Who was raised to life - is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us."

Romans 8:34

We humans need all the help we can get. Temptation, anxiety, ill-health and calamities are the stuff of life. Yet, in this 'Vale of tears', there is a lot to be thankful for.

Sorrow and joy often co-exist or alternate in our journey through life. There are black linings to many a silver cloud. The means of grace, i.e. prayer, Bible reading, church fellowship and wise counsel all help us negotiate the torturous paths of our lives. But these are not enough.

We need not despair for we have a powerful intercessor to take up our case before the Father, the Lord Jesus. Hear Him at prayer for us in John 17. He is presently at the Father's right hand, interceding for us.

There are many unknowns that frustrate us. Our finite understanding of life, our ignorance regarding events yet to unfold and our limited apprehension of God's will hinder our prayers. But Jesus "knows all about our troubles". He was tempted just like we are and He has the ear of the Father. As the great "I am" who spans space and time and eternity and the God who by virtue of His creation and incarnation knows us intimately, He sees right through into the inner core of our sequestered, hidden souls. And one of His primary functions today is intercession. Being perfect, His intercession is perfect, being omniscient His intercession is incisive and as the beloved Son of the Father His prayers are always answered.

Meditation: Read John 17. How does the fact of Christ's intercession for you impact your daily life?

"My Intercessor is my Friend" Job 16:20a

AN

AUGUST 22

God speaks in nature

"The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims His handiwork"

Psalm 19:1

philosophy; but rather let men endeavour an endless progress or proficiencie in both." (Bacon: Advancement of Learning.)

According to Psalm 19, day and night wordlessly declare the glory of God. The sun is singled out for special mention. It is like a bridegroom emerging from his wedding canopy and like a warrior eager for battle. It moves gloriously across the sky and nothing is hidden from its heat. This is not sun-worship but a recognition that the 'greater light' (Gen 1:14) created by God's command on the fourth day of creation, does God's bidding. God then is greater than the blinding sun.

We now see the sun, one of many in a vast universe, generating great energy and light. We know that the elements, of which we are made, like hydrogen and carbon, were generated in the heat of that furnace. We also realise that our life depends on sunlight for photosynthesis which make plants grow and give us energy. We know that the sun gives us the right amount of warmth to prevent us from freezing or frying. So we recognise that humans inhabit a fragile ecosystem dependent on the sun and that ecosystem declares God's glory.

To ponder: Admire the heavens and the earth and honour our creator.

Further reading: Psalms 8,19,104.

There is a long Christian tradition of God speaking through the book of nature and the book of Scripture. Charles Darwin in his, *On the Origin of Species* (1859) quotes Francis Bacon:

"To conclude, therefore, let no man out of a weak conceit of sobriety, or an ill-applied moderation, think or maintain, that a man can search too far or be too well studied in the book of God's Word, or in the book of God's works; divinity or

AUGUST 23

The Big picture

"My times are in Your hand"...

Psalm 31:15

and there was no evidence of God's glory in their midst.

We need to have this vision of the "Greatness of the God" who has called us, and a big picture vision of "His Glory"!

When Isaiah saw this vision - he recognized how sinful and insignificant he was - and was filled with a sense of unworthiness. God reached out to him, touched him, and cleansed him. "Grace" that was showered upon him by this great God, leading to deep gratitude.

We need to have a sense of "gratefulness to God", who by His grace has chosen us to be His instruments. "Gratitude", said G. K Chesterton "is happiness doubled by wonder".

The purpose of Isaiah being chosen was two fold - to be cleansed - to be transformed and then to be sent to be God's messenger to Israel, through his life and words. He was to persevere communicating and live in their midst bringing God's heart to them.

We need to persevere against all odds, desiring God to bring a change in us and around us. It is such leaders God is looking for - called by a great God, grateful to God for His hand on our lives, being transformed as we go through the roles and locations he sends us into, and persevering and holding on to the big picture HE has given us in the midst of all the brokenness we see around us....

Prayer: Lord, as I am available, help me make the most of my passing years.

SMT

AUGUST 24

God's Plan For Human Sexuality

Read Genesis 1:27-2:25

Sex is often a taboo subject, surrounded by silence and denial. As Christians we should ask ourselves: 'What is God's plan for human sexuality?'

The Bible is not silent on the topic of sex, but rather points out some important aspects of the issue:

Sex is God's creation. It was God's idea to create people as both male and female, and unite them through sex (Genesis 2:24). Both men and women are created with sexual desire.

Sex is good. (Genesis 1:3 1) Sex was part of God's good creation.

Sex is designed to provide pleasure and satisfaction (Song of Songs 4:10, Ecclesiastes 9:9, Proverbs 5:18-20, Deuteronomy 24:5)). Men and women are both given the gift of being able to experience pleasure and delight within marriage. This enriches and deepens the love relationship between the couple.

Sex is designed for marriage (Genesis 2:24) God's purpose for human beings is that men and women should experience a lifelong, faithful, permanent and responsible relationship. These conditions are met within the context of marriage. It is there that God blesses and approves this union. In Genesis 1:28 the command to 'bear fruit and multiply' is obeyed through the sexual relationship.

Unfortunately people do not always choose to follow God's plan. This is one of the reasons that many people suffer consequences like sexually transmitted infections (STIs), sexual violence, broken families and harmful relationships.

As Christian doctors we ask: What can we do? We can do at least two things:

1. Be aware of the truth of God revealed in the Bible, about sex and marriage. We must continue living under these principles.
2. We can also proclaim God's truth about sex and marriage to our patients, colleagues and neighbors.

Prayer: Oh Lord, I come before you today to ask of your mercy and grace to live out your Word in my personal, sexual and family life. Also help me to proclaim your truth about sex, with strength and love, to all those around me. In the name of Jesus, Amen

JP

AUGUST 25

God's Abode

"Now the dwelling of God is with men and He will live with them."

Revelation 21:3

God is often pictured as dwelling in heaven from where He "comes down" as it were. Thus He appeared in Eden to speak with Adam and in Iraq to meet Abraham. In their desert wanderings, His presence, signified by cloud and fire, accompanied the Israelites in their wanderings. When they eventually reached the Promised Land, His presence continued in the Temple.

With the incarnation, the Temple was no longer the locus of God's presence. God came as a man and "tabernacled" with us. As a result, we can invite Him into our hearts. [Revelation 3:20] and then His abiding presence remains as long as we want Him there. Obviously sin, rejection and apostasy break the relationship and we may miss the sense of His presence.

In addition to the experience of God in individual hearts, He is present within the fellowship of the church. Jesus said that where two or three are gathered together in His name, He is there with them. Believers are referred to, collectively, as the Temple of God or the body of Christ.

Our desire to abide with God, indicated by our obedience to His commands, results in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit making their home with us. The intimacy of this relationship is to be cherished and cultivated. As we continue to walk with Him we will experience the reality expressed beautifully in the 23rd Psalm: "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Meditation: Read John 15 on God abiding in us and our abiding in God.

Since God is Spirit, the very idea that God has an abode seems counter-intuitive. Language is often stretched in order for us to understand certain aspects of the divinity.

So where does God live? Even though we are told that the heavens cannot contain Him, God is often pictured as dwelling

in heaven from where He "comes down" as it were. Thus He appeared in Eden to speak with Adam and in Iraq to meet Abraham. In their desert wanderings, His presence, signified by cloud and fire, accompanied the Israelites in their wanderings. When they eventually reached the Promised Land, His presence continued in the Temple.

With the incarnation, the Temple was no longer the locus of God's presence. God came as a man and "tabernacled" with us. As a result, we can invite Him into our hearts. [Revelation 3:20] and then His abiding presence remains as long as we want Him there. Obviously sin, rejection and apostasy break the relationship and we may miss the sense of His presence.

In addition to the experience of God in individual hearts, He is present within the fellowship of the church. Jesus said that where two or three are gathered together in His name, He is there with them. Believers are referred to, collectively, as the Temple of God or the body of Christ.

Our desire to abide with God, indicated by our obedience to His commands, results in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit making their home with us. The intimacy of this relationship is to be cherished and cultivated. As we continue to walk with Him we will experience the reality expressed beautifully in the 23rd Psalm: "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Meditation: Read John 15 on God abiding in us and our abiding in God.

AN

AUGUST 26

God's Glory, Kingdom And Will

"Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness..."

Matthew 6:33

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, they probably expected instructions on how to go about petitioning God for their creature needs. This, of course, is the universal perception of what constitutes prayer. Jesus' response, though, gave the disciples a different understanding of prayer.

Our prayers tend to creep along the ground while the Lord's Prayer soars into the heavenlies. The first three clauses invite us to participate in the glorious business of heaven - a divine mission that challenges our comprehension and rises far above our vision. Suddenly, the mundane cares of earth seem inconsequential.

The opening petitions have to do with the person of God, His abode and His agenda. Jesus informs us that the overarching purpose of all of that was and is and will be, is to glorify God. Hence we pray that His name be hallowed, His kingdom established and His will performed on earth.

In the sorry world we live in, the converse is the case - the will of man is dominant, Satan rules and evil is hallowed. The Lord's Prayer seeks to reverse this. It is a grand picture where God in all His blazing glory is honored, where the shalom of His kingdom prevails and where the pure perfection of His will alone is evident.

The four petitions that follow, i.e., daily bread, forgiveness, victory over temptation and deliverance from evil deal with our needs. But in answering these petitions, God invites and empowers us to advance His agenda as spelled out in the first three petitions. The two halves of the Lord's Prayer dovetail beautifully serving to bring glory to God which is the primary purpose of humanity.

Questions: What are your priorities in prayer? Do you first of all seek His agenda? In using the Lord's Prayer, pay close attention to the order and particularly to the opening clauses.

AN

AUGUST 27

God's Infinite Patience

*'A bruised reed He will not
break, and a smouldering
wick He will not snuff out...'*

Isaiah 42:3

For Christians, Isaiah's first Servant Song (Isaiah 42:1-7) includes two wonderful word-pictures of the tender compassion of our Saviour Jesus towards His people.

The Servant Songs of Isaiah address two distinct 'horizons'. The first is impending judgment for the nation of Judah. God is preparing His people for invasion and exile. The nation has been deaf to repeated warnings to change its ways; but

here is a clear note of reassurance. God will never give up on His people. Their lives will not be rubbed out despite the huge national trauma they must undergo. The second horizon is the post-resurrection perspective on these events. Jesus is revealed as the Servant prophesied by Isaiah. All the hopes and longings of the people in Isaiah's day are fulfilled in the One who came and suffered to reconcile the world to God - a world estranged from God but through Jesus restored to fellowship with its Maker.

A reed is hardly an attractive plant; it grows in swampland. Much about our lives is broken, less than beautiful. Sometimes the light of our lives is dim. Perhaps we harbour sins that need to be dealt with. Perhaps we give way to a critical spirit that dulls our testimony. Jesus is in the transformation business. He wants to lift us out of the mire of our weakness and self-absorption so we become like Him. He can transform our brokenness and remake us in His service. He is infinitely patient.

He is willing to come alongside us. He wants to do the same with our patients, even the most difficult or fragile ones. Instead of snuffing out kindling that produces more smoke than fire, He will gently fan smouldering ashes so they burst into a flame, reflecting His light and warmth.

Further reading: Numbers 14:18, Hebrews 11:13-16

JM

AUGUST 28

God's perfect love

There is no fear in love, for perfect love casts out fear....

1 John 4:18

She was one of my many patients damaged by dysfunctional relationships. She had an alcoholic abusive father who, when sober, appeared to show genuine remorse for his violent rages. She also had a boyfriend who took advantage of her against her will. "Does he treat you well?" I ask. "Mostly," she replies. She thought his violence was evidence

of his love. Her father was a critical perfectionist. Nothing short of 100% was good enough. No wonder alcohol and other drugs gave her temporary relief from negative self-criticism. No wonder simply exhorting her to stop drinking was useless, placing an extra demand on her by her overbearing conscience.

I wrote the above verse on a script pad for her. I watched as tears started to flow. To be free from fear, to be free from punishment, from the rages! To be understood deep down, to be loved and not to be afraid...

"Where is perfect love to be found?" What a haunting question in this imperfect world! Christians believe that it is found in Christ who showed compassion for the poor, the marginalised, the broken and the sick. He showed us God's heart and He calls on His followers to continue His ministry.

Christians believe that the love of God was supremely shown when the Son of God gave His life for humankind on the cross. By faith in that crucified One, people are liberated from their sin and failure and they can enter the freedom of being God's adopted children.

I asked one patient, "Do you believe God loves everyone?" Unhesitating he replied, "Yes." "Do you believe God loves you?" He hesitated. "I hope so," he replied uncertainly.

Reflection: Marvel at the perfect love of God. Then seek to share this, by word and deed, with all you meet today.

Reading: 1 John 4:7-21.

AG

AUGUST 29

God's Will And Human Personality

*"My food...is to do the will
of Him who sent me and to
finish His work"*

John 4:34

Since God is the Omnipotent Almighty Lord of all, His demands are non-negotiable. Our wills are to be subject to His. He requires unconditional obedience.

This might appear unduly harsh to us who have been reared on the concept of absolute freedom with a carte blanche license to do as we like. Society encourages unbridled expression of our personalities.

Jesus was the truest expression of what it was to be human. His unquestionable divinity did not for one moment detract from His earthy humanity. He moved easily among mortals, laughing, weeping, dining and caring for others. He even got angry when the occasion warranted it.

And while genuinely human, His divinity was on full display. He walked on water, fed thousands, healed incurable diseases, cast out incorrigible demons and raised the dead. His final incredible achievement was to rise again thereby securing our eternal salvation.

Yet, surprisingly, He claimed not to have done anything of His own accord. He obeyed His Father and attributed His success to an unbroken communication with God. He was, thus, perfectly attuned to His will. His dependence on His Father was not a mechanical phenomenon. We are never given the impression that Jesus was less than man. His humanity came to full flower because of His intimate relationship to the Father.

Hence in calling us to full surrender and to do His will, we are not being tricked into a robotic existence. When we submit to God, our true humanity, sullied as it is by sin, failure and frailty, will be displayed in splendid glory. To be truly human and to live as God intended us to do, we must submit to God and abide in Jesus

Reflection: Read through John chapters 5 to 10 and reflect on the verses that speak of the utter dependence of Jesus on the Father..

AN

AUGUST 30

Good in dark situations

'I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us'.

Romans 8:18

'How can a good and loving God allow suffering?' This is one of the most demanding and oft-asked questions Christians are faced with.

As Christians we may have a reasonable understanding of how sin entered the world, and of how all creation has become damaged as a consequence of that, but this may seem cold comfort in the face of extreme and tangible suffering.

Who can satisfactorily explain to a young husband that God must have had a good reason for his wife to be killed in an accident? What words can you use to comfort parents who have been told there are no more treatment options available for their toddler's leukaemia? Yet in extreme circumstances, the Christian doctor has a unique hope to share. Worldly wisdom is empty and futile, yet the glory of eternity shines out even more brightly in the darkness.

We must pray for wisdom, discernment and tact regarding the words used, yet at the same time, recognize that God is bigger than our own understanding of the situation. There are times when it is okay to say we do not fully understand, but that we do trust in a God who knows all things.

Our firstborn child suffered an unexplained cardiac arrest followed by severe hypoxic brain injury at nine weeks old and died six weeks later. In worldly terms, the situation was futile. And yet spiritually, it was one of the richest times we have known; our faith was proven genuine, and indeed of greater worth than gold. We were encouraged and comforted by doctors and nurses who shared with us from their own faith, and we particularly appreciated honesty rather than attempts to avoid discussing uncomfortable topics. Even when physical cure is impossible, be encouraged that there is much that a Christian doctor can do to bring hope and healing into a situation.

Further reading: Romans 5:1-11

CW

AUGUST 31

Grace Upon Grace

"We beheld His glory.. full of grace and truth., [and] from the fullness of His grace, we have all received grace upon grace."

John: 14-16

Grace is a gift. Grace is love. Grace is favor. Grace is mercy. Grace shines forth from the Eternal Being whose very nature is love. God describes Himself in Exodus 34: 6-7, as "compassionate and gracious... slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love, forgiving sin..." As we read the Bible we see that this description is borne out in the lives of the patriarchs, prophets and just plain folk.

In Jesus, we move from abstract concept to a flesh and blood understanding of grace. In His earthly sojourn, Jesus lavished His grace on the least deserving, the harlot, robbers, tax collectors, a maniac and outsiders. Paradoxically, the high point of grace is the Cross. The most degrading event in all of history was also the most glorious one, for here the limitless extent of His grace was seen.

The God of all grace wants to gift us and we can experience it by faith. Without faith, grace remains illusory. One can speak of it, imagine it but cannot know it. Where faith is seen in abundance, grace is manifest in plenty. Where faith is weak, grace is weak. As we mature in the Christian life we learn to exercise greater faith and thereby appreciate His grace in ever increasing measure.

Meditation: Read Exodus 33-34 (especially 33:18-20 and 34:4-7) How does this compare with your perception of God?

If God is indeed who He says He is, we should not be surprised that He showers us with blessings. God reaches into His inexhaustible resources in order to bless us. In the prologue to his gospel, John conveys to us the matchless love of God. Grace is piled upon grace. One translation speaks of "grace instead of grace" suggesting that when one aspect or experience of grace ends, another replaces it. Grace goes on and on into infinity.

Grace is a gift. Grace is love.

AN

Elizabeth Blackwell - “ First woman doctor ”



It was 1847, in a medical class in Geneva, upper New York State. The medical class numbering 150 students was from the neighboring towns. It used to be said, “A boy who proves unfit for anything else can always be a doctor”. Some were serious about the study of medicine and some were not as much.

The dean of the medical school walked into their class with a letter in his hand and a proposition, an extraordinary request. It sought admission for a lady student who had been denied admission by several medical colleges. She was a good student, eminently respectable, and honestly sincere in wanting to be a doctor.

He left it for the class to decide. It was unheard of. “A woman doctor!” The students even thought it was a hoax. A meeting was called for and it had one hundred percent attendance. There was bedlam. One woman to a hundred and fifty men! After an animated discussion and speeches by the students, in the end, the vote was unanimous and a statement was made to give to the faculty. They would accept the proposition, yet wondered how it might turn out to be.

Elizabeth was born in Bristol, England. Her father, Samuel Blackwell was keen that his daughters were educated in par with his sons. She admired her father for his anti slavery position and his heart for people. They had to move to America , as the family business got into trouble.

As a young woman, one day visiting with Mary, a friend dying of cancer, she was surprised when Mary said “It is a terrible thing, to die a slow death like this. There is one thing that would have made the suffering so much easier. If only I didn’t have to be examined and treated by a man”! She added, “You are young and strong my dear. You have a keen mind and like to study. Why don’t you try and become a doctor?” Please my dear, promise me you will at least think about it?”

Elizabeth floundered in silence. It was Mary's eyes, steady and compelling, which made her say "I promise".

Women did not become doctors... but the matter persisted, in her mind and heart. It is during this time that she reached out to her Friend, the Lord Jesus. She spoke of peace unspeakable in her walk with Him. She went through deep struggle. Suddenly words spoken to another woman, a queen in another age, flashed across her mind: "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this"? She felt separated by God for the very purpose of being a doctor.

She took a job as a teacher to raise money for her studies. She lived with a physician's family while she taught. Dr. Dickson allowed her to use his library, where she read extensively and studied Greek.

On 20 October 1847, she received the acceptance letter from the small college in Geneva, New York state, along with the letter from the students enclosed. Elizabeth moved to Geneva and to medical school. It was an uneasy start, but she was determined she would do her best. The effect on the class was good and great decorum was maintained when she was around.

On her graduation day, she was as remotely exalted as the participant in a holy sacrament. For her, it was not only a graduation but an ordination for high calling as sacred as the ministry.

Elizabeth Blackwell continued practicing medicine abroad, mainly in France and England. She had to move back to New York city, giving up her role as surgeon, due to partial blindness. She later opened the New York Infirmary for Women and children along with another woman doctor Marie Zakrzewska. She also opened a medical school to teach women medicine.

She continued to write and lecture until her death in 1910.

(Read "Lone Woman" by Dorothy Clarke Wilson, for the whole life story)

Loyola Prayer

I wish for you discomfort at easy answers,
half truths and superficial relationships;
so that you will live deep in your heart.

May you be blessed with anger at injustice,
oppression and exploitation; so that you will
work for justice, equality and peace.

May God bless you with tears to shed for those
who suffer so that you will reach out your hands to
comfort them and change their pain into joy.

And may you have the foolishness to think that you
can make a difference in the world so that you will
do the things others tell you cannot be done. Amen

- St Ignatius of Loyola

SEPTEMBER 1

Gratitude Breeds Contentment

"I am the LORD; that is My name! I will not yield My glory to another or My praise to idols. "

Isaiah 42:8

bread and sharing of wine. Then there is the opportunity to confess and pray together for the needs of the world, or learn truth through liturgy.

But there is one part of our meetings that seems really strange to outsiders - songs of praise. What is all that about? Why does God want us to sing and go on about how wonderful He is? If a friend persistently asked me to tell him what a great doctor he was I might start to worry about him!

Does God need our gratitude? No. Could it be that praise is a gift from God to bless us? Occasionally we are bursting with thanks, but more usually church gives us the disciplined habit of gratitude, with music lifting us to a new perspective on our lives. In church we support each other to do this even if we feel down. Gratitude breeds contentment, faith, resistance to temptation, lower stress levels and yes - longer life.

Published papers demonstrate that regular church attendance is associated with increased life expectancy even when other known factors are accounted for. We should praise Him together regularly. Get there when work allows. And, when opportunity arises, with permission, gentleness and respect, let's explain why to your patients.

Further reading: Psalm 8; Psalm 29:1-11

Why should I, or for that matter my patients, attend church regularly?

There we can hear God's Word and the preaching which applies it to our lives. But can't the radio, television or internet do that? Going to church is also a chance to show solidarity with our Christian community and exchange news, needs and encouragement face to face. It can be a simple act of obedience to Jesus' command to remember Him, His death and resurrection in the breaking of

GM

SEPTEMBER 2

Guarding The Perishing Soul For An Imperishable Inheritance

"In His great mercy, He has given us an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.. .kept in heaven for us who are being shielded. .."

1 Peter 1:3-5

"Nothing in life is as certain as death and taxes", said Benjamin Franklin. The mortality rate for humanity is one hundred percent. Peter states that this perishing soul is being shielded for an imperishable inheritance. He emphasizes this by averring that this inheritance itself is being preserved for us in heaven.

This inheritance is described as a treasure that can "never perish, spoil or fade". Paul says, "eye has not seen, nor ear heard" the dimensions and the beauty of the heavenly reward. It is secure because the Sovereign God Himself guarantees it.

This, indeed, is the hope and the glory of the Christian. We go through innumerable travails and hazards en route to the grave and one of these will prove to be final and fatal. We cannot know the moment or circumstances of our demise, but it hardly matters, for we shall live again and that too, forever. Meanwhile, we are guarded by the power of God such that nothing can overcome us.

Our earthly pilgrimage prepares us for this inheritance. Whatever happens to us is under the sovereign control of our Father. As a result of His grace expended towards us, we grow in holiness, in love and in knowledge. These along with the trials He permits, prepare us for the glories of heaven.

Our souls preserved on earth and our inheritance guarded in heaven. What more can we ask for? May God enable us to live in the light of that glorious assurance.

Reflection: Encourage your hearts today by meditating on 1 Peter 1:1-11 and Psalm 121

AN

SEPTEMBER 3

”Hallowed be your name”

”Day and night they never stop saying, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come ‘”

Revelation 4:8

everyone else is derived. He is more real than we are. He is the Uncreated, Infinite Eternal Being. Moreover, He is holy which means that He is altogether Other than we are because of His moral perfection.

We know that He is already hallowed in Heaven. (Isaiah 6; Rev 4-5). Our prayer is that what is happening in heaven will happen on earth. Hallowing means, “to hold in reverence”. We are asking God to enable us to give Him the reverence that is due to Him. This opening phrase of the “Our Father”, in essence, anticipates and encompasses the rest of the prayer. As we hold His name in reverence, His kingdom and His will are established on the earth. Further, He will meet our daily needs. Since He is holy and sin cannot co-exist in His presence, He also forgives our sins. Finally, in His holy antipathy towards evil, He will deliver us from temptation and keep us from Satan’s wiles.

Our minds, unenlightened by grace, only spasmodically think of God. By hallowing God, we find ourselves constantly in His presence. Paul’s injunction to “pray without ceasing” and Jesus’ promise of “abiding” in us become realities.

Thought: When we pray we often begin with our requests. Try to spend five minutes in just praising and adoring God.

Scripture reference: Exodus 3:13-15, Compare Psalm 11:4 with 1 Corinthians 3:16-17,6:19 and 2 Corinthians 6:16

The Lord’s Prayer catapults us straight into heaven as it were. A door is opened and we join the angelic chorus as they cry, “Holy, holy, holy”. Prayer’s primary aim is to seek the glory of God.

What does it mean to say, “Hallowed be Thy name”? God has many names which describe His many attributes. But His personal name is “I am who I am” (Exod.3:13-14). His name indicates that He is the Eternal Being from whom everything and

SEPTEMBER 4

Hallowing The Daily Grind

“Serve wholeheartedly as if you were serving the Lord not people....”

Ephesians 6:7

Many people live humdrum lives of unrelieved boredom. Variouslly described as “the rat race” or “the daily grind”, we work at unrewarding tasks just in order to bring home a paycheck. Even the most rewarding work can ultimately become boring.

It was not meant to be like that. Work was ordained by God, the First Worker. He created the world and made Adam and Eve as vice-regents in creation. They

had meaningful work. Things were pleasant in Eden. Work was interspersed with leisure and fellowship. Sin and the fall changed all this. Work became drudgery.

Restoration came with redemption, such that Paul could admonish his readers to work with “all your might and as unto the Lord.” What changed was perhaps not the type of work, but a perspective on life, the world and work. Redeemed humanity’s relationship to God was restored, he is reconciled to God and in the context of this new relationship, order and shalom have returned. He now works not because he must, not because he gets paid, but in obedience and love towards God. He works to please God. It is the same worker but now he applies himself to a task given by God and work that will be rewarded by God. God is the prime master-earthly masters are secondary. While working under human supervision, we simultaneously please God and are doing His will.

Whatever the work, be it spiritual or “secular”, be it work that involves the mind or hard physical labor, be it artistic and creative or monotonous and repetitive, it is under the aegis of God. Thus work is sanctified. The ultimate result of this is the redemption of nature as it waits, groaning, for the manifestation of the sons of God.

Trusting God, we need to do what is entrusted to us and be content in knowing He knows best and knows the whole picture of our lives

Question : Is there a distinction between spiritual and “secular” Work?

AN

SEPTEMBER 5

Have You Felt The Father's Tender Care?

"The Lord your God...will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will exult over you with loud singing.

"Zephaniah 3:17

Scriptures. Seek Him in prayer. Seek Him in the congregation of the church. Seek Him through wise counselors. You will find rest in Him. He hears the cry of the "brokenhearted". He knows their pain. He is a faithful High Priest, a friend of sinners and a Brother near at hand. As you search for Him, listen attentively and expectantly. He will speak to you. He is the Master of the "Word in season", the Great Physician who knows the specific remedy, lovingly crafted by Him just for you.

Thank Him. Bask in the sunshine of His love. Allow the balm of Gilead to heal your wounds. Lay your life once more before Him and let Him take over. Though Satan and others may dredge up the past, you can forget it because God has forgotten it. Press on toward the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

**"Ask the Savior to help you, Comfort strengthen and keep you
He is willing to aid you, He will carry you through "**

Meditate on Zephaniah 3:11. Savor the fact that God is your Father and Jesus your Elder Brother and the Holy Spirit your Comforter.

Have you come to periods in your life when you knew that you have "blown it"? You think of what might have been. Hitherto you had attributed your failures to enemies, to circumstances beyond your control, to lack of opportunity, to happenstance, to the devil and the list goes on... But, sadly, you know that you and you alone are to blame for your failure.

All is not lost, though. When this happens there is only one thing to do. Seek the Father; seek Jesus. Seek Him with a sincere and simple heart. Seek Him in the

AN

SEPTEMBER 6

Heart and Head

"Above all else, guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life "

Proverbs 4:23

It is true to say that the mind is important to life and work. But there are pitfalls in the naked exercise of reason. Clever people are tempted to be proud and arrogant and that is a fatal flaw. A further issue with the intellect is that, as it balances all the pros and cons of a matter and subjects it to painstaking analysis, it can freeze us into inaction. The head needs to be harmonized with other aspects of our lives, such as the heart.

The ancient Greeks were famous for their emphasis on the intellect. The Hebrews, on the other hand, emphasized the centrality of the heart. In most cultures, the heart is associated with emotion. This attribute is certainly important for successful living. Emotion ought to be balanced by reason.

The Biblical notion of heart, while including emotion, goes further. It incorporates the will and involves determination, obedience and action. A well- balanced life holds all these in tension. The heart has to do with the whole person.

Engagement of both head and heart is essential in our walk with God. Faith involves both head and heart. With the intellect we assent to and appropriate the teachings of the faith and with the heart we commit our lives to that faith. Faith involves the transference of our affections, will and our very lives to God. To say that we love God with the heart is to say that we have faith-not merely an intellectual faith but an emotional, willing and submissive faith.

The head and heart are intertwined. While the head can inform us, the heart can energize and fulfill us.

We are taught to stand when being introduced or when an elder person enters a room. It is a sign of respect and honor when we stand up. When my heart is full and my mind is in it, I am compelled to stand in God's presence. A God who remembers His promises and is true to His Word.

Question: What does it mean to love God with heart, soul and mind? Matthew 22:37

AN

SEPTEMBER 7

Heaven Is Not A Pie In The Sky

"We are seated with Him in heavenly places in Christ Jesus"

Ephesians 2:6

How are we to understand this? Heaven, admittedly, is a mystery and is hidden from our view. Full revelation awaits the end of time or when we die. However, from the Scriptures, we can safely and boldly say that the kingdom inaugurated by Jesus is a replica of the heavenly Jerusalem.

When brothers and sisters dwell together in unity, we are graced by the glorious presence of the Trinity. When two or three gather in prayer, Jesus is in our midst. When we lift up our hearts in genuine Spirit inspired worship, we echo the chorus of the celestial choir. When there is order and peace in our assemblies, we are in tune with the government of heaven. Even in tribulation, we participate and complete the suffering of the Lamb of God (Col 1:2-4) through His body the church.

"Tis mystery all!" Trying to hold in tension the future revelation of the glory of heaven and our present circumstances is not easy since we continue to feel the sting of imperfection, the curse of sin and the aches and pains inherent in human flesh. We are "a work in progress." But one day our present experience of heaven will be perfected-as we see Him in all His glory and as "the knowledge of the glory of God will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea."

Meditation: Reflect on times when you experienced the immediate presence of heaven? What contributed to this?

AN

SEPTEMBER 8

The Beauty of Holiness

"Holiness adorns Your house"

Psalm 93:5

Luck and happenstance never create beauty. They only cause chaos. Prurient minds degrade beauty by equating it with sensuality. Beauty, as popularly perceived, is associated with music, art and literature. These works do not come about by chance.

Only beauty can create beauty. God is beautiful and the source of all beauty is God. Behind the beauty of nature, we see a Beautiful Creator. Since human beings are created in the image of God, we too can create works of beauty.

But this is not the whole story. God is not only associated with beauty, He is holy. The notion of holiness seems strange to the modern mind. If anything, holiness is considered boring, dull and stiff. It is seen as severe, having to do with laws and rules. It is the language of "fundamentalists" and other uptight people. The world makes fun of the concept of holiness and cannot conceive of a marriage between holiness and beauty. The Bible, though, brings beauty and holiness together. The two attributes cohere in the person of God.

Contrary to modern perceptions, holiness is not negative and should not evoke the picture of a severe, aloof and joyless deity. God's holiness is compatible with all His attributes including goodness, kindness, forgiveness, grace and justice. All these combine to make Him beautiful.

Holiness involves an antipathy to evil and sin. God's people are called to righteousness and holiness. This begins when we believe in Jesus and continue to grow, persevering in our relationship to the Holy One who is also beautiful. We are thus made ready to dwell in God's house forever, a house that is adorned by holiness.

Meditation: 2 Peter 3:11; Ephesians 5:27

AN

SEPTEMBER 9

Holy Chutzpah

“Let us. ...come boldly to the throne...”

Hebrews 4:16

Many of us have an imperfect and, perhaps, warped picture of Jesus. We commonly see Him as tame, aloof, enigmatic or severe.

Though His divinity is never in question, the Jesus of the gospels comes across as a very human person. He got His feet dirty tramping the dusty roads of Israel,

He dined with commoners, outcasts and sinners, He wept when disheartened, got angry at hypocrisy, blessed little children and had the human touch in relieving suffering.

This becomes even clearer as we examine how He deals with people. The human Jesus constantly challenged them. He derided Nicodemus who, though he was a teacher of Israel, did not understand salvation. He defied convention by engaging the adulterous “woman at the well” in conversation and nudged her toward confession and faith.

He seemed to welcome and reward a certain cheekiness in some very ordinary people. Blind Bartimaeus, rebuked and ordered to be silent, “cried out all the more”. Jesus heard him and healed him. The Gentile centurion dared to ask this Jewish healer to come and cure his servant, even suggesting that He could do it long distance. Jesus seemed to repeatedly discourage the Syro-Phoenecian woman. But she would not be denied. She conceded that she was unworthy but then obtained her daughter’s healing.

These stories encourage us to be natural and transparent when dealing with God. We can cast off airs, rhetoric and pretense and speak to Him as “human to human”, as it were. As Son of Man, He knows our frame, understands our thoughts, shares our aspirations and, yes, feels our pain. He empathizes with us and will bandage our wounds. We can enter boldly into His presence. May God grant us a dose of holy chutzpah.

Reading: The story of the Syro-Phoenecian woman. Mark 7:24-30

AN

SEPTEMBER 10

Home at last

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Psalm 23:6.

Psalm 23: *"The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want...Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...You are with me....surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life"*

We focussed particularly on this last verse, recognising that death, like life, is both a journey and a destination. The journey may be arduous and, at times, far from pleasant, but the destination for the believer is wonderful beyond our wildest dreams.

Keith enjoyed travel and packed a lot of trips into his last two years. We shared some of the frustrations of travel: the waiting in departure lounges, the delays and jet lag, the lost baggage and missed connections. But we agreed that, because of the wonderful places he had been able to see, it had all been worth it. How much more, when heaven is our destination and our loving Father awaits our homecoming.

I found it harrowing, but Keith found it helpful and asked that I share the conversation at his funeral.

For further reading: Psalm 103:2 Corinthians 4:7-18.

PP

SEPTEMBER 11

How God sees it

'But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.'

1 Samuel 16:7

doesn't choose his people according to their abilities. What matters to God is the heart.

Your successes as a doctor may be many or few. But if you are in Christ there is no medical achievement indeed, there is nothing at all - that will make God love you more, and nothing that will make Him love you less. Don't fall into the traps of pride or despair depending on how well you perform at your studies or in your job. Those aren't the things God looks at. He looks at the heart.

David's heart was turned to God in humble trust. And God's heart was on David: And what more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Lord God! Because of Your promise, and according to Your own heart, You have brought about all this greatness, to make Your servant know it. *2 Samuel 7:20-21*

God chose him, He had great plans for him. And the good news for us today is that God has chosen us too, in Christ, to be His people. It's not our abilities that make us special; it's God Himself, from His heart, through His son, changing our hearts to be like Him.

Further reading: Romans 12:1-8; Ephesians 1

Perhaps you're a senior doctor, with a successful practice and a good name in the community. You run a large department, and you've published many papers. You are very important.

Perhaps you're a junior doctor. The pay is not good, you get little respect from your colleagues, and you are given the jobs that no-one else wants to do. You are not important.

Except, of course, that this isn't how God sees things. He does not judge our importance the way other people do. Saul looked great, but he disobeyed God and his reign ended disastrously. David didn't look great, but God

according to their abilities. What

GC

SEPTEMBER 12

How To Abide In Christ

"I am the vine, you are the branches; He who abides in Me and I in Him, He bears much fruit.... "

John 15:5

We were created to glorify God. We do this by being Christ like. In fact, Christ-likeness is the "fruit" that we are to produce and this can only happen when we "abide" in Christ. What does this mean?

The word "abide" is related to "abode" or home. To abide, therefore, is to be at home with God, to know Him and to delight in Him. We dwell in, remain in, to settle in for the long term. This begins when we come to faith in

Christ and continues as we relate to Him also by faith.

Jesus fleshes what it means to abide, by saying that we should abide in His Word. As we read, study, meditate, memorize and pray the Word, the life of God grows in us. Jesus is the Word and as you study and internalize the Word He makes His dwelling in us and with us.

Jesus fine tunes the concept of abiding in the Word, when He instructs us to keep His commandments. We need to be familiar with His commandments, savor them, own them and, most of all, obey them.

Of all the commands, the one that He emphasizes is the one to love one another. Indeed, love is the fulfillment of the law. Truly loving others is tantamount to keeping the whole law of God. As we abide in Christ and His love, a lasting love for others will grow in us. We will even begin to love those who are most difficult to love.

Jesus boils down the seemingly nebulous requirement of abiding into practical, concrete, do-able acts. We study His Word and obey His commands and, specifically, the one to love others.

As the life of the Vine seeps into its branches allowing fruit to grow, so will we bear the fruit of Christ-likeness, bringing Him glory.

AN

SEPTEMBER 13

Human chaos... God's order

'Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters'

Genesis 1:2

used to stabilise the myocardium were all quite toxic, and had to be given through a central line. I hadn't learned that skill yet either.

Worse still, my bleep was nagging me about important but less urgent tasks all over the hospital. Chaos reigned. And my own physiology wasn't too clever either: my stomach was auto-digesting, beads of water gathered between the scapulae. Enter then a senior colleague, a Medical Registrar. Calm, collected, in control. Access secured. History clarified. Imbalances rectified. Rhythm gradually restored. Order out of chaos.

The Bible's God is a God of order, shalom peace and cooperation. The enemy's intention is always the opposite. The word diabolical describes his purpose of uncreation: to throw apart. Godlessness, disease, conflict, mental distress, loneliness are all symptoms. Of course, doctors cannot restore the deep shalom order of the new creation. But as we await the final reordering, let's look out for what He is doing and join in.

Reflection: Take time to recognise that the Lord is in control. Even when life seems dark and chaotic, He hovers over creation. How can we follow His lead and bring His order into our corner of creation today?

Further reading: Romans 8:18-21; Isaiah 45:18-19

AB

SEPTEMBER 14

Human Interference And The Will Of God

"Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. The Lord's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act.... God struck him., and he died. "
2 Samuel 6:6,7.

This is a sobering story. The reason given for Uzzah's death is a bit puzzling at best. However, the incident is a stark reminder that God is sovereign and we are to work in obedience to His direction.

This seems to go against the grain of what we know about our task in the world. The Bible is replete with action words - strive, work, serve, run and so forth. We are not meant to just stand on the sidelines. "Woe to those who are at ease in Zion".

However our desire for action needs to be placed in perspective. The Scriptures frequently remind us that God is Lord of heaven and earth. Nothing happens outside of

His express will.

What are we to make, then, of commands to work for God? The answer is that God and man are to act in concert with each other. Our call to serve is within the context of God's agenda and activity. Our task is to seek the will of God and do His bidding. We are not autonomous. We are under orders. In fact, Adam's fall happened when he acted outside the will of God.

This does not necessarily mean that every action is to be under God's direct control. Often, we do not hear clear directions or receive supernatural revelation. Where these are lacking, we are guided by Biblical principles, by wise counsel and by our own sanctified reason. And some needs are so obvious that we need no prompting to respond.

To do God's work in our power, substituting His directives with human agenda, will be subject to censure. God's work should be done in God's way to receive God's blessing.

Reflection: Is your work for God done in response to His bidding?

AN

SEPTEMBER 15

I'm His favourite

' Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God -children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. '

John 1:12-13

A colleague and friend once said to me with a grin, "Jesus loves you - but I'm His favourite!" What chutzpah, I thought. After all, there is explicitly no favouritism with God. Then I remembered the experience of coming to faith and knowing, by the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, that I was precious to this God who had saved me at the cost of His own Son.

It wasn't that I was in any way favoured over others, as the Scriptures suggested for further reading make clear, but that anyone and everyone who believes and is saved becomes as if he is His favourite. To a just and loving Father, each child feels incredibly special.

When, as in medicine, our work is relentlessly other-focussed, we can be tempted when under pressure to view ourselves as being offess concern to God than our patients or colleagues.

The right balance is demonstrated by a postcard I have with the slogan on it "You are unique. Just like everyone else." This sums up the love of God towards each of us. It's utterly just and fair, and yet feels - when experienced personally - almost unfair, it's so good.

Challenge: hold on to the truth today that everyone you meet is unique, and uniquely precious to God. But you're His favourite. You!

Further reading: Acts 10:34, Romans 2:11, Galatians 2:6, Ephesians 6:9

JC

SEPTEMBER 16

Ida Scudder's Vision

*"I was not disobedient to
the heavenly vision "*

Acts 26:19

The inspiring story of Ida Scudder is always worth recounting. In the late 19th century, teenaged Ida was visiting her parents in Madras Presidency [now Tamil Nadu] in India. Having no desire to follow in her parents' footsteps, her young life was nevertheless decidedly transformed when three high caste men came to their home one evening. They asked Ida to help their wives who were in labor.

Protesting that she was just a girl, she offered to bring her father, who was a doctor. Each of the three walked away, refusing the help of a man. Ida later learned that all three women died in childbirth - a common occurrence in those circumstances.

Moved to tears and then to action, Ida perceived this as a message from God. On her return to the US, she became one of the first women to study medicine and then promptly went back to India. She pioneered a remarkable movement. She started a dispensary which metamorphosed into a hospital and then a medical school. Today Christian Medical College is a world class hospital and research center. True to its motto "Not to be ministered unto but to minister" it is a blessing both to India and the world. All because one sensitive teenager responded compassionately and pragmatically to a series of arresting and tragic events.

Ida did not see a literal vision, but she had no doubt that she had heard from God. He stills speaks today in different ways. His call comes through direct words, Scripture, exposure to need, inner churning, harsh facts, disturbing statistics, stirring messages and the example of sacrificial lives. He oftenuddges or whispers gently and, yes, occasionally grants supernatural visions and dreams. May God open our eyes, ears and heart. May He give us courage not be "disobedient to the heavenly vision."

Response: Read "Aunt Ida" by Dorothy Clarke Wilson. When was the last time God nudged you to do something? How did you respond?

AN

SEPTEMBER 17

Incredible Ephesians

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

Ephesians 1:3

Incredible as it may sound, Paul was in a Roman jail, chained to a guard, when he wrote Ephesians. His *magnum opus* begins with a long, breathless sentence that reaches its matchless conclusion in verse 14. The opening words offer praise to God who gifts us with "every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ".

The rest of the sentence unpacks these blessings. Adoption, election, forgiveness, redemption, salvation, grace, sanctification and inheritance spill out over each other in a

cascading torrent. He caps it all up by declaring that we are "seated with Christ in heavenly places." When tracing the dimensions of God's love, words fail Paul and he ends up declaring that it "surpasses knowledge" and hence, language. The treasures that God gives us are rich-full of wisdom and knowledge.

The warfare he describes is no ordinary phenomenon. It is waged in heaven involving spiritual forces beyond our understanding. These enemies are invincible except through spiritual armor of which prayer is the key. When speaking of prayer itself, his thoughts soar as he systematically builds his case, finally asserting that God's answers are immensely more than we can articulate or even imagine! Doxology weaves its way through the whole letter, reaching a climax when Jesus is declared to be the "fullness of God that fills everything in every way."

Christian living, described in chapters 4 to 6, is possible because our highly exalted God powerfully and graciously leads and guides us. Therefore Paul calls us to live soberly, carefully, lovingly and wisely.

Suggestion: Study the epistle keeping in mind the themes outlined here. Consult a commentary such as the one by John Scott.

AN

SEPTEMBER 18

Instant Success Vs. Waiting On The Lord

"I am the Vine you are the branches; He who abides in Me and I in Him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."

John 15:5

In a fast moving world, we expect immediate results in all our engagements. We also give up easily, leave the task at hand and go to the next project. We have been tempted into thinking that success, and better still instant success, is all that matters.

As Christians, we are not called to be successful, but to be faithful. We take ourselves too seriously and feel the onus is on us, not only to perform, but to succeed. This leads to frustration, burnout and despair.

Sober reflection will hopefully help us conclude that we should be totally dependent on the Almighty God. A recognition of His supremacy and Lordship is absolutely essential when we work with Him. This is true in both big tasks and the small details and specifics of our lives. He who rules the spheres knows the number of hairs upon our head.

This should not be taken as an excuse for laziness, non-involvement and retirement. God calls us to do valiant things and He does want us to do well. Each of us has a distinct, if limited, role in the grand tapestry of God's ventures and we must do this obediently, faithfully and efficiently, all the while relying on God the Holy Spirit. Without His oversight, we dare not micromanage His work. We thus avoid frustration and retain our sanity. In His own time, God will work out His purposes through us, to the fulfillment of the mission so that He is glorified.

Reflection: Reflect on John 15,4,5. Do you engage in God's work autonomously or in submission to His will?

AN

SEPTEMBER 19

“Is your heart, is my heart?”

“Though you probe my heart, though you examine me at night and test me, you will find that I have planned no evil.”

Psalm 17:3

Christian life is a matter of the heart. Thus Solomon could say “Guard your heart, for out of it are the issues of life.”

All of us intuitively know what is meant by “heart”. It basically refers to the inner person - the real you. It is also that part of us that can relate to God.

The heart is the wellspring from which everything else flows. The heart that pleases God is a pure heart, a simple heart, a single minded heart “without folds”.

It is a heart that is open and transparent, a heart of integrity. It is plain, crystal clear, and white as snow. It has no alcoves that nurse secret sins, hidden agendas, wicked thoughts, bitter vendettas or stubborn unforgiveness. It does not simultaneously praise God with the mouth and harbor evil thoughts within.

In fact it has to be an altogether new heart. It is not attained by ritual acts, good deeds, affirmations, determination, introspection or even confession. The first step is to have our hearts cleansed from a guilty conscience through the miracle of the new birth - an inner transformation effected by God. This renewed heart is preserved and matured as we then die to self, take up the Cross and follow Christ. The initial commitment must be followed by both frequent renewals and a continuous abiding in Christ. Practically this means feeding on the Word, being strengthened through prayer and the spiritual disciplines and nurtured by fellowship within the church.

As we do this, our hearts become aligned to God’s. His will, thoughts, passion and direction become ours. Our heart will be as His heart.

Prayer: “Search me O God and know my heart: test me... know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, lead me in the way everlasting”. Psalm 139:23-24

AN

SEPTEMBER 20

Jesus' Temptations And Ours

".. *He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by the devil.*"

Mark 1:13

Jesus, in the three temptations from Satan, was confronted by choices which could have diverted Him from His mission. The same sort of issues can deflect us from our own mission.

In the first temptation, Jesus, feeling the urgency of hunger, was prompted to turn stones into bread. Obviously, there was nothing wrong in satisfying His hunger after a forty day fast, but by listening to Satan, Jesus would have given precedence to urgent

physical need over the importance of heeding the word of His Father. He chose the important over the urgent. So must we.

In the second temptation, He was challenged to jump from the pinnacle of the temple and thus fulfill the "plan of God". However, Jesus knew that the plan of the Father did not call for the spectacular, so He submitted to the drudgery of a mundane life, ending in the cross. We easily tire of the routines of our daily lives and thus give up or start looking for alternatives that are "different" and/or "spectacular". Though God will at times perform miracles, it is chiefly through the commonplace that He fulfills His purposes. God grant *us perseverance in the midst of the drudgery of the ordinary.*

God's plan is that the whole world should worship His Son. By suggesting that Jesus worship him, Satan's third encounter was providing a short cut to attaining this. But there was no leeway in God's plan for short cuts. His program required the cross and resurrection. The long walk of obedience culminating in the cross was itself important. The end can never justify the means in God's economy. The means are as important as the end.

God grant that we would like Jesus, listen to the Father, persevere in obedience and eschew short cuts to success.

SMT

SEPTEMBER 21

Keeping Up With Giants Of The Faith

"We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders... and run the race.."

Hebrews 12:1

During a hiatus in my career I worked briefly with the Lehmanns in Herbertpur. Leela and I stayed in their lovely bungalow, ate with them and enjoyed their friendship. Every morning, after breakfast, Dr. Lehmann would stride out towards the hospital. Though much younger, I struggled to keep up with him.

This is a metaphor for my life. I am ever trying to follow spiritual giants. Geoffrey and Monica Lehmann established the Herbertpur Christian Hospital in the Himalayan foothills in 1934. They pioneered here for forty years, providing affordable care to the poor and peaching the gospel. Their labors were amply rewarded later, but they did not see many come to faith in their lifetime.

Here is an abridged and edited excerpt of a poignant conversation between them early in their career.

M: "How long will it be till we are permitted to see a.... result of our labors?"

G: Perhaps never, dear.....We did not come to win converts. We came to represent Christ.... It may be our responsibility to plant and to water, but to never see the han'est.

M: Suppose there is a great han'est after our life-time?

G: That would be wonderful.

Those were generous and prophetic words. The hospital is a thriving institution now and the surroundings are experiencing a spiritual transformation. Many churches have been planted.

Their faith enabled them to bravely endure hardships and privations as they looked beyond their own limited lives to the sovereign God who makes all things possible. They continued undaunted in the face of an alien culture, customs and language. They suffered disappointments but never gave up. We should celebrate and emulate them and other giants of the faith.

Reference: The conversation is from Himalayan Heartbeat by Ken Anderson. Read the book and be inspired.

AN

SEPTEMBER 22

Knowing God Experimentally

"...it is by grace you have been saved through faith.... We are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works."

Ephesians 2:8-10

There are basically three steps in coming to know God. The first step has nothing to do with us. It begins with the grace of God. It is the gift of revelation.

We get to know God through revelation, which comes in two forms. In nature we have a partial view, but the full unveiling comes in Jesus Christ. The Bible is the primary means by which we come to know Jesus. Testimony from

other people and supernatural experiences may play a part but the definitive communication is the Word of God.

Grace generates faith which is the second step. Faith is intangible and seemingly insubstantial, yet it is the means of accessing God. Faith accepts God's revelation of Himself. It is that faculty of the mind that trusts God. While faith includes intellectual assent, it is not limited to this. It involves the total commitment of our lives to God.

Faith works itself out in action and obedience, which together constitute the third step. Faith without deeds is not faith. Without obedience, faith is spurious. Faith and works are part of a feedback mechanism. Obedience with accompanying actions enhances faith. The continuous interaction of faith and obedience, functioning under the over arching phenomenon of the grace of God, results in an ever-increasing and certain knowledge of God.

We may refer to this as the experimental knowledge of God. It is by doing that we know. It is by experiencing God by faith that faith itself is validated and increases. Faith adds to faith in an ever-tightening spiral, leading to an ever increasing experimental knowledge of God.

Question: Do you find your spiritual life stagnating? Examine yourself in the light of James 2:14-25

RE

SEPTEMBER 23

Knowing, growing, showing and going

*“Keep in step with the Spirit
Galatians 5:25*

act of loving service and the encourage us still.

Jesus said that knowing Him and His Father is to have eternal life. (John 17: 3) Those with this life are like branches of a vine, attached to Him as the main stem. His Spirit then brings daily refreshment, nourishment and spiritual growth.

Yet growing well will eventually mean pruning. God’s pruning shears can be the trials of life, from daily stress to deliberate persecution. Our eventual maturity involves showing growth and fruitfulness, the intended fruits of the Holy Spirit being love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. To grow all these we need to keep in step with the Spirit or, in John’s words, remain firmly attached to the Lord Jesus, our Vine.

Finally we need to get going. Jesus urged His friends to go near and far to reach those who would then believe on Him through their message- fruit of another kind. (John 15: 16, John 17:20). Take one of the Spirit’s fruits for each day, praying to demonstrate it whatever happens - even should this expose your need for a little more pruning...

Further reading: John 15, Galatians 5:16-26

In an Eastern European city a few Christian doctors and friends relaxed around a cafe table with overseas visitors. The local doctors held responsible positions, their integrity often challenged by bribery and corruption. What words of Jesus would strengthen the battle-weary and renew flagging spirits? Thoughts turned to the last evening before our Lord’s death when he had risen from a very different table to wash His friends’ feet. That humble inspiring table talk that followed

JG

SEPTEMBER 24

Let's get the Word out

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect

1 Peter 3:15

the gospel with out looking over his shoulder and hoping the patient will not tell on him, and some places where you need to risk your life to do it. But there are zones where we still have the freedom. A gospel copy or a tract maybe all it takes. The windows of opportunity are shutting fast and doors are closing all around us.

Of course we must do it with permission, love, and with respect for our patients. We need to be sensitive to God's leading and the patient's needs. There are times when a grateful patient refers to me like 'God'. I take this as a definite opportunity. I tell them, "I am not God, but let me introduce to the only One who is".

It can be discouraging at times because we speak to so many and we do not see any obvious result. We may be tempted to say "what's the use?"

But this is because the one who sows is often not the one who reaps and the one who casts the bread upon the waters is not the one who draws it in.

Sometime, another will reap; miles and miles downstream someone will be glad you cared enough to share.

Read: Ecclesiastes 11:1-6

Many years ago a friend of mine happened to be sitting next to a communist leader on a flight. During their conversation the communist man said. 'If I believed what you Christians say you believe I would run around like crazy and tell everyone about it.'

What are we doing about the Good News that we have? We see hundreds of patients a year; more people than an average pastor or evangelist would ever hope to meet. I know some countries where a doctor cannot share

SEPTEMBER 25

Life 'under the sun'

'Meaningless! Meaningless!' says the Teacher. 'Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.' What do people gain from all their labours at which they toil under the sun?

Ecclesiastes 1:2-3

It can be wonderful to practise medicine. To have the privilege of caring for people made in God's image, to help restore broken bodies and minds, to live and speak for Jesus with the needy and vulnerable.

But if we're honest, it's often not like that. There are times when we struggle to get through the day: we've had no sleep, no days off. The work overwhelms us: too many patients in the clinic, conditions too complex for our limited resources. We're bogged down in administration or management targets. Our research project fails. Despite all our efforts, our patient dies. And we're tempted to despair.

Life 'under the sun', life without God, is futile. The writer of Ecclesiastes felt the same way. Everything seems so pointless because everything is so fleeting. Even if we save our patient's life now, they'll die later. If we discover a cure for cancer, people will die of other diseases. The clinic we establish will one day be closed.

Ecclesiastes 3 begins to explore our hope in this meaninglessness. There is a way of living in this world, a way of wisdom, which sees God's hand in the good and beautiful gifts He's given us. Wisdom recognises that God's goal is for people to worship Him. He has set eternity in our hearts.

And we know Christ! He has defeated death, He brings eternal life. The futility we often see in our work is swallowed up in His victory. In Him, our labour is not in vain. So always give yourselves fully to His work. However miserable our job is at the moment, it is an opportunity for you to learn to be more like Jesus as you serve others. It is an opportunity for you to be a witness to others.

Read: Ecclesiastes 2:17-3:14, 1 Corinthians 15:54-58.

GC

SEPTEMBER 26

Living in Harmony

In the warm summer dusk, a group of husbands and wives sat in a circle. We were at a retreat for HIV positive people. We asked these couples to write out any questions, and problems that they had in their marriages. It was time to open the pieces of paper and discuss them. I was mentally getting ready to address some of the intimate issues of living with HIV and being married. Then we heard the questions: “my husband does not have time for me,” “my wife keeps nagging me,” “my wife does not respect me,” “my husband does not listen to what I say...”

Whether we have HIV or not - the challenges of relationships are very basic. We all expect much from each other. We know what pleases us - and want others to treat us that way. And when they don't, well! That may be our spouse, our co-workers, or our church members - but we end up disappointed and hurt.

The Bible has a powerful insight about how to live together in harmony. It reveals God's golden key to strong relationships - whether they be our marriages, our work or church. Paul writes to the Christians in Colossae and commands them to “bear with each other.” “Bearing with each other” means putting up with. There are many things that are not sinful that we do not like about others. We may even see these in our most intimate partner. God asks us to bear with them. We will enjoy much harmony when we put this into practice! How much unnecessary strain we go through because we try to bend the other into our mould - to shape them into what we think is important and right.

But not every action is innocuous. Beside those actions which are different, our partners can do things which are clearly wrong. The Bible calls this sin. The actions may be intentional or unintentional - and often cause us deep hurt when we are at the receiving end of this.

In that case what does the Bible tell us to do? We must forgive. We are to forgive whatever grievance we may have against one another. Forgive and do not take revenge. Forgive in the same way that Jesus forgave us. We had nothing to offer Him - but He loved us and gave us another chance.

The good news is that King Jesus is here to help us put this into practice. He can help us to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:21)- because He has done it so beautifully Himself. What a wonderful opportunity to show His love in action!

AE

SEPTEMBER 27

Loving one another

"A new command I give you, 'Love one another'"

John 13:31

Jesus summarized the Torah when He said that we should love God and neighbor. Later Jesus went further. He adroitly distilled the same law using one three-word sentence, "Love one another". By calling it a new command, Jesus accentuated both its novelty and its vitality. Further, He dignified it by calling it His command. There is one code to live by - the code of love.

It is interesting that in John 13 and 15, He did not reactivate the two-fold summary that He had earlier enunciated. He merely said, "Love one another." Why was this? Surely it is because if we love one another it indicates that we love God. We cannot truly love God if we do not love one another. Also we cannot truly love other people if we do not love God.

Jesus was very practical. Loving God is an internal matter. One can claim to love God, but this is hard to prove since we cannot see God. However, it becomes exceedingly plain for all to see whether we do or do not love others. The love we have for others is verifiable; the love for God is not.

Now it is natural for us to love our family and genuine compassion moves us to love the needy. It is more difficult to love those who we see every day and especially those closest to us in the fellowship of the church.

Jesus recognized this and hence He repeatedly spoke about it, demonstrated it by washing the disciples' feet and pleaded with His Father to ensure that it happens.

If we love those close to us in the church, we are then able to more effectively love those outside the fold. Love spills out and, of course, it proves that we love God.

Exercise: Read John 13-17 and note the command, the model and the prayer regarding love.

AN

SEPTEMBER 28

Martha! Martha!

"Mary has chosen what is better..."

Luke 10:42

One can imagine the scene in that Bethany home two millennia ago. It was a home given to hospitality. On this occasion they were entertaining none other than Jesus of Nazareth, that special preacher and healer who was electrifying the countryside. He was not alone; He was accompanied by a motley crew of Galileans. There was much to do - cooking, cleaning, washing and whatever else was involved in Judean hospitality. And Martha was right on top of it-she had taken control and efficiently ministered to the needs of this eclectic group.

But one thing bothered her. Her younger sister, ignoring the hustle and bustle, sat indolently at the feet of Jesus. So Martha complained. To her surprise, instead of agreeing with her, Jesus chided her-*"Martha! Martha!"* Gently, perhaps with a twinkle in His eye, he opined that while she was concerned about "many things", Mary had chosen "the better part."

Obviously, hospitality does not just happen. It has to be worked on. In saying that Mary had chosen the better part, Jesus does not rule out those other "parts" that occupied Martha. Jesus was not averse to work since He Himself worked hard, sometimes late into the night. So this was not the reason why Jesus chided Martha; rather, He was addressing her choice of priorities.

What we learn from this, is that there are priorities in life. God takes precedence over other things-business, the daily grind and even hospitality. Moreover, life does not consist in ceaseless work. There are rhythms in life which add to its joy. We work and do so with vigor but, as Mary did, we too must take time to sit at Jesus' feet.

In the busy demanding life of a doctor, it is so easy to miss out on spending time with the Lord, learning from Him, listening to Him. He waits and takes pleasure in us as we set aside time for Him.

Meditation: Read Luke 10:38-42.

Are you a Mary or a Martha?

AN

SEPTEMBER 29

“Mary !”
“Rabboni !”

“...weeping may stay for the night, but joy comes in the morning.”

Psalm 30:5

It was the worst day of her life. She had woken before dawn. It was cold and damp and dark as she grimly made her way to Jesus' tomb. On arriving she found the stone rolled away, but to her consternation, there was no body! Thinking the absolute worst - that a gravedigger had ferretted away the body for nefarious purposes, she sobbed uncontrollably.

Mary wept for Jesus. He was dead and his body missing. Mary also wept for herself. Her sorrow was so deep that it became irrational. The tomb was empty - clear evidence of the resurrection; there were angels there - usually a sign of good news. But Mary refused to allow reason and visions to interfere with her grief. She was determined to weep.

Then she heard one word, one powerful word, “Mary”. She recognized the voice of Jesus, her Lord and she cried “Rabboni”. She was the sheep that heard the voice of the Good Shepherd. What reason and angels could not do, Jesus did. Only the voice of Jesus stemmed the tide of her tears.

Living in this vale of tears, it may be that you are weeping now. Logic and supernatural experiences go only so far. The presence and the voice of Jesus alone bring joy and removes sorrow permanently. Jesus rose so that we do not need to weep any more. In the midst of the inevitable storms of life, ignore the thunder and listen for His voice. He and He alone is the One who wipes tears away. Weeping lasts only so long. Joy comes in the morning. Mary's Easter encounter is the guarantee that all tears will be wiped away for those sheep who wait for the voice of the Shepherd.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
'Come unto me and rest;
Lay down thou weary one lay down.
Thy head upon my breast'.

Meditation: Read John 20:1-18 and compare this with John 10:1-12

AN

SEPTEMBER 30

Matters of life and death

“All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be”

Psalm 139:16.

Does a Christian doctor approach this situation any differently than their colleague who is without faith? Even within the church, there seems to be an unhealthy fear of illness and death, particularly that occurring in our children. Among Christians, the situation seems quite simple; the process of death may be frightening and painful, the loneliness and pain of the bereaved must not be minimized, but for the one who died, what could be more glorious than an eternity spent with God?

As Christian doctors, regardless of our specialty, we must be comfortable discussing matters of life and death both in the workplace and in our churches. Do you know where you will spend eternity? Does this hope help you to bring comfort to those who are facing death? ‘But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.’ 1 Peter 3:15

Prayer: *Lord, I pray that today I have opportunity to share the wonderful hope of heaven. I pray that I will not be afraid of difficult questions, and that I may be able to share Your love with somebody who is searching for hope. Please give me wisdom, gentleness and respect as I deal with patients and relatives from many different backgrounds.*

Amen

Further reading: Job 19:23-27, 1 Corinthians 15:12-28, 55-58.

CW

Eric Liddell -“ He also ran fast”



Eric Liddell was born in Tientsin, China to missionary parents. He was not a charismatic personality yet people were drawn to him because of his sincerity. He was known for his quiet confident faith in Jesus Christ. He also ran fast.

As a runner, his presence on the track often meant an extra 5000 spectators beyond the normal crowd. But instead of using his fame as an athlete for personal advantage, it became his platform to serve others.

At the 1924 Paris Summer Olympics, Liddell, known as “The Flying Scotsman”, stunned everyone when he refused to run in the preliminary races scheduled to be run on a Sunday. They were his best events, but he considered the day holy, set apart for God. So when the gun sounded on Sunday for the race on Sunday, July 6, holding on to his convictions, Liddell was preaching in a Paris church.

Many thought he was crazy to put his faith above gold. When he was scheduled to run again on Wednesday, people thought he would not win. But he took the bronze in the 200 meter sprint and quietly made his way through the 400 meter preliminary heats. Shaking hands with the other finalists, he prepared himself for his last race. Liddell finished five meters ahead of the silver medalist, winning the gold and setting the world record of 47.6 seconds.

Eric Liddell stood out not because he won the gold. He made an impact because he let nothing stand in the way of his commitment to Christ”.

After the games, Eric returned to the mission field. In January 1945, he died of a brain tumor in Japan. His last words were, “It’s complete surrender”.

In the movie, “Chariots of fire”, which tells his story he says, “When I run, I feel God’s pleasure”. Whether it was as a runner or as a missionary, his greatest goal was to give God glory.

He died in a Japanese internment camp at Weihsien a few months before the end of the second world war.

Read ‘Pure Gold’ by David McCasland

Drinking from my saucer

I've never made a fortune and it's probably too late now,
But I don't worry about that much 'cause I'm happy anyhow.
And as I go along life's way I'm reaping better than I sow,
I'm drinking from my saucer 'cause my cup has overflowed.
Haven't got a lot of riches and sometimes the going's tough,
But I've got loving ones around me and that makes me rich enough.
I thank God for his blessings and the mercies He's bestowed,
I'm drinking from my saucer 'cause my cup has overflowed.
Oh, remember times when things went wrong my faith wore somewhat thin,
But all at once the dark clouds broke and sun peeped through again.
So Lord, help me not to gripe about the tough rows that I've hoed,
I'm drinking from my saucer cause my cup has overflowed.
If God gives me strength and courage when the way grows steep and rough,
I'll not ask for other blessings 'cause I'm already blessed enough.
And may I never be too busy to help others bear their loads, Then I'll keep
drinking from my saucer 'cause my cup has overflowed.

-Michael Combs

OCTOBER 1

My God, My God, why..... ?

“... when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.”

James 1:6

Peter died recently after four years of progressive loss through motor neurone disease.

“I hate God! Why, why, why?” cried his wife and “What’s the point of praying?” asked my believing friend John who had witnessed the tragedy.

I guess we all reach that point somewhere along the journey.

“We live in a predictable world of cause and effect”, continued John with his scientific background.

“So what difference can praying make?” It took a night of reflection before I was anywhere near being able to respond to the questions.

“Yes, we live in a predictable world of cause and effect; otherwise the process of diagnosis and treatment let alone prognosis would be hopeless; but it is NOT a world of ‘cause and effect in a closed system’. At the everyday level, human decisions affect the outcomes of all sorts of situations. If human decisions can affect the outcomes, how much more the decisions of God - and He chooses to act in response to prayer?”

The Letter of James is a beautifully balanced composition, beginning and ending with a call to believing prayer. He also uses words extremely carefully. “... when you ask, you must believe and not doubt.” (James 1:6) The word for ‘doubt’ could also be rendered ‘analysing’. We are not to analyse too closely how God will answer, but are to trust that He will respond to our requests.

In chapter 5:15 James uses an unusual word for ‘prayer’, expressing a whole-hearted commitment of the whole situation to God - entrusting Him with the outcomes whether through life or death. The word for ‘sick’ is also unusual, expressing particularly the weariness and despair that illness can bring. Believing prayer can turn this around and then who knows what may be the outcome?

Further reading: John 16:23-24.

PP

OCTOBER 2

Negative speech kills hope

“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Moaning seems to be endemic. People love to complain, to almost become competitive as they exchange tales of woe. This might be the junior doctor who always thinks she has had a more taxing on call than their colleagues; or the over-stretched middle-grade who feels they are the only one who must juggle clinical and academic responsibilities with family life. It might be the registrar who feels she was treated unfairly at interview, or the F1 who was alone on the nights shift due to the F2 feeling unwell.

I think most of us have felt this way at times and may have found some temporary comfort in talking things through later. This is not necessarily wrong, but indulging self-pity risks neglect of the great blessings in front of us - an education, a challenging and varied job which brings unique opportunities to demonstrate the love, grace and compassion of Christ daily, a good income, and most secure job prospects and often the opportunity to choose our career, rather than simply accept any source of income for our families.

Negative speech does not bring hope, encouragement or healing, but rather tempts one to focus on challenging circumstances rather than that ‘God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work’ (2 Corinthians 9:8).

We are never promised ease and comfort in this life, but are reassured that ‘I can do all this through Him who gives me strength’ (Philippians 4:13). Today, choose to ‘Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you’ (1 Peter 5:7).

Prayer: *‘May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in Your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer. ‘Psalm 19:14*

Further reading: Isaiah 50:4-8

CW

OCTOBER 3

No excuses

'The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities. His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse'

Romans 1:18-20

human being, godlike, who Grace is available.

Reflection

Is there something I need to own up to? Something I have been suppressing but know deep down offends God? Praise Him that whilst there is no excuse, neither is there condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus! (Romans 8:1)

Further reading: Psalm 32:1-5; 1 John 1:5-10

My patient had been caught in a police sting on an online crime. There was no denying the offense. But he had an unusual medical explanation, which he told me his psychologist had given him: 'My depression made me do it.'

He had written a long letter to his wife, blaming her for not stopping him. 'Couldn't you see I was ill?'

It's doubtful that a psychologist would ever tell a client that he is a victim with no moral responsibility. But, sadly, denial and self-pity is something I recognise in my own heart. And the reductionist view of a person as nothing but unbalanced brain chemistry, or childhood trauma, or genes, can encourage us to suppress what we know deep down.

I asked him how he would like to be treated. As a chemically unbalanced brain? Antidepressants are available. A victim of trauma? Counselling is available. Or a makes real choices, good and bad?

OCTOBER 4

“Not One Is Lost”

“Not one is lost”

John 17:12

One of the most remarkable pieces of holy writ is John 17. We begin to appreciate both the intimacy between Jesus and His Father and the deep love that Jesus had for His disciples.

In verse 12, Jesus avers that not one of the twelve whom the Father had given Him was lost, except for Judas. He speaks of having watched over them. For three years, Jesus walked, ate and conversed with them. He talked publicly and He taught privately, by words, example and action. Now as He was leaving them to return to His Father, He confidently states that none was lost and then prays that they would be protected and sanctified after He left them.

He does not stop with the twelve, though. He prays for “those who through the teaching will come to believe in Me” [v. 20]. That refers to you and me and all His followers. The prayer of the Divine Intercessor spans the centuries, covers the whole world and visits all manner of situations. In His physical life, He was restricted; in His ascended glory He is limitless. The picture of the celestial High Priest praying for us is as beautiful as it is awesome. How can we fail if this is the case?

In Scripture after Scripture, we are assured of God’s care and hence of our eternal blessedness. In Psalm 23, the Good Shepherd guides us into right paths, keeps us safe in the face of death, vindicates us before our enemies and ushers us into God’s eternal home. In Zephaniah, God is pictured as singing over His child; in Isaiah, God is as a tender mother, never forgetting us and in Romans we are “more than conquerors.” Thankyou Jesus!

Meditation: Read John 17 and imagine that Jesus is praying for you.

AN

OCTOBER 5

Of Bullock Carts and Solar Topees

“These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what they had promised. God had something better...”

Hebrews 11:39-40

The Indian landscape is dotted with hospitals and schools established by pioneer missionaries. The consummate bravery, resilient perseverance, self-sacrificing love and undiminished vision in the face of incredible odds resulted in an indelible and lasting witness to Christ.

In a world of instant communication it is hard to believe that letters took six months to reach India from Europe. Airline travel today means breakfast in Toronto, lunch in Frankfurt and a night’s rest in Delhi before pushing further. Such was not the case in the 19th century. The first missionaries traveled for months on the high seas and took slow trains pulled by steam engines. The final leg of the journey proceeded at snail’s pace as bullock carts lumbered along dirt paths into virgin territory.

These pioneers withstood the unbearable heat with innovations such as “punkahs” to circulate the stale hot air. They encountered poisonous snakes and equally poisonous scorpions, not to mention ants, gnats and other creepy crawly creatures. They braved malaria, typhoid and other devastating illnesses. They buried some of their children at a tender age and were separated from others who were sent to schools in the homeland.

And yet they dealt compassionately and skillfully with the indigent, taking care of tropical diseases, surgical conditions, trauma, difficult childbirth and the like.

They did not often see the fruit of their labors. They worked in faith “not seeing their reward”. Their legacy remains, though, with thriving churches, schools and hospitals. Deserts have been turned into gardens.

**“The lives of great men oft remind us
That we should make our lives sublime
And departing leave behind us
Foot-prints in the sands of time.” (Wordsworth)**

Meditation: Read Hebrews 11. Thank God for the “saints who from their labors rest.”

AN

OCTOBER 6

Of Laments and Grumbles

*"For God alone my soul
waits in silence; from Him
comes my salvation"*

Psalms 62:1

Jeremiah like most prophets was a lonely man. A messenger who could not resign from his role, who could not refuse his call. Most of his life was difficult, his cries lamentations.

Job, David, Habakkuk all had their laments. They cried out for a greater understanding of God and could not fathom the seeming contradictions of the character of God. They did not necessarily want to have anything for their own.

Why does a loving God do things the way He does? Does He really care? They seemed to say "Please Lord speak to me and reassure me that You are my God!!"

This kind of lament is very acceptable to God and is a part of maintaining intimacy with Him. This is how David came to understand God in his tumultuous life and God in turn could call him, "a man after my own heart".

These laments were primarily addressed to God as prayer and were not meant to garner support for an anti God movement.

During the exodus, the Israelites gave vent to their feelings in another way - grumbling. They wanted things for themselves and in the way they wanted. They had little concern about a relationship with God. It was also into creating an anti Moses and anti God campaign, so that they could turn back to Egypt.

There is a distinctive difference between lamenting and grumbling. Each has their origin from a different set of attitudes and has radically different consequences.

It is important for us to lament to God in private and let Him know our concerns, so that we know His heart on the matter and where we stand in turn. A lament ends in praise, worship and obedience.

Job's friends never knew he was lamenting for a closer stand with His God. They thought he was grumbling. They had to see that God seeks a beautiful and open relationship with Him where honest questions were acceptable.

Can we learn to make this important distinction?

Reflection: Read Job 13:15 "Though He slay me, yet will I hope in Him, I will surely defend my ways to His face."

VS

OCTOBER 7

Our Daily Bread- Dependence In A Day of Plenty.

“Give us this day our daily bread”.

Matthew 6:11

Most of us have our creature needs amply met. Thus, to ask God for daily bread appears both unnecessary and hypocritical. Our adequate and, even generous pay cheques as well as the social system we inhabit guarantee that we will not starve.

So why pray for daily bread? Are we not merely paying lip service in deference to Christ? Should we delete it from the Lord’s Prayer?

Of course, asking God for daily bread infers more than merely asking God for bread. The request gathers up all our needs as human

beings. We may not lack for food, but there may be other pressing needs such as protection or a job.

Praying in this manner teaches us one of the most fundamental aspects of our relationship to God, viz., our dependence on Him. Despite the bravado that some exhibit, we are but mortal. We may pad our lives with insurance schemes, healthy lifestyles, necessities and even riches, but we are nevertheless weak, frail and fleshly. External calamities and man-made catastrophes can change our lives in a flash.

But even if we are not subject to extenuating circumstances, God’s will is that we are to depend on Him for everything in our lives, big and small. This is how Jesus lived. He said that he did not do anything on His own and that by Himself He could do nothing. If this is the case with the second Person of the Godhead, how much more should it be true of us? In fact, Jesus enjoined us to do the same.

Being our Creator, He knows us and can care for us. Being our Father, He delights in providing for us. We are not meant to be autonomous, but to live our lives under His loving care. We are also not to worry about anything. What a way to Live! What a privilege!

Reference: “A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World” by Paul Miller.

AN

OCTOBER 8

Abba, Father In Heaven.

“.. you have received the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, ‘Abba, Father’ heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ..”

Romans 8:15-17

for Jesus to address God as *Abba*. We humans, though, are all too conscious of the difference between us and deity. In light of this, Christ’s gracious invitation to us to address God as *Abba* is, indeed, remarkable. It indicates that we can have a similar, though far from identical, relationship to God.

One of the wonderful aspects of our multifaceted salvation is the fact of adoption. Paul accentuates this when he says that by the Spirit of God we call God, ‘*Abba, Father*’, and further, when he asserts that we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. Frail mortals though we are, we can address our Creator as “Father”.

While we rightly savor this fact, we dare not rush into His presence. Our enthusiasm must be tempered by the reminder that our *Abba* is the “heavenly” Father. This introduces us to another dimension of *Abba* - His awesome holiness, infinite majesty, absolute sovereignty and altogether Otherness. We must therefore learn to combine our delight and confidence with awe, reverence and worship.

Going to prayer is going home to the heavenly Father. We are welcomed into the intimacy of the divine family where Father, Son and Holy Spirit live in unity and harmony. The bliss of this relationship can hardly be imagined, let alone be described. We should hold fast to this truth and it will bring the peace and joy of the blessed holy Trinity into our hearts.

Question: Do you know God as Father? If not, what seems to hinder this?

The rote repetition of the Lord’s Prayer obscures the radical nature of the opening phrase. What Jesus said was unprecedented. The Israelites never addressed God as “Father”. They held Him in fear. They were careful not to call Him by His Name and used elaborate appellations when praying to Him.

The word “*Abba*”, transliterated from Aramaic, was one of the first words uttered by a child learning to speak. It was natural

for Jesus to address God as *Abba*. We humans, though, are all too conscious of the difference between us and deity. In light of this, Christ’s gracious invitation to us to address God as *Abba* is, indeed, remarkable. It indicates that we can have a similar, though far from identical, relationship to God.

AN

OCTOBER 9

Partnership in Mission

“.. Give encouragement to each other, and keep strengthening one another...”

1 Thessalonians 5:11

It is possible to engage in mission with an unhealthy attitude and for the wrong reasons. Our colleagues in resource poor parts of the world, while grateful for genuine mission outreach are, nevertheless, apprehensive of certain features and iterations of the endeavor. “Mission tourists” who arrive with digital cameras, travel through the countryside and snap away at will are the most disappointing. They admittedly do some good, but soon return to the affluence of their homes and share power point presentations of their trip over coffee and dessert. The story ends there.

Then there are those whose main contribution is material, either by way of money or equipment. This is, indeed, welcome, but the danger is that the largesse may be distributed imprudently. The faithful gifts of tithing Christians may thus be wasted on sycophants and charlatans. Further, a culture of dependency may result, even among good people.

Many mission trips do help a significant number of the suffering. Equipped with skills, knowledge, medicines and machines, complex procedures are performed, major operations undertaken thus helping many who would otherwise have continued in their suffering.

While not seeking to minimize the merit of such acts of mercy, they may fail in one particular area. For reasons of efficiency, the visiting contingent might work all by themselves without interacting with the local hospital. Training the local team would add to the value of the enterprise.

Mission is God’s idea. We go out in obedience to Christ’s command. Functioning within the framework of the body of Christ, this venture should be a partnership of equals and not done in such a way as to foster dependency or satisfy prying curiosity. The mission team should provide training, advice, and, perhaps, resources. Thus local partners retain their dignity and sycophancy, corruption and disappointment are avoided. The mission is achieved to everyone’s satisfaction and God is honored.

Exercise: Reflect on your efforts in mission. What would have made the experience more worthwhile?

OCTOBER 10

Patient endurance

*“.. you have need of
endurance...”*

Hebrews 10:36

whilst our patients get plenty of experience in the British Health Service of having to wait patiently, as medics we are not particularly good at it. We love to do things and generally feel frustrated, angry or both when we can do nothing to help a patient with their problem. After all, we have spent years of training to learn how to ‘fix’ things - this is what we do. There are times however when we simply have to accept an insoluble problem and find the Lord’s presence in it rather than in His deliverance from it.

‘Life is not a wish-granting factory’, is one of my favourite aphorisms currently. I picked it up from John Green’s powerful novel, *The Fault in our Stars*, which tracks the romance of two teenagers who meet at a cancer support group. It hardly needs a ‘spoiler alert’ warning to say things don’t end well.

The Christian life doesn’t necessarily end well either, despite the many promises in Scripture of blessing and prosperity for those who seek God. In fact at any point from the very start, our heart’s desire even for what is true, honourable and right may remain unfulfilled for a long time and sometimes a lifetime.

This is why the Bible is full of encouragements to endure patiently. Recently in an intractable situation (which at the time of writing, remains fundamentally unchanged after over forty years), these five words, ‘You have need of endurance...’ hit me like a truck. This was not a solution let alone a panacea for my problem but it was a command nevertheless and one with a purpose - to enable us to fulfil the will of God and then to receive God’s promise - but perhaps not until eternity. Those five words may be all God says in your situation today too - but they are enough.

What if the issue you feel God is not answering your prayers about never changes? Is He any less the “Faithful One”? If so how can you experience His faithfulness more fully in the pain?

Further reading: Hebrews 10:35-39, Psalm 13, Habakkuk 3:16-19

TS

OCTOBER 11

Power of Touch

Jesus reached out His hand and touched the man....

Mathew8:3

power of touch.

She usually, from where she was sitting would move her hands around, as though looking for another hand to hold. To hold and “feel the presence”. She would quieten down if such a hand was nearby. I often wondered if there was a way to probe into the emotions of a cognitively challenged person....

The other time she would look for a hand was, when she wanted to pull herself up and try moving out of her restrained wheel chair. Touch and a hold, which gave purpose to a seemingly purposeless mind....

At times, when she was on her feet, rare as it was, she would not take a step ahead, unless there was a hand to protect. At times this touch also became a restraining touch!

If touch is so powerful, why did I wait till she is 84 and I am 54 to offer this to her, and, why is it that this powerful tool is so sparingly used?

Is not this picture of the “power of touch” also an external manifestation of an internal truth? The touch of the Spirit on our soul, which we cannot see, but through the eyes of faith! The soothing Presence of the Holy Spirit, strength for the inner man, though the external man wastes away, and a protection till our soul is received into our eternal home.

I need to learn - to use this tool more often, and to see through faith, the invisible eternal touch in the midst of the visible temporal tools I use....

Prayer: Help me Lord to reach out to others the way you want me to. Thank you for the Holy Spirit who comes alongside me in His gentle, calming way.

SMT

OCTOBER 12

Prayer is more than petition

*“Hallowed be Your name,
Your kingdom come, Your
will be done.. .give us...”*

Matthew 6:9

In the popular mind, prayer equals petition. We go to God with a list of our needs. We treat God like the genie in Aladdin’s lamp. While God does, indeed, wish us to ask Him for our needs, prayer is much more than petition.

Ingrained selfishness and the acquisitive culture we grow up in, seduce us to think that life mainly includes growing rich, being physically fit and successful. Furthermore, the cult of greed is spiritualized by the “health wealth gospel” so ardently promoted on television and elsewhere.

The primary purpose of our lives ought to be to seek God’s glory. In the Lord’s Prayer, we begin by seeking God’s glory, His kingdom and His will. It is in this context that we petition God for our needs. Petition is not a disparate activity but functions within the total spectrum of all that constitutes genuine prayer. As we seek to promote His glory, we discover that we need the means by which to see His kingdom established. This includes material needs; hence “give us this day our daily bread.” Sin hinders God’s purposes so we ask for forgiveness. Since forgiveness is a characteristic of the divine family into which we have been adopted, we freely forgive those who hurt us. We need moral fiber to vanquish evil and so, “deliver us from evil”.

These petitions are not an end in themselves. We do not ask for bread in order to get rich, for unilateral forgiveness just to feel good inside and for victory over evil in order to obtain power. We are granted the physical means, a clean conscience and victory over evil in order that God’s mission is accomplished. We become partners with God in bringing Him glory.

Meditation: Are the first three petitions of the Lord’s Prayer, priorities in your life?

AN

OCTOBER 13

Praying for God's light

"You are the light of the world."

Matthew 5:14

pray for the light of Jesus to transform.

Scripture frequently uses the metaphor of light shining in darkness to demonstrate the impact of the life of Jesus. Isaiah tells of the people walking in darkness who have seen a great light (Isaiah 9:2). John tells us that if we follow that light, we will never walk in darkness, but instead we will have the light of life (John 8:12).

But what is our response to seeing and receiving this light - the light of Christ - to be? In Scripture Isaiah guides our response: Arise, and shine, for your light has come (Isaiah 60:1). We are to get up and let the light that has come into our lives shine - in our workplace, in our home, and in our community. As Matthew (5:14) says, we are the light of the world, and we are to let our light shine before others, so that they in turn will give glory to our heavenly Father.

For reflection: Jesus said 'I am the light of the world' (John 8:12). Spend a few moments reflecting on how the light of Jesus has changed your life, and give thanks.

Further reading: John 12:35-36. Isaiah 9:2-7.

RK

OCTOBER 14

Praying in faith

“Ask and you will receive.”

Matthew 7:7

I had just finished my training and was posted to a rural health center with no means of transportation except for the crowded, beaten up buses which ran irregularly. All I could afford was my trusty bicycle which was good for short trips but little else.

Being rather timid, I did not petition my boss but I did pray about it. One day while in the Director’s office, he informed me that a scooter had been assigned to me to travel into the villages. He also indicated that personal use was okay if I paid for the petrol. I was glad but then forgot about it. Weeks later, on another visit to his office, he asked me why I had not picked up the vehicle. I walked over to the garage and took possession of a functional, slightly used Lambretta.

The lesson I learned is that God is interested even in small things. Moreover, He never calls us to do something without providing the means for it. And God does answer prayer, even perfunctory ones. He took my request seriously while I took it lightly. I prayed, but because of a rather severe view of God, did not quite believe.

A couple of years later I found myself in a similar situation. Since I had moved into town, this was no great hardship but God thought otherwise. Out of the blue, my friend offered me the use of his motor cycle since He was not using it. Soon, I was riding around on a slate black Java bike with my wife sitting side-saddle behind me and our infant son jammed in between. God met our basic needs and more. He even took special care of us as we weaved through chaotic Indian traffic in a patently unsafe manner.

Thought for the Day: “What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.

AN

OCTOBER 15

Prescriptions for good health

“The prayer of faith will save the sick,”

James 5:15

his thinking. (Strange to cite Job (v. 11) if that had been the case). In this verse James uses the unusual word ‘kamnonta’ only used elsewhere in Hebrews 12:3 and carrying the sense of ‘weary, discouraged or sick from overwork’.

Paraphrase of verses 13-16 could run like this:

“If you are in trouble, first of all pray yourself; if God gives you joy in your sorrows express it in song. If your trouble is a matter of sickness (aesthenei - the common word for sickness or weakness) share it with the leaders of your church fellowship; invite them to pray with you, looking to the Lord for His help. If your sickness comes from overwork or discouragement {kamnonta - v. 15) or is connected with your lifestyle, the advice of your leaders and their support through prayer and good faith will save you from yourself. The Lord will lift you up and you will be healed. Beyond all of this, God works in mysterious ways, as He did in the days of Job (verse 11) and of Elijah (see verses 17 and 18)-amanjustlikeus.”

Perhaps this is a word for each one of us in the pressures of professional life, as much as it is a word for our patients. This passage and the words James 1: 5-6 form the outer brackets of James’ instruction in practical wisdom that finds its clearest expression in James 3: 17-18 - truly a prescription for healthy living.

Further reading: James 3:17-18, James 5:7-19

.....but will it? How often have we struggled with the

complexities of sickness and healing, of prayer and faith and with the interactions between the physical and the spiritual?

James is extremely careful in his choice of words and there is nothing in the context to suggest that miraculous divine intervention is in the forefront of

OCTOBER 16

Proclamation, Good Works And The Inner Life.

*“Love the Lord your God...
and....love your neighbor”*

Matthew 22:37-39.

What, if any is the relationship between evangelism, good works and the inner life? To begin with, we must state that the central tenet of our faith is that Jesus came to save us from our sins and reconcile us to God. The church is then expected to witness to this fact. Hence evangelism is of the first importance. “For what shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his own soul?” We dare not lose sight of this.

We are also called to active good works and to serve in various capacities within the community of believers. All of this takes time and no one person is able to do everything. There are some gifted souls who can work in a number of areas and succeed in all of them. Others are less versatile and concentrate on one or other aspect of Christian service. The “body” is constituted in such a way that each of us has specific tasks that contribute to and thus complete the whole. The call of God should be seen both from an individual and a corporate perspective.

Thus, while evangelism is paramount, caring for the needs of others cannot be neglected. In addition, we are called to live good lives, indeed, holy lives. Holiness and good works give credibility to evangelism. Proclamation without caring for the crying needs of our neighbors is callous. It is contrary to love- and love is the driving force for evangelism. Also, the gospel which by its very nature entails lifestyle changes cannot co-exist with a worldly lifestyle. That would be hypocritical and ineffective.

The three emphases must go together. This, in totality, is our mission.

Question: How do you contribute to the mission of God using your particular gifts?

AN

OCTOBER 17

Pruning In Order To Bear Fruit

“..Every branch in Me that does bearfruit, He prunes so that it will be even more-fruitful.”

John 15:2

Jesus exemplified this in His own life. While Satan and humans colluded to make Jesus suffer and die, ultimately nothing could happen if it were not God's will. The pruning knife was wielded by the divine Gardener and Jesus submitted willingly, to the point of death. But His sacrifice bore much fruit as countless sinners were saved.

We are called to share in Christ's sufferings. The Gardener applies the pruning knife to us as well. This may come in the form of illness, disappointment with people, hassles at work, misunderstanding or loss of some kind. Let us not balk at this but accept it as from the tender Gardener who cares for our souls and wants us to succeed, i.e. to produce much fruit.

Remember too that the branch is never closer to the gardener than when he applies the knife to it. We are more prone to yearn for God and His solace when we face difficulties and suffering.

Finally, the pain that we bear here is not for ever. He who created us knows our limits. Indeed “sorrow may endure for a season but joy comes in the morning”. The ultimate reward is heaven where there is no more pain, sorrow or tears and where we will enjoy the fruit of our labors.

Meditation: Read John 15, noticing particularly the confidence of Jesus. How has pruning affected you?

Jesus' teaching about bearing fruit has a confident, positive tone to it. Fruit will be produced. God, the Gardener, will see to it. All we need to do is to abide in Jesus.

However, there is a caveat. In order to bear more fruit, the gardener has to prune the branches. This is painful. Though we chafe at this, there is no other way. “Whom the Lord loves, He disciplines.”

Jesus exemplified this in His own life. While Satan and humans colluded to make Jesus suffer

OCTOBER 18

Empty handed before God

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

(Matthew 5:3)

So who are these blessed, happy people? They are not who we might expect. They aren't 'those who behave well' or 'those who've done lots of good things.' They are those who are poor in spirit.

What does that mean? It means they know they have nothing to offer God that can earn his love. They come to him with empty hands, ready and eager to accept the free gift of his love. It's all about grace.

I have a good friend who is a pastor. He has taught, encouraged and cared for many people over many years. But in carrying others' burdens for so long, he burnt out. He has a drink problem and has been asked to step down as pastor. As his friend, I feel the pain of his shame and disgrace. But though my current failings may be less visible than his, I stand in exactly the same place before God: we are all sinful, broken people, 'poor in spirit.' The very people who will inhabit God's kingdom.

Jesus' words are both an encouragement and a warning. They are an incredible, wonderful promise for those who know they are broken and empty. But they are a warning to those who are self-satisfied, who feel they can manage fine without God. The kingdom of heaven will not be theirs. If our hands are full of ourselves, there is no room to receive God. Let's come to him with empty hands, ready to be filled with his grace.

Further reading: Matthew 5:1-12, Luke 18:9-14

VL

OCTOBER 19

Radical heart surgery

'And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.'

Matthew 5:30

However, the preceding verses are like a pathology report telling us that amputation will not achieve cure. The disease is metastatic, and has disseminated from our innermost thoughts. We would need to excise right back to the heart, and then what?

But Jesus is not addressing the pre-op ward, but outpatients. He is addressing those who have realised that self-surgery is futile and thankfully unnecessary. He is addressing the cured, those who consented to radical heart surgery (Ezekiel 36:26). They are renewed from the inside out, new creations, and now want to make the most of the new lease of life given to them. They want to live whole heartedly for the Great Physician.

I remember looking after a celebrity following a liver transplant; the jaundice faded, his strength rose and he looked like a new man. But within months he relapsed, and he poisoned his fragile new liver with alcohol. What a tragic and terrible waste!

Reflection: What might we be called to turn away from in order to follow Jesus?

Further reading: Colossians 3:1 -17; Romans 6:11 -14

AB

OCTOBER 20

Radical or Orthodox ?

*“Take My yoke upon you
and learn of Me...”*

Matthew 11:29

Teenagers, as part of growing up, are prone to defy convention. The phrase, “angry young men”, and its counter part among women, expresses a tendency among the young to question tradition. Some proclivities depend on our temperament, upbringing and culture and some folks are naturally more conservative than others.

But Christianity, both in theory and practice, transcends categories such as liberal and conservative. Thus it is disingenuous for ideological movements to cite Jesus as their example, mentor or figurehead. In some ways Jesus was a radical. He challenged the official understanding regarding Sabbath, had a bias toward the poor and moved along the fringes of polite society. On the other hand, He was orthodox on some issues. He frowned on sexual permissiveness, forbade divorce, taught submission to legitimate authority and attended synagogue services faithfully. He confronted both right-wing Pharisees and leftist Sadducees.

For the Christian then, the question is not where one’s political choices lie. The radical-orthodox divide is an artificial one. Unless a movement is patently sinful or harmful, it matters little on which side of the ideological divide one is found. What does matter is, for us to be Christ-like. Peter said we ought to be like Jesus in this world. Jesus Himself calls us to follow Him exclusively and decisively. We need therefore to study His life, abide in Him, listen to the Spirit and do as He would do and act as He instructs us to. This was Jesus’ own secret. He always obeyed His Father.

Jesus is our model. As doctors, part of a medical team we are the aroma of Christ. And people notice, much more than we realize.

Question: Are your views regarding life in the public sphere guided by Jesus’ example and teaching?

AN

OCTOBER 21

Reaction or response?

Be kind and compassionate to one another...

Ephesians 4:32

‘You don’t know how I feel, doctor.’ The distraught father banged on the desk as he spoke, creating sudden tension in the consulting room.

It had been a long morning and it would have been easy to react irritably. Yet beside him was the child about whose well-being he had such strong feelings, her needs lying at the root of the outburst. With an SOS prayer to stay calm the doctor leaned back, trusting that inner palpitations would subside, and said, “I get the feeling that you are very upset”.

This response earthed the tension and out came all the grievances about the man’s frustrated attempts to get help for his little girl’s obvious need for special education. There could be no instant fix but he no longer felt dismissed without a proper hearing.

We are all like radio stations, receiving and transmitting. When others broadcast anger, frustration or blame we can either react in kind, so increasing the volume, or switch off. It would be better to change frequencies, tuning in to the Holy Spirit and responding with His love. The recurrent prayer of any who live or work under constant tension will be for the Spirit to transmit through them His peace, longsuffering and self-control. Each stressful circumstance provides opportunity to produce these fruits, any praise being relayed back with gratitude to God.

Many emergency prayers are recorded in the Bible. Kings prayed before battle, Nehemiah sought help for more than one difficult interview and desperate prayers were often made directly to the Great Physician. He always responded graciously- and He still will, even to a simple cry of ‘Help!’

Further reading: 2 Chronicles 14:11-13, Luke 20: 35-42, and Nehemiah.

JG

OCTOBER 22

Reading, meditation and more

Jesus replied, 'You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God'

Matthew 22:29

and erring Christians.

For starters, we need to simply read the Bible. It is remarkable that the mere perusal of the pages and words of a book can introduce us to the thoughts of Deity. While a working knowledge of the entire Bible is obviously beneficial, there are parts that deserve more careful scrutiny.

Reading should be supplemented by meditation. Popular opinion associates meditation with a blank mind - one that is open to whatever comes into it. This is both a vacuous and dangerous notion. Christian meditation should be based on the Word of God. Thus, the mind is not bypassed but actively engaged. Moreover there is content to the meditation, the content being nothing other than the very words of God.. It involves mulling over a verse, verses or passage. Meditation accompanied by prayer brings us into a living relationship with God Himself. Memorization accompanied by prayer brings us into a living relationship with God Himself. Memorization is a further aid as it "hides" the Word in our heart making it our very own. This gives us more fuel for meditation and therefore, a closer walk with God.

Reading, meditation, prayer and memorization provide for thoughtful, prayerful and prolonged consideration of God's Word.

Suggestions: Read five Psalms and one chapter of Proverbs every day to go through both books in a month. To read the whole Bible in a year consult McCheyne's Bible reading plan:

www.bibleplan.org/mccheyne

We have access to an immense treasure trove of wisdom and knowledge in the Bible. The mind and will of God are available through the printed page and now, in digital and audio versions. Moreover, a plethora of translations, bridging the spectrum from the stately King James Version to user-friendly paraphrases, is readily available. Nevertheless, one of the greatest deficiencies of modern Christianity is Biblical illiteracy. As a result, there are many stunted

AN

OCTOBER 23

Really knowing your patients

“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.”

Matthew 10:29-30

been important to her.

God’s knowledge, of course, surpasses ours. When Jesus talks of sparrows, He is teaching His followers how much they are worth to God, and how well God knows them. John describes Jesus making use of His detailed knowledge when talking with the woman at the well (John 4:18).

Making the effort to find out a little, and using it, makes a big difference. A few months before, I spoke with the daughter of another patient who had died. She told me how grateful and comforted she was when I’d told her that staff at our practice (where her mother had worked many years ago) had remembered her mum and her work. A little knowledge of a patient had made a big difference to someone’s experience.

Why not plan today that you will make time to pause briefly with one or two patients and find out a little more about them? Pray that God might show you how to use this information to comfort them, and show them something of Him.

Further reading: Psalm 13 9:1 -18.

How well do you really know your patients? I recently met the family of a patient who had just died. Having been in her nineties and in a nursing home for some years, her death wasn’t a shock. Like many dementia sufferers, she rarely spoke, and hence I had known little about her. Her family told me about her nursing career, her youthful energy and love of walking, and about her wartime service in the Red Cross. I’d been caring for this fascinating woman for some years, but to my shame had known nothing of what had

AN

OCTOBER 24

The Lord is my Shepherd.... Psalm 23:1

My first assignment, soon after my medical studies, was to work in a leprosy hospital in the Himalayan region. It involved extensive walking on the high mountains. On one occasion we had to undertake a particularly difficult trek to a village which was on a height of 10,000 ft.

above sea level. After two days, on reaching the village we were told that the menfolk were high up in the mountains tending their sheep. Next day, we climbed to 15,000 feet. Men and sheep lived together in caves for six months of the year when it was too warm for the sheep at lower levels. We had to stay in the same cave with the shepherds, sheep, shepherd dogs, the stench and smoke. The shepherds spend half their lives with the sheep away from their own families. It looked as though they just lived for the sheep, were totally committed to them.

Psalm 23 begins with the statement, 'The Lord is my Shepherd...' David responds to God, who unconditionally commits himself to people. The Lord's commitment is shown in the rest of the psalm: 'He makes me lie down', 'He leads me', 'He restores', 'He guides', 'You are with me', 'Your..comfort', 'Youprepare', 'You anoint', 'will dwell in the house of the Lord'.

We never need doubt His commitment or His love for us. This is something that He has unilaterally committed Himself to. It is not dependent on our faithfulness or love or character, nor anything else that we can bring to him.

Only when we are secure in the truth of the unchanging commitment of God can we go out with confidence and courage to face the world.

Shepherd of my soul, I give you full control

Wherever You may lead, I will follow

I have made a choice to listen to Your voice

Wherever You may lead, I will go

Read: John 10:1-18

VP

OCTOBER 25

Resting in the Lord

“It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for He gives to His beloved sleep.”

Psalm 127:2

At the beginning of the spring term of my second year at medical school, we all had our heads down revising. I had established whilst cramming in the Easter holiday that the nemesis of 2nd MB for me was most likely to be the negatively marked pharmacology paper. However hard I tried, the threshold of 50% seemed an unlikely goal to attain. I also worked hard at anatomy to avoid the ignominy of the pass/fail viva I had achieved in my first year exams.

I distinctly remember those few weeks at university where I lost the most sleep over any exams. I would study until after 11pm and would still be trying to sleep at midnight. Often I would wake around 4am. I eventually made a deliberate choice to stop worrying, heeding Jesus who said, “Which of you can add a day to your life by worrying?” (Matthew 7:30)

In fact, I went to the extreme of committing my calling to God. “Lord, if you want me to be successful in medicine, I trust that my hard study will get me through this pharmacology exam!” I slept better, and my father’s wise advice, of better to be rested than prepared, whispered encouragement in my ears.

Results day dawned and with trepidation we milled around the medical school foyer until the results were posted. I passed the pharmacology, physiology, biochemistry and immunology. However, I had to present for an anatomy viva once more. The undergraduate dean assured me it would be fine - and here I am to tell the tale.

For many doctors, as well as our patients, good sleep can be hard to come by, even when we are off duty. I pray over my daughter every night Psalm 4:8, “In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.” Make this simple request your own.

Further reading: Matthew 11:25-30, Philippians 4:6-7.

JW

OCTOBER 26

Sabbath-Luxury Or Necessity?

“Remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy..... it is a Sabbath to the Lord our God. On it you shall not do any work.”

Exodus 20:8-11

told him he must rest on the Sabbath. Work is important and necessary, but it is to be punctuated by periods of rest.

The Pharisees, though scrupulous in their observance of Sabbath, missed the point. They prescribed such minutiae such as how much a person could walk on the Sabbath. Jesus’ incisive indictment was that they acted as if man was created to serve the Sabbath and not the other way around. God instituted Sabbath for our benefit and this liberates us from Pharisaic legalism. Rest is just that - and it implies a certain degree of freedom. Sabbath could mean taking a walk, enjoying a meal with friends, or reading a good book. If we are required to work on a Sunday we should choose another day to rest.

Above all, on the Sabbath, we remember God. We worship Him. Worship is not a chore because true worship brings rest. Worship orients our life so that it is centered on God. It brings the remainder of life into perspective. As we practice regular Sabbath keeping, rest becomes a part of our lives. We internalize Sabbath. We take Sabbath with us so that our work is no longer drudgery. The peace of God becomes a part of who we are as we enjoy His uninterrupted companionship. This is the true meaning of Sabbath.

Thought: Reflect on your experience of Sabbath. Do you enjoy it?

To many of us, Sabbath keeping seems a luxury. Professional demands, family responsibilities and other legitimate pre-occupations keep us busy much of the time. However, the hallowing of the Sabbath, being a command of God, is not an option.

Sabbath is God’s idea. The rhythm of work and rest began when God created the world and then rested. He created man and gave him work to do, but then

OCTOBER 27

The Sacrifice Of Praise

“Through [Christ] let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God...”

Hebrews 13:15

The concept of sacrifice is developed and embraced by the Old Testament. Our holy God could not tolerate sin and therefore man, the sinner, could not enter His presence. Sacrifice was the means of access and thus became an integral part of worship.

Things changed with the coming of Jesus and His death on the cross. Christ offered Himself up once for all as an eternal and sufficient sacrifice negating the need for animal sacrifices. This is the act that we celebrate when we partake of the Lord’s Supper. We enjoy free and bold access into the very Holy of Holies because of Christ’s death. We ourselves, and our expression of praise, are accepted because of His sacrifice.

There are times in our lives when we do not feel like worshipping. Sickness, depression and external trials bring us down and tempt us to retreat into sullen silence. However, as we come to appreciate that the “tribulations” are only temporary and that God in His grace has promised us over arching victory and everlasting joy, we can approach God in faith and pour out our hearts to Him. The gracious Holy Spirit nudges us and we are able, sometimes willingly, sometimes tearfully, to offer the sacrifice of praise.

As we struggle though our sojourn here on earth, praise is difficult at times, but it is our “bounden duty and service” and therefore is undertaken as a discipline in simple obedience to God.

Response: Have you had periods when you did not want to pray, let alone praise God? Try the discipline involved in the “sacrifice” of praise.

AN

OCTOBER 28

Sadhu Sunder Singh and Body Warmth.

“Love your neighbor as yourself”.

Luke 10:27

As a young man, Sunder Singh could find no peace in himself and contemplated suicide. However, in a dramatic vision he encountered Jesus Christ. He then went throughout the subcontinent preaching the gospel. He wore the saffron robe of a sadhu [Indian holy man] and walked bare foot earning the title, “apostle of the bleeding feet.”

On one of his frequent forays into Tibet, a land that he loved, he and a fellow-traveler came across a man who was obviously unwell, lying on the side of the road and shivering in the cold. Sunder’s companion moved on, concerned about the harsh conditions they were in and understandably feeling that stopping to help might jeopardize his own life. Sunder, on the other hand, picked up the ailing destitute and carried him on his back, trudging along at a slower pace.

A while later, he found his erstwhile traveling companion lying motionless in the snow. He was dead.

Sunder and the man on his back had both survived the bitter cold because of the body heat that passed from one to the other.

This is a dramatic tale with at least three lessons. First of all, it is a stark attestation of the Biblical adage that the one who seeks to save his own life may actually lose it. Secondly, it is an example of loving one’s neighbor even at a personal cost to oneself. This principle was most graphically and poignantly fleshed out by Jesus, as He suffered and died on the cross for us. Thirdly, we never lose when we help someone else. There is only gain.

Meditation: Read the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10: 25-37. How can you apply this principle in your circumstances?

AN

OCTOBER 29

Sandhya - The Time Of The Evening Sacrifice.

*“Let my prayer be counted
as incense before You and
the lifting up of my hands as
the evening sacrifice.”*

Psalm 141:2

Sandhya means “twilight” in Sanskrit. The word has religious symbolism, but also evokes pastoral images - the herdsman bringing his cows home, the housewife cooking the evening meal over a coal fire, children playing in the streets. There is a gentle haze, the light is fading, the toil of the day is over.

Sandhya as devotion has roots in ancient India. It has roots also in the Bible. In Hebrew Temple worship, the evening sacrifice was pleasing to God as prayers like the sweet aroma of incense ascended to the throne of God.

A few years ago I was introduced to Sandhya as a devotional practice. The last time was at an outdoor chapel in the idyllic Himalayan foothills. A pulpit by a placid lake and simple stone benches. There were just five of us and the Lord. We read a psalm. We paused. We read it again. We sat in silence. We meditated. Someone liked a particular verse. Another commented on the psalm. Someone prayed. We sang a chorus. And then we left.

Most of us have grown up with the morning quiet time. This is good. But the evening has become a time for selfish indulgence. We dine. We play. We watch TV, read a novel and go to sleep. While not decrying the need for legitimate leisure, our evenings can be enriched if we use it as a time to remember God. When God came down “in the cool of the evening” to speak with Adam and Eve in the garden, He hallowed the evening hour.

Those who have had the joy of attending Evensong appreciate its beautiful cadences. With Mary we magnify the Lord, with the congregation we confess our sins and with Simeon we rejoice in our salvation. With a prayer to “lighten our darkness” and the benediction, we depart peacefully into the night.

May we reclaim the evenings for God and enjoy His fellowship.

Exercise: Pray through the Evening Prayer in the Book of Common Prayer.

SMT

OCTOBER 30

Seated In Heaven With Christ

“And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ.”

Ephesians 2:6

seated with Him in heaven. Now Paul extends this privilege to all believers.

It is a seat of honor and of power and as such we do not deserve it and dare not aspire to it. It is only available by grace which leads us to faith in Christ. This should remove from us all thoughts of pride and engender not only much gratitude but a deep humility.

The seat is in heaven. For God there are no demarcations spatial, spiritual or otherwise. From His perspective, earth and heaven lose their boundaries. They merge with each other. The cross has broken down the barrier and opened Heaven’s gate to all believers.

What this means in practical terms is that we can view life from a different vantage point. We begin to value things from an eternal perspective. While continuing to live on earth, we live with a set of heavenly values. Human ambition fades as we seek the glory of God. We still eat and work and sleep - but we do it as to God. Our very natures are changed; we are becoming Christ-like in His purity, compassion and devotion. Our clod of earth is suffused with glory and we are not the same

Meditation: How does sitting with Christ in heaven change your daily life?

There are many mountain-tops in Ephesians. One exciting peak vies with the next one in a never-ceasing ascent to glory. One such summit is Ephesians 2: 6. This verse caps the many blessings described in chapter one. Paul makes the incredible, though somewhat obscure, statement that we are “seated with Christ in heavenly places.”

Now we know that Christ is seated with the Father at His right hand. Hebrews 1:3. Jesus told His disciples that they too would be

AN

OCTOBER 31

Servant Leaders

“Jesus...rose from supper. He laid aside His outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it round His waist. Then He poured water into a basin and started washing His disciples’ feet.”

John 13:3-5

The term, “Servant leadership” best describes Jesus’ leadership style. Jesus, supreme head over all things, laid aside His heavenly glory, took on the frailty of human flesh and became a servant. Both by example and instruction, He wants us to follow in His footsteps. In describing His mission, Jesus said that He came “not to be served but to serve.” This is in vivid contrast to conventional views of leadership where power, aggression, assertiveness and ambition are touted as necessary and even indispensable.

Servant Leadership does not come easily for most of us; it has to be learnt. It is acquired in the crucible of humility and mastered in the school of hard knocks. Things have to be beaten out of many of us before we become trusted leaders. The one who leads must know what it is to be led and to serve.

The servant leader does not seek personal advantage and is not vengeful or vindictive. He is not arbitrary in his decisions and is not subject to bouts of anger. He seeks not his own interests, but that of others. He is willing to sacrifice himself for the good of others. He is mature, humble, wise, gentle, judicious and gracious. He himself as under orders, is led by the Holy Spirit and reports to Christ, the servant leader par excellence.

Any other type of leadership falls short of the standard set by Jesus. Kingdom leadership, by definition, is servant leadership.

Brother, let me be your servant.

Let me be as Christ to you.

Pray that I might have the grace

To let you be my servant, too.

Reflection: Read Philippians 2.1-11. Is servant leadership practical?

AN

Florence Nightingale (1813-1873)

‘The Lady with the Lamp.’



Florence Nightingale was born in 1820, the daughter of wealthy English parents, William and Fanny Nightingale, who had inherited a large fortune. Florence, and her sister Parthenope, were tutored in languages, history, and mathematics by their father and in etiquette, society, and manners by their mother. When Florence was twelve years old, she was riding a pony near her family estate in Hampshire, when she came across a shepherd whose dog had broken its leg. The shepherd told

Florence that the dog was going to have to be put down. But Florence would not hear of it. She immediately took charge of the situation, binding the broken leg and tending the dog's wounds until the animal recovered.

At the age of seventeen Florence wrote in her diary, “God spoke to me and called me to His service.” When Florence told her parents that she felt called to serve God by becoming a nurse, and caring for the sick, William and Fanny were mortified. In those days hospitals were squalid establishments, and the nurses who worked in them were as disreputable as the institutions they served. William and Fanny had “far nobler things” in mind for Florence than becoming a “mere nurse”. But Florence would not be dissuaded from pursuing her call to nursing. In 1845 she began visiting hospitals to study how they operated for herself. In 1851 she persuaded her parents to permit her to train as a nurse at the Institute of Protestant Deaconesses in Kaiserwerth, Germany.

And, in 1853, upon her return to England, she accepted a position as Superintendent of the Institution for the Care of Sick Gentlewomen in London. Florence seized the opportunity that appointment provided to turn the Institution for the Care of Sick Gentlewomen into a model hospital of the times putting bells in wards so that patients could call nurses when they needed them, and training the nurses to give quality care when called upon to do so.

Meanwhile, war broke out in the Crimea. News filtered back from the front that the wounded were being treated appallingly. They were often being left to die, on makeshift beds of filthy straw, of dysentery. The Secretary of War, Sydney Herbert, asked

Florence if she would do something about the situation. And, two days later, Florence found herself on the way to the major hospital in Scutari, Turkey, with thirty four of her nurses. Florence was determined to do her utmost to provide the best care that she could. But when she got there, Florence found herself blocked at every turn. On the one hand there were the military bureaucrats who didn't want to lift a finger to help the "interfering women". And, on the other hand, there were the doctors, who didn't want to be upstaged by nurses in "their own hospital".

But Florence was undaunted by these obstructions. She confronted them fearlessly. "The very essence of Truth seemed to emanate from her," wrote an awestruck William Richmond. She had, he said, "a perfect fearlessness in telling it!" Florence broke army regulations that got in the way of getting what she needed for the men in her care. To anyone who had the temerity to try to tell her that something "could not be done", she countered, quickly, "but it is", "it must be done!"

However Florence never demanded any more from others than she demanded of herself. She was "on call" twenty four hours a day. She accompanied her patients into the operating theatre, and, as chloroform had not yet been invented, stayed with them through the operation to soothe their pain. She often spent eight hours a day on her knees, cleaning, tending and binding the wounds of the wounded. Then, before she retired, she would light a lamp, and walk through the wards walk by the four miles of men, in beds, lined up side by side, in the military hospital just to make sure they were as comfortable as they could be for night. Legend has it, that the men used to kiss her shadow as she passed by.

Though emaciated and exhausted, Florence refused to leave Scutari until all the soldiers were evacuated in July 1856. When she returned home the "Lady of the Lamp" was a heroine. But Florence spurned the spot light. She didn't make any public appearances or give any interviews to the press. Instead, for the next sixteen years she invested her time in training nurses and working tirelessly for real health reform.

Over time her own health began to fail, and by 1896, Florence herself became completely bedridden. For her heroic efforts in transforming the nursing profession, in 1907 the bedridden Florence Nightingale became the first woman to be awarded the British Order of Merit. Florence was quoted as saying "I have simply done my Master's work." And, having done so, in 1910 she died.

A quiet heart

When work seems hard and hectic
With voices in discord,
I retire to my hearts shrine
And listen to my Lord
In quiet hills and places,
From noisy crowds apart,
The precious words of Jesus
Yet echo in my heart
When lost in frenzied labor
This world's toil does impart
To discern your still,
small voice. Lord,

-Anonymous

NOVEMBER 1

Serving God by serving others

“If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tight-fisted toward your poor brother. Rather be open-handed and freely lend him whatever he needs”

Deuteronomy 15:7-8

“...a servant: One who is doing the will of another; with the resources of another for the benefit of another” Cosette Conaway

As children of God, we bear an innate “heart of service.” Often we walk through life with a distinct urge and indeed urgency to fulfil what dwells inside our hearts, a hopefulness of touching someone through the Gospel of the Lord. The Gospel is the foundation on which we plant our feet. God is grace and God is good. He has blessed us with a heart for service. The talents and gifts we have, He has equipped us with, in order to fulfil His mission. He has provided adequately and

abundantly for His cherished children.

“After much contemplation on the decision that lay ahead to pursue a career in dentistry, resistance rushed through... those questions of self doubt put forward in the wake of a life-changing decision, Am I worthy or capable? Will I succeed in serving God by serving others through my profession? Am I truly following God’s path and His will for my life?”

God has given us all a purpose, a heart that has a dimension of service to offer to Him. This is the light-filled path that He has placed before us in uplifting His people and bringing us all closer to Him. As doctors in service, the calling that God has placed in us is one of service to others through healing. Healing involves the removal of a mental or physical ailment that inhibits our day- to-day functioning. However, Christ illustrates to us through His gospel that healing encompasses spiritual healing by providing a sense of purpose, empowerment and well being. Through healing we are able to make known the miracles of our Father and allow God the honour of placing His hand in the palm of His people. In His perfection and grace we uplift, restore and open a passage of ever-lasting life through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Reflection: “Father, I have seen You work through others... and I want You to work through me” Romans 12:1-8

ShD

NOVEMBER 2

Share the gospel using words

There is a dangerous phrase that has been wrongly attributed to St Francis of Assisi, “Preach the gospel at all times. Use words if necessary.” Researchers have found no evidence that Francis ever made such a misleading statement.

“...go and make disciples..”

Matthew 28:8

This suggests that to demonstrate the gospel by example is better than to explain it verbally. Such an idea is contrary to Scripture.

Jesus told His disciples, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20).

The proclamation and practice of the gospel cannot be divided. Clearly Christians must live in a way befitting of Christ. However not to pass on the news about Jesus means that others cannot know who He is and what His death has achieved on their behalf. The gospel cannot be preached without words. It is the story about Jesus, the one historical person who was God Himself. St Paul wrote, “How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? . . . ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news’” (Romans 10:14-15).

St Francis himself was a passionate and animated preacher. He often preached five times a day, so great was his concern to get the Christian message out.

Further reading: Daniel 3

NOVEMBER 3

Signposts to persevere

"I am with you always"
Mathew 28:20

uterus which is a very rare complication.

Mrs P came to us with a systolic B.P of 40 mm Hg with altered consciousness to our ER in the middle of the night. It was an appalling sight to see the crying baby in the hands of the relatives with the mother lying unconscious nearby. On examination she was profusely bleeding and had complete uterine inversion of her uterus which is a very rare complication. She was referred from a Primary health center to the district hospital and in turn to our mission hospital. With the worsening critical state of the patient, we started resuscitating her. Blood was to be arranged from a nearby district hospital and we posted the patient for reduction of the uterus under general anaesthesia. She was put on blood pressure supporting medications. Her blood pressure was persistently low and during the reduction the patient developed a cardiac arrest .CPR was started following which the heart rate resumed. Within minutes she had a second cardiac arrest and CPR was given for another five minutes. She was immediately started on two blood pressure supporting medications and shifted to the ICU, and ventilated subsequently. Meanwhile one pint of blood was transfused. Her blood pressure slowly started picking up overnight and by morning she regained consciousness. By two days she had a remarkable recovery and she was discharged on the sixth day.

We were amazed at the recovery made by the patient from such a grave situation in such a resource limited setting. The work of the OT team and the junior doctor was commendable infusing prompt and sincere critical care to the patient. It was joyful to see the young mother feeding her baby with love after all the ordeal she had gone through. We knew God was in control of the situation.

Miracles such as this serve as gentle but powerful signposts to persevere and pursue in the hope given by God and just rest!

Reflection: How can I trust God and take Him at His Word when faced with trying situations in my life and in situations I face at work?

WSD & AS

NOVEMBER 4

Sleeping Through The Revival

“Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things that you do not know.”

Jeremiah 33:3

Sleeping though a revival is like slumbering through a thunderstorm. But I managed to do just that. Many of us had prayed for revival and it came upon us unawares.

It happened several years ago. Our Evangelical Union constituted a fringe group on campus. We were considered somewhat weird. We eschewed “worldly” pursuits like the cinema, spent time in Bible study and prayer. We were counterculture to the counterculture of the sixties.

Looking back, I would have to agree we seemed rather peculiar!

We were, though, by no means bastions of righteousness. We were imperfect, inconsistent, veering toward self-righteousness and hypocrisy as we dealt with our own neuroses, failings and inner turmoil.

Despite these faults, we were gripped by a cause greater than ourselves. It was more than a cause - it concerned the person of Christ and His glory. So we prayed for revival. We prayed often. On a Saturday night we prayed into the wee hours of the morning. We repented, sang, read Scripture and implored God.

And then I graduated and moved on. Learning the trade, busy with round the clock duties, there was little time for self or for spiritual pursuits. One day I happened to be back on the college campus and saw streams of students going to hear a missionary. Streams of students going to chapel to hear a missionary. Many committed their lives to Christ and some responded to the call of missions. The flavor of the campus had changed. It was nothing short of a revival. But I had slept though it all!

God is ever on the move and we may miss Him. He always hears the prayers of His children and graciously answers them.

Challenge: Take God at His Word, join others in praying for your community and see what He will do.

AN

NOVEMBER 5

Spiritual Atmosphere

“Surely the Lord was in this place and I was not aware of it.”

Genesis 28:16

For the most part, our workaday lives are very ordinary, filled with the hustle and bustle of clinics, wards and classrooms. We then go home to rest. We are not normally conscious of the spiritual world around us. But on occasion, we are blessed by a very real sense of the presence of God. The opposite can also happen when we become aware of an oppressive darkness.

Two sleepless nights come to my mind, one in a city in Asia and another in the West. There was a heavy, oppressive atmosphere in both places. I later discovered that both places were known for demonic activity.

More often, though, we are blessed by the presence of God. There are surroundings, often quiet country locales, where a serene sweetness fills the spirit. Silence, has a way of drowning out both the clamor of the city and the noise in our hearts. In the company of saints, we sense the very fragrance of Christ. In some church services, not usually in grandiloquent settings but in intimate gatherings of the faithful, we experience God’s nearness.

If this is God’s world, these special visitations should perhaps happen more frequently. We need to intentionally time in to God. It can occur every day in our quiet times whether at the break of the day or the cool of the evening. Our quiet times, whether at the break of day or the cool of the evening, are occasions for this to happen. We should expect Him in corporate worship since “He inhabits the praises of His people”. Even the workplace is hallowed as we consciously relate to God, stealing moments of quietude, using arrow prayers and pausing between tasks. Thus, rather than being a rare phenomenon, a spiritual atmosphere becomes our constant dwelling place.

Suggestion: A friend told us how he takes two minutes to be quiet, pause and pray before seeing his next patient. It gave time to disconnect prayerfully from the patient before and commit the next patient to the Lord for His wisdom and touch. This is a good habit to cultivate.

AN

NOVEMBER 6

Stigma and shame transformed by grace

'So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself'

Matthew 27:5

My patient was distraught that he would not get his ankle operation before leaving prison. He had been waiting a long time, and on release he would have to join a new waiting list and further delays. I could understand the irritation, but he was disproportionately angry. He became agitated, even threatening, and slammed the door behind him.

The nurse with me was equally bemused. Had we missed something? We checked his medical record, no evidence of mental illness, no grievance for a delayed diagnosis. But conflict is

common in prison, and we did not linger.

Three days later, he hanged himself. What we could not have guessed was the power of shame. He was a sex offender, and could not bear to face the family of his victim on his release. The ankle was the least of his concerns. I'm not sure what I would have said to him if I had known what he had been wrestling with. But I wonder how many of my patients I misdiagnose. Whilst I looked only the ankle, Jesus would have been probing the heart.

Shame, guilt and regret are unlikely to be volunteered in conversation without a great deal of trust. People carrying terrible stigma and shame flocked to Jesus and were transformed by His grace and truth. We need to know we are loved deeply in order to face the darker side of our natures.

Before he died, John Newton said to a visitor, " My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things, that I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Saviour " .

Reflection

What would Jesus see in my heart today? Pray for wisdom to see as God's sees. How can I be a healing presence for those God has sent me carrying guilt and shame?

Further reading: Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:27-31

AB

NOVEMBER 7

Still, small voice

“Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you.”

Isaiah 30:18

Perhaps the reason I recall so vividly those times when I have heard God’s still small voice speak clearly and unmistakably is because I don’t hear it most of the time, especially when life is breezing along quite easily. Is it in a crisis, perhaps albeit subconsciously we become attuned to its wavelength?

I recently got into a dispute with a colleague with whom I have to work closely in my role as a senior lecturer in medical ethics. It was primarily over a matter of principle which I felt I could not give way over without compromising my conscience. Yet at the same time I realised it was of prime importance to maintain a good working relationship with my colleague; there is nothing that disrupts the safety of patients, or the quality of teaching students’ receive, like unresolved tensions and conflict among the staff responsible for delivering it. I felt that my case was watertight but prayed very much that if I was right, the price would not be months or even years of my colleague’s resentment or indeed his hasty resignation. These things do happen.

in spite of my prayers and those of a few friends I had also mentioned this to, as I went into our boss’s room for him to decide on the matter, I thought to myself ‘There is no way that both of us are going to come out of here with our working relationship intact’. The boss ruled in my favour and immediately my colleague launched in with a personal comment. At that very moment, I heard the Lord clearly say to me ‘Tell them about Angela’. Suffice it to say that as I related the relevant story, I saw my colleague’s anger melt away as he realised that I was not attacking him and the issue was not personal but one of principle. How different things might have been if I had not heard the Spirit’s prompting and responded in anger instead?

What changes in your (my?) life do I need to make to become more attuned to hearing the Holy Spirit speaking to you (me)?

Further reading: Isaiah 30:18-22; 1 Sam3:l-10; 1 Kings 19:8-13

TS

NOVEMBER 8

Submission And Fulfilling Our Ambitions

"I am among you as One who serves"

Luke 22:27

Subsequent to the fall, ambition, accompanied as it is by fierce competition, is no longer an innocent pursuit. The harsh game of life has winners and losers. The winners exult and the losers languish or die.

God had given Adam immense freedom and dignity. Man failed in going beyond the simple boundary that God had placed. The limit was reasonable since Adam could do everything except to grasp the position that God alone can occupy.

Jesus came to show us the way back. He demonstrated excellence in every area of human endeavor and brilliantly achieved all He came to do. He championed the cause of the poor. He taught with erudition using turns of phrase that still capture our imaginations. He celebrated and enjoyed life. He was fearless in the face of death. Where Adam failed, the second Adam showed us how to live a full life while still submitting to God the Father's orders.

Some of us fear that if we do not thrust ourselves forward, the cause of Christ will falter, but woe to Christ's mission if it is dependent on fallible, vain humans! Our supreme need as mortals is to obey the Lord of the Universe. This entails occupying the lowest seat at the feast and taking up both the towel of service and the cross of sacrifice. The way of the cross is not a way of loss. Our supreme ambition ought to be to obey God as Jesus did. In this humble pursuit we will find greatness.

Question: What do you see as the relationship between ambition and obedience?

AN

NOVEMBER 9

Taking risks in witness

For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him.

2 Chronicles 16:9

It took me more than 20 years to grasp a basic truth: that Christian witness is not just for the ‘professionals’, but part of every Christian’s DNA. Horrified by my ignorance, the implications personally were clear: it was time to open my mouth for God. Aware also that none of us are positioned by accident, and that as doctors our primary sphere of influence should be the workplace, this meant evangelism in my GP surgery.

Over the past 15 years, I’ve experienced many highs, with those in terrible circumstances (addicts, the anxious, depressed, angry and homeless) being transformed through His love. All good, indeed this stuff gets me up in the morning, but reaching out at work attracts the attention of the enemy of souls, who will do his best to dishearten us. Complaints are a favourite tactic, whether from the patient, more commonly an (absent) supporter or relative, other health professionals or even Christian colleagues who do not share your understanding. Paperwork mounts as we need to defend ourselves and it is tempting to throw in the towel. After all, haven’t we got enough to do?

God is not unaware of our situations. He is continually on the lookout for those who are doing His will, in order that He might supply what they (we) need. Strengthened and comforted, nevertheless we’re still prone to weakness and we may still prefer a quiet life to the risks that witnessing may pose professionally. But before we do, let’s consider again the Great Commission. Jesus assures us that we act expressly within His all-encompassing authority. As professional guidelines tighten, we may feel the climate is against us, but one thing remains true: one day, we’re all called to account. The naysayers and even the medical authorities do not hold the keys to eternal life.

Further reading: 1 Peter 3:15-18

RS

NOVEMBER 10

Tea Bags In Boiling Water

Then I said, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain; yet surely my just reward is with the Lord, and my work with God."

Isaiah 49:4

but more importantly it changes this jug of boiling water itself, to tea! He then concluded, we are not called to be potatoes and eggs but to be like 'tea bags' in society.

Jesus' mandate to the disciples was, "go ye unto all the world and TEACH..." It meant an outward diffusion of values and principles of the Kingdom. Even in the midst of a medical college where the academic learning is inward, students who are disciples are supposed to 'teach' and influence the world around them. Instead we find ourselves changed by outward pressures. We start 'learning' from the world around instead of 'teaching' the world. Every semester exam, there are so many opportunities to cheat. Many succumb to it because everybody is doing it. Like the potato that softens to become mashed or an egg that becomes hard after boiling, our pressures soften or harden us to cope with the situations and we adapt in compromise.

When positioned in challenging situations in healthcare, the pressures can be considerable and people who perceive us as Christian doctors, wait to see "Is the system going to change him or is he, going to change the system?" Our call is to be 'agents of change.' Like tea bags in boiling water. Like Daniel in Babylon, Joseph in Egypt who were tea-bags in boiling water. This is possible when you let God help you.

Father, I believe You when You say that "All things are possible to him who believes" Mark 9:23. With Your help, I will keep at being an agent of change.

JZ

NOVEMBER 11

The Wind of the Spirit

“..I will ask the Father and He will send you a Helper; to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive...”

John 14:16,17

and the like are manifested in us and through us. He is our Counselor, the one who whispers to us, “This is the way walk in it”. He speaks softly into our hearts.

Perhaps the reason for the Spirit’s hiddenness is that His primary function is not for us to get to know Him, but for us to get to know Jesus. He stands back and points to Jesus. His modus operandi involves gentleness -He whispers, He nudges, and He is subtle. He is as the wind. We feel His effects but do not see Him. He is also sensitive and so will withdraw if He is not wanted or grieved.

We ignore Him at our peril. Gentleman or gentle God that He is, He will not push us or drive us. He waits and if He sees a response to His gentle nudging, He blesses us with more knowledge, greater ability and Christ like character.

Spirit of God, descend upon my heart,
Wean it from earth, through all its pulses move
Stoop to my weakness, mighty as Thou art,
And make me love Thee as I ought to love

George Croly

Reflection: Look back on times when you have felt God’s presence or heard Him speak. What were the circumstances and how can you be prepared to hear Him? Study John 14-16.

AN

NOVEMBER 12

The act of praise

“I will extol you my God and King. I will bless Your name forever and ever”

Psalm 145:1.

The very fact that there is a God in heaven is reason enough for His creatures to praise Him. The divine attributes of His sovereignty, omnipotence, omniscience, immortality, infallibility, eternity, supreme wisdom, awesome holiness, infinite love and measureless grace, all define His being and evoke praise.

He is indeed vastly different from, and infinitely greater than, mortal earth bound sinful human beings.

There is a gulf fixed between the Creator and His creation. Hence, the overarching obligation and fitting response is to fall down in worship. Isaiah did this in the Temple when he saw YHWH and, John on the isle of Patmos, before the glorified Christ.

This worship may begin with muted, awed silence, but moves on to vocal praise. It is embedded in our songs, both in the rich hymnody and majestic liturgies of past centuries and in contemporary praise choruses, with their spontaneity and intimacy. It is done in congregational worship and in the private cloisters of our heart. Praise should never be absent from our hearts and should be constantly on our lips.

But praise is more than words and songs. Praise is expressed in action. Nehru, agnostic though he was, struck a chord when he said, unwittingly perhaps, that “work is worship”. The love for God, the worship of God is to be joined with love for neighbor. The two go together. Our daily God given tasks and our loving acts of service towards our neighbor, especially the poor, are a part of the whole. There ought to be a seamless continuity in our lives. Worship without service is empty rhetoric and labor without praise is joyless drudgery. The two together become a fragrant offering, acceptable to God.

O for a heart to praise my God!

A heart from sin set free

A heart that always feels Thy blood,

So freely shed for me

Charles Wesley

Exercise: Take some time in quietness before God to praise Him. Look for opportunities to praise Him by your deeds today.

AN

NOVEMBER 13

The bane of cynicism

“Love ...is not arrogant or rude...rejoices with the truth.... believes all things..”

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

A characteristic feature of our time is cynicism. A cynic believes little and despises much. He scoffs at truth. He does not accept anything at face value. He looks behind the scenes for the hidden motive and the real agenda. He believes he can win any argument and point out the flaw in any statement. He has the appearance of a sage but is short on true wisdom.

This common ailment is more pronounced among the educated, the professional and the affluent. It afflicts a smaller number of those less educated or unsophisticated, though even the poor, knocked about by fate, victimized by others and beaten by “the system”, can fall prey to it.

Cynicism is related to other negative or critical attitudes such as skepticism, pessimism and nihilism. Science embraces a robust form of skepticism that aids the advance of knowledge. Indeed, without healthy enquiry, scholarship and human progress would be hindered. However, casually transposing skepticism into the domain of relationships, values and life is hazardous.

It is hard to keep scientific skepticism and Christian values in separate compartments and the former can easily spill over into our relationship with God and others. We must be wary of this risk. The Christian cannot be cynical. Cynicism does not mix with Christian agape, hope and faith.

It is the very antithesis of what it means to be a Christian. Agape love, according to Paul, believes all things and bears all things.

Jesus was wisdom incarnate. He deftly deflected the barbs and attacks hurled at Him by His enemies and confounded them by His brilliant response. He could also easily discern the motives and intents of people. His keen intelligence did not negate His kindness and compassion. As in everything else we must learn from Him.

Reflection: Is there a dissonance between genuine scientific skepticism and the expression of Christian faith? How can we reconcile the two?

AN

NOVEMBER 14

The call to mission: 'Come East.... go South'

" He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said..... 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few, pray...send forth laborers.'":

Matthew 9:35-38

Surveying the compelling task of mission before us, we cannot escape two opposing yet complementary realities. The first is the magnitude of the needs in the global South and the second is the wealth of resources in the West. Despite improvements in a number of physical indices and palpable gains in the spiritual arena, there is a substantial gap between the two worlds. A partial litany of woes afflicting two thirds of the world include deadly diseases like AIDS and tuberculosis, poor sanitation, water scarcity, illiteracy, human trafficking and child malnutrition.

Enthusiasm for missions is waning in the church. This is regrettable since the West is gifted with a considerable repository of wealth and information. We need to be stewards of the blessings we have

received. We cannot avert our gaze needs stare at us from the television screen and newspapers. Our sisters and brothers made, as they are, in the image of God beckon us. Jesus, our role model commands us and will empower us. James warns us of the danger of turning away from the needy. Compassion for the downtrodden is incumbent on us.

The harvest field, of course, belongs to God and the good news is that God is on the move. Local churches, indigenous missions, national governments and international agencies are all working towards change. But more is needed and the church has a distinctive contribution to make, one that cannot be duplicated by other agencies.

The call today to women and men, young and old, is "come east, go south." Today's Macedonian call is the African call, the call to the Orient, to the desert sands, the silk route and the shantytowns.

Reflection: What experiences have you had in mission? How can you respond to God's call to help the helpless?

AN

NOVEMBER 15

The Christian Mind

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind”

Romans 12:2

Harry Blamires, in his famous book, “The Christian Mind” laments that there is no longer a Christian mind. He avers that the church possesses a vibrant spiritual life but she has stopped thinking in a Christian manner.

This was not always so. In the ancient world, as well as in the Middle Ages, some of the most formidable public thinkers were Christians.

Things changed with the Enlightenment. Scientific rationalism and naturalism have managed to edge Christian thought from the public square, academic circles and professional life. Christianity has been privatized. The opportunity that post modernism seems to provide is illusive because of its tendency to relativize everything including Christian thinking.

Years of immersion in the Enlightenment ethos has handicapped us. In our teaching, professional life and in any public enterprise, the rules of engagement created by our irreligious culture are forced upon us. We have been unwittingly bought into a system that divorces mind from spirit and fact from value. In order to recover lost ground, the first essential for us is to affirm that there is a distinctively Christian way of thinking.

The road to recovery begins with the diligent study of the Scriptures. The Bible is a rich repository of God’s wisdom and knowledge. “The fear of God”, obtained by saturation in His word, is after all, “the beginning of wisdom”. It reveals the mind of Christ. The Spirit of God, our divine Teacher, schools us in this mind. Thus equipped, we can intelligently engage the workplace, interact effectively with others and redeem the public square. It has been done in the past and can still happen.

So help us God.

May the mind of Christ, my Savior,

Live in me from day to day,

By His love and power controlling

All I do and say. May I run the race before me,

Strong and brave to face the foe,

Looking only unto Jesus

As I onward go.

For further reading: “*The Christian Mind*” by Harry Blamires.

AN

NOVEMBER 16

Humility - The Distinctive Trait Of The Christian Mind

“The lowly He sets on high...”

Job 5:11

cannot see something that is above you”

The attribute of humility was despised in the ancient world. Even today the sophisticated intellectual and just plain folk do not think much of the humble. It is considered to be the lot of the poor, the downtrodden and the dim witted. We do not associate humility with intelligence. *C.S. Lewis writes in Mere Christianity, “As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down you*

A close inspection of the faith reveals that humility, this much derided feature is a chief characteristic, if not the hallmark, of the Christian mind. There is no shame in this, since humility characterized our Lord Jesus Himself and we are called to be like Him.

Paul masterfully unwraps this concept in the book of Philippians. He begins by stating that Jesus is equal with the Father and then quickly argues that He did not consider this as something to hold onto. Christ voluntarily “emptied” Himself and became a bonded slave, the lowest spot in the human chain. He took on flesh; God became man; the Creator became a creature. He was subject to all the frailties, privations, aches and pains of our weakened state. He further humbled Himself when He died. His death was the worst death known to man; it was cruel, shameful and torturous.

This lowliness of mind, and nothing less than that, is the attitude that we must foster. Without this feature, it is doubtful, if we can be said to be in possession of the mind of Christ. Any other characteristic, however laudable, cannot compensate. This was the distinctive mark of Christ who surely was the most intelligent and learned person ever to grace this planet. Learn from Him.

Scripture Reading: Philippians 2: 5-11: Matthew 11:28-30

AN

NOVEMBER 17

The Day Of Small Things

*“Who despises the day of
small things?”*

Zechariah 4:10

myth are self-made men and women, those who climb from obscurity to fame through sheer will power and determination.

The evangelical subculture is particularly prone to this malady. We have been seduced by the prospects of instant salvation, immediate sanctification and spectacular healings. When there is delay, we get discouraged. We are bored with the slow march to sainthood. When these unreal expectations elude us, we are disappointed and are tempted to abandon ship. The Bible presents a very different image.

God does not seem to be in a hurry. It took two millennia for the promise to Abraham to be fulfilled. A further two millennia later we're still waiting for the second coming. Exactly why Christians are lured into immediate and spectacular results is a mystery.

The prophet warned us not to despise the day of small things. Jesus told us that the seed must fall into the ground and die. The seed vanishes into the soil. It is covered over, but in time a sapling, and then a tree grows up. Without death to self, without remorse, without obscurity and humility there is no lasting tree and no lasting fruit. Some seed may sprout on poor soil and suffer a quick extinction. But the seed that is nurtured and bides its time will grow into a fruit tree. So let us be nurtured by the water of the Word of God, fertilized by the Holy Spirit, tended to by the Father, live harmoniously in the nursery provided by the church and we can be assured of good fruit.

The most important issue in the Christian life is not what we do for

Him but what He does for us - Selwyn Hughes

Meditation: Are you in hurry? Consider John 12:24

When confronted with overwhelming obstacles, why are we tempted to trust in human might or power?

AN

NOVEMBER 18

The Democracy of the Trinity

“..chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through the sanctifying work of the Spirit for obedience to Christ...” 1 Peter 1:2.

With respect to human government, most people would argue that democracy is superior to other imperfect options. What about Christians? While the universal church may be considered to be a theocracy under the Lordship of Christ, it would be harmful if we appropriated to ourselves, the functions and prerogatives of the divine. It is far better for the church to function as a democracy. In this, we take our cue from the Trinity.

When we consider God, three characteristics emerge. These are unity, harmony and delight. These properties are clearly seen in the joint activities of the Trinity. Creation is attributed to the Father, is effected by the Son and is brought into being by the Spirit. Redemption was conceived in the Father’s mind and worked out in the life and actions of the Son. Jesus laid aside His glory, took human flesh and, with the master-stroke of the cross, ensured our salvation. And yet He did this in the power of the Spirit.

The Father gave the church to the Son and the Spirit sees to her proper functioning. In Jesus’ farewell address, He speaks of the Spirit coming and dwelling in the disciples and then speaks of His abiding in us. He finally states that both He and the Father will make their home with us.

The unity and harmony of the trinity, described above, are suffused with a sense of delight. It is into this wonderful family that we are incorporated and we are to reflect the family image. It behoves us to seek the same form of governance, viz. a divine democracy.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,
God in three persons blessed Trinity!

Reginald Heber

Thought: The Bible’s teaching on relationships and submission is fairly nuanced. See for instance, 1 Peter 5:5: “....younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another...”

AN

NOVEMBER 19

The elder brother syndrome

“His older son...was angry and refused to go in.... His father came out and entreated him.....‘you are always with me and all that I have is yours”

Luke 15:25-30

Jesus was generally recognized as a bonafide rabbi. However, the Pharisees and scribes regarded his free association with outcasts and harlots with considerable discomfort. Arguably in the parable of the Prodigal Son, Jesus was seeking to point out the flaw in their thinking using the elder brother as an example.

The elder brother strikes us a stuffy, self-righteous individual and, as such, resembled the Pharisee. In contrast to the apostate younger brother, he had stayed at home to manage the family farm. He toiled from dawn to dusk, never partied, and made no demands on his venerable father. He returned from his toils one day and, horrors! Music, dancing, feasting - all in honor of a profligate, ungrateful rebel of a son.

He missed the point, didn't he? Somehow despite, or because of years of strenuous labor and adherence to duty the elder brother did not really know the father who was the very epitome of grace, forgiveness and joy. He judged his father by his own mean, legalistic standards. No doubt the Pharisees would have identified with the elder brother. Jesus' tongue-in-cheek denunciation of this gentleman was in effect an appeal to them to accept the welcoming love of God the Father.

Many Christians today find themselves in the position of the elder brother. We are tempted to act in a self-righteous manner. We feel that both unbelievers and raw Christians are patently different from us who currently occupy the farm. We forget, as this parable vividly illustrates, that our Father loves them just as much as He loves us. In fact it was to save sinners that Christ came into the world. May God grant us the Father's heart to love the unlovely to welcome the alien, to patiently nurture the novice, realizing all the time that we ourselves are no more than "sinners saved by grace".

How often, as we encounter patients who have life style illnesses, begin to condemn in our heart, or sideline them in our interactions?

Reflection: In what ways do modern Christians resemble the elder brother?

AN

NOVEMBER 20

The Gentle Nudgings Of The Holy Spirit

“Your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it.’”

Isaiah 30:21

Of the three persons of the Trinity, the most enigmatic is the Holy Spirit. This is by design. Though He is God and hence has all the attributes of God, He does not promote Himself because His primary function is to reveal Christ.

Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit has a crucial role in our lives. We ignore Him at our peril. He is the agent of the blessings and revelations of God. He is our teacher, but He does not come to us uninvited. One has to listen for Him. He comes to the prepared heart- the one who is attentive to the Word, communes

with the Father through prayer and has a clear conscience before God. Further, as the Holy Spirit, He has nothing to do with evil and removes Himself from those who deliberately sin. He waits in the background until we have repented and been cleansed.

Once we turn and seek Him, we can receive Him by faith. As we then listen for and to Him and obey Him, He becomes our Helper, Comforter and Counselor. He is gentle by nature. Hence He nudges us and speaks with a “still small voice”. We can miss Him. But as we listen for Him and obey Him, we get to know Him better. His speech becomes plainer, the haze clears and we discern a form- not a ghostly persona or a spooky spirit - we see Jesus. It is the Spirit’s ambition to reveal Jesus.

Exercise: Practice the presence of God by befriending His Spirit. Thus our knowledge and experience of God are perfected.

AN

NOVEMBER 21

Social Action And The Christian

*“Religion that God our
Father accepts as pure and
faultless is this: to look after
orphans and widows...”*

James 1:27

During medical school life in India in the 1960s, there were two distinct student Christian organizations. One majored on evangelism, and the other on social action. This reflected the modernist-fundamentalist divide of the times, a phenomenon that is not as obvious in the twenty first century.

The Scriptures have much to say about social issues. The law of Moses insisted on kindness to the stranger. The Psalms advocated for the poor and pronounced

them “blessed”. The prophets censured people on their lack of mercy, their selfish accumulation of wealth and their hypocrisy in divorcing mercy from religion. Jesus cared for the sick, the indigent, little children, the widow and the outcaste as well as others at the fringes of polite society. His harshest words of condemnation were reserved for the observant religious person. His caustic denunciation of those who claimed to know God but demonstrated the hollowness of their profession by neglecting good works is documented in the gospels. While acknowledging that evangelism is paramount, one cannot escape the scriptural injunctions, fleshed out in the life of Jesus, to do good to all people.

in a world of vast needs, whether they are at your doorstep or half a world away [yet brought viscerally near by television into the family room] the follower of Jesus cannot but be involved. The cry of the poor is self-evident and scarcely needs emphasis.

While continuing to be zealous for truth, growing in holiness, keenly holding out the gospel of peace, may God find us also giving the “cup of cold water” in His name. These are not disparate themes but are all parts of the whole of what it means to follow Christ.

Meditation: Read Isaiah 58. Is it relevant to our practice today?

AN

NOVEMBER 22

Election And Grace

“...He chose us in Him..”

Ephesians 1:4

Ephesians, that majestic epistle, opens with a list of blessings that God showers upon His people. The very first in this brilliant litany is election. Using words such as chose, predestined, adopted, pleasure of His will, glorious grace, freely given, Paul underlines the wonderful grace of election.

This is most remarkable, given humanity's crass rejection of the God of love. Numerous passages in the prophets attest to our indifference. Jesus wept over Jerusalem lamenting over their rejection of Him. He burst into tears at the tomb of Lazarus. This was more than sorrow over a friend. He grieved over the rebellion and sin of humanity, the inevitable result of which was death. Our appetites were never towards God. We are consumed with our selfish selves, our petty agendas and egregious sins.

It is clear that we have not chosen Him but He chose us. What a mighty transformation He effected in bringing us from the dark night of hell to the glory of being counted as His own children. As we glimpse the chasm between the depth of our rebellion and the wonder of His grace in choosing us, we fall to our knees in praise and adoration.

Just as the enigma of the Trinity and the supreme wonder of the cross are beyond our comprehension, so is the mystery of God's redeeming grace in the doctrine of Divine election. While we acknowledge the difficulty of harmonizing this doctrine with the workings of our human intellect, we can nevertheless accept it in humble faith, knowing that one day we will have full clarity. In the meantime, we can revel in His goodness, goodness as demonstrated in creation, worked out through history, but spectacularly lavished on us at the Cross, the means by which He effected our election. Let us continue to serve Him gladly all our days.

Meditation: Read Ephesians 1 noting the pre-eminent position given to election.

AN

NOVEMBER 23

The Hermeneutic Of “Love”

“And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you, but to fear Him, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve Him., to observe the Lord’s commands... ?”

Deuteronomy 10:12

There is no question that our primary stance toward God and others ought to be love. This being true, there is a feeling abroad that everything is controlled by the hermeneutic of love. No matter what the situation, we should be non-judgmental and respond in love. We are to accept all forms of behavior as equally right. Our liberal society has, for instance, redefined marriage thus validating non-biblical views on this sacred subject. Rights and love trump everything including God’s law.

Such an approach gives us a warm fuzzy feeling. But is this right? Should everything be subsumed by love? hi answer, we begin by

saying that love is not absolute, God is. Love functions only when seen within the context of deity. We are to love God but we are also called to fear, obey worship and submit to Him.

To live under the direction of God requires following the example and lead of Christ and adherence to His revelation as found in the Bible. We have been given boundaries, examples, guidelines and law. When action and behavior contravene God’s law, though God still loves us, we come under His censure. Since this is the case, as those who fear and love God, we cannot carte blanche indulge in or agree with behavior that is contrary to His will.

Love is not the sole hermeneutic that guides us in our relationship with others. In fact responsible love requires us not only to love, but to respectfully point out the requirement for humans to obey God’s commandments. Love does not preclude obedience.

Reflection: How do the fear of God, obedience to His commands and love for God and man relate to each other?

AN

NOVEMBER 24

The hope of heaven

“Let not your hearts be troubled. ...in My Father’s house are many rooms....I go to prepare a place for you...I will come again and takeyou...”

John 14:1-3

this is a physical entity, there is a sense in which it seems to be “up there” somewhere. At Jesus’ baptism, God speaks from up there-coming as a bolt from the blue. Jesus ascended into heaven and we are told that when He returns we will see Him coming in the clouds.

We are, also, granted glimpses of the celestial reality when the curtain is pulled back a bit in Revelation. God is enthroned on the mercy seat with Jesus at His right hand. Angels and archangels and a myriad people from every nation surround God’s throne. We enjoy the sounds of celestial praise, hear rolling thunder and are dazzled by flashes of lightning.

There is certainly a degree of ambiguity and mystery attached to the afterlife and the concept of heaven. We can be sure, though, both of the reality of it and the fact that the experience will be literally something “out of this world”. Above all, though, we shall see Him whom our soul loves. The picture is breathtakingly magnificent. It prompts one to fall face down in wonder, love and praise.

Reflection: *We are all visitors to this time, this place. We are just passing through. Our purpose here is to observe, to learn, to grow, to love ...and then we return home.*

Australian aboriginal proverb.

Take time to thank and praise God for the hope of heaven.

AN

NOVEMBER 25

The humanity, weakness and humility of Christ

Jesus 'made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant...He humbled Himself...became obedient to death.'

Philippians '2:5-8

The simple wonder of the incarnation is that Jesus was born like any one of us. He emerged from the warmth of His mother's womb into the cold, damp, night air of our common earth. Suckled at His mother's breast, taught rudimentary lessons such as walking and talking. He ploughed through the acne and neuroses of adolescence and grew up to be a man. Given the special circumstances of His birth, He was, no doubt, the subject of cruel taunts. Housed in cramped quarters, working as a carpenter, He earned a meager living by the sweat of His brow.

Launching out on an itinerant ministry, He spoke of His homelessness declaring, "Foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." He was hungry, He was thirsty, and He was tired. He was verbally abused and thought to be mad. His enemies scrutinized His movements and parsed His words.

He displayed exceptional courage and much wisdom, taught eloquently, cast out demons, fed thousands with a couple of fish, walked on water and healed the sick. Yet He claimed no glory for Himself, saying that He was merely listening to His Father and did nothing by Himself.

Finally, abandoned by friends and family, unjustly condemned to death, spat upon, mocked and beaten, He was driven to Calvary. Nailed to a cross, derided by passersby, He finally succumbed. He died. The Scripture sums up His life by saying that He learned obedience through the things that He suffered.

The awful weakness of Christ, His palpable humanity and submissive humility are unparalleled in all of human experience and literature. This is your God, worship Him.

Suggestion: Read Isaiah 53 and spend time worshipping the Lord Christ.

AN

NOVEMBER 26

The Impossible Gospel

How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?"

Hebrews 2:3

By any stretch of the unaided, human imagination, the gospel of redemption is impossible. To believe that the immutable God would send His Son to be born of a virgin in a stable calls for a leap of faith. As an adult, Jesus battled the devil in a desert and then embarked on a three year mission. He walked on water, stilled raging storms, changed water into wine, cleansed lepers, healed all manner of disease and summarily cast out

demons. This should have gained Him public approval if not a crown.

The only crown He received was one of thorns, as jealous leaders, narrow-minded Pharisees and a volatile public turned on Him. Against all norms of justice, with the cowardly signature of a petty Roman official, He was sentenced to death. Beatings and humiliation were followed by the unspeakable agony of the cross. Then the incredible happens, He rises again.

Though naysayers relegate the story to the realms of lies and skullduggery, it has the ring of truth and can scarcely be dismissed as legend, fable or fiction. Others soften the blow, differentiating between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. As if faith in a lie could ever create the explosive movement that followed!

To add to the story, the classic explanation given for His death and the benefits that accrue from it challenge contemporary wisdom. He died to ransom mankind from sure destruction and His resurrection assures a celestial future.

On a human plane, the gospel of redemption is implausible. Only as we accept it as divine revelation do the pieces fit together and fall into place. Conviction of its authenticity is born of faith and its acceptance in turn generates more faith. Miraculously, we ourselves are drawn into this narrative which transforms us and further settles for us its veracity.

Prayer: Take time to praise God for His marvelous grace

AN

NOVEMBER 27

The interview

'Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them.' Psalm 139:16

I remember entering the portals of the head office after my post-graduation, for an interview with the organization's boss. I was a bit nervous, having never attended an interview before. I was ushered into the office like a very important person. There were two seniors I was supposed to interact with. The medical secretary, I had met before on one occasion, and the executive director I had seen from afar.

They were formal, precise, and asked pertinent questions. The medical secretary enquired as to whether I wanted coffee, I don't remember what I answered but I remember him walking up to the coffee machine, vending the coffee himself and bringing it to me. I was taken aback a little.

The interview took a little more than fifteen minutes at the end of which the executive director put his hands into his pocket, fished out a chocolate and gave it to me.

I took the chocolate and with it a deep inner conviction that I was joining an organization which was different.

Thirteen years later my conviction still holds. It was not the coffee or the chocolate that impressed me but the unaffected thought behind the act which was so unselfconsciously done which made an impression on me.

The Lord Jesus during His ministry on earth surprised different people with random, life-changing acts of infinite grace.

How often this character of my Master overflows from my life to touch another, I have wondered. Is this a way of life with me? It was, with the Lord Jesus.

So it should be with us, His disciples.

For reading - John 2:1 -10, Luke 19:1-10.

CT

NOVEMBER 28

The just shall live by faith

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this is not from yourself it is the gift of God..”

Ephesians 2:8

The statement, “the just shall live by faith” is very liberating. Salvation is all of God’s grace and has nothing to do with our performance. All that is needed on our part is faith. No longer need we despair that having fallen short of the mark, there is now no hope for us. Whatever our personal achievement, potential, or resolve, we will ever be found wanting because of our sinful human nature. Striving to obtain God’s approval is an exercise in futility.

The doctrine of justification by faith avers that however flawed and sinful we might be, we are declared righteous by virtue of God’s abundant grace - a grace accessible by faith and faith alone. The righteousness of Christ, in all its perfection, is imparted to us. It covers our sores, our blemishes and our sins. The holy God sees not our failings and rebellion, but the beauty of His Son.

Faith and grace go together. Faith resigns self to God, and humbly, yet exultantly, accepts the gift of grace. Faith is not dependent on merit, and to the contrary, points to grace. Faith places the onus on grace and on God. This frees human beings and gives the glory to God. This is also why we cannot glory in faith since faith is not an achievement or work. It involves resignation and surrender.

As we express faith, God takes over. Thus faith is powerful in a subtle, hidden sort of way. As we commit to Christ and believe in Him, all heaven and its powers are open to us and God is able to intervene to see His will accomplished in our lives. Gloriously, by virtue of our faith we become partners in God’s work.

Reading: Ephesians 2:5-8

AN

NOVEMBER 29

Leadership - God given, to consider others

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works...

Hebrews 10:24

Each of us are called to lead someone or the other, whether it is in the family, institution, project or organization.

Leadership for a Christian is a spiritual role, a God given responsibility, to be carried out His way, considering others.

An inner poverty of the spirit - which will lead us to dependence on God and interdependence on each other in the team to fulfil our God give roles. It is not our inner strength which will enable

us.

An inner mourning - seeing the brokenness in us, around us and within our own communities, out of which comes a deep desire to see transformation. To be part of the answer to the challenges and problems we see around and not be part of the problem.

We become *meek* - a condition of mind and heart which demonstrates gentleness, not in weakness, but in power. One writer explains meekness this way getting upset at the right time, in the right measure, and for the right reason. It is a balance born in strength of character. A gentle strength!

A deep hunger to see the righteousness of God in our lives and around us. Not what is right in my eyes, but what is righteous through God's eyes.

Such people will be full of mercy defined as "Compassionate treatment, especially of those under one's power".

No mixed inner motives but a pure heart to see your own life changed and others around you changed into what God wants each of us to be. A singleness of purpose and out of this, a working towards peace and unity in the team, and commonality of vision and purpose.

If we are such people, the conflicts and interpersonal challenges we go through will become much less. But the onus is on each of to grow in these inner characteristics.

Reflection and prayer: Jesus, thank you for being my Shepherd and Guide. Help me learn from You, following Your example in all I do.

SMT

NOVEMBER 30

The more I see....

“bring every thought under obedience to Christ...”

2 Corinthians 10:5

While working in a mission hospital in South India, the ward I was in charge of, had the picture of a chimpanzee, with the caption, “the more I think, the more I am confused”. Being young and “knowledgeable”, I did not pay much heed to this wise saying. But today when I hear of, self righteous, self-serving politicians, leaders of faith based organizations who should be different-embroiled in land and property and moral issues... I cannot stop seeing, but should I stop thinking? Is that the way out?

Not much different in the immediate surroundings too! I see once able, leaders of institutions and programs, aging now, losing cognitive functions, physical strength, and slowly wilting away in front of our eyes. Even internally there are issues -thoughts running wild when you see brokenness outside, near you and within you!

“Bringing every thought under obedience to Christ”, You are to see, and think, but you are to bring the thought under captivity. Easily said than done! How do you bring wild running thoughts under captivity?

So the answer may not be only to “Bring captive”, but fixing our eyes on Him in doing so.

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

So I need to see, but see differently. If I see differently, I will think differently, If I think differently, I will not get confused but live with clarity.

Prayer: Help me Lord, to see, fixing my eyes on You.

SMT

Dietrich Bonhoeffer - 'The Man Who Stood By God.'



In 1906 Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born into a very respectable family in Breslau. When he was six, Dietrich's father was appointed as Director of the Psychiatric Clinic at the ** — t University of Berlin. So Dietrich grew up in the capital of Germany. Dietrich's great-grandfather was Karl von Hase, a famous Protestant Professor of Church History in Jena. And Dietrich was brought up as a dutiful young Lutheran. His family were probably actually more Prussian than they were Protestant, but Dietrich developed a passion for religion that transcended his devotion to tradition.

Of the eight Bonhoeffer children, Dietrich was the only one who decided that he wanted to study theology. And study theology he did. To begin with Dietrich went to the illustrious University in Tübingen. Then he went to the celebrated Union Theological Seminary in New York.

Dietrich was very much influenced by the ideas of the world renowned German Protestant theologian Karl Barth whose series of lectures he had attended as a student. Dietrich was a theological prodigy; Barth himself commending his early brilliant academic work. So it was hardly surprising, that the theological whiz kid was appointed as a lecturer in theology at the University of Berlin at a very young age.

From 1933 to 1935 Dietrich served as a pastor for two German speaking churches in London. During this time he formed a close friendship with Bishop Bell of Chichester. Dietrich told him of his fears about the rise of the Nazi party in Germany. He was particularly worried about the fact that so many German Christians seemed to embrace Hitler as some kind of messianic figure who would save German Christianity. Dietrich had already joined the Confessing Church that opposed the Nazi Party. But he felt the Confessing Church did not go far enough.

He had begun to speak out against the persecution of the Jews. But try as he might, he could not get the Confessing Church to support his protests.

The Bishop affirmed Bonhoeffer, and, as the leader of the Ecumenical Movement, promised the young activist the wholehearted support of his organisation for the struggle. In 1935 Dietrich returned to Germany to start a theological seminary under the auspices of the Confessing Church. In 1937 the government shut down the subversive Finkenwalde centre. But Dietrich continued to train his students underground. In 1939 Dietrich was called up for military service. He refused to take an oath of loyalty to the Fuhrer, and found himself in a headon confrontation with the authorities.

Reinhold Niebuhr, the American theologian, invited Dietrich to New York to deliver a series of lectures. When war was declared Dietrich was tempted to stay on, but he felt constrained by God to cut short his stay in the US, and return home to Germany to face the future for better or worse with his people. When he arrived home, his brother-in-law Hans von Dohnanyi, invited Dietrich to join the resistance movement that was conspiring to bring down the Nazi Party and put Hitler on trial.

For years he worked for the Abwefo; against the Gestapo. He passed on information to the allies through Bishop Bell, whom he met in Sweden and helped smuggling Jews out of Germany into Switzerland. In 1943 Dietrich was arrested, charged with 'subversion of the armed forces' for encouraging students not to do military service.

Though a pacifist, Dietrich eventually came to the conclusion that the only way they could bring the Nazi Party down and end the madness was to assassinate Hitler. So Dietrich got involved in von Stauffenberg's famous attempt to blow up the Fuhrer. It failed and Dietrich, along with his co-conspirators, was sentenced to death. On April 9, 1945, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was executed. He had sought to 'stand by God in his agony.'

If possible read "The Cost of Discipleship" by Bonhoeffer

Detours

Life's journey includes detours-
Changed plans, failed dreams,
Wrong-way turns, even dead ends.
Sometimes we feel abandoned,
Left to wander in the wilderness
Of defeat, discouragement, and despair
But in His time, God steps in
To give Direction.
We often chafe when we're forced
To retreat or stand still and wait-
We want to advance.
But God knows we need training
And faith-building
And lessons in trust...
Discipline.
We strive to achieve, but
God says, Learn
We strain to rim, but
God says, Walk.
We struggle to do, but God says,
Be... And trust Me
With your Destination.

- B.J Hoff, Faces in the crowd, Warner Press

DECEMBER 1

The mute speak

'Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.'

Isaiah 35:6

It's not often that you can restore a mute tongue with a pill. But that's what happened. Our patient had an inoperable brain tumour which left her unable to write clearly. She had pressure of speech frustrated by dysphasia, and aware that time was short. She was desperate to say her farewells to her family who she had not seen together for a long time.

We had given dexamethasone before, and with each dose increment she had a few days of lucid speech before the swelling

recurred, and she was left mute once again. Now she had one increase left, and her family gathered round in high anticipation. What would she say? What had she been storing up for all these weeks?

If you only had a few words left to speak, what would you say and to whom?

Reflection: Of course, none of us has unlimited time or words left. So what are my priorities today? Is there someone I need to make peace with? Someone who needs to hear about the joy of knowing Jesus?

Further reading: Romans 10:12-15; Colossians 4:5-6

AN

DECEMBER 2

The only way to grow

'Whoever acknowledges Me before men, I will acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns Me before men, I will disown him before My Father in heaven'
Matthew 10:32-33

Challenging words from the Saviour; what greater incentive can there be for going public in our commitment to the Lord Jesus?

It is striking how a small vociferous group of people can change society. It was a small group who followed Vladimir Ilyich Lenin that introduced Communism into Russia and from there throughout the world. It was a small group of vociferous atheists who have introduced secularism into Britain and the West, whilst the churches slept. It is a small group of active homosexuals who are changing attitudes to homosexuality in the West.

Yet if Christians wake up and start again to acknowledge the Lord Jesus in all we do, there is no reason that we cannot change the world as the early Christians did.

It is vital that all Christians get over their embarrassment and learn to talk to others about Jesus. When first attached to a gynaecology firm as a medical student I found it extremely embarrassing to take a medical history from the ladies. How often I blushed and was tongue-tied. Yet because I had to learn the art, I slowly overcame the problems, so that now I am no longer coy, and subsequently I don't think my patients feel so awkward either.

It is just the same in talking about spiritual matters, where it is even more important that we learn to overcome being embarrassed. To be embarrassed about doing this is one thing, to be ashamed of Jesus and of the Bible is another. It has eternal consequences for us.

What an awful thought: to be publicly rejected by Jesus Christ Himself because I have not courageously acknowledged that I love the Lord Jesus. Jesus said, "If anyone is ashamed of me and of my words, the son of man will be ashamed of him when He comes in his glory" (Luke 9:26).

Further reading: Psalm 138.

BP

DECEMBER 3

Pride - The Peculiar Peril of The Professional

*“God opposes the proud, but
gives grace to the humble”*

James 4:6

We have not sought it; it just happens. Pride creeps up on us unawares and we begin to think of ourselves as somewhat special.

One would imagine that becoming a Christian should change all this. After all, are we not the followers of the Lamb of God, the embodiment of humility? Paradoxically, though, our acceptance with God and our position as His children can actually heighten our sense of pride. Not only are we doctors, but now we are Christians, the elect of God and called to glory! Sadly, we fail to realize that salvation rather than being a license to pride, is a catalyst to humility and gratitude.

How can we avoid this trap? We need to slow down and make some time to reflect and read the Scriptures. In particular, look at our model and mentor, the Great Physician. Learn of Him, described in Philippians 2 as a servant, and watch Him washing the disciples' feet in John 13. “By looking to Jesus like Him thou shalt be”. He practiced humility and so must we.

Meekness and majesty manhood and deity

In perfect harmony the Man who is God

Lord of eternity dwells in humanity

Kneels in humility and washes our feet

Graham Kendrick

Reflection: Read Matthew 11.28-30. How do you compare with Jesus who said that He came not to be served but to serve?

AN

DECEMBER 4

“The Poor You Will Always Have With You.”

“You always have the poor and whenever you wish you can do good to them; but you do not always have Me.”

Mark 14:7

money thrown at the perfume could have been better used to feed the poor. Jesus’ unlikely response was “You will always have the poor with you”. Was He belittling the poor? Not really. He stated a fact - the poor are always there. They did not suddenly appear. Jesus perhaps discerned a hint of hypocrisy in the sudden concern for the poor and His words served as a gentle rebuke.

Furthermore, Jesus affirmed the loyal, if naive, devotion of the woman. Jesus looked beyond the act to the intent and expressed His appreciation. Also, He pointed to a deeper meaning. Her gesture was a preparation for His sacrificial death. Indeed, since redemption is central to God’s agenda, everything ought to be seen in its light.

In response to the suggestion that the statement is callous with regard to the poor, we should consider Jesus’ relentless ministry on behalf of the indigent recorded in the gospels. He was known as a friend of sinners and outcasts.

The central motif of our lives ought to be devotion to the One who died on the cross. Yet, service to Jesus and concern for the poor are not polar opposites. True devotion requires that we live as He did, pouring out our lives for the less fortunate. Micah brought the two together when he said that what the Lord requires is to love mercy and justice and walk humbly with God.

Exercise: Reflect on Micah 5:8 and James 1:27

Jesus was a master of the enigmatic statement. What appears, at first blush, to be a straightforward remark is found, on further reflection, to have layers of meaning beneath it.

In the episode cited above, a woman anointed Jesus’ head with oil. In light of first century Palestinian culture, this act showed considerable boldness and risked caustic censure. The disciples demurred, self-righteously declaring that the

AN

DECEMBER 5

The Sermon On The Mount -Is It For Real?

“Therefore, everyone who hears these words...and puts them in to practice is..wise..”

Matthew 7:24

of the Sermon, taming it into

Christians differ in their approach to the Sermon on the Mount. Some see its message as directed solely to the clergy, others relegate it to the millennial reign of Christ. Still others bypass its imperatives by maintaining that the sermon is in the tradition of the law and that we cannot and need not live by its stipulations. They aver that its function is to show us our sin and our inability to keep God’s law thus driving us to the gospel of grace. All of these approaches blunt the sharp edge of irrelevance.

One can hardly accept these evasions. These are the words of Jesus and we cannot ignore them. The sermon beckons us into a world of surpassing beauty, a state of blessedness where we will have pure hearts, are merciful and righteous and abound in peace. It is a world where there is no lust, anger, swearing, lying, envy or greed. How wonderful not to have anxious thought, to eschew materialism and greed and seek the good of the neighbor! This is the gold standard and as God’s children we must ever strive to live by it.

Attempting to fulfill its demands, though, can fill us with despair. It is obviously impossible. The sermon aims at perfection, a goal which will always evade us. What shall we do then? We need God’s aid. We need to be filled with His Spirit. We then nurture the new life with a daily routine of dying to self, looking to Jesus, repenting, imploring God for aid, obeying Him and using all the help that will encourage us in our walk with Him. It requires the dogged perseverance of faith. We will thus be transformed.

We ignore Christ’s teaching at our peril, but as we embrace its teaching it will bring immense joy.

Reading: Read the whole sermon (Matthew 5-7) in one sitting.

AN

DECEMBER 6

The Value Of Theology

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”

2 Timothy 3:16-17

and systematic study of the Scriptures. The basic doctrines of the Christian church must also be learned. These then need to be applied to the ethical, relational and moral challenges that we as doctors grapple with on a daily basis.

In any field of knowledge, there is a core body of truth that has to be mastered. Imagine someone saying that anatomy and physiology are unimportant to the education of a practicing physician. If this is so in disciplines that have to do with our bodies, how much more is it relevant to the study of that which is far more important, viz. the knowledge of God? Jesus' admonition to the Pharisees that they erred in not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God, should be taken to heart by all of us. Finally listen to the writer to the Hebrews as he rebukes his readers: *“Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles... You need milk not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness since he is a child.”* Hebrews 5:11-13.

Question: What would constitute a core curriculum for the education of a Christian doctor?

Over the years there has been a steady erosion of interest in the serious study of the things of God. Many Christians receive little systematic teaching. Doctrine has been replaced by pop psychology, stories and subjective experience. The post modern turn in society has also made inroads into Christianity. This results in a demphasis on objective knowledge, facts and truth. Thus the Christian can go through life with only a rudimentary knowledge of God. The deep things of God are left unexplored.

A robust Christianity engages the mind. What is needed is a serious

and systematic study of the Scriptures. The basic doctrines of the Christian church must also be learned. These then need to be applied to the ethical, relational and moral challenges that we as doctors grapple with on a daily basis.

AN

DECEMBER 7

The Vine And The Young Branch

*“I am the true Vine, and my
Father is the gardener.”*

John 15:1

In John 15, the relationship between Jesus and His disciples is picturesquely described in terms of the vine and its branches.

In verse 2, Jesus describes a branch that is like a new, young branch that trails in the dust, is covered with dirt and produces no fruit. The Greek verb that describes the response of the gardener to this branch is *airo*. This word can either be translated as “cut off or “lift up”. The appropriate translation here is the latter one.

It would be a rare gardener who would chop off a young branch that has not had a chance to bear fruit. This kind of branch needs extra attention and a wise and kind gardener would provide this. Thus, an immature Christian who is still learning the ropes and, hence, makes a mistake or two is not severed from the Christ vine, but is lifted off the ground and nurtured.

Such an approach is consistent with our understanding of the nature of God as depicted in other passages of the Bible. For instance, in John 10, Jesus is portrayed as the Good Shepherd that tenderly cares for the sheep.

We need to make certain, that we remain united to the Vine by prayer and feeding on Christ in His word. We may also be reassured that our weaknesses and failures are not occasions for God to throw us off but opportunities for Him to correct us, to teach us and tend to us. He is the God of the second chance.

Suggestion: Read Psalm 23 and reflect on the care of Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

AN

DECEMBER 8

Thinking Big Thoughts

“The people that know their God shall do exploits”

Daniel 11:32

or disability will overtake us. Our boundaries upon us.

However, as I read the Bible, I get the impression that I am perhaps living below my potential. Paul speaks of the high calling of God. Jesus has given us a divine “whatever”. He has said that whatever we ask in His name will be given to us. (John 15:7)

History is filled with examples of what visionary people have been able to achieve.

Paul changed the thinking of the then known world. The Reformation unleashed forces that altered Western civilization. Wilberforce, against all odds, effected profound social change. Ida Scudder started a medical school whose influence reached all of India and has even been a blessing to the nations. These were spiritual giants with big visions - visions that were generated by God.

It is God that plants big dreams in our hearts and, if we are obedient and move forward in faith, we can achieve these. The caveat is that we cannot, yea dare not, do this in our own strength and to advance our own egos. The Scriptures admonish us thus: “Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not” but “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness....” The Lord’s Prayer begins with a grand vision of God being glorified, His will being done and His kingdom established. God graciously includes us into the effort to realize the vision that this prayer embraces. As we realize that by His strength we can do valiant things, these dreams will be fulfilled.

Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart...

Question: Has God given you a dream/vision? What is hindering you from achieving this?

AN

DECEMBER 9

To cure often, to be kind always.

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Ephesians 4:32

when he did, not because he was wantonly disobedient and careless, but because he thought he would not be able to afford it and so he postponed the visit until it became unavoidable.

I have often not been as successful at keeping my temper as I was in this case. When the patient has been negligent it's easy to pile on the blame. When somebody loses his old records or does not follow post-surgery instructions, I tend to give them a piece of my mind. I can think of many reasons why I do this. For one it puts me on higher ground and at an advantage if the patient is at fault. The inconvenience it sometimes causes makes me angry. What ever the reason there is place for forgiveness. It is easier to forgive when we understand the patient's situation. If we had been in their shoes we might have done the same. It's easier to be kind when we remember how kind the Lord has been to us and how much He has forgiven us. Should we not do the same?

Reflection: Spend time praising God for His work in your life, and pray that He will give you grace in the areas needing improvement.

Read: Mathew 18:21 -35

Thomas came to me in the middle of the night with retention of urine. I had seen him a week ago with a stone loitering about his bladder. I knew it would cause trouble. It was small enough to pass the bladder neck but too large to pass the external sphincter. I had asked him to come the next day to have it out. But here he was at this unearthly hour. The urge to shout at him was hard to resist.

Being kind is always a challenge. But knowing the other person's circumstances helps. Thomas came

when he did, not because he was wantonly disobedient and careless, but because he thought he would not be able to afford it and so he postponed the visit until it became unavoidable.

DECEMBER 10

Tough Decisions

*And David enquired of the
Lord...*

1Samuel 30:8

The young doctor saw that the accident victim had major lower limb fractures, a feeble pulse, and a systolic blood pressure just about knocking 70 mm of Hg.

As he dialed the senior missionary surgeon on the premises, he thought to himself, 'quite a mess this one, better get him to a city hospital.'

The senior man was there in minutes and proceeded to elevate the foot -end of the bed, he asked for an intravenous set and seemed set to start giving the needed care. The young doctor finally could not contain his apprehension. "Sir", he asked "don't you think we should transfer him?"

"It's two and a half hours to the city; he won't make it. We will have to take the risk and stabilize him with some blood," replied the older man calmly. Over the next one hour the junior physician watched in wonder as the surgeon ran around to ask the staff to donate blood and saw to it that it was started. Dawn was breaking by the time the patient stabilized and could be transferred safely to a bigger center.

That night the missionary surgeon had not only saved a life but demonstrated to his younger colleague how to take a wise decision.

Sometimes we are faced with these dilemmas especially if we are working in a small hospital. Often when we do not have the expertise, it may be wiser keeping the patients good in mind, to refer him rather than stand on our pride or think about the hospital income. When the choice is difficult perhaps we should withdraw and spend a few minutes in prayer asking the Lord to guide us. However desperate it seemed, David always took time out to enquire of the Lord, as we read in 2 Samuel 5:23

With God and a clear conscience on our side we can calmly face the consequences of our decisions whatever they may be.

Read: Proverbs 3:5-7

OC

DECEMBER 11

Question: How do wisdom, knowledge, intelligence and revelation relate to each other?

“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gently open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.”

James 3:17

Wisdom is a rare commodity in our day. In the digital age, knowledge and intelligence have replaced wisdom. With the dominance of scientific rationalism, cynicism and skepticism have usurped it. The Biblical revelation places a high value on wisdom, but what is wisdom?

Wisdom incorporates knowledge and builds on it but is not synonymous with it. Likewise, intelligence and wisdom are complementary but not all intelligent people are wise. Wisdom sifts out facts and discerns between truth and error, right and wrong. Wisdom is quick to pick up on truth because it is truthful. Wisdom is thoughtful. Wisdom listens. Wisdom does not jump to conclusions nor does it easily discard the opinions of others. With wisdom comes discretion and good judgment.

Wisdom is not a natural faculty but a moral virtue. Wisdom’s companions are truth, beauty, goodness, peace, joy, patience, forgiveness, balance, self-control, compassion, selflessness, sacrifice and service. Wisdom’s chief virtue is humility. Unlike cynicism, wisdom is not rude, argumentative or dismissive.

Wisdom is not autonomous. Solomon said, “There is nothing new under the sun”. The scientist who makes a discovery is the hand maiden of God; the ultimate source is God. Wisdom begins with “the fear of the Lord”. Wisdom is gleaned from sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to His still small voice and studying the Scriptures. Wisdom is augmented in the company of others, especially the church. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of wisdom and revelation. He speaks of Jesus who is Wisdom Incarnate. And as we continue in the fear of the Lord, wisdom increases. Its branches spread until it bears all the fruit of the Spirit-beautiful to behold-”a tree planted by the rivers of water that brings forth its fruit in due season”.

Suggested Reading: ‘The Christian Mind’ by Harry Blamires

DECEMBER 12

What motivates you ?

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”

Philippians 2:3-4

in this area which need to be used for His glory. I have met other Christians who have almost been afraid to pursue excellence for similar reasons. I believe one must be very careful; it is possible to start with a good motivation, and become swayed along the way. The roles that Christian doctors can serve God best in are diverse and numerous, but today I want you to think about those in leadership.

God can be glorified by having His people in senior positions - Christian doctors can be greatly used in management, education, academic and clinical leadership roles. We should pray for our Christian seniors that they do not fall into temptation particularly with regard to pride or idolatry, but are rather able to humbly serve our God in their role. As juniors, we should not be afraid to stand out, to excel and to be different and to move towards leadership roles ourselves. And yet at the same time, we must prayerfully guard our hearts.

Prayer: *‘Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.’* Psalm 139:23-24

Further reading: Psalm 37

What is your ultimate motivation? Do you seek excellence because it honours God or because you want a good reference? Do you seek promotion because you think you will be able to serve God more effectively from that position or because you would like the seniority and status that may come with that step? Do you stop to think about what your motives might be? Does it matter anyway?

Because of academic success, I have been accused of making my career an idol; I would contend rather that God has given me gifts

CW

DECEMBER 13

When the going gets tough

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:10

When I was in my first six month obstetrics and gynaecology post, I worked for a particularly challenging consultant. She took great pleasure in finding things to criticise me for, whether it be knowledge I didn't have or just for asking her advice when I wasn't sure what she would prefer me to do. At the start of the post I had approached the clinical director to explain my position on abortion and that I would not want to be part of inducing such a procedure.

One Saturday morning a ward prescription for drugs to induce a medical abortion had been lost and the nurse asked me to re-write it. I politely declined but sought the opinion of the duty registrar. She also held a position of conscientious objection and as a locum asked me to contact the aforementioned consultant who was on call. She did not hide her contempt for the situation and the unnecessary delay that she felt I was putting the patient through. However, she came in and wrote the prescription.

Persecution for the sake of the gospel takes many forms. If we stand up for Jesus and His ways, then we should expect to get a negative reaction from certain quarters. Sometimes it will be very obvious why we are getting grief; other times it will be more subtle. This passage in the Sermon on the Mount should serve as an important reminder that, even in the midst of such treatment, we can rejoice. Firstly it is a recognition that we are on His side; secondly we are being blessed by God through our experience; and thirdly we can look forward to our place in His kingdom when it is all over.

Finally, if you are finding the Christian life too easy at the present time, maybe you should prayerfully seek God's wisdom on your current efforts to walk and witness. Establish whether you could be more pro-active in certain areas and seek His help to do so.

Further reading: Matthew 5:1-10, Romans 8:31-39.

JW

DECEMBER 14

When we fall

“Two are better than one.”

Ecclesiastes 4:9

prayer: “Lord, make me more significant in this nation.”

Little did I realise how He would answer in the way He did. He firstly allowed me to incur the wrath of the British General Medical Council for talking to a patient about faith and then to suffer the indignity of developing rectal cancer. Not quite what I’d envisaged on my knees. But both situations have allowed His Name to be glorified, firstly through public debate on the role of faith at work and then by publicizing statistics of faith improving health outcomes. Nevertheless, these past few years have been pretty daunting at times, not least for my wife.

Both times I had a decision to make: do I hunker down and keep my seemingly disastrous personal situation to myself and a few chosen friends, or do I share it more widely? In choosing the latter option, I sought to maximise my prayer support. I was delighted to receive prayer from a mentally-handicapped lady in church. I’ve also been humbled by the sheer volume of letters and emails received. Many of these were from strangers, who when I run into them at events often reveal, “Yes, I’ve been praying for you.”

As doctors, we are archetypal carers. But we, too, can fall down and need a friend to lift us up. With the world an ever-shrinking place, ‘friends’ include all those within God’s immense global family. Let’s not be too proud to ask for their help.

Further reading: Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, James 5:14-16.

RS

DECEMBER 15

Wholesome Healing

While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus Himself drew near and went with them .

Luke 24:19

drunk and abused her and the children. Her elder son had recently committed suicide and the younger one was mentally challenged. I looked into her eyes and saw the pain she bore. I wondered whether part of her symptoms was related to this.

As doctors we often focus only on the physical problems. Our medical training also is reductionist and does not equip us to address the emotional, mental and spiritual issues that our patients go through. Our patients come to us primarily for their physical ailments and we need to do our best to address them. However, physical problems are often intertwined with other areas, so healing is incomplete without us looking into these areas.

Jesus often touched these issues in His interaction with people. To the woman of Samaria at the well, who wanted water, He enquired about her family, thereby touching a deep area of her life. To the woman caught in adultery He said, "Go and sin no more". To the paralysed man whom He healed, He said, "Take heart son, your sins are forgiven".

As health care professionals who have experienced inner healing and life through Jesus Christ, it is our responsibility to see healing in all aspects of the lives of our patients.

With 'sensitivity, permission and respect', we should address and desire that they experience "life and life in all its fullness". This is what Jesus came for, and promises to all who come to Him.

We have many opportunities in our medical practice, and may we be available to be a channel of His blessing to many lives that are broken in this hurting world.

Prayer: Thank You Lord, for drawing close when we listen, minister to those who carry burdens, when perplexed, for when we listen You come alongside.

MJ

DECEMBER 16

Wisdom And Morality

“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.”

James 3:13

In a passage that would sound strange to modern ears, James wedd wisdom and morality. We normally do not combine wisdom, intelligence and cleverness with morality. Intelligence is associated with pride, suavity and status. Clever people use others. They look for accolades. Morality, in this view, can hardly be spoken of in the same breath as wisdom.

The wisdom of which James speaks has a special origin. It is from above. It is not of this world. Paul spoke about this elsewhere, contrasting the wisdom of the world with that

of Christ. While there may be some correspondences between earthly and heavenly wisdom, there are distinctive traits that characterize the latter which are not shared by the former.

The reference to wisdom in James is ensconced within a passage is that deals with jealousy, ambition and evil. These traits are anathema to heavenly wisdom, whereas human wisdom does not differentiate between good and bad, right and wrong.

Wisdom is gentle and kind. James goes on to list certain characteristics of wisdom - all relating to morality and to doing good. Heavenly wisdom is humble, peaceable, kind and considerate. It is bereft of partiality and hypocrisy. Wisdom promotes actions that are good and merciful and fosters a society marked by peace and justice. These characteristics are not prime considerations with human ways of thinking. Earthly wisdom is neutral when it comes to such virtues. It is indifferent to issues of morality. Gentleness, for instance, does not appear on its radar.

Our challenge is to replace carnal ways of thinking with the wisdom that is from above.

Meditation: Read James 3:13-18. How can you apply these insights in your professional life?

AN

DECEMBER 17

Work Life Balance

*"I have come.. .not to do
My own will, but the will of
Him who sent Me.*

"John 6:38

superficial. The family is neglected. Workaholics can lose their spouses and damage their children. There is a personal cost as well, as we face burnout ending in a total breakdown. Sadly, some are lured into substance abuse in order to cope.

By dint of personality, by virtue of the culture we imbibe in medicine and the habits acquired in the practice of our profession, there is a temptation to add to our burdens. We unwittingly take on more than we have time or skill for. It is important, therefore to periodically take stock of our lives and activities, recognize our limitations and impose restrictions.

Boundaries must be created. While taking stock and placing limits are important, we also need a different orientation to life and work. To cultivate this we need to develop the habit of a quiet time when we read God's Word, pray, listen to His voice and plan our day in accordance with His will. This sets the tone for the rest of the day. As we practice this discipline, we learn to "abide" in Him. This was Jesus' secret. He rested in the Father's will and did only what He was told to. This enabled Him to live an unruffled life and fully achieve the purpose for which He was called.

Response: Do you spend time listening to God? How can you make this time more meaningful?

It is right to say that the doctor is a busy person. She seems to frequently run out of time. It's not that we are trying to increase our work load. Assignments are thrust upon us. Scarcity of resources and personnel impel us to take on more.

The hazards of over work are many. We cannot complete our tasks. Our performance may be

AN

DECEMBER 18

Shining Lights

“Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven.

“Matthew 5:16

Jesus said ‘If you don’t believe Me look at My works...!’ God’s nature is evident from His handiwork. His greatness, splendor, power, intellect, esthetics are seen in His vast creation. The ‘seen’ stands as evidence to His ‘unseen’ qualities. The miracles and works that Jesus did were not just to thrill people, but to express His message of compassion and to show the nature of God. He told His followers, “Let your light so shine among men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven”

When we serve the sick and the hurting, work takes precedence over preaching. Work, though a powerful channel of expression, has been neglected or misused. Even the simple act of bandaging a wound can speak volumes. A shabby bandage, a tight painful one or one that is loose sends a message that negates anything I may have said about the gospel. When I neatly apply the right bandage, using care not to hurt the patient, she will appreciate both my knowledge and the type of person I am. It would increase the value to what I tell her regarding my faith in God.

At the same time, we should not ‘show off. Our boasting becomes reprehensible when we claim the credit when someone is healed. All healing truly comes from God alone. Jesus said that when they see your good works they should glorify the Father in heaven and not the worker on earth.

Reading: Matthew 5:13-16

Several years ago, when I was registrar in Vellore, we were giving a farewell party to a senior doctor in our department. We had just presented him with a parting gift, when he picked me out of the group and asked, “Did you wrap this?” We were all surprised. I realized later that one can identify the worker just by looking at his work.

Jesus said ‘If you don’t believe Me look at My works...!’

JZ

DECEMBER 19

Called to lead

“Well done, good and faithful servant.’ You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your Master’s happiness!

“...Mathew 25:21

reluctant leader, one who was not too sure about His call or competence and was comfortable to continue to be, a care taker of sheep.

When circumstances in the organization or work situation pushes one to take leadership roles, many a times, it would have been easier if there were a burning bush and God appearing to tell us! Most of the time, we have the organization asking us, the need put before us and we are expected to step out and take the responsibility. The struggle between the careers we want to pursue, the lack of competence we feel for the role we are called to take up and lack of surety of the “call” are real challenges I have gone through. Some take up the role with confidence and then are driven to a point of feeling incompetent and stretched!

Moses helps us recognize that we do not have the surety or competence for our role, and so we require the support of others, and constant dependence on God, who engineered circumstances to put us where we are. To draw strength and direction from Him to build us into what He wants us to be, transform us into His likeness and through that process be part of building His Kingdom.

To be faithful.

Reflection: Father, help me to be faithful in my role, big or small

SMT

DECEMBER 20

In His Presence

“The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent....

Exodus 33:11

God’s bidding. Here was a man who knew Who was in control, and Who he chose to follow with his family (Joshua 24:15b)

The people saw it too. They could easily accept him as leader because they saw that the LORD was with him.

To linger in God’s presence makes us understand that being is more important than having, and that we are worth more than the result of our efforts. We would know that our life is not a possession to be defended but a gift to be shared. We would recognize that the healing words we speak are not just our own, but given to us, that the love we express is part of a greater Love.

Reflection: A man who gives God His place and glory... He gives God scope to work. When God finds such a man, He delights to prove Himself through him.

I Am I able to give Him scope to work in my life?

The age gap between the two would be considerable. One the venerable yet humble leader., whom the LORD used to speak to face to face as with a friend. Wonder what their conversations would be like..

And Joshua, young and courageous who learnt early the lesson of being in the Presence. He lingered knowing the LORD was there. He probably heard nothing, but he chose to wait. And Moses was never threatened by that, he knew his aide stayed back and so was comfortable to hand over the mantle of leadership to him, at

SD

DECEMBER 21

The long expected Jesus

*“My soul magnifies the
Lord, and my spirit rejoices
in God my Saviour’*

Luke 1:46

a puzzle. Was she in denial? Was she afraid? Did she really not know?

Far from being a secret, the advent of Mary’s baby was long-expected. Predicted at the dawn of time (Genesis 3:15), the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2) and would be miraculously conceived: ‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel’ (Isaiah 7:14).

Mary was probably a teenager when the angel Gabriel visited her. It is hard not to be in awe of her submissive spirit and love to read her song of praise (Luke 1:46-55).

Events sometimes shock or surprise us - we may be stunned by bereavement, depressed about exam failure, grieved by opposition or difficulties at work. We may even have experienced an unplanned pregnancy. How do we react?

Health professionals are so used to ‘fixing it’ for other people that sometimes we try to fix it for ourselves. We leave God out of the picture. Mary’s song recalls God’s faithfulness and sovereignty. He knows the end from the beginning; He is our Saviour; He has the best interests of His people at heart, even in baffling circumstances. He keeps His promises.

Prayer: *Help me, Lord, to be courageous in unexpected circumstances, to magnify Your name and to rejoice in my Saviour, today and forever. Amen.*

Further reading: Luke 1:26-38, Luke 1:46-55

RE

DECEMBER 22

God to the rescue

“Shegave birth to herfirst-born, a son.

“Luke 2:7

Test your Bible knowledge: who were Shiphrah and Puah? Well done if you recognised the names of the midwives commended by God when they disobeyed Pharaoh and saved the lives of the newborn boys (Exodus 1).

Midwifery is an ancient profession and was an established role in Israel. Christmas Nativity plays tend to portray Joseph and Mary

alone in the stable, banished from all care and comfort, but it is entirely possible that, when the mother of Christ went into labour, a cry went up in Bethlehem: 'Call the midwife!'

Mary and Joseph had come to Bethlehem for the census. They could be surrounded by extended family and their relatives, Zechariah and Elizabeth, lived not far away (Luke 1:39-40). Pregnant women are nurtured the world over, especially as the birth becomes imminent and someone, somewhere gave them shelter.

The Bible does not mention a stable – this is inferred from the manger. Jesus may well have been born in a simple peasant home where people lived in close proximity to their animals. Perhaps the animals were in an annexe or tethered inside at night. Maybe there was always a feeding trough handy. Would the shepherds have “returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen” (Luke 2:20) if Mary was cold and neglected?

Our word 'midwife' comes from Old English and literally means 'with woman'. And just as a midwife comes to help when the mother is vulnerable and in pain, so Immanuel, God with us, came to rescue us when we were helpless and lost, alienated from God our Father.

Reflect: Praise God for midwives and for good obstetric care. Remember those in developing countries where giving birth is still perilous.

Further reading: Exodus 1:8-20

RE

DECEMBER 23

Poverty and Riches

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor; so that you through His poverty might become rich."

2 Corinthians 8:9

Before Jesus' entry into the world at Bethlehem, He enjoyed all the splendour of heaven. The Book of Revelation describes it with extravagant images of precious stones, gold crowns and angelic beings (Revelation 4:1-11). But of course these are just pictures: in reality, heaven will be more amazing than we can imagine or dream of. Even more importantly, before coming into our world, Jesus was in total and constant communion with God - the beloved Son sharing His Father's glory and power.

When Jesus came as a man to first century Palestine, He laid all this aside. He replaced the riches of heaven with the dust of a carpenter's workshop, and exchanged communion with His father for the agony of separation on the cross. He gave up His riches so that we might have them. We can become God's beloved children; we can look forward to an eternity in the splendour of heaven. He became poor to make us rich: GRACE can be defined as 'God's Riches At Christ's Expense.'

We can't earn this gift; we can only ask and receive. 'O little town of Bethlehem' is one of my favourite carols because it describes how the miracle of Christmas happens year after year, day after day, no longer in Bethlehem but in our hearts:

How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given

So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heaven.

No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin

Where meek souls will receive Him, still the dear Christ enters in.

This is the step we take when we first turn to Christ, but we need to hear this message again and again. As our hearts grow cold and busy, we need to invite Christ in afresh, day after day, year after year.

Further reading: Ephesians 2:4-10

VL

DECEMBER 24

Emmanuel - God With Us

"Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and He shall be called Emmanuel, which means 'God with us'.

Matthew 1:23

Ever since Adam and Eve were banished from Eden, the Bible describes God's quest to bring us back to Him. He wished to restore the pristine fellowship between Him and those made in His image.

God's efforts began with the call of Abraham and continued with the deliverance from Egypt. He accompanied them through their desert wanderings and established them as a nation in the Promised Land. The Temple in Jerusalem

became the locus of God's presence with them.

But with Jesus's birth, both the structure and the function of the physical temple became redundant. In Jesus, the eternal Word became flesh and "tabernacled" among us. Jesus is Emmanuel-God with us. Peter built on the temple metaphor referring to God's people as "living" stones that together make up the dwelling place of God. Finally, at Pentecost, we move from the realm of word pictures to palpable reality, as the Triune God makes His home in our very being.

The first disciples asked Jesus "Where do you live?" He said, "Come and see". The gospel is an invitation to come to Jesus and remain with Him. By the exercise of faith, God's abode in us becomes real. The consummation of this, of course, does not occur until heaven "when the dwelling of God is with men". But even today, we can know, if only dimly, the reality of the experience for we are "seated with Him in heavenly places".

Prayer: 'MaranathaJ'-Come Lord Jesus, into my heart and into my home and then, Lord Jesus, take me to be with You forever.

VL

DECEMBER 25

Emmanuel: God with us, God one of us

*“Jesus, being in very nature
God...made Himself nothing,
taking the very nature
of a servant and being made
in human likeness.”*

Philippians 2:6-7

dried him off and wrapped him in a piece of cloth. I cut the cord and delivered the placenta without any problems, for which I was very thankful.

I often think back to that day at Christmas time. Who delivered Jesus? Was it Joseph? Or did they run for their host's wife or a neighbour in the night? We don't know, but we do know that it was a very humble beginning, not unlike the surprise birth I attended in Malawi, and just like the births of thousands of babies born each day in the poorer countries of the world.

How marvellous and mysterious that the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe should 'make Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant.' After the explosion of light and song that terrified the shepherds, and the mysterious movement of the planets that drew the wise men from the east, what did they find? A baby in a manger, born in poverty. Jesus did not only come to care for the poor, he actually became one of them. Emmanuel: God with us, God one of us. What an incredible gift, what a wonderful Saviour.

HAVE A WONDERFUL, BLESSED CHRISTMAS.

Further reading: Philippians 2:5-11, Matthew 25:31-46

VL

DECEMBER 26

The Heavy Cost

“He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High...and of His kingdom there will be no end...”

Luke 1:32-33

Herod the Great was the Roman client king of Judea. It was during his time and rule that the proclamation of Jesus birth came... from the angel to Mary, to the shepherds.

To wise men from the east, there was the sign of the star and where else would they come questioning and searching in their wisdom, but to Herod. They took their eyes off the star which had guided them so far.

Then again, the question is: “Why was it that when Herod the King summoned the chief priests and scribes and asked them about the birth place of the Messiah, did they so very readily tell him the prophetic location i.e. “Bethlehem”?”

The Chief priests knew the kind of King he was; he was known as “a madman who murdered his own family and a great many rabbis”, “the evil genius of the Judean nation”, and “prepared to commit any crime in order to gratify his unbounded ambition”.

The Chief priests knew that Herod the king was elected by Rome to be the “King of the Jews”; they knew that the birth of Jesus a “king of the Jews” would give Herod the impression that a usurper was born and would make him paranoid and murderous.

Why did they not hesitate to instruct Herod? And if they had to tell him, could they not have told him that Christ the Messiah was not a usurper of human Kings’ thrones but had to come to destroy Satan the real usurper?

The Chief priests did not use their knowledge responsibly; it cost Bethlehem and Ramah, the lives of all children below two years of age. They loved being consulted by powerful people.

The doctors who possess much knowledge have to be responsible in the way they dispense it. They have to be careful about obliging “mammon”, the choices they make and the stands they take. The cost of misplaced actions might be too much.

Prayer: Lord, help me to take my eyes off myself, from the situations around me and may I seek ways to remember You and please You.

VS

DECEMBER 27

Taking up the towel

“..I am giving you an example that you should do just as I have done to you.

“John 13:15

disciples’ grimy feet. The action is described in vivid detail so as to imprint it upon our minds and hearts.

Peter’s outburst, “Lord, you-my feet?” followed by his adamant exclamation, “Never!” was no doubt felt by all the disciples. Such an act, in their view, was the job of a menial slave, usually a Gentile. In their wildest imaginations they could not have conceived that the Lord of the universe, their supreme teacher, acclaimed to be the Son of God, would perform such a lowly task.

Jesus patiently satisfies Peter’s objection and, after washing their feet, continued teaching His disciples. Jesus linked His act to the atonement and the need for ongoing cleansing. But there was more. He went on to tell them that He was giving them an example. If He, their Lord could do this, how much more should they wash their brother’s feet?

Foot-washing is not about pedal hygiene or ritual ceremony and, perhaps, makes little sense in a modern setting. The point of Jesus’ teaching is that we should show the same loving service to each other. This is not just a feel good story to charm us but something that we should put into practice in our daily lives.. In fact if we neglect to obey Him here, our claim that Jesus is our Lord and teacher is invalidated.

Reflection: What does it mean to “wash feet” today? Think of practical ways of doing this. Read John 13

AN

DECEMBER 28

Triumphantly Victorious

“In all these things, we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us”.

Romans 8:37

Christians are often faulted for using triumphalistic language. The criticism is valid if we are engaged in a competition with other religions or enterprises; but, of course, our struggles are not with these. Our primary need is to master our own inner selves, i.e. deal with our weaknesses, failings and sins. Then we need decisive victories over evil and the evil one.

It is in this context that we are assured of triumphant victory. Paul made it clear that “our warfare is not against flesh and blood”. We wrestle against the spiritual forces of darkness. Elsewhere we read that our “weapons”, are not those of human manufacturing or speculation, indicating, again, that our quarrels are not of a terrestrial nature.

Since victory over darkness has been secured by our Lord, and since we are included in His triumph, we need not be afraid. Whether it be disease, want, external threats, spiritual forces or inner turmoil, we shall prevail. Whatever the situation, we have victory.

Paul explains why this is so. The battle for the cosmos was won, once and for all, by Christ on the cross. By His efficacious death and glorious resurrection, we have passed from death to life. Transported from the human arena, we are counted among those who, sharing in Christ’s resurrected life, are already seated with God in heaven.

We need to own this concept, transfer our affections from self and the world to God, exercise faith and constantly “abide” in Christ. It requires obedience and faithfulness. Sin, anxiety and taking our eyes off Jesus all rob us of this certainty.

Our victory is not an individual one. It is not something to brag about. The victory we enjoy is only because of Christ. We participate in His triumph. To Him alone is the glory.

Reflection: How can eager expectation of His glory help us cope with our present problems and sufferings? Romans 8:31-39

AN

DECEMBER 29

Understanding non-judgement- alism

“ Do not judge and you will not be judged. Do not condemn and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven.”

Luke 6:37

to do with our heart than with our doctrine.

Being non-judgmental is about “accepting”, believing that in spite of a failure the person can change and be a saint. It is about seeing the potential for good.

In the novel “Le Miserables” by Victor Hugo, the Bishop not only forgives the convict and thief Jean Valjean but gives him more of the candle sticks and says: I have bought your soul with this, withdrawing it from evil and giving it to God; now go and live for Him.”

Both in this example and in the example of the woman caught in adultery in John chapter 10, we see that the persons concerned were fully loved and accepted but their actions were not accepted as right. Jean Valjean, because the Bishop believed in him and accepted him, became a saint and a social reformer; so also the woman caught in adultery was fully loved and accepted but her actions were deemed to have been wrong as Jesus said: “Go and sin no more”.

While we can objectively judge actions to be wrong or right we cannot give up on people or believe that they are incapable of change or that they are any worse than us. We should always love, accept and support people after the mistakes they may seem to make; simply because God does the same for us. He accepts us in spite of our many wrong doings. However He does not condone wrong doing; He will continue to say: Sin no more”.

Reflection and prayer: Lord Jesus help me see others clearly, as You see them, and to believe the best about them.

We often hear people saying: “Yes he committed adultery, but who am I to say that adultery is wrong? It may be right for him. I do not want to judge”.

Judgementalism is not about blurring the boundaries between right and wrong. What then is it?

Being judgmental is about a secret desire to find fault, apportion blame, to ruin reputation and to feel morally superior. It has to do more with a heart attitude than any particular action. It has more

VS

DECEMBER 30

What I need... not what I want

“Give us this day our daily bread” Matthew 6:11

Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and dishonour You and say, “Who is the Lord?” Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonour the name of my God.

Proverbs 30:8-9

my patients are seeking all sorts of treatments from me that they don't need, but simply want. But then how often I have expected God to give me what I want, rather than what I need? And how quietly I have assumed that the wealth accruing to me from medical practice is my just due. Do you also have more than you need? Oh how radical a change in me is needed if I am to make it through that narrow gate! I will have to do it in company! I will have to entertain the needs of others every day. A complete re-orientation to 'we', 'us' and 'our'. 'My Father, forgive me'? - No, our Father, forgive us our trespasses, for Christ's sake.

Here is a wise warning of the temptations that arise when I get more or less than I need. Jesus improved on this prayer in an amazing way. He moved it from the personal to the communal. As soon He substituted the words 'us' and 'our' for 'I' and 'my' the problems of poverty and wealth disappeared. If I have more than I need I will know what to do to answer my prayer today. If I don't have enough I know that others are concerned to meet that deficit today and have been praying for it already.

It is what we need that is being requested and not what we want.

How often I have grumbled that my patients are seeking all sorts of treatments from me that they don't need, but simply want. But then how often I have expected God to give me what I want, rather than what I need? And how quietly I have assumed that the wealth accruing to me from medical practice is my just due. Do you also have more than you need? Oh how radical a change in me is needed if I am to make it through that narrow gate! I will have to do it in company! I will have to entertain the needs of others every day. A complete re-orientation to 'we', 'us' and 'our'. 'My Father, forgive me'? - No, our Father, forgive us our trespasses, for Christ's sake.

Further reading: Exodus 16:4-12; Deuteronomy 8:1-4; John 6:35-40.

GM

DECEMBER 31

Remembering our Origin and destiny

“Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under His power, and that He had come from God and was returning to God; so He got up from the meal, took off His outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around His waist. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around Him..”

John 13:3-5

Like Jesus in the passage above in John 13, we should know our origin and our destiny if we are to continue washing the feet of our needy neighbors. In the words of Socrates, “Knowing oneself is the key to a secure identity.

About our origins we have to remember at least 3 things:

We are made in His image and in His likeness, which means that we are above any other kind of creation. (Gen 1:26) While God said “good” about everything else He had made, He said “very good” after creating man. It also means that like God we are moral beings, and are so made that we cannot be at home with evil.

We are God appointed “vice-regents” over creation and that means we are “governors” or leaders managing His creation. (Gen 1:28)

We are made for “community”- because God says: It is not good for man to be alone. (Gen 2:18)

Regarding our destiny we need to remember:

God will reside in community with man: “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God.”(Rev. 21:3)

There will be no more pain or sorrow: He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying nor pain anymore...Revelation 21:4

There will be no more exploitation of man by man or man by creation: The wolf and the lamb shall graze together ...on my holy mountain says the Lord” ... Isaiah 65:25

Message to remember as the year ends and a new year begins:
Remember your lofty origins and your fantastic destiny, feel secure in Him so that you can serve others and wash their feet.

VS

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The International Christian Medical and Dental Association

Societies or meetings of Christian health carers have existed in some countries for over one hundred years. Personal contacts led to the first International Congress of Christian physicians (ICCP) in 1963. The International Christian Medical and Dental Association (ICMDA) developed from these beginnings, seeking to develop and strengthen bonds between Christian Physicians, dentists and clinical students worldwide. It is composed of autonomous national Christian medical and dental associations and it assists these national movements in achieving their aims.

Vision: “A Christian witness through doctors and dentists in every community in every nation”

Mission: The ICMDA exists to start and strengthen Christian national medical and dental movements through:

- **CALLING** - Enabling national movements to dialogue on relevant issues in their secular or other-faith contexts from a foundation that is biblical and ethical
- **EQUIPPING** - Training and building the perspectives, Christian
- understanding and witness of doctors, dentists and students for leadership
- **FELLOWSHIP** - Bringing together members in fellowship at regional, international and other levels to support each other through mutual encouragement, prayer and learning
- **SERVICE** - Initiating and strengthening missions to all especially vulnerable communities through partnership among national movements.