

Daily Reflections

By Esther Rogers

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1.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates."

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

At the moment many of us are spending a lot of time indoors with our families: children not going to school, older children returning from their term time address, spouses no longer at work. Many are trying to adjust to a new lifestyle: how they'll spend their days together, educate children from home, keep one another entertained, avoid arguing, and look after their family and friends who can't leave their homes.

This will be a time where our children are asking questions about our world, about life, and about God. It will open big and difficult discussions with our older children, with our siblings, partners, and friends. Let us spend as much time as we can learning more and more of God's word, learning to open it with family, to speak openly about it with those in our home, to teach it to our children, to pray together. If you are stuck at home, use this time to soak up as much time with God as you can. Set aside dedicated time in spite of (and even more so because of) life's present difficulties. Use this time to be strengthened, because there will be times where you will need to lean on the things you learnt when you were alone with God. They will be the things that you will cling to in times of trouble. Use this time to encourage your loved ones of a wonderful hope in the middle of so much fear and uncertainty. Many are thinking about life itself, about how little we are in control of our world, how quickly our circumstances can change.

But when the difficulties of 2020 become a page in history, the majority of us will quickly attempt to forget the questions we asked today. Covid-19 has, for a moment at least, exposed the emptiness of everything the world has to offer. Spend as much time with the Lord as you can during these strange days – time spent with Him always proves fruitful.

As many of us are kept at home, use this time effectively, looking to the future

2.

'Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him." Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

John 3:1-3

Nicodemus came to Christ because he knew that the things Jesus had been doing must have been from God. But there is more to it than that. He knew that only the Son of God could do such miracles. In John 2, many believed in Christ because he performed signs and miracles, but even though they believed in his abilities they didn't seek to know Jesus. This is the difference between the casual listener and the searching soul. Here we see Nicodemus who, after seeing the signs, came to Jesus in search of answers. He came to Jesus confessing that he knew that Jesus must have come from God.

Nicodemus had a lot of questions for Jesus and maybe felt confused, stupid, or embarrassed for some of these questions. After all, he was supposed to be a teacher of other people! But Jesus saw his searching heart, saw his honesty, saw how he was restless to understand more, and Jesus revealed who he was to the Pharisee.

We don't see a grand conversion from Nicodemus, but we see quiet and strong steps taken by him that show how from that conversation by night he went on to lead a life for Christ. In John 7:50-52 he defended Jesus in front of the other Pharisees when they wanted to kill him. After Jesus was crucified he and Joseph of Arimathea gave the body of Jesus a proper burial, risking their reputations and their lives (John 19:38-42). They did this while Christ's own disciples fled and deserted Him. Meeting Jesus that night changed Nicodemus' life, and made him willing to risk his life for Jesus' sake.

Does Jesus bring out this reaction in us? Do we search to meet with Him and know Him? Are we ready for the answers to our questions, and what they mean for how we live our lives? Nicodemus was not Jesus' most 'famous' disciple, but he was faithful in obedience and love for his Lord.

The Lord does not need influential followers, but seeks faithful servants

3.

'Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from Him. Truly He is my rock and my salvation; He is my fortress, I will not be shaken. My salvation and my honour depend on God; He is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to Him, for God is our refuge.'

Psalms 62:5-8

David wrote this while running away from enemies, while trying to escape death, and his psalm encourages us to go to the same place he went to for strength, security and peace – God Himself.

Why not take this time to think about this confidence that you have. There is a God, a God who created the universe, the solar systems, who created our very own planet to be stewards of; He made our animals, us, our air, and our minds. The God who has existed for all of eternity has given us His Holy Spirit to indwell, who is with us in our quarantined living rooms.

This incredible God, who did all of that, has promised to be our place of rest and refuge. He wants us to pour our hearts out to Him and trust Him for everything. Where could we go when we are afraid that would be better than this?

This Psalm is about silently waiting for God, waiting with patience, without complaining but affirming and remembering wonderful truths about who our God is. He is not the rock, but my rock. He is sovereign, in control at all times. We can trust in His power and mercy. He is my Salvation. If God Himself is your salvation, what have you to fear? He is my fortress. Though the circumstances of life throw us about, confuse us, our fortress will never be overcome. Bring your worries, your fears, your failures before Him, and take refuge in God the rock.

True contentment does not come from better circumstances, but from the perfect God

4.

“For lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisers.”
Proverbs 11:14

When the PM, Boris Johnson, was taken to hospital, many Christians prayed for his health. This is a good thing to pray for, and the Lord in His grace answered that prayer positively. If we came to the throne room to ask God for our leader’s physical health, how much more should we petition the Lord for his soul! These last few weeks undoubtedly made him think about eternity, and many did pray not just for his health but for his soul, praying for the staff around him who were Christians, praying that they would be a witness. May we continue praying that God would save souls in government and change our leaders and our country.

Who can correctly guide a nation except God? No human leader can guide correctly; every human leader is imperfect. Pray for national leaders, that they would be guided by the Lord.

But the Christian’s commission is not just to pray. How will anyone hear if no-one will speak? We have a relationship with the loving God through the Saviour this world needs. Will we be silent about our Prophet, Priest, and King? Evangelism is difficult at the moment, as most of us rightly stay indoors and minimize contact. But in a short while there will be many opportunities to speak of our Saviour. Use this time to equip yourself with the full armour of God.

Our country needs the Saviour. Who will pray, and who will tell?

5.

“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

When we read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 we can see the practical need for friendship, but we can also take these verses as spiritual advice. When working for God two are better than one: if one of us stumbles in our spiritual life, having good Christian friends who we are accountable to is a real blessing. They can help us see where we've stumbled, point us to God's Word and pick us up again with love and care. Do you have a friend like this? Are you that friend for someone? When we are alone and don't share our doubts and troubles with others we can so easily slip further and further away from God. Find opportunities to make and maintain friendships, to help and be helped by those around you.

Many times I have learned most from God when I've been reading the Bible with friends, when we've questioned verses and searched the scriptures for answers together. My closest friends are those who have taken me back to God's word, who have listened to my problems and prayed about them with me. When verse 11 talks about two keeping each other warm this is what we can do for one another's spiritual lives: as iron sharpens iron, we can encourage one another and build each other up so that together we can fight off the enemy – and as v.12 says, a cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Why not arrange with friends to call or send messages to each other about the things that you learnt in your time with God today? Arrange with some friends to read a Christian or Bible book at the same time and share your thoughts on it. Or maybe agree to send each other your prayer and praise requests.

Good fellowship and accountability is vital to Christian growth, especially today

6.

'He must increase, and I must decrease' John 3:30

John was a man of God but was still only a man. He could never reveal the things that Jesus could. It is Jesus who has existed before time, it is Jesus who has been in perfect communion with God the Father and Spirit, it is Jesus who is all knowing. Only Jesus could explain the law and only Jesus could fulfill the law. In the person of Jesus God himself came down to reveal himself, to show the way of salvation, and to be our means of salvation. And only He could do that.

John knew that he had the honour of proclaiming such a message, preparing people's hearts to receive Jesus. He found joy in seeing people come to Jesus. His desire was to give God, and God alone, the glory. John was happy for all eyes to look to Christ and for himself to be forgotten. He found contentment in Christ being noticed and him un-noticed. Do we? There must be no-one higher in our estimation than Christ; certainly not ourselves.

Prayer: Lord, make it my heart's desire first and foremost to point people to Christ. Give me a life that elevates Christ in everything I do. No matter the time, the circumstances I find myself in, no matter what is happening in the world around me help me to always find reason to be content in my freedom in Christ, and give me eyes which always look for opportunities to glorify my Saviour.

7.

'Turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding - indeed, if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.' Proverbs 2:2-6

When we start to search for wisdom we start to enjoy it, we get a taste for it and we find ourselves wanting more and more. As Christians we should always desire to walk closer to God, to become more like Him each day, to worship Him more, to understand more about Him and fear Him – and this is what godly wisdom gives us.

But this is often easier said than done in the life of a Christian. We must listen carefully, turning our ears to listen to the Word. Hudson Taylor famously depended on God for every situation, no matter how big or small. His is a good example. In every situation or decision in our lives we must be asking Him for His help and guidance. We are woefully unable to steer a meaningful course through this life without knowing His constant guidance. Essentially, knowing and applying this truth is the anthem of Christian wisdom.

Ask God to help you understand His Word so that you can then apply it to your life. Cling to the promises of His Word so that you may be ready to use it each day as you need it. If we seek out wisdom – God's wisdom, not the world's - like silver and search it out like treasures we will understand more of who He is and worship Him more joyfully and reverentially. Isn't that what our soul wants? Do you want to understand more about God, to worship Him, to help others see more of Him too? To be able to teach others all the wonderful things he has taught us?

The wisdom of God confounds the wisdom of the world; there is only one place to get this wisdom. 'If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you' (James 1:5).

Pray every day. Pray continually. Pray without ceasing. The only one who can give us true wisdom is God, and He promises that when we ask for it He will give it generously. So why not pray for it today? We need Godly wisdom today.

God's wisdom is far above that of humanity, and can only be found by coming to Him

8.

'My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hiding places on the mountainside, show me your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely. Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom.'

Song of Songs 2:14-15

In her book, 'Disciplines of a Godly woman', Barbara Hughes tells the following story: "Susannah Wesley, mother of nineteen children (including theologian Charles Wesley and hymn writer John Wesley), used to enjoy the Lord's presence right in the middle of her noisy kitchen, just by sitting down and throwing her apron over her head. She created a quiet small space, however small, to be with the Lord."

Find a place to be alone with God, somewhere you can shut yourself off from distractions. It doesn't have to be perfect but just somewhere you can pray and read. When you spend time with God, look at His beauty, seek His face, and listen for His voice. Find joy in His face and guidance from His voice. Let Him be your cleft of the rock, your safe hiding place, knowing that you have come to speak to the One who loves you and understands you more than anyone in this world ever could, that you have come into His presence where you can pour out your heart.

As a matter of urgency identify the things that spoil and steal your time with Him. "Catch the foxes" in your life. These are often small things that we think are insignificant, but they slowly corrupt our relationship with God.

But sometimes we have the quiet place and time but not the attitude. Some days our minds simply are more prone to wander, unable to shake off distracting thoughts, overthinking details of our circumstances, and we can't focus on God.

Every time you meet with Him, begin by praying that He will focus your mind on Him, remind yourself of how much you need the Lord in every aspect of your life. As you meditate on God's goodness, the time will fly.

No worry is too big or small to bring to God

9.

“Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me. Redeem me from human oppression, that I may obey your precepts. Make your face shine on your servant and teach me your decrees.” Psalms 119:133-135

Imagine a life where your footsteps or actions followed God’s Word, where you didn’t get caught up in your own desires or act selfishly but more like God. Imagine a life where you didn’t let sin rule over you, where it didn’t control your thought life. What would that look like? How different would it look to your mind currently? Of course, these things will only be made perfect when we are in glory, but they are things we strive for in our lives here on earth as we run the race.

David asked to be redeemed from human oppression because he wants to worship and obey God without fear. He asked that God’s face would shine upon him, that God would be pleased with him. When we do things do we think about what others around us will think of us, or do we live our lives to be pleasing to the one who made us and saved us?

David comes with a servant heart; he knows that compared to God he is nothing, that even the King has to come before God as a servant, humbly and earnestly.

In the same way come before God, asking Him to teach us, rebuke us, save us, comfort us, and encourage us, so that we may honour him as we should and proclaim His Name in our lives.

Pray that God will:

1. Help you to have your priorities right
2. Help you to put Gods Word first
3. Help you not to put small things before your relationship with Him

10.

'Test me, Lord, and try me, examine my heart and my mind; for I have always been mindful of your unfailing love and have lived in reliance on your faithfulness.' Psalms 26:2-3

Ask God to show you your sins. It will not be easy. I remember once praying that God would show me my sin in a new way; two days later I was back on my knees, weeping and asking God to stop. I couldn't cope with it.

We don't want to face our flaws, much less have them pointed out for us. We don't want light to be shone on our idols, our failings. We want to keep them hidden and pretend that they're not there. But as Christians we have to understand that God already knows our hearts, our desires, the darkest parts that no one else knows. Yet He loves us, unconditionally.

As Christians we should also be so much more aware that we have God's spirit living in us. Our body is a temple for Him. We should seek to make it a temple worthy of His presence, asking Him to help us see the sins that we can't see, as difficult as that is, and to have self control against the sins that we do see, to be always thinking of His love and His faithfulness.

Make an inventory of times you've spent with God, times you've brought things to him in prayer and the times you've seen prayers answered, seen his unfailing love time and time again. See how you live relying on his faithfulness every single day.

Although it was so painful seeing my own sin in a fresh light that I could not cope, that experience drove me back to the cross with a love, a desperation, and a thankfulness that I had not previously known. It made me run to Christ my Saviour. May it do the same for you.

As we see more of our sin, we see more of our sinless Saviour

11.

'...while he himself [Elijah] went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he travelled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.'

1 Kings 19:4-8

It can be easy to pile work on top of work on top of more work. It can feel like there is no end to it; as soon as you feel like you have made progress you look up to see the workload has doubled somehow. Sometimes it can make you feel so weary, it can seem like you don't know how to carry it all, or maybe as if you're not getting the help or support you want. Whatever work you do please do not feel like you are alone, please do not feel discouraged.

Our culture has come to equate rest with laziness. We must each be working, or at least available, at all hours. The distinction between work and rest has gone. Even before the lockdown, we received and answered work emails and calls from home, and took work home with us, in the evenings. There can be no day off.

This is not how we were made. Like Elijah we need to allow for rest. Stop and let your body recover. Afterwards, take time to sit with God, lay your burdens before Him, and ask Him to help you find a new perspective on the situation you are going through as well as the patience to know that He is at work even when you don't see it. Reach out to others to find support or advice. We don't have to face the situations of life alone.

Rest is a gift from God that we need

12.

“They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favour in the presence of this man.” I was cupbearer to the king.’

Nehemiah 1:10-11

Nehemiah is praying for his people, praying for forgiveness for the sins and corruption of his people. He remembers God’s words to Moses, promising that if they returned to Him and kept his commandments he would unite them, no matter how far they had been separated and He would be their God.

Like Nehemiah we must ask God to hear the prayers of his servants who desire to fear His name, to forgive us from our sins, to make us faithful and fruitful for Him in our work. Let’s pray that in our church, in our ministry, and our lives people will see that there truly is a God. Pray that God will work in our time, through us.

Nehemiah’s prayer, trust, and devotion bore fruit. ‘So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God.’ (Nehemiah 6:15-16)

For many it is hard to think about evangelism when we must stay at home and have as little physical contact as possible.

Our Sundays are shaped by listening to sermons online, our fellowship is with the people in our home, and we don’t have the evangelism opportunities we previously took for granted. But during these uncertain days why don’t we spend time with the Lord asking Him for opportunities to evangelise from home, to think of ways we will serve our new online church, and ways each of us can help our church to grow when we can meet together again. Spend a moment right now thinking of a way you can give the reason for the hope you have, to share the good news of Jesus’ death and resurrection. It doesn’t need to be big or grand. Pray that the Lord would ‘give His servant success’.

Right now there are so many people who have been made to think about where they will spend eternity. How will we serve these people? How will we point them to Christ? How will they see that our work can only have come from God?

A successful Christian witness is built on dependence on God

13.

“Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.” Ephesians 5:15-17

You may be sick of hearing about it, but let’s take some moments to reflect on our current situation. Let’s reflect on the time that God has given us, and the opportunities he is giving to us right now. What opportunities has this time given you personally?

We can so easily think: “if I were in a different position, or if I were working or living somewhere else, things might be easier”. But God has put each of us where we are for His purposes, to serve those around us, for His glory.

It’s easy to waste time, to fill it with unnecessary things to pass the time, trying to feel productive in some way. This is especially so right now, when so many of us are trying to work from home and we feel like there’s no structure in our day. We are encouraged to take up new exercise routines, to pick up a new language, to learn to play a new instrument. All these things are to help us use our time productively and better ourselves while we have the time.

These things are good of course, but as Christians our relationship with God comes first. Let us prioritise our relationship with Him, encouraging others, and witnessing to others while we can. Let’s be wise with time and fill it with the right things first – for time passes quickly.

Pray: that God will show what His will for you is, whether it’s to encourage others, to pray, to teach, to lead, to give or to serve.

14.

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

Don't let fear or timidity stop you living your life for God. We can so easily imagine problems that aren't there, and our hearts will always find a reason to avoid our ministry. Where none of us are qualified and no one is good enough, it is God who qualifies us, God who gives us strength and power in our weaknesses. In all things we must rely on God's love to stir us up in our ministry, to see those who are in need and to see how we can love others as God first loved us.

But there is something important here: The Spirit God gives us gives power and love to do His work, but also gives us self-discipline. Rather than a mind controlled by fear we have a mind that can act with wisdom. Instead of serving God only during times when we “feel” right, we pray for guidance and do the Lord's work continually as He gives each day. Without self-discipline, the Christian constantly wavers between hot and cold in their ministry and their faith is pushed about with every emotion.

But the gift of self-discipline pushes us to learn more about Gods Word and His love, experiencing His love through our knowledge of Him, and steadies the rolling ship. Pray that the Lord would give you self-discipline in your prayer life, your reading, and your ministry.

Just as importantly, self-discipline is not an ability of our own; like all good things, it is a gift of God. When your discipline slips, go back to the throne room once more. Our God is gracious and generous to His children.

The ministry of each Christian is built on the gifts of a generous God

15

“After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.”

Genesis 15:1

Why does the Lord tell Abram not to be afraid? Because despite any worries he has, despite anything he may be lacking in, he has the Almighty, eternal God on his side, and having the Lord God as his reward will prove to be far greater than anything any earthly king could offer him (Genesis 14). Knowing that God would be a shield around him in times of trouble was the greatest comfort Abram could know.

The same holds true for every Christian, and even more so. Christ is our beautiful and exceedingly great reward. He is our salvation, our security. The things of this earth cannot compare to the love that God has for us, which He has shown in sending his only begotten son, Jesus Christ.

We live in difficult days; many people are facing situations that they have never faced before. Many of us are faced with the truth of a broken sinful world in grievous, exhausting ways. But Christ is our reward, and the more we see the troubles of the world we live in, the more we appreciate the love and mercy of God in making a way for us to be saved, in making a way for fallen people to have eternal life and a restored relationship with the one true living God, who will one day wipe every tear from our eyes, when we see Him face to face.

Christ is a far greater hope and reward than anything a fallen world can offer

16.

“But Abram said, “Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.” Then the word of the Lord came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.” He took him outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Genesis 15:2-5

Yesterday we looked at the verse immediately before this. God had promised that He would be Abram’s shield. What a wonderful truth!

In Genesis 14 Abram had denied the rewards from the kings saying ‘With raised hand I have sworn an oath to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the strap of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, “I made Abram rich”’(Genesis 14:22-23). Abram could have received his riches in that moment, but he knew that this wasn’t the right way. He had faith in God to give him what he needed. After denying those riches, God promises that He Himself will be Abram’s reward - and God rewarded him more than any earthly king could ever have rewarded him. In front of the King of Sodom Abram shows an unshakable faith in God, declaring that he trusts God’s plans.

Yet when it’s all over and he is alone with God, and after God has told him that He will be his shield, and his reward, Abram says “Lord God, what can you give me since I remain childless”. When he’s alone with God his doubts creep in, and his worries start to show.

But instead of keeping those doubts to himself he expresses them to God. He vents his frustrations to God. His words may at first seem disrespectful, but Abram shows he’s not afraid to be honest with God, he knows he cannot hide anything from Him. And his intimacy with God shows in his outburst. It is not wrong to ask God questions.

I’m sure, like me, you have had questions and concerns about how God will be your shield since we read that verse yesterday, whether in big situations or in small details. But Abram’s honesty with God, and God’s dealings with him, should encourage us to bring whatever doubts, frustrations, and longings to God. Because this is where God shows him that, despite Abram’s doubts, things are in motion, that the Almighty has everything planned and will fulfil it according to his perfect timing.

Often, we do not understand the will of God in our lives. It is ok to admit that. But we know that God is good, loving, just, merciful, and gracious. Cling to His promises.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to be honest in my prayer and humble in my opinions. Remind me today that you are in control and that I can trust in you for all things, big or small.

17.

“Arise, Lord! Lift up your hand, O God. Do not forget the helpless. Why does the wicked man revile God? Why does he say to himself, “He won’t call me to account”? But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted; you consider their grief and take it in hand. The victims commit themselves to you; you are the helper of the fatherless...You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, defending the fatherless and the oppressed, so that mere earthly mortals will never again strike terror.” Psalms 10:12-14, 17-18

Let us spend time in prayer for those who are helpless. We have been told to stay home and wash our hands - yet there are so many people without homes to stay in, without the soap to wash their hands, without the food to feed themselves. Many are quarantined with their abusers - domestic violence numbers have doubled in our country, let alone elsewhere. Many have mourned the unexpected loss of loved ones. Many were not able to mourn their loss.

These are some of the truths that we live with in a broken world where most live without Christ. As people who know Him, our hearts must be moved in compassion for these people. Do we see the injustices of the world and pray for a change? Do we pray that God will open our eyes to see where we can help? Pray that God will be the defender of the oppressed; that he will not forget the helpless, and let’s pray that our hearts will not be cold or indifferent but compassionate to fallen humanity – If God had not had compassion on us in sending Christ, where would we be?

Christian compassion is modelled on Christ: self-sacrificial and with a desire to save

18.

“Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I. Send me!” Isaiah 6:8

Wouldn't it be amazing to see that this pandemic had caused many people to change their lives and live for Christ, to see people who we never thought we'd see saved suddenly fall on their knees and cry out to God, to see hundreds and thousands of people want to join the ministry, to go and witness, in foreign lands or at home, because this crisis made them see the needs of the people? Have the last few weeks done this to you?

Already this pandemic has made people see how shallow and materialistic our cultures have become. It has made so many see the emptiness in our world. Let's pray that God will equip each of us to go, whoever we are and wherever we may be, to seek out the lost and to point them to the one who will make them whole, to the only One who can save us from our sin.

Ministry for God does not have to be something we dread doing, nor something we will only be able to do half-heartedly. God often uses our talents and passions. We may not even know what they are yet. There may be things we never thought we could do but God turns them into things that become our joy and our delight. Our gifts will become “his good, pleasing and perfect will”

What is your mission field?

19.

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.” 1 Peter 5:6

In the midst of our questions and doubts when we look at all that’s happening, we have to submit ourselves to God’s mighty hand. He is accomplishing everything according to his divine purpose, and He will lift us up in due time. Look at the faithful servants of God throughout the Bible, and how they dealt with difficult times.

One of the famous examples is Job, who said: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised” (Job 1:21). Job said those words after hearing the loss of all his cattle, his servants, and all his children. Of course, he reacted with deep grief like any of us would. He tore his clothes, and shaved his head, but in his grief he fell to the ground and worshipped God. He humbly acknowledged that all the things he had in this world were given to him by God, that nothing belonged to him but to God. He trusted that the Lord’s purposes were perfect, if unfathomable, and that He should be worshipped in all circumstances. And God blessed Job for his faithfulness.

Job shows that grieving for the things we have lost is normal, but that even when all looks lost we must turn to God, that He is still deserving of our worship, and submission. It is relatively easy to worship Him when we have everything we want – but is the Lord everything we want? Can we still sing the words to “In Christ alone” today?

“In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.”

20.

“As for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more. My mouth will tell of your righteous deeds, of your saving acts all day long— though I know not how to relate them all. I will come and proclaim your mighty acts, Sovereign Lord; I will proclaim your righteous deeds, yours alone. Since my youth, God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds. Even when I am old and grey, do not forsake me, my God, until I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come.” Psalms 71:14-18

Are we like the psalmist - wanting to tell people of all the righteous deeds of our Heavenly Father, but not knowing where to begin and deeply aware that the blessings of God's love are innumerable?

Do we pray that God will keep us until we are old and grey so that we can live to tell the next generation about God's saving grace? This is a desire we can all share: to live our lives waiting for the next person we can witness to, and then the next, and the next after that.

Let's pray for that same desire the psalmist had to tell others of the mighty deeds of God, to tell everyone that He alone is just and salvation is found in Him alone.

Prayer: Lord, you alone are worthy of praise, for you are the God who lifts us from the pit. Let me tell the people in my life more about you. Give me an opportunity and give me wisdom in sharing the glorious hope that is found in you.

21.

'I am a prisoner of Jesus Christ' Philemon 1

Paul is in prison. But he does not say 'I am a prisoner of Rome', or 'I am a prisoner of the Empire'. He says 'I am a prisoner of Christ'. He knows that whether he is in prison or not he belongs to Christ and he follows and obeys His words.

But He is happy to be a prisoner; he uses this title to open the letter. Why? Because Jesus has saved him from the life he had before. Even though Paul came from a good family, received one of the best educations possible, had a career he was passionate about, he says that Jesus saved him from that.

He saw who Jesus really is. He saw that a life without Him is not a life worth living. He saw that before he knew Jesus, he was a slave to sin. He saw that the human heart constantly wanders towards sin, but that through Jesus he had been justified, freed and made clean from sin.

Christ bought us with His sacrifice. But, praise God, even though our lives now belong to Christ he does not want us as slaves to be kept distant, but as sons and daughters.

This is true freedom – freedom to be a prisoner of Jesus Christ. The things that satisfied us before don't satisfy us now. We no longer feel like we belong in this world but know that we are pilgrims passing through. We no longer worry about what our life will mean after we've lived a life of blood, sweat, and tears. We have been set free. Instead, we know that after a life serving the Lord, we will receive our reward in heaven which we receive through Jesus Christ our Lord.

When we are truly free we also begin to think about how we can help free others from the grip of sin: only through the power of Christ. And so we go, speaking of the one who set us free, no matter the cost, for we have a sure future. That is being a prisoner of Christ.

Every human is either a prisoner to sin or a prisoner of Christ

22.

'Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him.' 1 John 3:21-22

As believers, one of the most comforting truths is that God delights in our prayer. But this is not simply a truth to comfort us, it is a truth that develops our dependence on and trust in God. This is what John is speaking of here. This trust should turn into patience and that patience turn into faith. We can know that the Lord listens, trusting that He answers prayer and that He knows the best way for us.

They who pray while following Christ, seeking holiness, purity, are pleasing to Him. God sees our submission to Him which he blesses in part by answering prayer.

But John doesn't just talk about patient trusting prayer. A central part of a powerful prayer life is praying for others, prayers of intercession. So our prayers are not selfish, but develop our love for one another.

Pray that our brothers walk in the light, for their wars against sin, that they will walk in holiness, and that they will be more satisfied in Christ than in anything that Satan has to offer.

Prayer: Lord, I submit to Your Word and Your will. Thank you for the confidence I can have in coming before your throne of grace because of the work of Jesus. Help me to keep your commands and to do what pleases you, that I may become more like Christ today.

23.

“Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.” Hebrews 12:14

Why should we pursue personal holiness each day? Because the pursuit of holiness will inevitably draw us near to God. We strive to be holy to be more like our God who saved us.

We must understand that trying to pursue holiness is not what “makes us good enough” for heaven - it is not what will save us. Pursuing holiness is not about being the ‘best Christian’. It is not one-upmanship.

Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy. Holiness is about longing to become more like Christ – in our thoughts, in our speech, in our use of time, in our actions. As Christians we have received salvation by the work of Christ on the cross. Because of God’s grace we are saved. It is the Holy Spirit that works in transforming us to be more like Christ. And as Christians our main goal and priority should be to be more holy like Christ.

But our pursuit of holiness is not only for our own good. As Christians, our lives need to be clear testimonies of a life changed by God. So, another reason we pursue holiness is that people will see something of God in us. Our love for others will reflect the love God has for us.

Pursuing Holiness is a command, and a joy. Our obedience, out of gratitude, is worship. Determine to pursue holiness today as your act of worship to God.

Personal holiness is Christ-likeness; look to Him today as your example

24.

“Don’t be afraid,” the prophet [Elisha] answered. “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” And Elisha prayed, “Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see.” Then the Lord opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.’ 2 Kings 6:16-17

The king of Syria had sent an army to capture Elisha. He didn’t just sent a few men to collect him but sent horses and chariots and a great army to surround the city where Elisha was staying. And while Elisha’s servant was afraid of what would happen to them, Elisha knew that he was on the winning side. He knew that the Syrians had much more reason to be afraid, because they had set themselves against the Lord’s servant, and therefore against God Himself.

When we are telling others about Jesus, it is easy to be worried about how people will react to our message: will we be mocked or ridiculed? Will we be risking jobs, reputations, friendships?

But here we are reminded of the reason why we can witness with boldness and power: we have a God who is above all the things that we fear. His heavenly army is much stronger than anything that can harm us here.

There are so many things that God is doing that our human eyes cannot see, but we can know that even when we can’t see it God is in control - always and forever.

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

25.

“The path of the righteous is level; you, the Upright One, make the way of the righteous smooth.” Isaiah 26:7

The novel coronavirus has shown the world how quickly everything we know can change, how quickly our comfort zones, our security, and the things we thought to be essential can suddenly change or be taken away. Suddenly the things that really matter and that should come first in our lives become obvious.

It is worrying that it takes a global pandemic to make us see these things. Many of us will have to begin relying on God to help us get by from day to day. We'll have to begin living by faith alone. But we can trust that he makes our ways known, that he makes our rough places smooth. He never forsakes us. In fact, He makes the path straight and level, He is our light who helps us to see where we are going, and He is our guide who never leaves us, but leads us along every step of the way. And when we falter, He is there to catch us and lift us up again with His hands. He is the Upright one.

By ourselves we are weak, walking blindly, stumbling through our lives. We're trying to fumble our way around and make our own paths to success. But He is the one who guides our ways. Put your future in his hands, for He is the God who cares. As He said through Isaiah later, “I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them” (Isaiah 42:16). Take your worries to God; He will listen and care – and is mighty in love.

Prayer: Father, thank you that you are not a cold, distant God, but that you are the God of boundless mercy and love. Thank you for loving me even when I did not want to know you, and thank you for the work of Jesus, who removed my sin from me, so that the way of salvation is clear before me. Help me to trust you in the practicalities of today, for I know you have gone before me

26.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30

We can be worried and concerned for so many things, but there’s only one thing we need. We will not find peace and contentment in being busy, but only by coming to Jesus’ feet.

We are often at the point where we are so busy and fill our lives with so many duties and responsibilities that trying to find time for Jesus seems like another difficult task to add to the list of things to juggle. We can become so burdened by our sinful world; we burden ourselves by trying to keep up a perfectly productive life, when this world only gives us emptiness.

Instead, these verses tell us that when we come to Jesus, we find true rest. Because he is not expecting us to lead a perfect life by ourselves, he does not expect us to do everything in our own strength. He wants us to go to Him and put our trust in Him. There we will see that he led the perfect life for us, that we are made clean and sinless because of Him. We are no longer slaves to this world; we are sons and daughters of the King. We find eternal rest in his grace.

Prayer: Father, help me to find the balance between the busy-ness of work and taking the time to be still to come before you each day. Help me to use my time wisely in work and rest, and to rest in You.

27.

“But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

Paul had asked the Lord to remove his ‘thorn in the flesh’ three times. But the Lord did not. Instead, God used this thorn to reveal to Paul that His grace is sufficient, that it is enough. The “thorn” drew Paul away from pride, saved him from relying on his own strengths and made him lean on God in a way he otherwise would not have done. To be effective for God, Paul had to know and understand his own weakness.

When we see how weak we are, how little control we have over our own lives, we see God’s strength and His sovereignty, and we learn to rely on Him. We look back on our Christian walk and we see something of His perfect timing. We understand in a deeper sense that He knows exactly what we need better than we do, and we catch a glimpse of how powerful He is. Nearly always, we can only see this in hindsight, but we know it is true today.

Let’s not hide our weakness; don’t be afraid to share your weaknesses with others. How can God be glorified in our weaknesses when we pretend to be strong in ourselves? Instead, every time we go through trials admitting our weakness, God will be glorified in it – for it is He who brings us through, not our own abilities.

There have been so many times where I have been so grateful that God did not answer my prayer in the way that I had asked. It is only later, during those quiet moments with Him, that He showed me how He answered it in His perfect way and in His perfect timing. Take a moment today to reflect on answered prayer; you will find the same.

In our weakness the power of Christ is shown

28.

“After they [Paul and Silas] had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.” Acts 16:23-25

The other prisoners heard Paul and Silas singing in the prison. God also heard their songs and shook the prison with an earthquake. From that incident the jailor and his household were saved, and the prisoners were released.

Our self-isolation within our own homes and social distancing is no doubt very different to the conditions Paul and Silas suffered during their time in prison. But self isolating may make many of us feel like we're trapped in a prison of our own. A prison of loneliness, of fear or doubt. But God will hear you; He's waiting to hear your prayers.

Take your worries to him. Let him give you a new song. Let this be your new song: “I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear the Lord and put their trust in him.” - Psalms 40:1-3

29.

'Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world.'" John 4:39-42

Many of us already know this story but it's one that I love to think about. It's the story of the woman at the well in Samaria.

After meeting Jesus, this woman was so filled with joy that she ran to the people of her city telling them that she had met the Messiah, telling them the things that he told her. By her spreading this news many of the Samaritans of that city believed her and searched for Christ to see for themselves. And because of this many more people saw that he was the Saviour of the world and believed in Him. Isn't that incredible?

Jesus used the words of one woman to help so many find eternal life in Him. This woman was not trained at a Bible college, she was not the pillar of society, and John doesn't describe her as being an eloquent and persuasive speaker. She was an ordinary woman.

Despite her sin Jesus chose to meet with her. He revealed himself to her. And because of the words of Jesus, others believed her. She didn't have to do the convincing; they themselves said "we no longer believe just because of what you said: now we have heard for ourselves". All she had to do was point to Him, to tell people what he did for her - and Christ did the rest.

How encouraging that is to hear! We know nothing about what qualities or skills she had - only the message that she had, which is the same message we have: Christ is the Messiah. Let's pray that God will give us the passion of that woman at the well, that we will forget our past, our reputation, our insecurities and run to tell people what God has done in our lives. May we listen to Jesus' words today: "I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest." (John 4:35)

Prayer: Father, help me to speak about you. Help me not to focus on my abilities, but in your power. Work through me for your glory. May I be an encouragement to my fellow believers, and the messenger who brings good news to those who do not yet know you as their Lord.

30.

The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me." Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip. When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit." "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you." Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel." Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that." John 1:43-50

When Nathanael was underneath the fig-tree, he thought that he was alone, that no-one was there. But when he meets Jesus, he discovers that Jesus had seen him under the tree, and Nathanael is amazed by Jesus' abilities.

Jesus saw Nathanael in a way that only God could see – beyond the physical exterior to the needy soul. Even when Nathanael thought no-one was there, Jesus was. Nathanael is rightly amazed by this and identifies Jesus as the Son of God. Jesus is always there with us, even when we feel alone. He sees our restlessness, our worries, our searching for answers. Only Jesus knows our deepest fears, our deepest desires. Only Jesus can satisfy our souls, because only Jesus died for our sins.

But their meeting doesn't stop there. Jesus goes on to say to Nathanael: 'You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that.' It's the same with us. When we first met Jesus, when we were first saved, we were overwhelmed by what we saw and what we learnt. But in our ongoing journey with him we see so much more. Our original meeting with Jesus was only the start of the wonders we would see as we walk through life following Him.

Nathanael was impressed by Jesus' abilities, but he would see even more amazing things as a disciple of the Messiah. There is no end to the things we will see as we continue our walk with Christ, the Son of God through whom we have eternal life.

Each day with Jesus will show us another reason to worship Him