



THE ART OF PRAYER

"Magna ars est conversari cum Deo"

*It is an art - this great and creative prayer
- this intimate conversation with God.*

Thomas à Kemp

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DEDICATION

To my children, David, Marc, Déborah and Myriam.
May this presence redeem some of my absence

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Introduction

When Jesus prayed at his baptism, "*heaven was opened*" and the Holy Spirit descended, dove like, bringing a divine proclamation.

"You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." Luke 3:22

May heaven open upon you from the very beginning of these pages, may the Holy Spirit descend, showing how much you are a precious daughter - or son, of the loving heavenly Father.

"Our Father in heaven..." can only be prayed by those who know they are children of God.

This book contains devotional teaching and examples of prayer in action. As true prayer always contains a dynamic mission thrust, there is also some more concrete teaching on world evangelisation, gleaned from the experience of living amongst the Pygmy people while encouraging the emergence of indigenous mission movements in Central Africa and beyond.

The aim of all of this is to see our lives and churches transformed by prayer which will express itself in the incarnation of relevant, multi-national expressions of Christ's Body in the world.

Above all, it is a book which is passionate about the infinite possibilities that prayer opens up to us, enabling even the most humble mortal to fulfil his

personal destiny in bringing the awesome love of Christ to the nations.

Many years ago as a young Christian the Lord challenged me with the following truth:

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us..." Ephesians 3:20.

What are you daring to ask or imagine?

What would the young fisherman Simon Peter have dared dream of on the shores of Galilee? He could probably have coped - as *"a fisher of men,"* with a few getting caught in his "kingdom" net. And yet, one day he would walk on water, he would see over 3000 come to Jesus in response to his words, and he would own the honour of martyrdom. Indeed, God was able to do so much more than his human mind could grasp. As you read through these written words, may the Holy Spirit so grip your heart that you may have the faith, the obedience and the passion for the *"immeasurably more."*

1 SIMPLE PRAYER

The Aunty Nelly Factor

"You must believe in the yes that comes back when you ask, "Do you love me?" You must choose this yes even when you do not experience it." Henri Nouwen

Many years ago, as a young boy, I was dragged along by my parents to the Sunday afternoon tea ritual with my Aunty Nelly. Numbed and bored by the conversation, I would inwardly groan as the pointing finger of my Aunt rose in my direction.

"Why is he so big?" she would say.

Such a question simply opened up a black hole of despair in my vulnerable brain, but my Dad came to the rescue.

"He is big, because he eats lots of bread pudding."

Arriving home after the ordeal, I looked up to my Dad and asked:

"Am I really big because of bread pudding?"

"No son," he replied,

"The bread pudding was for your Aunty Nelly. You are big because I love you. It's my love that makes you grow."

With that he knelt down, gave me a hug and planted a big kiss on my forehead.

That lesson has stayed with me for decades. If you want to grow big, if you want to learn to pray, you must know that you are loved!

It is not the "*bread pudding*" of quick fix, legalistic formulas and Christian jargon that will strengthen your spiritual muscle, but a simple surrendering to an intimate relation with your heavenly Father.

Jesus, at the very beginning of his ministry, models this prayer and life principle for us.

"When all the people were being baptised, Jesus was baptised too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." Luke 3:21-22

When you pray, heaven opens and the Holy Spirit descends

Prayer also begins a dialogue – it releases the voice of the Father, carried on the wings of a dove. Hearing this voice is the basic essential for building a prayer life. Hear His voice speaking to you now, calming the storm of pain and suffering. Heavenly words invade the mundane monotony of days without prayer and ignite a new beginning.

"You are my son/daughter, whom I love; with you I

am well pleased."

We all become heroes when we know we are loved.

Allow the kiss of the Holy Spirit to settle on your forehead, and let Him strengthen you for prayer. Don't worry if you do not know what to pray in the beginning – such weakness is actually a great asset!

"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." Romans 8:26

Do you sometimes "*groan*" inwardly as you watch the news or see the madness of life around you? Do deep sighs nestle in your breast as you contemplate your own limits to living? Interpret the breath of God into such pain and find a prayer that even the greatest poet cannot pen.

Great groaners can become great prayers.

As you carry the longing up your own particular mountain of prayer, remember to hear the all sustaining voice that leads you on. In your pain and doubt you may cry out,

"Do you love me, do you really love me?"
Choose to hear the "Yes."

Oh When the Saints

"And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints." Ephesians 6:18

Pray in the Spirit:

Be inspired, allow heaven to be continually invading your heart and giving utterance to your lips. Allow yourself to get carried away in the Spirit's prayer and carried along by the spiritual tidal wave of other's prayer.

Luke 6:45, talking about good and evil utterance, states,

"For out of the overflow of (your) heart (your) mouth speaks."

Don't always worry about finding the correct words. As we saw in the previous passages, the Holy Spirit may often take us beyond words into longing.

Hear what John Bunyan had to say about this:

"The best prayers have often more groans than words."

On all occasions – the "kairos" moment:

The best way to overcome time is through prayer. We all know Martin Luther's famous phrase,

"Tomorrow I plan to work, work, from early until

late. In fact I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer."

The great preacher Spurgeon also learnt the priority of prayer as a means of making the most of every opportunity – redeeming time:

"We think we are too busy to pray. That is a great mistake, for praying is a saving of time."

In Greek there are two words for time – Chronos, which is the seconds and minutes of a watch, and Kairos, which is the opportunity, the "*timeless event*" in time. "*All occasions*" is translated "*kairos*" here. True prayers live in the kairos moment and are no slaves to clocks and time.

All kinds:

Inspired by the Father's love, may our tongues flow into "*all kinds*" of prayers. Diversity is the hallmark of prayer. There are as many ways of praying as there are personalities and cultures. It is always good to be open to learning from others, but the art of prayer is to be able to recognise and develop your own God-given style. Corporate prayer is like arranging a beautiful bouquet of different flowers. Just as the skill of a professional florist can bring beauty from the right arrangement, so the skill of a seasoned prayer leader will bring harmony and strength to the corporate prayer event.

Don't be afraid of people who pray differently from you. Don't shut down their utterance. Sometimes, people need space and time to learn to pray out loud and refine their words. Initiate long sessions of prayer which allow such apprenticeships. Don't expect perfection, or theologically correct phraseology, but allow the precious pearl to emerge from the mud of the diversity.

Be alert – no hypnosis!

The Greek word used here - "*ayrupneo*," has its roots in "*hypnos*" which means sleep, and "*a*", which means "*out of*", or "*no*." No sinking into the land of nod for those who want to pray. I have always been amazed to see how many yawns appear, and how many people begin to sink into the arms of Morpheus during a prayer session. It is a spiritual battle to stay alert! Somnos is the Latin equivalent for sleep. Prayer pushes us to "*insomnia*," or as the Muslims say,

"Prayer is better than sleep."

Hypnos, in Greek mythology, had a twin brother called Thanatos whose name gives us the word for "*death*." When most of the people are half-asleep or non-engaged in the prayer, you are simply inviting a very deathly spirit into your session. Remember the context of spiritual warfare within which this teaching on prayer is given. *"Be Alert!"*

Always keep on:

Forsyth said:

"The chief failure of prayer is its cessation."

You will never finish a marathon if you stop. The very nature of prayer is persistence – not simply a legalistic masochism to get to the end of the session, but a hard-working, painfully sweating, sweet communion with our Bridegroom King. We do not just pray to get stuff, but the very *"praying personality"* which God is forming in us has untold, eternal value in itself.

The Bride is indeed, with much faithful perseverance, making herself ready.

For all the saints:

Who are the saints? This is what Pope Francis recently said on his Twitter page.

"To be saints is not a privilege for the few, but a vocation for everyone."

Our prayers must never remain only mystical words. Beware the aimless strumming of a guitar, or the endless listening to worship for hours on end that sometimes goes by the name of a prayer session. At some point, your prayer must connect!

Praying for the saints doesn't mean a mystical

devotion to an old man's bones or a young man's singing. It means finding incarnation and communion.

Prayer needs to be directed to real people and projects. It needs a group of bodies to live in. It needs your own willing body. It needs a living sacrifice.

King David sums up this necessary incarnation in Psalm 109:4 when he says:

"I am a man of prayer." Literally, he is saying: *"I am prayer."*

Prayer needs to incarnate into unreached people groups, language learning, faith sharing, generous giving, servanthood – a genuine carrying of our own rugged cross.

Your prayers also need communion.

The Apostles creed states that we believe *"in the communion of the saints."* This can only be fully grasped in the context of prayer. We ever live in our prayers. Groanings and intercessions outlast time and death. We can still be in communion with the prayers of Saint Paul, but also of Saint Evan Roberts, and all the other cloud of witnesses who have faithfully, and often anonymously, prayed throughout the ages.

We are called to pick up the baton of such prayers

and carry them forward into our own generation. Longings and dreams for revival, for the awakening of whole people groups. Hudson Taylor's groanings for China have been taken up by a whole new generation of Chinese now on their way *"back to Jerusalem."*

There is indeed a necessary synergy of intercession – a deep communion with the living prayers of those who have gone, and are going before us.

The everyday *"koinonia"* – fellowship, of a prayer group's life is also vitally important for the efficacy of prayer. In Matthew 18:19-20 we read:

"Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree – symphoneo, about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together – synago, in my name, there am I with them."

"Symphoneo" and *"Synago"* – the sweet music of agreement, and the unity of the gathered - true synergy and genuine communion.

"The saints go marching in!"

Don't you Worry Child

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, 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

Are you a worrier? Don't despair, worry can be a great springboard into prayer. When you worry you are demonstrating a willingness to take responsibility for something. You are carrying a burden. This is a great beginning, but you need to focus on the "*positive possibility*" by taking worry into prayer.

"What anxiety and hope actually have in common is a sense of what is possible. In anxiety we anticipate possible danger. In hope we anticipate possible deliverance." Juergen Moltmann

The Greek word for anxiety is *merimnaó* which carries a sense of literally "*being torn apart*." We all know that feeling of being torn apart, churned up on the inside, as our anxious thoughts prophetically run wild and predict the worst possible scenarios for the burdens we carry. These burdens may be about "*anything*" – big or small, but all our anythings and "*everything*s" can be transformed by a simple step.

We need to change trains.

Leave the train of anxiety which is heading to a painful dead-end and catch the new train of prayer which will take you to the place of wholeness, peace and "*shalom*." Instead of having a torn heart

and a spinning mind, you can find the place of harmony and togetherness, shielded by hope in, and intimacy with, Christ. There are three important stops on this prayer train:

Proseuché - Prayer

This is literally the "*place*" of prayer. In a world which had no room for the Messiah at Christmas, we often find "*no place*" for prayer in our lives. We need to make space for God, give a place to the supernatural act of talking to heaven. Having a physical place to go to can be a great help in developing this discipline of space making. The original Greek word also means "*to wish towards.*"

Wishing heavenwards – a great definition of prayer.

Wishing to the little gods of money and power will never bring the deliverance hoped for and will inevitably put us back onto the train of worry. However, those who have found the space to wish beyond the earth to a benevolent, redeeming God will be rolling along on the tracks of peace.

Deésis – Petition/Supplication

This was often seen as an entreaty addressed to a King. The Greek word means "*being in lack,*" and true prayer uncovers the bounty of the giver but the sheer dependence of the petitioner. The great

Chinese pastor Watchman Nee put it this way.

"True prayer uncovers the emptiness in the petitioner but the fullness in the Petitioned"

It is in this place of supplication that the groanings of the previous passage, find their expression. It is in the place of petition that we are thrown into seasons of fasting and tearful entreaty.

Eucharistia – Thanksgiving/Grace in action

This last station is by far the most beautiful. It is finding the place of thanks and gratitude. An attitude of gratitude is the key to successful praying and a life of shalom. It is no surprise that the Greek word gives us the same word for the thanksgiving meal that Jesus shared with his disciples. We are called to bring every person and situation to that place of thankful grace. By prayer, it is as if we can pass on the piece of sacrificial bread to the prayer subject and say:

"The Body of Christ keep you in eternal life. Thank you Lord for this person, thank you for this situation. Thank you for taking me to this place and time in my life."

Linger long at the station of thanksgiving, as it will truly deliver you from the pagan prayer of worry and accusation.

The Pagan prayer

"And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."
Matthew 6:7-8

"So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them."
Matthew 6:31-32

The pagan prayer is a man centred, works orientated, many worded, religious duty. It wants things in return for works. It seeks the gift rather than the giver. It prefers food to the Father. It will take you onto the tracks of worry.

Seek a King not a thing!

"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."
Matthew 6:33

Seek the giver, seek the Father. You don't have to pray for stuff. Forget about it! Seek first, prioritize a living, intimate relationship with your Father King and all the blessings of life will follow.

From this place of relationship, provision, peace and security, you will have space to pray for the really important stuff.

Are you on the Shalom train?

One thing is needed

"She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said." Luke 10:39

"Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down. In the middle of the night something startled the man, and he turned and discovered a woman lying at his feet." Ruth 3:8

The previous passage on prayer encouraged us not to worry, and this one begins with the same exhortation of Jesus himself as he is confronted with the hustle and bustle of Martha's desperate ministry! Like many of us, Martha is *"worried and upset by many things."* Jesus calms her down and shows her the importance of simply focusing on *"one thing."*

We need to discipline ourselves to find the *"priority position"* to take in our lives. We must find *"what is better"* and what lasts forever – our intimate relationship with Jesus, the ultimate *"kinsman redeemer."* It is a place of listening to His word – a place of obedience and submission. Mary found this place at Jesus' feet. Ruth, at the feet of Boaz, also gives us some beautiful insight into this priority position of prayer. Let's take a quick journey into chapter three of the book of Ruth.

"My daughter, should I not try to find a home for you, where you will be well provided for?" Ruth 3:1

We find identity and a home with Jesus. Relation with him is where all true provision begins.

"Wash and perfume yourself, and put on your best clothes." Ruth 3:3

Confess and repent of your sins, washed in the cleansing blood of Jesus. May the incense of prayer and worship arise from our contrite hearts and may we clothe ourselves with the fruit of the Spirit and with power from on high.

Colossians 3:12-14, gives us a whole wardrobe of *"best clothes."*

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."

Compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and the *"overalls"* of love!

Let's take a closer look at these essential qualities which must *"clothe the praying character"* if we desire to open heaven.

Compassion:

The *King James Version* translates "*compassion*" as "*bowels of mercies*." Such seasoned words convey the sense of something being felt deep within. A "*gut feeling*," a deep travailing and groaning of soul. Jesus felt this compassion when he saw the people as sheep without a shepherd or when he wept at Lazarus' tomb. Compassion is an essential catalyst to set our prayers afire and our lives ablaze for Christ. It is the painful identification with the suffering of others which sets the stage for a potential miracle.

Kindness

Just be nice and agreeable! Before demanding a powerful, wonder working anointing to save souls, ask the Lord to make you a kind person. Simple acts of kindness win more souls than a year's worth of triumphalistic anointing. The Greek word used here is "*chrêstotês*" which is derived from "*chreia*," meaning "*need*." The literal sense is:

"The desire to make oneself useful, to minister to the needs of others."

Friendly, practical helpers are a key ingredient to the success of any Christian work. The cooks and cleaners, the builders and gardeners, the carers and givers, open heaven by their practical generosity. Their service is a living prayer. At some point, our asking must incarnate into a living,

active prayer. The absence of this quality is keenly felt and bodes the onset of spiritual poverty.

Humility

God opposes the proud, and yet gives grace to the humble. Humility, rather than making us a "doormat," gives us the quiet dignity of those who can give space to others, knowing that they do not have to force their own way. They trust God to lift them up in the due time.

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

The original Greek for "humility" - "tapeinophrosynê" is composed of two separate words: "tapeinnos" - low, and "phrên," - intellect or mentality. It is the opposite of being "high minded" and proud. This humble mentality is supremely displayed in Philippians 2:1-11, where Christ personifies powerful humility and where Paul encourages us to:

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit , but in humility consider others better than yourselves."

Gentleness - tamed power.

The idea of naive weakness which our English word for gentleness sometimes conveys is light years away from the original Greek meaning "praotês."

This word corresponds to the Latin "*mitis*," which is used to describe a tamed animal. The image of a powerful stallion, allowing a rider, would have been the original idea conveyed in the word. It presents an image of immense strength - possibly dangerous, were it not tamed and mastered.

Classical Greek added another facet to this idea of gentleness by implying the notion of it being "*like a caress*" and Aristotle defined it as being a half way house between anger and weakness. God has unleashed tremendous power into the heart of every believer. Such energy needs to be tempered by obedience and quiet submission to the Holy Spirit. The Patriarch Jacob learnt to walk with a limp and bless a nation - Hebrews 11:21. True worshippers have also come to know the power of gentleness.

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." Psalm 51:17

Patience

My patience, like my first shirt which struggled to contain my growing body, is far too short! However, the notion of patience goes way beyond just the ability to wait. I trust that I won't bore you by bringing in another Greek reference to help us come to grips with the true beauty of this concept.

For the ancient Greeks one of their most prize worthy cultural aspects was the concept of

"*megalopsychia*" - quite literally the "*power of soul*." Aristotle defined this as the proud refusal to forgive or tolerate a wrong. In short, it was the spirit of vengeance which demanded that a man's wronged honour be satisfied in the eyes of the world.

Jesus and his disciples confronted this cultural norm with exactly the opposite Christian virtue of "*makrothumia*," or "*patience*." Along with its verb "*makrothumein*," two ideas are conveyed by this radical new concept of longsuffering.

The first idea is that of tenacity - not giving up, of persistent commitment which perseveres to the very end. We find it in Abraham, hanging on to the promises of God in the face of overwhelming odds, and in every faithful Christian who holds on to the hope of his calling through life's long pilgrimage. In a nutshell, it means resistance, endurance. A famous French Huguenot, Marie Durand, was locked up in a tower in *Aigues Mortes* for many years because of her faith. She faced daily trials and temptations, but after her release they found the following words etched into the walls of the prison.

"*Résister.*"

The second idea is even more demanding. It signifies a love which continues to forgive and do good even in the most adverse of circumstances. This notion was an outrageous scandal to the worldview of the day, and even in our modern

times, this longsuffering love cuts across all ideas of division and vengeance which are still only too common factors of life. Indeed, "*makrothumia*" is a truly divine initiative. God Himself is described as "*slow to anger*" - Exodus 34:6, and only the outpouring of Christ's Spirit into our own hearts, and the crucifying of our selfish nature, can equip our humanity for such patience.

Bear with each other

Jean Paul Sartre's famous phrase, "*hell is other people,*" has an opportunity to be proved totally false by communities that choose to bear with one another's weaknesses. Early man fell by choosing to eat at the tree of judgement rather than at the tree of life. Instead of a mouth and a mind full of judgemental statements about all and sundry, let us cultivate a more positive mindset of looking for the good in the other.

"Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand...Therefore let us stop passing judgement on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way." Romans 14:4 and 13

And for those outside the Church?

"What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside." 1 Corinthians 5:12

A person - even in the wrong, represents an infinitely precious soul for whom Christ has shed his blood.

"Forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

This gracious cloak of mutual pardon is surely one of the most essential elements needed to clothe us and prepare us for effective prayer.

The original Greek word meaning *"forgive"* can also help us here. Paul employs the verb *"charizomai"* - from *"charis,"* which literally means *"grace in action."* Being truly charismatic is being wholly forgiving of others.

Another Greek word exists in the New Testament for *"forgive"* - *"aphiêmi."* The sense of this word is *"to leave behind, give up, abandon."*

When used in the context of forgiveness, it communicates the idea of God liberating us totally from guilt. Christ himself uses this term as, even with his dying breath on the cross, he sets us free from our sins, enabling us to leave behind the past with all its ugliness and condemnation.

"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Luke 23:34

However, the word *"charizomai,"* which is always

used by the apostle Paul to denote either God's forgiveness or mutual forgiveness between brothers, goes a step further than "*aphiêm*." For Paul, forgiveness takes us into the realm of Christ likeness. We are owning our birthright as Christians when we persevere and suffer on the road to forgiveness. Forgiveness is a divine act. As Christ generously, freely and definitively forgives us, so we too must forgive our brothers with the same extravagant generosity. In so doing, we carry the mark of the divine.

Love

"And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."

Whenever a dirty or arduous job presents itself we usually put on the appropriate clothing to undertake the task. The ultimate Christian "*overalls*" are the "*over all*" of love. Love prevents us getting soiled by the trials of life. It "*covers*" a multitude of sins:

"It always protects - panta steguei." 1 Corinthians 13:7

The verb "*seguein*" originally means "*to cover*."

Even if you forget to put on the other virtues, you can still "*cover up*" and keep warm by seeking to love. Love is the belt that holds all the others together. It is the fulfilment, the ultimate destiny of our being clothed in Christ. Get clothed and open

heaven, just as Ruth put on her best clothes to kneel in the presence of her redeemer.

"Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer." Ruth 3:9

How we need the garment of grace to approach our Lord. This is not our own garment but it is given to us freely. As Christ spread out his loving arms on the cross to embrace fallen humanity, so he extends his individual grace to each of us and clothes us in his righteousness.

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God." 2 Corinthians 5:21

There is a wonderful promise attached to the place of prayer. It is a *"leitmotif"* which runs throughout the Bible and which we will look at in the following pages. It is the wonderful promise of provision and answer which Ruth hears through the affectionate, intimate words of Boaz:

"And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask." Ruth 3:11

We too, modern Ruths, like Jesus' own disciples, also hear.

"You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it." John 14:14

Nations, People and Revival

Following on from Boaz's promise in the previous pages, we can now join the 41414 club. What's that? It is a select group of people who hold on to the promise of the 4th Gospel, Chapter 14, Verse 14:

"You may ask me for anything in my name and I will do it."

So what do we ask for?

We have already seen that we do not have to waste time praying for ourselves or our stuff – we do not pray *"like pagans"* striving with *"many words"* or *"running after things,"* but we simply seek our Father King who *"knows what we need."* We should learn to avoid Self/Sin centred praying as well. Too many prayer hours are wasted in telling God how awful we are! There is obviously a place for confession and genuine – not just spoken, repentance but when we read the basic model prayer the Lord gave us we find there are a lot more things to begin with. Seek the Father, seek the King, seek His will, receive bread and then, before launching into the spiritual warfare of overcoming temptation and evil, you get forgiven and forgive others. Here are three major thrusts for our prayers to rise upon.

Nations

Psalm 2:8, building on the promise of sonship, and giving a Messianic root to Jesus' prayer promise above, clearly encourages us to open up our prayer window onto the world and pray for nations.

"Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession."

True prayer is initiated in a strong missional thrust. Prayer allows the Church to participate in the "*Missio Dei*" – the mission of God.

As you watch the news, refuse to be overwhelmed by the Godless, negative information overload about various tragedies across the world, but carry the situations that touch your heart to the Lord in prayer.

Praying for nations may well change your lifestyle and take you quickly into the realm of intercession – but that is another future chapter waiting for us.

People

"I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." 1 Timothy 2:1-

4

You can pray for "everyone." Wonderful! Try and enthuse your prayer by picking up God's longing and strong desire that "*all men be saved*" through hearing the truth of the Gospel. Rather than wasting controversial hours on debating or philosophising about who is "*lost*," fill your heart with compassion for the crowds and pray the Lord of the harvest to mobilise active evangelists. Many people have the time to moan about their leaders – but who takes the time to groan for them in prayer? Are you a moaner or a groaner?

Verse 8 in the same passage brings the same challenge – instead of getting hot under the collar we need to get on our knees.

"I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing."

We would have far less divisions in church and society if we learnt to lift our hands in prayer rather than making fists. The ordinary trials and little prayers of everyday life pave the way to great spiritual revival.

James' practical epistle illustrates this principle. In chapter 5:13-20, he talks about prayer and mentions the great prophet Elijah. We see this great prophet opening the heavens with his earnest prayer – his cry for physical rain mirroring our own cries for spiritual rain on the barren lands and

hearts of this world.

"Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops." v.18

The prophet Zechariah encourages us to:

"Ask the Lord for rain in the springtime – (in the time of the latter rain.)" Zechariah 10:1

"I could never be an Elijah," we think.

"I've got too many troubles, and I can't even get rid of this runny nose!"

Well, such struggles with weakness are the first battles for revival.

"Elijah was a man just like us." v.17

And from the beginning of James' teaching we see that our very ordinary struggles take us on a journey towards prayerful victory.

"Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick?" v.13-14

The key to being successful on this journey is "Community" leading us to "Righteousness." True prayer for revival is community based and will lead us to mutual accountability and righteousness. So many verses here call us to community:

"He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord." v.14

"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." v.16

"My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins." v.19-20

We are called to spur one another on to integrity and righteousness. We cannot pray beyond our personal and corporate degree of righteousness. We cannot pray big prayers and live little lies together. An envisioned, truthful, prayer community is a powerful tool for revival. Community builds faith – *"the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well."* v.15.

Community is a practical outworking of our personal justification. You may feel weak, but push through into praying for nations, people and an open heaven.

"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." v.17

Protecting the promise

We saw a few pages back the incredible power in the prayer promise to those who find their identity in the 41414 Club.

This promise and power must be protected from wrong or immature use. This is why there are two major "*bouncers*" on the door to this promise club, guarding the entrance.

The name of the first "*protector*" is "*Sonship*."

The power of prayer is protected by the proven character of Jesus, the Son, modelled and built into our lives. Like a baby's first cry as it leaves the womb, so our first Holy Spirit inspired prayer, which births us into the environment of faith, reveals the Son in us.

"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 8:15

Jesus underlined that this was the first requirement for learning to pray in answer to his disciples request to teach them how to pray. He gave them the key to the prayer door.

"This, then is how you should pray: Our Father."
Matthew 6:9

Matthew 7:7 (another elite group – "*club 77*") also emphasises the strong "*sonship*" element needed

to seize the power filled promise of,

"Ask and it will be given to you."

"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 good gifts to those who ask him!" Matthew 7:11

God is working to create within us the character of His Son.

One way of doing this is to spend time remaining, abiding, in His presence. Spending many hours imbibing the character of the Son through His Word in the Bible is a vital part of this process of daily transformation.

"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you."
John 15:7

Like Daniel in the Old Testament, we need to be able to fuel our prayer through a vital understanding of God's prophetic word and purpose.

"In the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years."
Daniel 9:2

How long will the "*desolation*" of our churches last? At least until dutiful sons give themselves to prayer and understanding of the Word of God. We need a genuine Bar Mitzvah – we must become true sons and daughters of the commandment, entering into the maturity of ministry and prayer.

Flawed character leads to wrong motivation and a frustration of the whole prayer experience. The apostle James puts it very clearly:

"When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures." James 4:3

Hedonism and love for the world will take us out of the genuine prayer experience.

True intercessors are in the "*word system*" not the "*world system*."

The road to sonship is paved with discipline and correction. Hebrews 12: 5-12 puts this very clearly.

"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?...No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of

righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."

Allow the painful experience of life to train us for prayer.

The apostle John never gave up on the prayer promise and, even in his old age, he was constantly coming back to the theme. He emphasised that prayer was all about having the right character, the right heart. Being an obedient and pleasing son was far more important than having intellectual gifts or charismatic prosperity formulas.

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

And what then ultimately pleases God? What must I do to please Him and obey his commands?

"And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us." v.23

Faith and love – Pistis and Agape. Two essential qualities of character which release the power of the prayer promise to us, so that we may embrace the world and open heaven.

And the greatest of these is love.

Wisdom protects the promise

Having encounter the friendly bouncer of sonship, we need to call in the second bouncer who protects the powerful promise of prayer for those in the 41414 club!

How do you build up prayer power? Jude gives us a possible option.

"But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit." Jude 1:20

But what is praying in the Holy Spirit for you? Is it being zapped by some charismatic gift from heaven? Is it praying from the Spirit inspired Scriptures or praying with holy, sanctified character? While you're deciding on an answer, here's another question!

How did Solomon pray?

One day he had an amazing encounter with God who invited him to join the 41414 club.

"That night God appeared to Solomon and said to him, Ask for whatever you want me to give you." 2 Chronicles 1:7

What would you ask for? What do you want?

To coin a once popular phrase from the comedian

Harry Enfield, you might ask for *"Loads'a money."* Number two on the list might be fame, and then a healthy, long life and protection from enemies. You could no doubt find various forms of such prayer aspirations on most pages of the glossy *"How to be happy"* Christian magazines, and their self-centred echo resonates in even the most orthodox prayer meetings.

We must stop putting the cart before the horses! Take five minutes to tame the fleshly prayers and listen to Solomon's answer.

"Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?" v.10

Like Solomon, we need to constantly call in Wisdom to our prayer lives.

Someone, disappointed, may then ask:

"Does that mean I can't ask for all the other stuff?"

On the contrary, God is generous and loving, wanting to shower you with intelligent blessings. Once the wisdom is in place we are safe to receive the measure of *"Shalom"* appropriate for our growth and personal situation. Wisdom adds, like sonship, the necessary component of discipleship. The promise says *"Yes."*

"...therefore wisdom and knowledge will be given

you. And I will also give you wealth, riches and honour, such as no king who was before you ever had and none after you will have." v.12

Practical James also sees the ongoing character building qualities of heavenly wisdom.

"But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere." James 3:17

So ask for wisdom:

"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." James 1:5

True wisdom is not simply *"clever thoughts."* Wisdom is a person. Wisdom shared the creative process with God and is always a source of inspiration and joy. Wisdom was born of Mary in a stable. Solomon used his lifelong revelation of wisdom to write Proverbs. The eighth proverb is an ode to wisdom and well worth a meditative read in our quest to be wise.

"Then I was the craftsman at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind." v.30-31

Wisdom always chooses to love and rejoice in our

fellow human beings.

Not many of us could claim to be wise in the harsh, judging eyes of the world. However, as we have seen, the source of true wisdom goes beyond intellectual capacity to the ability to receive a living relationship. God is constantly calling us to a living relationship with Christ, the true wisdom from heaven.

"...but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." 1 Corinthians 1:24

God's wisdom confounds the world's wisdom, by making wisdom a gift, a person, to be received in grace by the weak and humble.

"It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption." v.30

So, indeed, build yourself up in faith by praying in the Holy Spirit, praying for more intimacy with Christ, praying for wisdom. Wisdom opens heaven.

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him." 1 Corinthians 2:9

Moving to God

"Prayer is more about movement than words."

Rowland Evans

Another element that rescues the prayer promise from the deception of selfish ambition and hypocrisy is the desire to get close to God and join Him in His project. Jesus emphasised this when he said:

"I tell you the truth, 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. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does." John 5:19-20

Some prayer tries to get God to move to our personal platform. True prayer involves us moving towards God.

"Where are you God? I want to be with you where you are. Help me to come to you!"

This may well be the best prayer that we can utter in the morning.

John 15, talks about us *"abiding or remaining"* in Christ. Finding God means finding His words, His prayer, His answer.

"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you."
John 15:7

This *"movement"* element of prayer challenges

each one of us to be part of the answer to the words we say. We move to a place of truth, a place of faith, a place of sacrifice. We are moved to love. We have to put flesh on our longings and get involved with God who is already at work in the world. You can pursue such "*movement*" in the pages on mission which follow in this book. True prayer will call us to move towards the God of mission – the Missio Dei, who is always at work in this world.

Let me end this chapter my sharing some of the prayers that my friend and mentor, Rowland Evans – intercessor and founder of many mission movements, taught me as he sought to move closer to God in his life.

"What is the greatest prayer I could pray for you today?"

"What is the greatest thought I could think for you today?"

"What is the greatest work I could do for you today?"

Perhaps Jesus himself provides a simple - yet profound, answer to these questions in the prayer model that he taught his disciples.

Our greatest prayer might be when we move to the intimate cry of "*Father,*" when we submit to His will

in our lives and ask for His Kingdom to come.

Our greatest thought might be when we imagine a world without hunger, fed with the provision of God and nourished with His Word. Thoughts of love expressed in forgiveness towards our brothers and enemies would indeed move us to inner glory.

Our greatest work might begin with the daily victory over sin and temptation in our everyday lives, leading us to engage in that higher calling of walking with Jesus to preach the Gospel to all nations, destroy the works of the devil and make Christ the head of all creation.

2 GOD REALLY IS GOOD

The ongoing ideology around us and overwhelming media coverage of death and suffering are constantly challenging the image of a good God. Like the proud beast in Revelation 13:6, Satan's strategy is to constantly undermine the character and goodness of God.

"He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling-place and those who live in heaven."

We are almost deafened by the cries – carried often on the wings of our own cruel suffering and loss, that God is somehow nasty, asleep, unfair and uncaring. We are constantly challenged to push against this prevailing blasphemy and find the true perspective of God's love. This is the heart of spiritual warfare as we battle against a wrong perception and experience of who God really is. To pray successfully and open heaven, we need to be healed of this wrong perception and gain fresh revelation of God's ultimate goodness and willingness to answer prayer on our behalf.

Satan's strategy is to deform our perception of God and slander Him to us in an attempt to destroy our faith and vitality.

From childhood, authority figures – teachers, parents, political and religious leaders, are

sometimes abusive and mould deep within our beings a wrong conception of God.

Jesus recognised this truth in his own teaching on prayer. Let's learn from the master. It is important to note that, as a good teacher, Jesus exposed the wrong conceptions in the hearts of his listeners before replacing them with the radical truth of God's grace. Certain phrases are repeated over and over again in Christ's teaching as he juxtaposes our erroneous conceptions with the truth concerning his Father. It is important to grasp these "*leitmotifs*" as they lead us on the path to a genuine vision of God's greatness and love. Jesus often uses phrases like,

"How much more."

"So I say to you."

"And will not God."

He does this to open the texts up to comparisons between human and heavenly perspectives.

I'll limit myself to three specific texts of Jesus concerning prayer, but we could find many more, not just in Jesus words but also in the epistles. Jesus lays down a foundation for prayer in Matthew 7 :7-11, Luke 11 :1-13 and Luke 18 :1-8. Let's take a closer look at these passages in our quest to open heaven.

In Matthew, Jesus is giving his disciples the key to prayer. Thinking back perhaps to his own commissioning in Psalm 2 : 7:

"You are my Son; Today I have become your Father."

We have already seen how important the element of "sonship" was.

"This, then, is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven." Matthew 6 :9

He hammers the message home even more strongly in chapter 7, and I imagine him being quite humorous in his style, using everyday family images which would touch a chord in each heart. His longing is to heal his hearers of a wrong concept of Fatherhood.

"Ask and it will be given to you," is the wonderfully frank truth of scripture.

However, in a world of hard knocks the hearers' minds are already putting up barriers and *"get out clauses"* in a wounded, knee jerk response to such a generous theology. Jesus, in his desire to heal their faulty paradigm, is already one step ahead of them.

"Which of you , if his son asks for bread , will give him a stone ?"

Little Johnny, hungrily expectant at the dinner table, is suddenly summoned to the garden by his Dad. Grabbing his son by the hair, he pulls him forward and rams a dirt covered stone down his throat !

"Here son, chew on that. It'll do you good !"

Next Friday, he's there again at the table looking forward to a promise of fish and chips, when suddenly he is summoned once again to the garden - remember Jesus was speaking to a middle eastern audience who had much more exotic things in their gardens than slugs and lettuce. There stands his Father with a nasty snake which he quickly puts to his son's tender mouth. Poisonous fangs await to do their damage. Other options on the menu include scorpions with a vicious sting in the tail ! (See Luke 11:12)

"Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake ?"

By now you can almost imagine Jesus' audience, amused and yet slightly enraged at such an ungenerous Father, wanting to butt in and say something more positive about Fatherhood. Jesus, having gotten them thinking in the right direction, beats them to it:

"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 good gifts to those who ask him!"

Has our view of God been so warped that we think he will give us something hard like a stone ?

Many, like the servant in the parable of the talents, think of God as being a "*hard man*." Many of my Catholic friends here in France have a view of two ways to God. The hard way through God the stern Father, and the easy way via Mary. A wrong view of God can also bend our theology.

Even in more evangelical circles, there is often the hidden fear that God's will for me might be something hard and horrible. Deep down are we afraid of obeying God? Are we fearful of getting too involved in prayer, in case He might actually speak to us ? Do we think He has prepared something for us with a nasty sting in the tail ? The devil lies to us and perverts the truth of God's love by filling us with fear.

Jesus goes to the heart of this fear and unbelief by gently bringing it to the surface in His example of the evil Father. He exposes such a concept for the demonic lie it is and unequivocally asserts the truth of God's Fatherly care. His words carry the balm of healing and restore the image of God the Father in the hearts of His hearers.

Perfect love casts out fear ! Meditate on Christ's words and enable Him to free you from your own deep-seated fears in order to be able to receive the faith to pray aright to a loving heavenly Father who longs to give good gifts to his children.

"How much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"

Is God asleep?

As we continue our prayer journey towards finding the right perspective of God, let's move on to Luke 11. Again, Jesus is teaching on prayer and comes up with another striking little story. Like our first story, this one is designed to expose the hidden views we have concerning God's character, especially in relation to prayer.

Essentially we have a man in need coming to "*his friend*" to ask for three loaves of bread. He is the archetype of all who come to God with their needs. However, in spite of his being a friend he gets a rather shocking reception.

"Don't bother me."

Deep down, do we sometimes harbour the image of God being like some high-powered business executive, rushing around running the world with no time for my simple prayers and concerns, having no interest in my three little loaves of life!

"The door is already locked."

Do you sometimes think that a "no entry" sign has been put up specifically over heaven for you ? Have sin, rejection and unbelief put barricades before heaven's generosity ? Has someone told you that you've no right to pray, as that is only the job of priests, holy men and the super spiritual ?

"...and my children are with me in bed."

Well, here we have it. God is asleep in bed while the world hungers for bread !

How many have not sometimes found themselves pondering such thoughts. Communists and humanists load their guns with such ammunition. The famous communist playwright, Bertolt Brecht, wrote:

"Food is the first thing, morals follow on."

God seems strangely absent from the world scene. Often, we may have cried out to God and felt, perhaps, His absence. An absence that may well have wounded us deeply and left the way open for Satan's bitter lies.

"I can't get up and give you anything."

Is God really as pathetic as this ?

Better find some rich businessman to get things

done or some mafia warlord as God, it seems, is powerless !

The above is the exact opposite of who God is and a direct antithesis to the whole ethic and promise of prayer.

If you've ever believed this lie about Him you almost deserve to be breadless. Such a blasphemous view of God and prayer is a pretty serious sin that needs repenting of. Jesus gently rebuked the father of the demonized boy in Mark 9: 23, when he weakly said,

"If you can ?"

We need to remember that he was speaking to the all-powerful Son of God.

"If you can ?" is just not good enough when you are addressing the Lord of creation. Jesus reminded him of the level of *"faith filled asking"* he was looking for.

"If you can ?" said Jesus.

"Everything is possible for him who believes."

Let us repent deeply of all the wrong views of God that are exposed in Jesus' simple story. Like our concerned father, struggling with past failure and demonic lies, let us cry out :

"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief !"
Mark 9:24

Let us persevere and be bold enough to walk through apparent contradictions by faith. Learn to laugh at Satan's lies and attacks and hold firm on God's generous giving nature. This is the "*persistence*" mentioned in the text. A persistence for a right perspective of God, not a superstitious persistence in dead works of unbelief.

The "*boldness*" and perseverance here is not to change God's mind or somehow win Him over through good works or penance. It is simply our own inner perseverance and boldness needed to overcome the lies of the enemy which continually blaspheme God's character to us. We must daily and boldly overcome such persistent demonic propaganda.

The original Greek word used for "*boldness*" here is *anaideia*, which literally means "*without shame*." When we think of the strong hospitality and shame culture present in these times, we also get the same unimaginable image that we found in the evil father giving a stone. In Jesus' culture it would have been just as unthinkable and horrendously impossible for someone to show such a lack of mutual support and hospitality to an asking friend.

Jesus, having exposed the lie and blasphemy of the

enemy within, takes us firmly back into the truth of prayer and promise.

"I tell you..."

"So I say to you..."

"...he will get up and give him as much as he needs."

"Ask and it will be given to you."

In this world, where God's image is constantly being blasphemed by the enemy's works of death and destruction - aided and abetted by the our own passivity and feeble prayer doctrine, we need a bold generation who will hold firm in prayer, striving daily to maintain their high view of God and getting answer from heaven to meet the needs of mankind.

The prayer of faith will always meet God's provision. God is longing to find faith that receives *"as much as we need"* and hearts that dare to ask.

"So...how much do you need ?"

Is God unjust?

We are making good progress in our journey into the promise land of prayer. Our next lesson emphasises once again the necessity to overcome the lies and find a true perspective on God's

character.

Our third text opens with the familiar "*antithetical*" teaching style of Jesus as he begins by exposing the erroneous, sinful view of God.

Luke 18: 1-8 is a story designed to encourage prayer.

"Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up."

What makes the majority of people give up on prayer ?

The idea that God is uncaring, unjust and harsh !

Many people have an unhealthy fear of God, seeing Him as an unfair judge. This paralyses their prayer and makes them give up easily. Jesus exposes this wrong view in his opening lines describing this awful man.

"In a certain town" – he might even have said, "In a certain mind-set !"

"There was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men."

Again, this definition exposes the hidden lies that have wounded our perception of God. It couldn't be further from the truth of a generous, loving God

who so cared for the world that He sent His one and only Son to suffer and die on a cross.

The ultimate caring !

A widow's prayer request is also mentioned.

"Grant me justice against my adversary."

Her plea is the universal cry for justice which has risen from broken, bereaved hearts since the earliest ages. Literally, she is saying:

"Give me justice against anti-justice."

As well as being the voice of humanity, she is also the voice of the Church – not yet fully understanding her inheritance as a Bride, yet interceding for justice against the great adversary, Satan.

Sometimes, in reading this story, it seems that the judge is more of a problem than the widow's adversary. Sadly, many people in the world seem to spend more time blaming God for injustice and adversity than blaming their true adversary Satan. True evil hides behind perverted perceptions of God.

Our *"uncaring, judgemental God"* here is just as refusing as *"our asleep God"* in the last story.

"For some time he refused..."

Refusing justice ! Unthinkable ! Even old Abraham knew better than that when he "*persisted*" in prayer to raise himself up to the level of God's justice in interceding for Sodom and Gomorrah.

"Will not the Judge of all the earth do right ?"
Genesis 18 :25

Again, the whole passion of Christ is a potent statement of God's utter lack of procrastination in bringing justice to the world.

So are we to vainly pray for justice like some poor widow woman?

Is prayer only about giving God a headache until he gives in?

Are we meant to simply wear God out with our superstitious mumblings and good works?

I remember hearing a famous preacher once say that many religious people he met seemed to be "*nicer than God !*" Is our attendance at church, added to our cultural morality, myriad Masses, Rosaries and prayer chains designed to wear down God's resistance until he finally gives in and answers?

"Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming !"

Surely we can do better than this! Is my prayer life simply a dutiful means to "wear God out?"

Jesus' whole aim here is to expose our wrong legalistic perceptions and spur us on to faith. If an evil father can give food to his kids, if a sleeping man can get up, and if an uncaring judge can finally give in, **how much more** does God want to answer!

"Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?"

It is at this point that you have to think back to the pantomimes you saw at school.

"Oh yes it is!...Oh no it isn't" You get the idea?

The crowds around Jesus would be bursting to answer.

"No! No! Our loving God will not keep putting us off. Even if the Romans are here, bringing injustice with every step, we know that Yahweh is not an unjust judge."

And Jesus, having got them to a point of faith continues:

"I tell you, he will see that they get justice" – big cheer from the crowd, *"and quickly"* – even bigger

cheer from the crowd.

And then he delivers us our ultimate, deeply challenging punch line:

"However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth ?"

Will he find hearts freed from fear and unbelief, hearts which trust a loving Father who gives good gifts to those that ask?

Will he find the faith that pushes through the apparent failures, lacks and contradictions of life, a faith that takes hold of Yahweh Jireh, God the Provider?

Will he indeed find his chosen ones crying out in intercession, day and night, in full faith that their prayers for justice in the nations are being met and that deliverance is as quick and as sure as the rising dawn?

In reading these words and parables, the Holy spirit may have exposed deep wounds and lies that have distorted God's generous beauty to your eyes. Allow these same words to gently encourage and heal, bringing a fresh power and perspective on prayer and its certain answer in a wonderful, loving and good God.

Look to the cross, look to the heart of Christ and find total care, total Fatherhood, total

commitment, total grace, total intimacy, total
action and total love.

"Oh yes he is!"

3 PRAYING FOR THE HARVEST

Prayer and Mission begin and find fulfilment in the heart of God Himself. A window in heaven opens in Psalm 2:7-8 and we are privileged to hear a conversation in the heart of the Godhead between the heavenly Father and His Son.

"He said to me, You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession"

This promise is not firstly made to us but to Jesus himself. In view of the Father's powerful mandate of giving the "nations" to His Son, it comes as no surprise to see this promise wonderfully fulfilled in Revelation 5:9:

"You are worthy...because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation."

And Revelation 7:9:

"After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no- one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb ."

But what lies between the promise and the fulfilment?

The answer? *"Ask of me!"* - Prayer for an "Open

Heaven."

Jesus made the ultimate intercession for the nations in giving his life on the cross, but He also delegated the promise of such prayer to his disciples in John 14:14:

"You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."

In our previous chapters you have already been signed up for this exclusive 41414 club! In giving us his "*name*," He has delegated the authority to us, his faithful followers, in order that we might "*ask for the nations*" in the same way as he continually intercedes for the world.

Revelation 2:26-27 encourages us to persevere in this prayer.

"To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations - 'He will rule them with an iron sceptre; he will dash them to pieces like pottery' - just as I have received authority from my Father."

God is longing for us to take up prayer as a key to missionary breakthrough. He wants us to look at the nations rather than our own needs and problems.

Matthew 8:25-26, reveals how most of us are used to praying.

Let's call it "panic praying."

Often, it's the only prayer that ever rises from the Church for, without a crisis or problem to inspire us, we so often remain prayerless! Anyway, the boat begins to fill up and the storm is raging overhead. All eyes are on the problem. A prayer rises out of man's basic instinct for survival:

"Lord, save us!"

This is as far as many of us get. A crisis may always be a good way to kick start genuine prayer, but we must be wary of falling into the trap of becoming totally self centred around our own personal problem.

"Save me! Help me! Bless me!"

As their eyes are fixed more and more on the storm, the prayer becomes prophetically negative.

"We are going to drown!"

It seems that their prayer is being inspired more by the spirit of death than by the Holy Spirit. They are predicting in prayer their own demise by drowning! I'll leave each one to judge which spirit might inspire your own prayer meetings. Unfortunately, so many missionary prayer gatherings focus on the problem and risk the danger of praying out negative statements over the nations of the world.

Jesus hears the request, as he hears all our words.

He hears more than the words, he hears the spirit and motivation behind them. With cutting discernment, He succinctly summarizes the spirit behind their prayer:

"He replied: You of little faith, why are you so afraid?"

Here we have it. Unbelief and fear - the two foundations on which our "*panic prayers*" are based. Focussing on the problem always leads us into such unbelief and fear. We need to turn away and let Jesus and His word transform our perspective until we find faith and boldness filling our hearts.

We all know what it's like when the water starts filling our boats, but before panicking, look to Jesus, "*sleeping*" as the waves rage, and find the peace and faith He is longing to inspire. Take time to look on His power and authority rather than your own weakness and problem. Let Him rebuke the waves and the wind - the earthly and the spiritual powers, and bring the calm. Don't panic pray the problem but look to the power and authority of Jesus - then pray.

The home of Mary and Martha, in Luke 10:40-41, gives us some more insight into how and how not to pray.

This time we'll call it "worry prayer."

Often folk relate well to Martha and of course we

need to honour those with servant hearts and a practical bent. However, in this particular incident Martha proved herself to be quite a formidable character. First of all, she wasn't thinking straight. She launched into the "prayer" - or talking to Jesus,

"distracted by all the preparations that had to be made."

How many prayers die before they even begin because of distraction? It comes as no surprise that Jesus himself went to the quiet, desert places to pray and advised his disciples to shut the door of the hidden chamber in order to find a place far from distraction. The place of inner calmness - even if the outside is bustling, is the place where prayer begins. Anyway, Martha is getting more and more agitated and, as the deadlines begin to approach and she imagines the guests arriving, she blurts out.

"Lord, don't you care?"

Fancy that. Accusing Jesus of not caring!

The distraction and agitation have given her a completely erroneous view of the Lord. She begins to lose sight of His love and compassion. This often happens to us all in the face of fatigue, weariness and advancing deadlines. We may not be as direct as Martha, but the hurt is often there in our prayer, accusing Jesus of not caring. True prayer can only be birthed as we arrive at the place of knowing

God's commitment and compassion for a world of people. He may not care so much about our own selfish, private agendas.

"My sister has left me to do the work."

She accuses her sister next!

"Worry prayers" are marked by their spirit of accusation no matter how religiously veiled they may be. Martha was focused on the work whereas her sister was focused on the word. Here is a key. We must not let ourselves get focused on the work which will only lead us to worry, but rather be listening to the word of God which will lead us to Jesus' feet.

"By myself."

She is falling into self pity now.

Looking only at the work has given her a false sense of martyrdom. Somewhere inside, she is wounded with rejection and this shows itself in the desperate plea for help. Many missionaries, pastors and servants of the Lord may sometimes find themselves praying as Martha, releasing their feelings of frustration and loneliness. We long for more *"workers,"* but our asking is too often based on worry, need and a sense of getting an *"uncaring"* Jesus to act on our behalf.

"Tell her to help me!"

Now she's giving orders to Jesus!

At first glance, it doesn't seem like sin, and we all fall victim to the arguments that need and worry present before us. However, it really is quite serious, and Martha has slipped into a spirit of manipulation rather than the submissive resting in the Holy Spirit. She is on the slippery slope of allowing an evil, domineering spirit to speak through her. The Lord will not tolerate such a situation and longs to set her free. We really do need to be careful about how we pray for workers and the "needs" of the mission field. If we drift away from the centrality of Jesus - His love and provision, we end up self-righteous, accusing, worried and rejected manipulators! However, before giving up in despair, let's take a look at Jesus' loving response to Martha.

"Martha, Martha!"

He quietens her down. Speaking out her name restores the relation with Him and one can sense the love and patience of Jesus coming over in His double mention of her name. How often we need to be quieted by Jesus' loving words to us.

"He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."
Zephaniah 3:15

As he did with the disciples in the boat, he put His finger on the true inspiration of Martha's prayer.

"You are worried and upset about many things."

The Greek word "*turbazo*" is used for "*upset*," which means to make turbid like troubled waters in tumult and uproar.

As we saw previously, worry can be a good springboard to prayer, but it should never become a substitute for true prayer.

"Do not be anxious about anything, (especially 'many things') but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." Philippians 4:6

Let the Lord calm our "*troubled*" waters before we pray. Worry and upset should never dominate - or even infiltrate, our prayer times.

Jesus brings the solution.

"Only one thing is needed."

"What's that?" we cry.

Well, we saw it earlier on when we discovered Ruth at the feet of her "*Kinsman Redeemer*," and Mary was clever enough to have chosen the same thing. We can choose it too. It is not forced upon us as a rigorous duty.

"What is it then?"

To simply listen at Jesus' feet. Prayer is all about listening.

"Mary sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he

said."

We need to come back to Jesus' own advice about praying for missionary advance which we find in Matthew 9:36-38.

We might call this "*the harvest prayer.*"

"When He saw the crowds, he had compassion on them."

Jesus' eyes were not on himself. He saw the crowds, and their utter helplessness. He had compassion - this is His spirit. He longs to inspire us all with this same spirit, as we pray for the world.

He longs to melt our hard hearts with his compassion.

He said:

"The harvest is plentiful..."

Jesus emphasises the opportunity not the problem.

Just take a look out there. All those nations to be won for Jesus. They are ready for harvest. What an opportunity!

Compassion and Vision – feeling the pain of the lost and seeing the opportunity of the ready harvest are the two pillars of "*harvest praying.*"

"...but the workers are few."

Again, Jesus is saying this as an opportunity rather than with fatalistic resignation.

At the time, there were only 12 disciples. As they prayed and went, they quickly became 72, and then 3.000 on the day of Pentecost. Some sad people continually whine out this phrase as if it was set in stone at the time of "*only 12*" as an excuse for failure to pray and recruit more workers. They totally ignore the fact that the whole idea is to multiply the workers! In an age when millions of "*eleventh hour*" workers are waiting to join the final thrust of world evangelisation, surely we should be taking the prayer opportunity that Jesus offers us seriously.

"Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

The key prayer for our generation is to ask God to release the workers from Africa, Asia and the Americas. Those who genuinely ask, will probably find themselves going as well.

Ask and go!

Jesus was the ultimate sent one. We can learn more about the prayer for the harvest and opening heaven as we delve deep into his prayer for the world given to us at the end of the Gospel of John.

Seven lessons from Jesus' prayer for the world

1) Revelation – *"I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world."* John 17:6

God wants to be known. Eternal life itself depends on this ultimate knowing.

"Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." v.3

The apostle Paul also echoed this reality of revelation when he prayed for the Ephesians:

"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better." Ephesians 1:17

The generous Father has already *"given"* us people to whom He will reveal the beauty, glory and salvation of His Son Jesus. Who are your *"given?"*

2) Edification and Sanctification by the word of truth – *"For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them...Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."* John 17:8&17

You must give people *"words"* that you have overheard from the Father. Such words are found in the disciplined and loving meditation of the

whole Bible. Try reading it through at least once every year.

3) Prayer – *"I pray for them."* John 17:9

Jesus *"always lives to intercede for"* us according to the writer of Hebrews 7:25, and we should also devote our lives to pray for those God has entrusted to us.

4) Protection – *"Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name...My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one."* John 17:11&15

For the Jews, there was great power in the revealed name of God. That name is now incarnated and fulfilled in the name of Jesus before whom every knee must bow:

"Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Philippians 2:9-11

Proclaim the name of Jesus over those you love, your church, your friends, family and your nation.

True protection can never come from just hiding away behind the four walls of the church or barricading ourselves behind a marginalised

religious culture. We are in the world as salt and light. Engage boldly with it, releasing those you love to their culture and friends, trusting that your prayers will protect them from all evil influences.

5) Unity – *"so that they may be one as we are one."* John 17:11

Staying together always requires effort, sacrifice and love. It is the mark of the mature and the reflection of true Christian character. Unity is never separate from the truth of God's Word. Heeding the apostle Paul's advice, we must all work towards this goal.

"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." Ephesians 4:3

The Puritans put it this way.

"Unity in essentials, liberty in non-essentials, charity in all things."

6) Joy – *"I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them."* John 17:13

Jesus is a joy bringer. Cultivate joy in your life and sow it into that of others. The atmosphere of the Church, where Jesus is present, should be impregnated with joyous freedom. The cold, stony sadness of many religious edifices simply signals

the absence of the true Beloved.

"Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." Nehemiah 8:10

7) Mission – *"As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world."* John 17:18

There is a great river of purpose flowing out from God's heart. He wants all of us to be caught up into this passionate current of love which seeks salvation and restoration for the world. Jesus began the *"domino effect"* of such a mission as He laid down His life, was *"sent"* and knocked on to His disciples the same *"sacrificial sentness."*

May your own domino fall on to those around you, adding to the great teleological history of salvation.

The Prayer Dialectic – Mission and Pain

Psalm 22 takes us deeper into Christ's prayers for the harvest.

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

God's promise and perspective:

My early Christian beginnings were nourished in the victorious context of a prayerful missionary movement. I fed on the nectar of the Biblical promises I shared with you earlier from Matthew 7:7 and John 14:14:

"You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."

My guiding principle was:

"Prayer means answer."

What do I do then with the shuddering, God forsaken cry that comes from a broken man?

"O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer..." v.2

What do you do in face of failure? How do you handle a cross? Jesus himself spent a lifetime resisting the devil's promises to answer prayer. The last temptation of Christ was to come down from the cross:

"Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!" Matthew 27:40

Theologians come up with two useful phrases that help me understand God's apparent failure and weakness. Kenosis and Epistemological Distance. The first is based on the humility of the incarnation, the fullness of deity, *"making himself nothing (kenosis)"* Philippians 2:7

The second speaks about a necessary limitation on the knowledge of God in order to protect our freedom to love. God doesn't write his name high in the sky or play miracles to the crowd in order to

impose Himself. He hides in humility, and sometimes pain, waiting to be discovered by those who long for true intimacy.

Perhaps my own prayer weakness may also be a sharing of the same principles? I am not a "*prayer superman*." I need the discipline of learning obedient sonship, leading me like Solomon, to ask for more wisdom.

So, should we all just give up and abandon the prayer promises? Surely not!

My experience is always less real than God's Word and promise. In the face of transient non-answer and pain – hang on! Be a limping Jacob, refusing to let go of the promise:

"I will not let you go unless you bless me." Genesis 32:26

In the Psalm, the suffering hero appeals to the Sovereignty of God and decides to praise Him anyway, whatever the circumstances – can we not do the same?

"Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel." v.3

Other's testimony and my experience:

Are you sometimes overwhelmed by the victorious testimony of others compared with your own

meagre experience of victory? V.4 speaks of the testimony of history where "*Fathers*" trusted and were delivered. Others "*cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed.*"

Wonderful, Hallelujah, but what about me and my failures?

"I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people..." v.6

There seems to be a glaring contradiction in the heart of intimacy. The bridal delight of "*Hephzibah*" in Isaiah 62:4 seems to have been perverted into the restrained "*delight – Chaphets,*" v.8, of God towards his servant. I should be a glorious Bride, but I feel like a worm! Kenosis and distance are again at work.

What can I do? Appeal to destiny – throw yourself into the ultimate purpose of God.

"Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you even from my mother's breast. From birth I was cast upon you; from my mother's womb you have been my God." v.9-10

Demonic oppression, yet victory in His presence:

Bulls, lions and oxen speak of the fearsome reality of the demonic opposition sometimes let loose

upon holy servants. Hearts turning to wax, being *"poured out like water"* v.14, are experiences of many burnt out, fearful – yet faithful, men and women of God. The *"piercing"* v.16, of hands and feet points us to Christ's passion, but it is the same physical or mental torment of many of his people throughout time and geography.

Only the presence of the Almighty can give us strength in such times:

"But you, O Lord, be not far off; O my Strength, come quickly to help me." v.19

The apparent contradiction of the opening *"abandon"* finds a deeper answer of intercession in the ultimate Presence.

"For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help." v.24

Our testimony - intercession, prayer, praise and proclamation:

"I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you." v.22

My mission is geographical, social and generational.

Geographical - *"All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families*

of the nations will bow before him, for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations.” v.27-28

Social - *“All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him-those who cannot keep themselves alive.” v.29*

The whole social structure from the rich to the “*dirt poor*” will be impacted by such intercession from his Church.

Generational - Our lives of faith, prayers and sufferings lay a solid foundation for those who are to follow. Nothing is wasted. Can you believe that part of your mission is for the yet “*unborn?*” Those who sow in tears can be encouraged by this long-term perspective.

“Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn – for he has done it.” v.30-31

Our harvest prayers will indeed encounter suffering. The knocking on heaven’s door resonates with the knocking of nails into crucified hands and feet. Don’t give up. Allow the example of Jesus – in pain and yet rising to ultimate victory, to bring strength as you persevere in your purpose of opening heaven. Ask and Go!

4 INTERCESSION

A Sympathetic God

Having laid a solid foundation concerning some of the basic concepts of prayer, let's begin another journey in our quest to open heaven by engaging with the practice of intercession.

First question:

"What is the difference between prayer and intercession?"

Much good material has been written on this. Most people would agree that it might be unhelpful to make too dogmatic a distinction as there are many overlaps and grey areas between the two. A person who prays much may also find himself in the place of intercession whether he knows it or not. Intercession is more of *"a standing in the gap"* on behalf of someone else, some situation or nation.

For me, intercession is the place where your own prayers take on flesh. After a prayer meeting, you can go home and forget the prayers you prayed and carry on with your life. An intercessory prayer will stick on your insides. It will not let you go, it becomes part of your life. Psalm 109:4 puts it well as, in the original Hebrew, it literally states:

"I am prayer."

Intercession is when you become your prayer. It goes beyond words into a lifestyle. As we will see later, this may well entail entering into a more “missionary” calling upon our everyday Christian lives as we incarnate our prayer.

Isaiah 53:12, is a prophetic passage speaking of the crucifixion – the ultimate intercession, when the innocent Lamb of God took our place and punishment for the guilt of sin.

“Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

Ezekiel 22:30 also offers a good description of such intercession which stands on behalf of someone else.

“I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so that I would not have to destroy it, but I found none.”

Great intercessions from the Old Testament can be found in Abraham’s prayer for Sodom and Gomorrah, Hannah’s prayer for a child, Nehemiah’s

prayer for Jerusalem, Daniel's spiritual warfare to see the promises of God for his nation accomplished, Moses prayer on behalf of wayward Israel in the desert and many more.

Psalms 106:25 speaks in the same terms about Moses' intercession:

"So he said he would destroy them— had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him to keep his wrath from destroying them."

And Moses himself comments the event in Deuteronomy 9:25:

"I lay prostrate before the LORD those forty days and forty nights because the LORD had said he would destroy you."

Jesus' earthly life - as well as Paul's and the apostles', were all about crying out to God and living on behalf of others:

"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission."
Hebrews 5:7

Jesus is still operating in this vital ministry of intercession which burst forth once and for all from the cross and resonates into our present day and circumstances:

"Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them." Hebrews 7:25

Let me give you three major attributes of intercession.

1. Identification – *Sympathéo*

You cannot just say words. There is a taking up of a position of identification with the situation prayed for. A missionary paradigm enhances the power of intercession as languages are learned and cultures assimilated in an incarnational process. We have a God who identified with His creation:

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise (sympathéo) with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin." Hebrews 4:15

Pathos comes from the Greek word for suffering. *Sympathéo* – from where we get our English word sympathy, is much more than just a sad feeling for someone. It is an intentional taking on of their pain. Such identification may take the form of fasting, nights of prayer, sacrificial giving and service. It is important to allow the Holy Spirit to lead you into such things as man's good or guilty intentions will only end in failure and spiritual pride.

2. Suffering – *Dolor*

Identification will lead us to suffering. Jesus, the "*man of sorrows*," knew all about this. We will all need to negotiate our own "*via dolorosa*" through life as we follow Jesus, carrying our own crosses.

"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us... In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express"
Romans 8:18,26

The above verses open by talking about such suffering. Rather than seeing it as some huge crushing curse, they go on to show how the Holy Spirit can take our local suffering and give it global, intercessory significance. Who knows what caused David to cry out in his Psalm 22:1.

"My God, My God, Why have you forsaken me?"

Hundreds of years later, his local cry of pain became a cosmic redemption on the Son of God's crucified lips. Who knows what glory and significance our own groans might carry?

3. Authority – *Exousia*

After a cross there is always resurrection. The suffering endured on behalf of others gives a moral

and spiritual authority to our lives and prayers. It puts substance into our faith and quality into our character. Each successive event and place of intercession gained builds up our own personal curriculum vitae of credibility before God and men. Desmond Tutu, in his book *"No Future without Forgiveness,"* commenting on Nelson Mandela's twenty seven years of imprisonment and subsequent release, writes the following:

"It would be easy to say that those twenty-seven years were utter shameful waste: just think of all he could have contributed to the good of South Africa and the world. I don't think so. Those twenty-seven years and all the suffering they entailed were the fires of the furnace that tempered his steel, that removed the dross. Perhaps without that suffering he would have been less able to be as compassionate and as magnanimous as he turned out to be. And that suffering on behalf of others gave him an authority and credibility that can be provided by nothing else in quite the same way. The true leader must at some point or other convince her or his followers that she or he is in this whole business not for self-aggrandisement but for the sake of others. Nothing is able to prove this quite as convincingly as suffering."

Jesus stood on a mountain before a discouraged

band of disciples. Some worshiped when they saw him while others doubted. Doubt and worship form the beautiful vulnerability of the missionary context where the splendour of God and our own inability form a glorious – if not contradictory, alliance.

Jesus spoke these majestic words of authority, encouraging a handful of ordinary people to take on the world:

"All authority (exousia) in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations..." Matthew 28:18-19

His authority was the fruit of His passion, the fruit of intercession. May we rise to the challenge to bear such fruit in our own lives.

Calling all Mums

Every Mum is an intercessor !

All mums display the three essential ingredients of intercession that we mentioned above. They fully identify with the growing baby in their womb, they suffer in that identification through the initial birth and permanent care of the child and they have their own motherly authority of love over their offspring.

The Bible is full of this "*Motherhood factor.*" We witness throughout its pages both the literal and spiritual birthing of significant children - even unto

Christ, through intercession. We see the power and the pain. Let's consider a few key verses:

"All these are the beginning of birth-pains."
Matthew 24:8

"To the woman he said, 'I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing ; with pain you will give birth to children.'" Genesis 3:16

The world had been lost through sin. God began his redemptive strategy by giving prayer and work to mankind. Adam was to sweat it out labouring the fields, getting rid of the thorns and thistles, while Eve was to cry out in labour giving birth to new lives. It is interesting that the monastic movement founded by Benedict in the middle ages, which transformed Europe, had these two principles as its founding credo:

"Orare Laborare" – Prayer and Work.

Eve, our ancient mother, began redeeming the fall through the *"gift"* of labour pains, suffering – intercession. The following verses of Genesis 3:15, which speak prophetically of Christ's intercessory victory over Satan, emphasise the warfare context of such labour.

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

The ancient battle and enmity between Eve and Satan traverses history, stretches into the future and finds ultimate incarnation in the fruit of Mary's womb.

"But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; his kingdom will never end." Luke 1:30-33

Even the natural world of "Mother Nature" seems to be flowing in this ancient rhythm of intercession inherited from the first fallen creation.

"We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time...In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." Romans 8:22,26

The natural world, frustrated by decay, is our ally in intercession.

A place of barrenness in our lives, lands and

ministries is always an opportunity for fruitfulness via intercession. Don't blame the barrenness but sing beyond it.

"Sing, O barren woman, you who never bore a child; burst into song, shout for joy, you who were never in labour; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband." Isaiah 54 :1

The great pioneer Paul, also took up Eve's spirit as his entire life was consumed with the birthing and nurturing of churches through his apostolic intercession.

"My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you." Galatians 4 :19

In the same breath he mixes a number of metaphors – as does John in Revelation, where a Bride interchanges with the Heavenly Jerusalem, pointing to a heavenly principle which echoes the redemptive birthing of the early garden and brings it to fulfilment:

"But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother." Galatians 4 :26

The veil is mysteriously drawn back in John's Revelation of the Church and Christ and their ultimate victory and consummation is described

from a variety of colourful, metaphorical and gloriously sacramental viewpoints.

At the beginning of Revelation 12, the scene shifts into showing some of the hidden spiritual rhythms and realities which lurk behind history, reach into our present time and thrust us into the future:

"A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven : a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth...The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron sceptre."

Revelation 12 :1-5

Another Mum!

What does this breathtaking sign mean?

Who is the woman of Revelation 12 ?

Who is this dramatic "*sign*" in heaven? Many scholars and theologians have addressed this question over the years. I even read recently that some people interpret her as the zodiac sign of Virgo who awaits the time to have a certain configuration of moon and stars around her.

However, the main explanations that have emerged from various ecclesial traditions ask these three questions:

"Is she the Church ?

Is she the Virgin Mary ?

Is she Israel ?"

Now, as a fairly ecumenical Protestant, I cannot fully accept the Mary solution. However, so as not to throw the proverbial baby out with the bath water, I prefer to redefine this explanation as the woman representing the "*Mother*" figure and essentially all the courageous women from Eve, Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba and many anonymous others, who birthed the line of the Messiah through the ages, culminating in the glorious fulfilment of it all through mother Mary's miraculous birthing of the Messiah in the flesh.

The vulnerable child, born it seems in hopeless weakness to be devoured before the dragon's gruesome mouth, is in fact born with an innate Messianic promise. He holds the "*ancient*" sceptre, to fulfil the "*ancient*" promise of the garden, (Genesis 3:15) to overcome the "*ancient*" serpent.

"He said to me, You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will make

*the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth
your possession. You will rule them with an iron
sceptre; you will dash them to pieces like pottery.”*
Psalm 2:7-8

The “*male child*” is neither crucified nor devoured,
but lifted up to heaven, echoing the prayer that the
Lord Jesus gave his people in Matthew 6:10:

*“Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as
it is in heaven.”*

This is a great encouragement to us. So often, our
ministry and its vulnerable fruits seem ready to be
devoured by persecution and strife. However, what
is born out of intercession and promise carries
innate authority and will always survive against all
the odds!

I’ll come back to this “*Mother figure maintaining
the line of the Messiah*” later in the study, so let’s
move on.

The classic interpretation is that she represents
Israel with the miraculous salvation from the
waters reminding us of the crossing of the Red Sea
in the famous Exodus story and the forty-year
“*desert*” period of wandering. The twelve stars
might speak of the twelve tribes and the sun and
moon are images used by Joseph in his dream to
emphasise the family, and hence the roots back to
Abraham – and even beyond to the early garden

creation. Israel gave us Christ.

Other commentators would emphasise that in the "*new alliance*" she represents the Church who has been grafted in to the aged root. Let us cast a brief glance over these three options in the light of our subject of intercession.

She is Israel

We need to go back to Genesis 32:22 to find the beginnings of Israel's name. We find Jacob wrestling with "*the man*." The prophet Hosea comments on this passage by stating that:

"In the womb he grasped his brother's heel; as a man he struggled with God. He struggled with the angel and overcame him; he wept and begged for his favour." Hosea 12:3-4

It is a story about struggle and transformation.

"I will not let you go unless you bless me." v:26

This is the language and posture of intercession.

Jacob's physical and soulish strength is broken in the process:

"...he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man."
v:25

True men and women of God, those trained in the

school of life and intercession, do not walk with a swagger but a limp.

"The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip." v:31

He "overcame" an all-powerful God through his faith to hold on in weakness and vulnerable love, refusing to let God go. Pain and suffering often tempt us to push God away, but we can be transformed as we "overcome ourselves" and hang on. The Father's righteous wrath was "overcome" on the cross as Jesus hung on for a blessing to all mankind.

"Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and man and have overcome." v:28

Israel means "he struggles with God," and Israel, with the great prayers of Abraham, Moses, David and the prophets have always been an intercessory people. It is the key to understanding their persecution by the dragon throughout history.

With the blessing he received, leaning on his staff, Jacob went on to bless Pharaoh - Genesis 47:10. Our intercession can bless the world. He also had a prophetic blessing to pray over his sons, the next generation to carry the blessing.

"All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is

what their father said to them when he blessed them, giving each the blessing appropriate to him."
Genesis 49:28

Our intercession must also prophetically rally and bless the emerging generation of pioneers.

Go and bless your world and family today!

Having seen the woman as the "*fighting, praying, suffering, and broken*" Israel, we will move on to look at the "*praying*" Church.

My heart's desire and prayer

We saw above how the woman in Revelation 12 could be seen as Israel. Now we look at the second option of her as the Church. This time the twelve stars could be seen as the twelve disciples and the sun and moon representing the breadth of the Church as her members "*shine like stars*" in a dark world. However, adding metaphor to metaphor is not the real point. We, as a Church, are a people called to pray and open heaven.

The early apostles set the identity of the Church and Paul, like a Moses of old, wrote down the grace principles in his letters and his life. In one word, Paul modelled intercession. He, like the sign of the pregnant woman, knew all about making disciples through painful spiritual travail.

"My dear children, for whom I am again in the

pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you."
Galatians 4:19

We see this same committed intercession at the end of Romans 8 - a passage which "*hinges*" significantly to the beginning of Romans 9, and which shouldn't be stopped by the chapter numbers, but should flow on to reveal Paul's pained identification with his brother Israelites. One thread of chapter 8 is the incredible commitment and love that God shows in Christ to His people. There is now, "*no condemnation.*" For,

"If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"

There is also no accusation:

"Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? 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."

And no separation:

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?" Romans 8:31-35

The climax to all this comes in the last verse, as Paul emphasises the certainty and indestructibility of our place in God's heart:

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8:38-39

He is emphasising the "no separation" love he knows of Christ – and yet he is prepared to go beyond promise, beyond even his own blessed experience of Christ's intimacy, stepping boldly into the realm of identification and suffering for his own people.

"I speak the truth in Christ – I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit – I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel. " Romans 9:1-4

The man who so confidently proclaimed to the Philippian church:

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"

now has unceasing sorrow for his brothers. This is the paradox of our Christian pilgrimage on earth. Sorrow and joy often meet in the same heart, sometimes in the same instant, both intensely real and yet not hijacking one another in the mature believer. Tears and laughter can share an instant in the hidden heart of the intercessor.

Like his ancestor Moses of old, and his beloved Jesus of the cross, he is willing to sacrifice even his own salvation, such is the passion of his prayer.

"But now, please forgive their sin - but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written." Exodus 32:32

Christ's living body on earth also modelled the obedience of intercession as an almighty God identified with the pain and lostness of His people with powerful tears.

"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission." Hebrews 5: 7

Before a waiting and watching world, imprisoned in the depths of sadness and suffering, the Church, the body of Christ, stands. May the multitudes see our tears and prayers as we are sent out in the same intercessory spirit as Christ himself.

Paul makes an interesting statement of Christ's passion in Colossians 1:24:

"Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church."

What is lacking? Surely there is no lack on the side of Christ's full redemptive act. The lack is on the other side of the cross, as the Church is challenged to pick up the missionary baton of intercession and take Christ's love to the ends of the earth – on knees first, and then aeroplanes! It is not a redemptive lack, but an intercessory, missionary lack! The power and passion awaits those who dare "rejoice" in suffering for the Gospel.

"To this end I labour, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me." Colossians 1:29

This is a call for the church to "*labour*," to birth the reigning male child, Christ's Kingdom, into the world.

I'll end by going back to Romans 10:1, which encapsulates Paul's longing – the Church's longing, and hopefully our own longings in intercession for people to be saved. Paul prays for his brother Israelites here, but you can use these lines to pray for those closest to your own heart.

"Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved."

The purity and the triumph

We have just seen how Paul modelled for us the intercession of the Church, and before that, we had considered the woman of Revelation 12 as being the image of Israel via Jacob's prayerful battle. We are now coming to our last and final foray into this mysterious sign.

Faithful mother's have founded history and the story of the people of God.

Earlier on, we encountered Eve as she received the painful covenant of child-birth. Like many of my wonderful Pygmy friends who live in the heart of the Equatorial forest, she is closely associated with the beautiful garden of creation. The woman of revelation is also in harmony with creation as *"the earth"* helps the woman escape the Satanic deluge. Most scholars see this as referring to the foundational crossing of the Red Sea in Exodus, but it also shows the close link between our intercessory cries and those of the natural world:

"We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time...In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray , but the Spirit himself intercedes for us

with groans that words cannot express."

Romans 8 :22,26

Mother nature is also crying out!

Earlier, I ventured to mention that the woman of Revelation 12 is:

"The vital seed bearing "Mother" figure, representing all the courageous women from Eve, Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba and many anonymous others, who birthed the line of the Messiah through the ages, culminating in the glorious fulfillment of it all through mother Mary's miraculous birthing of the Messiah in the flesh."

The seed of the Messiah has always been viciously contested, almost devoured, throughout history and Sarah had to hang on and fight the battle of faith to receive Isaac. Isaac himself had to intercede for his sterile wife – like we need to intercede for our often sterile church, so that she could carry on the chosen line.

"Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant."
Genesis 25:21

The patriarch Jacob instinctively understood the importance of the Messianic genealogy – the

appearing of God in human line and human flesh, when he prophesied over his son Judah.

"The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs – the Shiloh, and the obedience of the nations is his." Genesis 49:10

This suddenly fast forwards us into the realms of the male child born with a sceptre in our chosen passage. Jacob almost invents a word, "*Shiloh*," to express his prophetic longing. "*Shiloh*" can have roots in Shalom, the Prince of Peace, or Siloam, the Sent One. The New International Version of the Bible chooses to express the Messianic ownership of such a rule and reign.

Let's take a look at this emerging "*Shiloh*" as he is carried through history in the womb of intercession. The opening chapter of Matthew gives us some beautiful insight into all of this as it describes the genealogy of Jesus. As you read it, why not do as the French say and:

"Cherchez la femme – Look for the woman."

In the male dominated society which brought the Bible to us, women do not have a place in most accounts. This makes it all the more extraordinary to find five women listed here.

Did you find them?

*"Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was **Tamar**...Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was **Rahab**, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was **Ruth**, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been **Uriah's wife**... and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of **Mary**, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ." Matthew 1:3,5-6,16*

The first four ladies are wounded heroines, owning life's more difficult stories.

The Canaanite wife, Tamar, after double widowhood to abusive men had to resort to prostitution with her Father in law in order to save the line of Judah. She saved Israel just as much as Joseph did. Her story is symbolically sandwiched in between Joseph's exploits to make this little known redemptive link.

Rahab, a pagan prostitute holed up in Jericho, and yet recognising God's hand, was willing to risk life and limb to help anointed strangers. One of these visiting spies, Salmon, must have been touched by her kindness and fell in love with her.

The Moabite Ruth – the fruit of Lot's daughter's incest and a famine stricken widow. Her hard work and faithful support of her mother in law, coupled with her obedient reverence to Boaz, saw her

birthing King David's granddad.

Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, the innocent victim of a royal stalker and adulterer. Her faithful husband was cynically murdered and her first child died. Through her beauty, courage and perseverance she ended up birthing him that was loved of the Lord, "*Jedidiah*," Solomon.

It is amazing – even shocking to some, to think that the Son of Man's earthly history should pass through such imperfect people and situations. Some use this to denigrate Christ but, on the contrary, it elevates Him all the more as He was willing to gracefully step into fallen human history. He identified with life's difficult stories - he understands your story too.

What a struggle to uphold the "*male child*," God's purpose hanging on such a slender thread with that "*ancient serpent*" constantly looking to devour.

The genealogy is crowned and brought to wonderful fulfilment by Mary - known as Myriam to her Jewish friends, and her husband. Here stands a true virgin daughter of Israel. Her story is full of Shalom. She is Holy, Kadosh, a pure virgin bride loved by her husband.

Does she stand apart from the other female stories in holy separation? Quite the opposite. Not holy separation but holy penetration of the damaged

line with her promise of Shalom.

"Hail Mary – Shalom Myriam!"

Mary's virginity is not just some attribute in itself to give her "goddess" standing. It is far more profound and beautiful. At the end of a long line of weakness, impurity and pain, she stands as a portent of hope and redeemed wholeness. Her very miraculous virginity pours back pristine purity into the past, healing the victimized womb of humanity, as the Christ flows into the world with glorious healing in His wings – a truly immaculate conception...and redemption!

It is fitting that she too, Myriam the humble Jewish intercessor, should identify, suffer and pray for her beloved boy. Simeon, who was waiting to see the revelation of the "*male child*" Messiah, spoke prophetically over Mary, recognising her unique role and gift of intercession.

"It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ...Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

Luke 2:26,34-35

A sword piercing a soul. What a compelling description of intercessory prayer. The final sword of curse on King David's line was to fall on this child at the cross, and his mum would carry her pain too. Not the redemptive pain and authority that is reserved for Christ alone, but the pain that all mums carry for their families, the pain the Church can still carry for the world and the pain of the daily swords we all have to bear.

"Let it be..."

So, we have come a long way on our journey into intercession. Have we discovered who the woman of Revelation 12 really is? I'm sure there is much more to say, and greater scholars than me have put their minds and prayers to the task. These devotional thoughts are my simple contribution to the debate – to be felt and practised with passion rather than dissected in the cold operating theatre of dispensationalist theology.

To conclude, she is the heavenly Jerusalem, the Mother of us all.

"But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written: Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labour pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband." Galatians 4:26-27

She is the people of God through the ages in vital intercession, bringing the Kingdom of God into the world.

She is both Israel and the Church, beautifully free, in harmony with the longings of Creation and the Holy Spirit, redeemed, majestically pure, yet birthing the reign of Christ – your Kingdom come, into global existence, overcoming the ancient serpent and fulfilling the ancient promise.

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."
Genesis 3:15

She is still crying out in you and me as we choose to take on our inherited mantle of intercession. This last book of the Bible, Revelation, is not just some future speculation, it is a drawing back of the veil – a revelation of ultimate reality, an *"Apocalypse Now."*

Find your own rhythm and life style in the longings. Choose to overcome. Be courageous. Follow Christ!

"They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."
Revelation 12:11

From Rejection to Intercession

"If someone asks him, 'What are these wounds on your body?' he will answer, 'The wounds I was given at the house of my friends.'" Zechariah 13:6

As we long to "Open Heaven," we still have a few short miles to tread before we come to the end of our journey into intercession. After many years of living on this earth, it seems to me that one of the deepest wounds that most people feel is that of rejection. The contexts that inflict the deepest pain are those that involve relationships and friends. Who has not been wounded in the "*house of their friends?*"

That "house" may be a marriage or family, a place of work, a church, a mission or any other relational context. I'd like to concentrate on our church family, but the principles discovered may well help in handling rejection in all the contexts mentioned.

We are so very much a body of friends in our churches and mission agencies, but our very nature – our fellowship, has to be closely watched as it, in itself, has the potential to wound. The happy few, the "*Band of Brothers*" on a mission, has the potential in changing seasons to inadvertently exclude and reject. New lamps may be exchanged for old, the pioneer personality gives way to organisational maintenance, and a new generation

necessarily grows up with a desire to forge ahead rather than interpret the future through their history.

This seems to be the case when we look at Israel's Biblical history.

After the inspiring leadership of the Patriarchs, Moses and Joshua,

"another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel." Judges 2:10

The Lord tested the heart of the new generation by leaving the problem of taking the land of promise. Judges 3:1. Each new generation must prove itself by engaging in battle – the inner, spiritual confrontation which proves character.

Decline inevitably set in and, instead of taking full possession of the promise, the people were mainly oppressed by their enemies with occasional bursts of revival through various *"Judges"* who brought the people back to the Lord and their mission.

The great prophet Samuel seems to be one of the last in a long line of Judges. He gave himself to the people wholeheartedly and set them back on track with God. However, like every ministry, he had a sell-by date. He grew old and wanted to appoint his sons as judges, but they lacked the moral fibre of their father, seeking gain rather than God.

"So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have." 1 Samuel 8:4-5

"You are old!" – For the more silvery haired amongst us, the challenge of adapting to a new season, and surviving the rejection of those you have led, can be devastating.

We read in the text that Samuel was *"displeased!"*

He prayed and the Lord led him to come to terms with the wound of rejection that was eating him up.

"And the LORD told him: Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king."
1 Samuel 8:7

In the end, all of the wounds of rejection that we endure, all the exclusion that we encounter, falls on the ultimately rejected one, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The naked man lifted up on a cross, the rejected God, sucked into himself all our pain of being left out and marginalised.

How did Samuel survive this moment? How was he able to move on, anoint and bless the new *"Messianic"* season? How was he enabled to discern

and nurture the gifting in the young David? How can I move beyond my own painful rejection and bitter words to become a blessing?

The key is found a few chapters later in 1 Samuel 12:22-25. It seems that after the initial shock, Samuel has come to terms with the fact that nothing is going to prevent this new season emerging. He has found a place of peace. How?

He has chosen to pray for those who rejected him.

"As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right." v.23

When we feel rejected, we often speak from the wounded overflow of our heart, harshly criticising and judging others. We need to move from this tree of good and evil and feed on the tree of life. Begin to pray and not sin! Then stand and proclaim what is *"good and right."*

No easy task, but ultimately the only way to move on and enter a new season.

In fact, it seems that the very wound of rejection may even in itself be the catalyst to new beginnings.

At the end of the Gospel of John, on that post resurrection evening, we find Jesus launching His disciples into a new season. He begins by making it

very clear that ministry – all living and loving, will involve wounds.

"...he showed them his hands and side." John 20:20

In an unmistakable visual he is saying:

"This is how the Father sent me – to be wounded."

And, as Jesus may be speaking to you His own disciple today, he continues: *"As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."* v.21

The wounding is a new sending!

Intercessors are always the wounded ones. One might even say that "healed rejection" is a key attribute of the praying personality.

We need so much help to own this. This is why Jesus breathes on us intimately, allowing us to receive the Comforter – the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit puts the very character of Christ within our own flesh, in our own time and culture. He brings healing and the potential to forgive, move on and pray for the *"house of my friends."*

"And with that he breathed on them and said, Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." John 20:22-23

5 SYNERGY, REALITY AND VULNERABILITY

A necessary key to the success of opening heaven is to learn to discern the intercession of Christ laid down and passed on by the "*saints*" of previous ages and to learn to walk in reality and vulnerability. This is an ongoing part of our intercession which thrusts us not only into the "*third heavens*," but also into the ugly realms of life. We may celebrate a while on the mountain of transfiguration, but the demonised valley also awaits our necessary descent. Even in the difficult moments, we can be strengthened by taking up the baton of our "*father's prayers*."

Synergy

When I first heard the word "*synergy*" I wondered if it was talking about my special capacity to sin with energy! The natural man always seems to have reserves of power to sin. However, with a closer look at a dictionary, I found a more suitable definition. From the Greek "*sunergiā*" - cooperation, and "*sunergos*" - working together. Synergy means:

"The interaction of two or more agents or forces so that their combined effect is greater than the sum of their individual effects."

Another definition says:

"Cooperative interaction among groups, especially among the acquired subsidiaries or merged parts of

a corporation, that creates an enhanced combined effect."

Synergy occurs when the result is greater than the sum of the parts. Synergy is created when things work in concert together to create an outcome that is of more value than the total of what the individual inputs might be.

There are many verses in the Bible that show how God's covenant with Israel was meant to create the blessing of synergy. Leviticus 26:8, is one of many examples.

"Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall by the sword before you."

Simple mathematical multiplication suggests it needs 500 to chase 10000. The synergy of this passage promises five times more power.

Do our projects seek only to multiply the same, or are we discerning the opportunities of synergy with others? Are we merely looking to survive as five, or are we looking to take the step of faith to become a hundred?

I believe that the Lord is asking us to lift up our eyes and seek out synergetic partnerships. It is only our fear, unbelief and "*sin energy*" that can stop us.

I'd like to give you three domains for synergy.

The synergy of nations.

God's heart is for "*all nations to reach all nations.*" In 1 Chronicles 12:22&38, we see the model of many tribes coming together at Hebron,

"fully determined to make David king over all Israel."

We need to recognise our own particular "*Hebron*" in this world's global village. Standing shoulder to shoulder with different nationalities and indigenous mission movements, we can endeavour to make Jesus the true "*King over all the earth.*" Revelation 5:9 and 7:9 give us a glimpse of the redemptive beauty of many tribes and cultures worshiping in glorious diversity in a synergetic celebration of the nations.

The synergy of generations.

"I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also." 2 Timothy 1:5

The apostle Paul clearly recognised the "*sincere faith*" of two generations of intercession which added capital to Timothy's young ministry.

The Apostle's Creed talks about the "*communion of saints.*" What are we in communion with? Surely not just some superstitious offering to the dead, but more a taking up of the living baton of a

previous generation's love for Jesus expressed through their prayers and dreams.

"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams." Acts 2:17

The dream of the "old men" must find an interface with the vision of the "young men" of a new generation.

An old man with a dream, but without the next generation, is doomed to frustration and sterility. The young man with vision, but without the discipline of the "dream" of the past will be rootless, wrongly ambitious, superficial and lacking direction.

"See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse." Malachi 4:5-6

If you are a young man - or a young mission movement, be rooted in the living dreams of the fathers. If you are an old man - or an old mission movement, attempt to disciple a few young men and women with your dream.

The synergy of denominations.

We inherit our ecclesial history which is

unfortunately filled with schisms and separations. There are no superficial solutions to healing such deep wounds of division, but the Apostle Paul encourages us to "*keep the unity*" of Biblical fellowship. Even if we are used to playing our various instruments in different orchestras we can always come together to find another missionary harmony as the Body of Christ moves into corporate action. We read in Matthew 18: 19-20 :

"Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

The word "*agree*" is "*symphoneo*" in Greek which takes us back to the idea of the beautiful symphony of synergy. Let us make every effort to keep the unity, to express a powerful missional thrust by praying across our denominational divides.

We are all called to share the joy of Jesus together.

"It was not men's grief, but their joy Christ visited, he worked his first miracle for men's gladness...And indeed, was it to make wine abundant at poor weddings he had come down to earth?" Brothers Karamazov

True joy is found in sharing Christ together. Change our water into wine Lord!

I'd like to give some more personal testimony now

about the importance of the generational synergy and intercession related to the rich spiritual heritage of the land of Wales.

Four Welsh Fathers.

Someone once said that if we want to be successful we should seek to find out what God is doing and do it with Him. This is a true principle, but we need to look beyond our immediate limits of time and space and try to understand what God has been doing across the ages. Biblical scholarship and meditation upon the revealed Word of God are vital to such success, as well as the ability to discern one's own spiritual history in the light of this.

Fatherhood is another important Biblical principle, as Fathers are called to pass on collective wisdom, culture and blessing to the next generation. Sadly the opposite can also be true when Fathers fail in their calling.

*"Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord.
They will proclaim his righteousness
To a people yet unborn." Psalm 22:30-31*

Prayer and intercession are the keys to good Fatherhood.

Knowing a Father always brings strength and security to our work and identity. This is true for our family, as well as for our national identities. We need to have some understanding of our roots.

What baton have our natural and spiritual Fathers passed on to us?

*"Look to the rock from which you were cut
and the quarry from which you were hewn;
look to Abraham, your father,
and to Sarah, who gave you birth."* Isaiah 51:1-2

Our first father is Abraham, who was crowned with a heavenly missionary call.

"Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you."
Genesis 12:1

May the inherited passion for mission burn strong within our hearts and may we own our call as Abraham.

"...all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." Genesis 12:3

My own particular prayer life and mission endeavour finds its roots in the prayers of four Welsh fathers. May they serve as living examples to help each one into their place of sonship and inheritance. Their prayers transcend time and leave a legacy of virtue and intercession which wait to be taken up anew by those who have the faith and heart to follow.

My own Father was a Welsh orphan who owned a dream of having twin boys. On the verge of seeing the accomplishment of that dream, he suddenly found his new born twins dying in hospital because

of their premature birth. He resolved to go home and, throwing himself face down on the floor before God in the agony of prayer, he hung on for answer.

"Oh God!"

He prayed.

"Give me the life of my boys. Let me love them. Let me feed and provide for them. Let me give everything for them and then, when they are old enough to look after themselves, then you can take them. Just give me time to love them now."

As he rose up from the prayer, he knew that he had touched God's heart. The contract had been signed and faith for the future rose in his heart.

His prayer example gives flesh to the rather misty idea of intercession we sometimes have. He was willing to put everything he had into the prayer. He owned it, taking personal responsibility through love and sacrifice. Once possessed, he gave it back to God, surrendering his own sovereignty in submission to God's best. This is the kind of intercession Jesus' life shows us. He owned the pain of suffering humanity, giving His all, His last drops of blood, to buy us back from death. He then gave it all back to God in faithful expectation of resurrection life. My Dad summed up another aspect of this prayer when he once shared with me his testimony of this event.

"I went deep, to the very depths, and there at the

very bottom I touched a heart - the heart of God."

Going deep and touching a heart - what a fulfilling definition of prayer.

My Dad is now in heaven, closer to that loving heart than ever before. He fully accomplished his role as a Father. I go back to words which accompanied Abraham at his time of passing.

"Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people." Genesis 25:8

The French translation says he was *"reunited with his deceased ancestors."* My *"orphan"* Dad is rediscovering the joys of finding an eternal family – reunited, at the very least, with his own believing Mum and Dad. We were once chatting about how he might recognise his parents in heaven. He added:

"It's the love in them that I will recognise."

Profound words from a Father whose life was marked by deep contentment, service, thankfulness, happiness and big strong hugs! One of his last encouragements to me was when he remembered a poem he used to recite at Sunday school in Cardiff called, "Life."

*"Life? Did you think was easy going,
with no ruts to mar the way."*

*With nought to cloud the sunshine through the
whole long Summer day.
Did you think it would be all harmony,
no discord sharp or flat,
And everything a holiday...
No, life's not like that.
Life's often full of battles,
where a strong man needs his strength,
Life's often like a highway
with wrought miles of wearying length.
And sometimes laughter's crowded out,
and often eyes grow wet,
And sometimes people miss the prize on which
their heart was set.
But don't lose courage ever,
mysterious though it be,
Life holds a mighty purpose,
and Christ our captain holds the key!"*

I'm so grateful for the deposit of love, faithfulness
and prayer handed down to me.

I'd like to introduce you to the second Father,
Rowland Evans - the founder of at least two
mission movements, *World Horizons* and *Nations*.
Five years of hidden intercession gave birth to
these works. What was the burden of such intense
prayer? How was heaven so opened up?

In the early 1970's, the church in Britain was
experiencing a breath of renewal and many new
groups were forming. Rowland became a very
popular itinerant Bible teacher for such gatherings.
As he was at the height of his ministry and in much

demand, the Lord challenged him to consecrate the next years of his life to total prayer and, in doing so, to pull out of public life. A burden of intercession seemed to descend on his heart like dew descends on the grass. The days came and went in prayer. Days became weeks, weeks months and months years. The Lord was leading Rowland to a prolonged period of intercession. After three years of intense prayer, followed by two more less intense years, the burden seemed to gently lift. Five years of prayer! I remember asking Rowland how he managed to pray for that long. What did he pray? Did he have a long list of subjects? His answer surprised me.

"You know," he said,

"Intercession is like your heart is breaking. It's a sharing in Jesus' crying out for the nations of the world. Sometimes a prayer is simply expressing the inner longings of Jesus for a world of people. I can sum up the prayer God gave me in one sentence:

"Oh God! Give me your work to do."

Intercession is like a "broken heart." Here we have another definition - a beautiful, painful sonnet to the glory of prayer.

Remembering the 1904 Welsh revival, I'd like to introduce you to another more historical, yet prophetically vital, Welsh Father - Evan Roberts.

From his boyhood, in his home chapel of Moriah in

Loughor, Evan Roberts had known a compelling desire to honour God in every aspect of his life and to serve Him faithfully. This had increased to the point where he felt he should leave his employment as a coal miner and prepare for the ministry. In explaining his decision to a friend, Roberts wrote:

"Last Sunday night while thinking about the greatness of the work and the danger of my dishonouring God, I could not but weep. And I prayed that the Lord should baptize you and me with the Holy Spirit."

This letter, and other writings by Roberts at the time, revealed a deep longing of his heart that a fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit would be given. Evan Roberts had an overwhelming sense of God's presence drawing near to him. He describes a moment of intimate communion which he experienced in the spring of 1904.

"One Friday night last spring, when praying by my bedside before retiring, I was taken up to a great expanse - without time and space. It was communion with God. Before this I had a far-off God. I was frightened that night, but never since. So great was my shivering that I rocked the bed, and my brother, being awakened, took hold of me thinking I was ill. After that experience, I was awakened every night a little after one o'clock. This was most strange, for through the years I slept like a rock, and no disturbance in my room would awaken me. From that hour I was taken up into the divine fellowship for about four hours. What it was

I cannot tell you, except that it was divine. About five o'clock I was again allowed to sleep on till about nine. At this time I was again taken up into the same experience as in the earlier hours of the morning until about twelve or one o'clock. This went on for about three months."

It was also during these weeks that Roberts experienced an open heaven - a vision of one hundred thousand people being saved. He owned a deep assurance of faith to claim this as a promise which God would not deny.

The Holy Spirit was poured out upon the land of Wales, bringing many to a personal relationship with Jesus. It was a revival which also brought social transformation. Heavy drinkers no longer went to the pubs – some of which had to close down, and the police found that there was a marked decrease in crime.

Evans' heart cry in prayer continued:

"Come Holy Spirit!"

There is good reason to believe that in Wales alone the 100,000 souls for whom he had asked God, had been added to His kingdom, while the consequent effects of the revival spread to many other parts of Britain and into the wider context of church and missionary development throughout the world. It is often said that the great Pentecostal revival of Azusa Street, in Los Angeles America, was rocked in the cradle of Wales.

Our final Welsh father is Rees Howells – founder of “*The Bible College of Wales*” in Swansea. He too lived a life of intercession, faithfully documented in Norman Grubb’s book “*Intercessor*.” He was a man who trusted in God’s Word and was led to live a number of daunting experiences as he grew in faith and discipline. He even gave up the joy of family communion with a beloved son in order to become a missionary. He was instrumental in bringing a spiritual revival to East Africa. Howells had a vision for every creature on earth to hear the gospel. One of his last recorded prayers pulsates with this missionary passion.

*“Everything in me is praising God because the Holy ghost can say, ‘**I have finished the work Thou gavest Me to do.**’ Every creature will hear the Gospel, the finance for the Vision is safe, and the King will come back.”*

An American intercessor, Dutch Sheets, also speaks about the synergy of generations - our ability to mesh our present day prayers with the passion and purpose of former generations. Such sensitivity and discernment in prayer will enable the Church to benefit from the power and destiny of what has already been given. Let us learn to flow with God’s prophetic intentions.

Gaining understanding of our spiritual inheritance is vital if we are to successfully build a ministry which seeks to open heaven and transform our world.

We can charge on alone and oblivious to history in an attempt to re-invent the wheel, or we can humbly learn on our knees. Obviously, the Welsh prayers - as the different Welsh Revivals, found their own culturally relevant forms. Our challenge is to take up the baton of intercession which posterity has passed on to us and incarnate it in our many nations - in appropriate cultural and social expressions. God will meet us in His plans and purposes. Let us learn to re-interpret history from God's perspective.

Christ ever lives to intercede for us - Hebrews 7:25, and prayer has an ability to transcend time. Let us discover the Christ given burdens laid on our Fathers - and Mothers, add our own measure of intercessory grace and put them into flesh for our own generations. Just as Isaac unblocked the wells dug by his Father Abraham in Genesis 26, so God is calling this generation to unblock fresh wells of intercession for the nations.

I'll finish with a short summary of the prayers of my four fathers which you can pray for yourself.

"Oh God! Take me deep, show me your heart and give me your work to do. Come Holy Spirit, save the lost, bring revival to our lands and take me to what you are doing in my time. Let me bear much fruit and finish the work you have given me. May the gospel go to every people..."

Confessions of an Intercessor

As we are looking at more practical applications of prayer in this section, the following account is a short testimony of a prayer event I was led into several years ago.

On Sunday 14th December 2003, I came back from church looking to end a 21 day fast that had begun on 24th November. Apart from a desire for personal sanctity, a wish to lay a foundation for future ministry, and wanting to support friends in Africa, I had begun the time with a strong burden to pray for the fulfilment of God's promises for Israel. The first day was unexpectedly difficult and I felt thrust into a new dimension of spiritual warfare.

On the second day, the Lord spoke clearly into my heart that I was to pray for the arrest of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and that Al Qaeda would know a setback. I was to be as much of a "spiritual soldier" as those who were literal soldiers on the ground in Iraq at the time. I felt, like Daniel, that I was to give three weeks to this prayer. I remember clearly saying to my friends that they should be witnesses to these two objectives.

After much battling in prayer, I came to a local prayer meeting which was to be given over to prayer for that evening's "*Thanksgiving*" outreach. At the beginning of the time, I requested prayer for the above and suggested that we prophetically "give thanks" for the capture of Saddam Hussein.

During that week, I was encouraged by the news of arrests of Al Qaeda members in GB and Turkey. The prayer grew in intensity for the breaking of the spirit over Saddam. Prayer meetings came and went and I had an open forum to share. Weak in body, yet strong in faith, I shared from Genesis 22. Essentially it was about the prayer of sacrifice which releases God's provision. As Abraham walked with his precious sacrifice up one side of the mountain, God was already directing the steps of a ram, His provision, on the other, hidden side of the mountain.

I asked folk what they were willing to sacrifice in prayer and then asked them what their "*ram*" was. For myself the "*ram*" was Saddam Hussein "*caught by its horns*" in the thicket. It's hard to explain, but a powerful prayer of faith was released from this time and I was fully expecting to see news of his arrest on the television in the next days. Hours of prayer turned into days as another intense week drew to an end. No news of Saddam had come from Iraq and although I was generally encouraged by a number of growth points from the prayer - a door opening into Africa, I began to wonder if I had been presumptuous concerning Saddam. I almost gave up the last days of the fast.

However, the Lord strengthened me with a clear word from Psalm 141.

*"O Lord, I call to you; come quickly to me.
Hear my voice when I call to you.
May my prayer be set before you like incense;*

may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice."

I found strength to speak out loud as I read from verses 5-6:

"Yet my prayer is ever against the deeds of evildoers; their rulers will be thrown down from the cliffs, and the wicked will learn that my words were well spoken."

I came back from church on that last Sunday to find my friends telling me that they thought they might have arrested Saddam Hussein. I quickly turned on the television which officially confirmed the fact. I felt strongly the need to be away in prayer, so I went off for a time of quiet thanksgiving. While praying, I felt the favour of God and yet was fearfully overwhelmed by the power, privilege and responsibility of intercession. I found myself mumbling out my humble praise for the Lord's greatness.

Thinking of the passages in Matthew 6:6, I felt the Lord gently say,

"This is just between you and me."

"Just think," I answered inwardly.

"A reward of 25 million dollars on offer for his arrest and this is just between you and me!"

And somewhere, from the unfathomable depths of

God's grace, as He took on real life and conversation, came the ultimate promise to those - who like me, are part of His secret army of warriors:

"Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

Such testimonies of God answering our prayers can encourage us to launch into all sorts of intercessory adventures. We feel we can take so much ground for the Kingdom and our vision grows. However, a word of warning. We need to always keep our feet on the ground. In spite of our heavenly vision, we must always be grounded in reality.

Embracing Reality - learning to love Leah!

"Wonderful light streams through impeccably clean windows, draped majestically with flowing lace curtains which flutter gently in the cool breeze. Bronzed and Adonis like, the archetypal, handsome, successful Father bounds effortlessly out of bed and glides, God like, down the stairs to meet the smile of his outrageously happy family. His wife, haloed with the perfect blonde perm, the eternal Venusian beauty of both youth and motherhood on her perfect body, has sublimely prepared the ultimate breakfast, which lies, like a Eucharist, on a well laded wooden table. Pure, unctuous white milk simply bursts forth with a life of its own from the jug, caressing golden petals of corn, the glorious prize, in a fount of plenty. As they crunch and commune on such ambrosia, their

smiles and happiness seem to transfigure them all into paragons of virtue, avatars of a new day."

Are your mornings like that?

We live in a society which craves beauty and success. The idea of fulfilling dreams and attaining outstanding goals is continually drummed into our hearts. As we consider the idealistic realms of prayer, intercession and "*opening heaven*" we must be careful not to get carried away into a fantasy land of dreams. Our heads may be in heaven but our feet need to be firmly anchored to the ground! A major challenge for most of us is to come to terms with the fact that life is never as simple as the adverts make it out to be. We have to learn to handle the everyday realities of life while pursuing our dreams. This is indeed a long apprenticeship, but I'd like to share with you some valuable insights that I have gleaned from two wonderful women - Rachel and Leah.

They get a mention at the end of the book of Ruth.

*"May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, **who together built up the house of Israel.**"* Ruth 4:11

These two women were the builders of Israel. Together they brought the required elements to give an identity to the people of God. Allegorically, they represent the same two principles that are needed today to build up the people of God, the Church.

They literally *"gave birth"* to Israel. Many Old Testament births, apart from carrying their historic significance, point us to the ultimate birth of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Each child, bearing an all important Hebrew name, is a type of Christ. The apostle Paul, in writing to the Galatians, applies this principle *"of birthing Christ"* to the level of discipleship when he states:

"My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you."
Galatians 4:19

We will need to join Jacob's story in Genesis, chapters 29 and 30, to glean the full benefits of what these ladies teach us.

Jacob is staying with his uncle Laban who is looking to get a good worker in his nephew. Jacob's eye has caught that of Laban's daughter, Rachel. She *"was lovely in form, and beautiful."* Genesis 29:17

She was Jacob's wonderful vision. She was his dream and hope. Laban's other daughter, Leah, was less in view. Indeed, she seems to have been less visually attractive than Rachel.

Rachel represents vision. She is the ideal Platonic form. She is the beautiful dream to be pursued.

Leah, on the other hand, is all that vision is not. She is not beautiful and exciting. The fact that she is described as having *"weak eyes,"* is the very antithesis to vision.

Leah represents our unwanted realities of life.

"Jacob was in love with Rachel." Genesis 29:18

We always love vision. Vision encourages us in our labour and gives it meaning. Jacob was willing to work seven long years because his heart was motivated by the prize of Rachel. What motivates your own work? Here we have a principle. We must be,

Motivated By The Vision.

Jacob was so in love with Rachel that his tough life of a shepherd was transfigured. Instead of enduring the drudgery of dirty, smelly, boring sheep every day, he rose above the problems, upheld in his labour by his passion for the dream.

"So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her." Genesis 29:20

Without a vision, we have no passion and the time drags. We get bogged down in problems. It is essential to be motivated by a vision. At the very least, we need to be able to see Christ glorified as the goal of our lives and activities. We need to be captivated by his beauty.

John Stott wrote the following concerning work.

"The story is told of a man who was taking a walk down a country lane, when he came across a stone quarry in which a number of men were working. He

questioned several of them about what they were doing. The first replied irritably,

"Can't you see? I'm hewing a stone."

The second answered without looking up,

"I'm earning £100 a week."

But when the same question was put to the third man, he stopped, put his pick down, stood up, stuck out his chest and said,

"If you want to know what I'm doing, I'm building a cathedral."

So, it is a matter of how far we can see. The first man could not see beyond his pick, and the second beyond his Friday pay packet. But the third man looked beyond his tools and his wages to the ultimate end he was serving. He was co-operating with the architect. However small his particular contribution, he was helping to construct a building for the worship of God.

"Laborare orare," - work is worship, provided that we can see how our job contributes, in however small and indirect a way, to the forwarding of God's purpose for mankind. Then, whatever we do can be done for the glory of God.

Having fired you all up with a call to fresh vision, I still have to come to terms with the questions that arise when the reality doesn't always measure up

to the vision.

Let's go back to Jacob who has finished his labour and is looking forward to consummating his relationship with Rachel. You can almost feel his eager enthusiasm as he says to Laban:

"Give me my wife. My time is completed, and I want to lie with her." Genesis 29:21

They have a marvellous feast, singing and dancing. In the dark of the night and in the heat of his passion, Jacob gains his prize.

But...

"When morning came, there was Leah!"

As they say in French. *"Quelle horreur!"*

He was expecting to gaze into the lovely eyes of his beloved, his beauty, his vision, but instead he got landed with Leah. How many of us also know the feeling of being landed with Leah?

We dreamt of a vibrant church coming into being, and yet, after many years, the *"Sunday morning comes,"* and we find the same old faces, the same old songs and the same old boredom. A *"morning"* of division, personal failure, sickness, poverty, tragedy or strife brings us to the sad revelation of our own personal Leah. In a nutshell, we are deeply,

Disappointed By The Reality.

This was Jacob's reality. He cries out:

*"I served you for Rachel, didn't I?
Why have you deceived me?"* Genesis 29:25

This may well echo our own personal heart cry to God. I served you because I believed in a beautiful church, and now this! I served you for a vision of unity, and now all this division. We don't always vocalise it, but often we feel deeply let down by God.

Do we think that God has somehow deceived us - conned us into ministry? It is not just God. So often we blame other authority figures. How many feel let down by parents, politicians, teachers and pastors?

The expression of such feelings of disappointment can lead us to rebel or run away. The non resolution or sublimation of these issues can leave us in a constant state of anxiety, bitterness and anger, with a fatigued inability to push through and finish anything.

Laban gives some priceless advice to Jacob.

"Finish out this daughter's bridal week;"
Genesis 29:27

The temptation is to flee our realities. Like pampered butterflies, we fly from one vision to another, never able to settle and build. The

Christian world can also feed us on unreal expectations, and we end up running after one illusion after another instead of achieving something in our everyday circumstances. Miracle crusades, exciting books, a special anointing, new breakthroughs, come and go while the very basics of Christian character and commitment are often neglected. Families need to be loved and served, telephone bills paid, promises kept and the unreached peoples prayed for.

Jesus gave the example as the ultimate *"finisher."*

"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."
Hebrews 12:2 - King James Version.

In order to get Rachel, Jacob had to learn to love Leah. However much he disliked the fact and wanted to run away, he had to learn to embrace his reality and finish his time with her.

It takes both vision and reality to build the kingdom.

They are the two facets of the Bride of Christ, the Church. Like Jacob, we love our vision more than our realities.

"He loved Rachel more than Leah...the Lord saw that Leah was not loved."
Genesis 29:30-31

This brings us to back to our central theme.

Love Leah!

We need to learn to love our less than beautiful realities. This is so important.

If we refuse to embrace Leah our vision remains sterile and empty.

"Rachel was barren. Leah became pregnant."
Genesis 29:31-32

Embracing our reality forges God's fruit into our lives and we are prepared to own a future vision. We must learn to love Leah because she puts the character of Christ into us - she transforms us into the calibre of Christian who can be truly trusted with vision. So many visions are just empty illusions because they are not owned in reality. Many dreams become sterile fantasies because no one pays the price of rooting them in the everyday world.

Remembering what was said at the beginning of this chapter concerning Christ *"being formed"* in us, let's take a look at some of the beautiful children Leah gives to us.

Reuben - See, a Son!
"The Lord has seen my misery."

Reuben is also the *"son of provision,"* as the Hebrew *"to see"* also means *"to provide."* Yahweh

Jireh - God the provider, uses the same root word.

Our realities are often full of misery. Misery is created by all sorts of lack and neglect - lack of friendship, health, resources, care, forgiveness etc. In generously giving us all things in Christ, God has put himself in total opposition to such lack.

"He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" Romans 8:32

Reuben can bring a fatherly touch of healing for those who have been humiliated by the realities of poverty and neglect. However, God never responds to just need - he responds to faith and vision. Reuben, the son of vision, is birthed through our faith battles with the reality of lack. God,

"so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son."

He gave a greater *Reuben*, to die on a cross and provide abundantly for all our needs. The Lord sees the misery of the world and provides hope and healing in providing a solution in his Son. He wipes away our tears and gives us the strength and provision to carry on.

Do you *"see a son?"*
Provision is *"for the vision."*

In the midst of misery we need a revelation of God's total provision in Christ.

Simeon - One who Hears. *"The Lord heard that I am not loved."*

Yahweh Shamma - God the hearer, is also linked to this Hebrew son's name.

One of the hardest realities - and one of the most painful wounds of mankind, is the suffering of not being loved.

This lack of love is often expressed in the murderous indifference which inhabits our selfish inability to listen to the other person. Listening is loving. Roots of rejection express themselves in all sorts of sinful misery. Most of our sinful habits find their source in "cold" or "unloved" areas of our hearts. God brings healing to these wounds through "*hearing*" us, and sharing an intimate love through His Son. The dark clouds of being unloved can hold a silver lining of a greater, redemptive love. This love permeates our realities through the gift of prayer. Prayer is having God's ear. Simeon is the "*son of prayer*", birthed through our battles with the reality of a cold, unloving world. He is one of our key sons as we seek to "*open heaven*" in this book.

One of the greatest revelations of God on earth came to Moses through the burning bush. In a few short phrases God reveals His "*Reuben/Simeon*" heart, and his desire to "*see*", "*hear*" and act.

"I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of

their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them."
Exodus 3:7-8

God rescues us from loveless reality by "*coming down*" and putting the burning passion of prayer into our hearts.

Levi - Attached. "*Become attached to me.*"

Isolation is the scourge of modern existence. Alienated individuals, each one striving for his five minutes of fame, we march on through life, unaware that we are all part of one human family.

A modern adage is "*divide and conquer*," and evil powers constantly attack the Body of Christ on earth with demonic assaults to break apart the fellowship of the saints. A lack of unity in the systems and governments all over the world creates untold misery. Division and strife in the family leads to pain and divorce, while war between nations is probably the ultimate expression of this lack of "*attachment*" one to another. The Greek word which defines Satan as "*the devil - diabolos*" means the divider.

Anyone who has tried to build the work of God will have had to confront this sad reality of division. It is in the fiercest furnaces that the finest gold is smelted. It is easy to be united in times of peace, prosperity and sunshine, but the winter's chill of hardship and battle will reveal our true friends. A true team is forged in the fires of adversity.

Levi is the son of fellowship, the true gift of covenant relationship to those who have persevered together through trials.

As hard iron nails attached Christ to the cross, so his spilt blood made a new covenant relation possible with God, attaching us eternally to the Father's heart, and bonding us as brothers into a new humanity on earth. As a man is joined to his wife in loving intercourse, so we too enjoy the ultimate bonding of communion – *koinonia*, with Christ and look forward to an eternal consummation.

"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery - but I am talking about Christ and the church."
Ephesians 5:31-32

Judah - Praise. *"This time I will praise the Lord."*

Can you wake up on a drab Monday morning and praise the Lord? Learning to love Leah invites praise into the most mundane of circumstances and makes reality pregnant with God's presence. The Authorised version expresses this beautifully in Psalm 22:3.

"But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel."

God lives in our praise, and shouts of thanksgiving and worship can transfigure even the most arduous of realities. It's relatively easy to praise God in a

packed congregation or a glorious Christian conference, but how do you fare in the confines of your closet? Paul and Silas were even more confined as they found themselves in the bitter injustice of a Greek prison! In the midst of this harsh reality, they did not sink into self pity and criticism, but found the strength to praise the Lord.

"About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose."
Acts 16:25-2

Unleash an earthquake of praise into life's trials, and upset the status quo of criticism and negativity. The apostle Paul insisted,

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" Philippians 4:4

Judah, the son of praise, is given to us so that we may incarnate heaven on earth's hellish horizons.

It is well worth learning to love Leah as she gives us much fruit. Own your responsibilities and embrace your realities as they will forge Christ into your character.

Already we have seen, Reuben as Vision, Simeon as Prayer, Levi as Fellowship, and Judah as Praise.

Let's move on to consider Leah's other two natural children which follow a season of barrenness for her. Seasons of dryness and lack of fruit - *"dark nights of the soul"* as St John of the cross used to say, are a fact of the Christian life. We must learn to handle God's silences and pace ourselves for His seasons. For flow and brevity I'm not including the children born by proxy via the maidservants, although they too are part of Israel, and a study of their names is not without benefit.

Issachar - Reward. *"God has rewarded me."*

God delights in rewarding His hidden heroes. True prizes are rarely the public laurels placed on well heeled brows, but more often the hidden gems which reside regally in the hearts of God's servants - servants who have learnt the lesson of sacrificial love, servants who live the miraculous law of "perissos" - the extraordinary, abundant more of divine love.

"But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked." Luke 6:35

Matthew gives us three secret realities which, if embraced, procure a reward.

*"So when you give...
But, when you pray...
When you fast..."*

Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret will reward you." Matthew 6:2-24

Your true reward will not be based on outside achievements or on what men can see, but on your secret life with God, seen only by the Father.

Men rarely see the hidden tears of a night of intercession, the secret abandon of sacrificial giving, or the disciplines of self denial. Issachar, the son of genuine reward, embodies all these realities.

Zebulun - To Dwell or To Honour. *"Dwell with me. Treat me with honour."*

The Hebrew root *"zabal"* - meaning *"habitation,"* indicates in this son's name the idea of *"taking up residence,"* although the NIV translates it as *"to honour."* In essence, if God takes up residence, this is indeed an honour. God desires to reside in our clay pot lives, transforming them into vessels for His glory.

"But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and made ready for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work."

2 Timothy 2:20-21 - King James Version

God resides in our realities.

He doesn't live on some mythical "*Mount Olympus*," a never, never land of indifference, a mere spectator of humanity's suffering. Instead, he came to be born in the poverty, muck and straw of flesh and blood reality. He inhabited the extreme agony of bone wrenching crucifixion, and is eternally present, in the mystery of pained majesty, at all of man's barbaric atrocities.

Zebulon, is the son of incarnation, the ability to live and act for Christ in any and every situation. He is an essential part of Christ's pioneer promise to his first apostolic believers.

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20

I hope that by now we are beginning to learn to "*love Leah*" and are able to embrace our own particular trials and realities. God is never unfair, and when he sees that the character of His Son is being gradually wrought into our lives, He knows that it is the right time to trust us with our vision.

God always remembers our dreams.

"Then God remembered Rachel." Genesis 30:22

It was the "*kairos*" moment for the vision to bear

fruit. God has the right time for each of our particular dreams to come to birth.

"But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman."

Galatians 4:4

Our own time has come to engage the fruit of vision and learn from Rachel's new found fecundity. Joseph. May he Multiply. *"May the Lord add to me another... God has taken away my disgrace."*

The original creation mandate sent man out to multiply. The Body of Christ on earth is also meant to expand and fill the earth. Our shame is that we are sadly *"barren"* when it comes to effective evangelism and missionary enterprise.

Vision will always lead us to mission.

We are too often in disgrace in the eyes of God and men because of our passionless, visionless religion. We stay within the security of our four church walls, having little relevance for 21st century man. We end up in sad decline rather than the biblical norm of seeing folk added.

"And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." Acts 2:47

Joseph, the son of mission, takes away our disgrace, and moves us on to multiplication. He is,

"A fruitful vine, a fruitful vine near a spring, whose

branches climb over a wall...The prince among his brothers." Genesis 49:22&26

Joseph is the missionary structure that enables us to go beyond the "wall" of the church and influence a nation. The dew of heaven rests upon his brow and he brings princely dignity to the people of God. He can make a home in "*Egypt*" and learn a new language and culture. He can go through the flames of spiritual warfare and testing to take up the prophetic mantle of leading a nation.

He knew rejection from his brothers, trial, temptation and prison in Egypt. Through it all, he learnt to encourage others in their dreams, thus fulfilling his own dream as a young man.

He is also the son of tested vision. His "*richly ornamented robe,*" symbol of his dream, was ripped jealously from his shoulders and "*dipped in blood.*" The authenticity of ownership was recognised in a blood stained cloak.

"It is my son's robe!" Genesis 37:33

Christ's own redemptive dream was violently nailed to a cruel cross. The authenticity of salvation and victory was also recognised in blood and suffering. "*He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God.*" Revelation 19:13

Our dreams and visions may well go through the process of death and suffering.

Rachel's second son well illustrates this other principle of tested vision.

Benjamin...Or Ben-Oni? *"Son of my right hand...or Son of my suffering?"*

On the same road to Bethlehem that Mary and Joseph were to take, a pregnant Rachel was also carrying a child of promise.

"Rachel began to give birth and had great difficulty...As she breathed her last - for she was dying - she named her son Ben-Oni. But his father named him Benjamin. " Genesis 35:16-18

Humanity saw Christ, the *"man of sorrows,"* dead on a cross, but like Jacob of old, a greater Father intervened in love and overturned the naming in death with a vital new christening of resurrection, raising up His son to sit at His right hand in heaven.

Benjamin is the son of resurrection. The ultimate triumph of the vision over death and suffering.

May we know this same denouement of resurrection life in our own experience. Vision and reality, the pain and the gain, the cross and the victory of eternal life - all are part of life's feast. May each of these sons build more of Christ into us and encourage us to *"Love Leah."*

For all who have known the sacrifice of loving Leah, I'd like to look at the grandchildren of vision. They

are sons of deep healing.

Manesseh. Forget. *"It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household."* Genesis 41:50

Forgive and forget. Not the forgetfulness that doesn't remember, but rather the forgetfulness that still leaves a scar, but without the pain and infection. Joseph knew all about trouble and dysfunctional family life! Holding his young son in his arms, he also knew the gracious sovereignty of God who could make all things work out for the good. Manesseh gave him the healing grace to be able to forgive his brothers.

He is the son that heals our past and soothes the pain of our harsh realities. May we too know the gift of Manesseh to our own *"troubled"* hearts.

Before going away to serve God somewhere, it is vitally important that we go as whole people. Our missionary call and devotion to service should never be a fig leaf covering up our deep emotional hurts. Never run away into mission! The apostle Paul clearly stated that he did *"one thing"* to fulfil his calling.

"But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus."
Philippians 3:13-14

Ephraim. Twice Fruitful. *"It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering."*
Genesis 41:52

We all have our lands of suffering. Families, churches, towns, mission fields. Joseph had suffered deeply in Egypt but he persevered through to fruitfulness. He held his son and was deeply satisfied. It had all been worth it. Jesus, a much greater Joseph, knew the profound suffering of the cross, but, as he hung in pain, he held the pregnant promise of a new humanity being birthed from his wounds.

"After the suffering of his soul, He will see the light of life and be satisfied."
Isaiah 53:11

"For the joy set before him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Hebrews 12:2

The ultimate *Benjamin/Ben-Oni*, Christ was fruitful in his suffering. Ephraim is the joyful mother after childbirth, forgetting the labour pains. He is the son who puts the Christ like seal of fruitfulness on our labours, healing us from the despair of bareness and bitterness.

What a wonderful family we now have!

Be *"motivated by the vision."* If you end up *"disappointed by reality,"* you must press on to *"love Leah."* This has its application for all

husbands and wives as well. We may not be as beautiful as we once were, but never give up on love! Don't run away into illusion. Don't be seduced by the adverts! Stick with a faithful love of reality in all its dimensions. Learn to embrace Leah once more. She will produce a rich and eternal harvest.

Vulnerability equals Opportunity

- The "*Little Brothers*" of Jesus.

Having encouraged you to embrace reality in your prayers, I'd like to end this chapter by sharing another essential quality for every intercessor and missionary. We must also learn to embrace vulnerability.

Although I have given the best years of my life to a missionary vocation, I sometimes have a rather ambiguous love, hate relationship with the whole concept of missionary work. Our best intentions can be thwarted by ethnocentric pride, and history has offered the opportunity to deflect and distort the meaning of missionary work in every age.

A Catholic missionary, Vincent Donovan, shared some insights about the origins of mission in East Africa. They were confronted with the problem of slavery. Before slavery, the indigenous people had an orderly, fairly stable way of life. Slavery brought havoc, confusion and misery unimaginable. Donovan continues in his own words:

"The Arab raiders went far inland to get their slaves and they drove them back to the coast

toward Zanzibar. The last stop on the mainland was Bagamoyo.

It is said that Bagamoyo takes its name from the two Swahili words, bwaga and moyo. Bwaga means "to throw down," "put down" or "let down." In a long safari, the one leading the safari, at different points, would yell to the porters, "Bwaga mizigo, put down your loads." Moyo means "heart." Bwaga moyo would thus mean:

"Put down your heart."

Bagamoyo was the place where the captured slave, after his long trip from the interior, would put down his heart, lay down the burden of his heart, give up hope – because it was his last contact with his own country before the trip to Zanzibar and a life of misery."

The first missionaries who arrived on the scene were full of good intentions to do something about this dreadful enslavement of a people. They did what they thought was best and decided to buy slaves themselves.

"They bought them left and right, with all the money they could get their hands on. They bought them by the hundreds and by the thousands – and they Christianised all they bought. Buying slaves and Christianising them became, in fact, the principal method of the apostolate not only in East Africa, but on the entire continent."

Money was obviously the key element in this enterprise, and it was amply supplied from Rome - for the Catholics, and from "*mission societies*" - for the Protestants. Antislavery movements in both Britain and America also pulled on the heartstrings of those back home to help finance this vital mission work to the poor slaves. The missionaries were, in good conscience, fighting the system of slavery, but in looking back, one wonders if the best way to fight a system was to buy the products of that system?

"The missionaries bought those slaves, took care of them and fed them by means of huge farms and plantations, run by the ex-slaves themselves. One would feel reassured if the missionary journals of that time showed evidence that the lot of the ex-slaves was noticeably better than that of their slave counterparts on Zanzibar or elsewhere. Physical cruelty, of course, was never part of the mission compound regime. But the word "free" might not be the most accurate word to describe life on the mission plantations. And even for that freedom, such as it was, there was a price to be paid - acceptance of the Christian religion."

Donovan's account confronts us with hard questions that will not just disappear. One wonders how many missionaries of the time questioned the wisdom of what they were doing. In effect their enterprise was sheer madness. They were trying to build the church in the most artificial way imaginable.

"Following baptism of these ex-slaves, and the training of many of them in the work-shop schools, the mission arranged marriages among them, hoping to settle them as Christian families and villages on some part of the vast mission compound."

The hope was that such families would multiply and end up filling a whole continent with Christians. Unfortunately, the offspring of such slave families dwindled, and the idea proved to be a dismal failure.

"But perhaps more serious in the long run – this early missionary effort in East Africa has left its subtle mark, the mark of slavery, on all succeeding generations of missionary work. The mission compounds are still in evidence in East Africa. And the questionable motivation for baptism, the subservience and dependence of the Christianised peoples, the condescension of the missionaries, are themes that have returned again and again in the intervening years. And the distortion as to the purpose and meaning and methods of missionary work has taken us far from the true centre."

Here we see the folly of best intentions going tragically wrong. So many suffered and laboured, trapped in a distorted paradigm of missionary work, which was far from the true centre of a vulnerable Christ.

"Bagamoyo stands like a ghost town today, with its huge and empty cathedral, its slave blockhouse, its

tall coconut trees with their branches hardly stirring in the stupefying heat, and its melancholy graveyard filled with the remains of so many young missionaries, with the sleep of a century upon them.

Bagamoyo indeed – "leave here your heart and hopes," a fitting symbol for the thousands of slaves, the many missionaries, and a half-century of missionary work in Africa."

Donovan, agonisingly reflects on the failures of mission, looking at education, the political and geographical influences of colonialism, and independence.

"There is no mistaking the fact that missionary work is in a shambles. Born in slavery, disorientated by the school system, startled by independence, and smothered in nation building – mission in East Africa has never had the chance to be true to itself."

He may sometimes seem to overstate the negatives, but his quest is to find reality and a suitable paradigm for effective missions today. In the end, Donovan himself decided to become vulnerable, stripping off the security of the mission base and finance. He became a vulnerable traveller amongst the Masai people, humbly exposing Christ to them in their culture and language.

"Who is the Christ I preach? What is the unique contribution of Christianity when all the cultural

accretions of Western civilisation have been pared away?"

He incarnated the difficult answers to these questions as he dwelt among the Masai. Each one of us, especially those with a heart for mission, and a prayer to open heaven, must have the courage to face up to the challenge of these questions. My own quest for reality has led me to try and find some answers, not in East Africa, but Central Africa, which has the same chequered past concerning mission structures.

The following paragraphs attempt to challenge some of the more established ideas of mission work, and introduces the idea of vulnerability – a key aspect of the intercessory life, as being a main paradigm for mission strategy. Donovan left us to do an apprenticeship with the Masai people, I'm introducing you to my own apprenticeship with the Pygmies.

A few years ago I was travelling in the back of an old Landrover towards Scieplac in the Central African Republic on my first visit to a Pygmy encampment. The road was bumpy, I was hot and sticky and deep in thought about the challenge of raising new missionary movements from the various African tribes.

"Is it really possible Lord?"

In the West we have so much. We learn from birth to look after ourselves, to be strong and

independent. We are taught to seek good food, clothing and shelter, good medical care, stable family life, good education for the children, decent means of transport and communication, and a stable secure environment in which to live. Having been saturated in these values it is no surprise that the Church in the West - albeit it in a very balanced "Christian" way, also models these basic lifestyle values.

Most missionaries I have met, who have been sent out from such Western churches, also model the same values on their field of service. I must say here that I have no intention of criticising or judging such missionaries who are often living quite sacrificially compared to a potential lifestyle in the West. In most cases however, they still need to be maintained in a way that reflects to some degree the values they have grown up with.

The missionary lifestyle which is modelled is often one of a very capable - bible school or graduate education, quite self sufficient individual. Most probably he will need a decent vehicle to travel in Africa, a reasonable house to live in and the facilities to communicate to the outside world. In most cases, he may well be receiving his support by donations from a home church or foreign missionary agency. Again I emphasise that I in no way want to be critical in saying this and it is obvious that European and Western missionaries need the above to maintain reasonable life and service on the field.

Mission specialists like Phil Elkins insist on the necessity of good preparation, training and education, as we see in his article *"Preparation: Pay the Price."*

"What are these basics that everyone needs prior to entering the field? A person needs a solid introductory course in missions taught by one or more experienced missionaries who are professionally trained in the discipline of missiology."

He goes on to mention the importance of language acquisition, understanding the principles of contextualising the Gospel followed by other basics including,

"missionary anthropology (cultural anthropology is helpful but needs applications), cross-cultural communication, and extensive studies of what causes churches to grow and what retards growth on the mission field."

Other godly missionary pioneers like David Adeney in his article *"Lifestyle for Servants of Christ,"* also brings out the importance of identification with the local people, a humble learning attitude and a common intercession of shared sorrows. As Adeney shares his commitment to the fellow believers in China, one cannot help but be moved by all that has gone on before and give homage to those Western missionaries who have paid the price.

"In the early days of World War II, we shared in the sorrows and dangers of our fellow believers in China. And they shared in ours. I shall always remember our Chinese fellow workers standing with us by the side of the little grave where our second child was buried, praying that as God had taken our treasure to be with him, our hearts might be drawn closer to heaven."

However, in spite of everything, it seems that mission is often modelled to the African as something for the well equipped and well prepared to do. In looking at the number of requests I receive from Africa - and I know other missions do as well, for 4 x 4 wheel drive land-cruisers, computers, motorcycles, money for children's education and grants for books and study, I wonder what message and what model we are giving the emerging African missionary movements for becoming a successful worker?

Are we saying that you cannot be a good missionary unless you have money, good health, stable family resources, good education etc? Where does this leave the emerging "rag-tag" missionary workers of French speaking Africa and beyond who are now looking to fulfil their destiny on the front lines of world evangelisation?

Where does this leave your average pygmy whose heart is on fire for God but who possesses no more than his bow and arrow, a mobile leaf "igloo" and a loin cloth?

All of these thoughts were passing through my mind as the road got bumpier and the equatorial forest thicker! I reflected on how I personally had been brought up to be independent and strong. I thought about how much of the evangelism which I was involved in consisted of the strong and equipped going out to the poor and needy. Indeed, the very notion of being able to give someone the gospel can even imply some kind of superiority.

The Western world along with its roads, schools, hospitals and commerce has given the gospel to Africa. To many, the idea of mission still conjures up images of a paternalistic, Dr Schweitzer like figure building clinics in the heart of Africa or crowds of happy faced orphans gathered round a godly missionary nurse.

Mission triggers a knee-jerk reaction of meeting need.

The conclusion then becomes that you must have certain resources if you're going to meet the needs of others. Ralph Winter in his *"World Mission Survey"* brings out an important point here in talking about the immense missionary resources in Latin America.

"Can Latin America be a "mission base?" Here comes Parkinson's sixth law: If you convince people they need help, you may convince them that they cannot help others. Latin believers can become missionaries only to the extent that they no longer see themselves as dependent on missionaries."

We need to be very careful here. Promoting the need of others can effectively disqualify a new generation of missionaries from ever rising. It may make us feel better and keep us in a job, but it will prove counterproductive in the end.

A close friend once confided in me how much he hated the help he had received in an orphanage when he was growing up. No-one had been unkind, and the folks were loving - he simply hated being a victim of someone else's charity.

Some co-workers have shared with me that the people they have often given the most to in material help etc, are the ones they end up having the most problems with, whereas the ones who've been able to help them have been more receptive! So often we want to help folks so as to have an opportunity to share the gospel. I would contend that perhaps we need to learn to be more vulnerable to get the gospel released.

"Have we managed to get things the wrong way round?"

I thought, as we approached the encampment. Bonhoeffer's words from *"The Cost of Discipleship"* sprang to mind:

"When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."

Christ's baseline call is to weakness and vulnerability.

Even Adeney's earlier quotation shows how he bonded with the people, not through his strengths, but through his vulnerability.

As the pygmy Christians surrounded us, I seemed to hear God gently speaking:

"Their seeming disadvantages are in fact their strengths. Strengths you no longer possess in the West. Vulnerability equals opportunity."

I then received the passage from Matthew 25:31-46, and was thinking of the little brothers of Jesus while the very present pygmy "*little brothers*" welcomed us in.

I'd like to study this passage in some depth now in an attempt to back up the argument for vulnerability – both in mission and intercessory prayer. I want to challenge our need centred perspective on mission, while showing what opportunity exists for the emerging multitudes of African workers, whose "*leastness*" is their most powerful qualification.

In his book, "*The Work of Evangelism*," J. Herbert Kane cites three major kinds of evangelism: Presence, Proclamation and Persuasion evangelism. He argues strongly for all three to be in place, especially presence and proclamation. Another way of expressing presence evangelism would be "*incarnational evangelism*" - the message becoming flesh and dwelling amongst a people. Christ, God's Word, became flesh and dwelt among

us. Bishop Azariah of Dornakal, attributed the mass movement in the Telugu country to the quality of life manifested by the Christians.

"It is universally admitted by all missions and churches that the reason most often given by the converts for accepting the Christian way of life is the impression produced upon them by the changed lives of the Christian community."

This passage is all about the power of presence evangelism to change the destiny of nations. If we look at the task of world evangelisation solely from the point of view of numbers we may get discouraged and miss the goal. Should we be looking for greater numbers of recruits to reach the unreached peoples and an ever increasing world population?

Obviously this is one part of the job and a certain David Barratt, who is a world authority on statistics and numbers, has two excellent books, *"Our Globe and How To Reach It"* and *"Seven Hundred Plans To Evangelise the World,"* which go into great detail about the numbers needed and the required synergy to complete the task. However, I would venture to say that this is not enough - even with seven hundred plus plans!

Numbers are not enough. Christ came a lone man and modelled the gift of a life laid down for the redemption of many. It is the quality of a sacrificial life which brings salvation to nations.

I believe that our passage in Matthew 25 is also showing that a life laid down equals *a redemptive opportunity* for a nation - or an opportunity for judgement. We will see this more clearly as we work through the passage.

Christ, with all His angels, sits on the throne of judgement.

"All the nations" are gathered before Him to be judged.

Some are *"blessed"* by the Father and invited to take their eternal inheritance in the kingdom of God, whilst others are cursed and thrown into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. It is all a very serious business.

It is interesting to note that the *"nations"* - from the Greek word *"ethnos,"* being entire ethnic groups or tribes, are given an opportunity to respond to a Son of Man that they may not have immediately recognised.

"Lord, when did we see you?" - repeated 4 times in the passage.

I would dare to venture that whole people groups are in the process of being prepared to receive Jesus and are already responding to Him, even though they do not yet have full knowledge of Him.

This gives me a great hope for the Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists of this world. I am not in any way trying to dilute salvation - Acts 4:12, or condone

universalism, but am simply encouraging us to have a new optimism in seeing the value of presence evangelism, lives laid down amongst the unreached peoples of this world.

We must now answer a very important, pivotal question concerning all of this.

"What, or who, brings salvation - or damnation, to the nations in this passage?"

Again, salvation is found in Christ alone, but the response of nations to various incarnations of Christ is vital here.

The classic answer would be to say that it is our action to the poor and disadvantaged of the earth. Many aid agencies use these passages in appeals for finances etc. The argument goes:

"Helping the poor equals helping Christ."

If this answer is pushed to its logical conclusion, we end up with salvation by works as well as a need and guilt-centred view of Christ's redemptive achievement.. Jesus said:

"You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

Mark 14:7

The poor are important and Christian aid is relevant, but I don't believe the primary thrust of this passage is to encourage us Christians, from

our riches, to go and help the poor. I actually believe it teaches the opposite. Verses 40 and 45 hold the key.

"I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least - or smallest, of these brothers of mine, you did for me."

This passage is indeed about the poor, but the poor are not the poor in general, but the poor brothers of Jesus - brothers who have risked the same walk of vulnerability as their Master.

So who are Jesus' little brothers?

For a start, born again Christians - those who know the Father, and walk in personal relationship with the Holy Spirit. I believe such brothers of Jesus must also include the Jewish people in particular, who are Jesus' blood brothers. Paul in Romans 9:2-4 prays:

"I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel."

We do well to remember God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3.

"I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Israel's vocation was to become a redemptive opportunity for nations.

I believe that she has not been simply replaced by the Church and still maintains a specific signpost role. Nations need to weigh up very seriously how they treat Israel. However, the Church age has arrived, and it is now the responsibility of "*little brothers*" of Jesus from many nations to dare to clothe themselves in the missionary mantle of vulnerability, and offer redemptive opportunity to the nations of the earth. Before looking at how the brothers offer "*redemptive opportunity*," I believe there is another group of little brothers of Jesus. I openly admit that some of this may be my own personal opinion, but it seems that little children, in the age of innocence, whom Jesus calls to himself, and to whom the kingdom belongs, also offer redemptive opportunity to a nation. This is why horrendous crimes against the unborn and the innocent ones in nations will have such terrible consequences.

"And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believes in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea." Matthew 18.5-6.

True mission is about offering redemptive opportunity to others.

It is the exact opposite of the wonderfully strong and together helping the miserable poor.

It is about identifying so strongly with Christ - in his hunger, thirst, foreignness, nakedness, sickness and incarceration, that we give peoples the opportunity to respond to Him, enabling them in some mysterious way to discover more of his presence in the world.

Christ became poor so that we might become rich. He made himself nothing. Paul stated that:

"We carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that His life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you." 2 Corinthians 4:10-12

The life of Jesus revealed in the bodies of those little missionary brothers, willing to be on display and vulnerable in the nations.

"When did we see you hungry?"

Jesus himself knew hunger:

"After fasting for forty days and forty nights, he was hungry." Luke 4:2

Jesus made himself available to receive hospitality.
"Zaccheus, come down immediately! I must stay at your house today." Luke 19:5

His vulnerability in this area opened up the opportunity for Zaccheus to repent.

"Today salvation has come to this house ." Luke 19:9

Mary and Martha's hospitality enabled them to fellowship with Jesus.

The apostle Paul cited his own missionary experience:

"I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food."
2 Corinthians 11:27

Hunger may be a very real issue for emerging African workers. Jesus said that even someone giving a cup of cold water to one of His disciples wouldn't fail to have a reward. How much more those, who willingly share their bread with the hungry little brothers of Jesus.

I find this a deep challenge to my own well fed culture. Having spent many months in North Africa, where hospitality has been a hallmark of many of the Muslim families, the very fact of such families offering a meal to a Christian brother of Jesus may offer the strong possibility for some of them to touch Jesus for the very first time. I believe redemptive power and possibility is released when we humble ourselves to receive.

Jesus asked the Samaritan woman for a drink and salvation came to a whole village.

"We know that this man really is the Saviour of the world." John 4:1-42

"When did we see you thirsty?"

Paul was often thirsty. Some of my African friends and colleagues have walked over a hundred miles through forest in the heat of the day to bring the gospel to hidden villages. I wonder what their first phrase is on arriving? Are we still thirsty?

"When did we see you a stranger?"

The true missionary is inevitably a stranger. New cultures and new languages need to be learned. E. Brewster in his book *"Bonding and The Missionary Task,"* recognises that, rather than being a weakness, the vulnerability of language learning opens up much opportunity to share Jesus.

"From the very first day it is important to develop many meaningful relationships with people. The newcomer should early communicate his needs and his desire to be a learner. People help people who are in need! Over 30 people came to know Christ as a result of the involvement ministry that these new language learners were able to develop during those first three months."

Christ Himself became a stranger.

"He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to

those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." John 1.11-12

Every cross-cultural missionary – incarnating a vulnerable stranger, becomes a redemptive opportunity to those who help them.

"When did we see you naked?"

Not quite such an option for most Western missionaries, unless you're called to beach evangelism in some parts of Southern France! Pygmy Christians may be able to identify somewhat.

Job cried out:

*"Naked I came from my mother's womb
and naked I shall depart."*
Job 1:21

Christ came a naked babe into the world and departed a naked man on the cross. His nakedness clothed a guilty world with grace. His was the prophetic animal skin sacrifice which clothed Adam and Eve's shame - Genesis 3:21. The apostle Paul confessed:

"I have been cold and naked." 2 Corinthians 11:27

Probably, the most painful, shocking images of the holocaust are of the mass nakedness of thousands lined up for the gas chambers, or piled up in gruesome mass graves. The Jews too, have known

what it is to be vulnerable little brothers of Jesus.

"When did we see you sick?"

We come back to Paul, the man who healed so many, as he witnesses to the Galatian Christians:

"As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself." Galatians 4:13-14

As if he were Christ Jesus! Once again we see how Paul became a *"redemptive opportunity"* for the Galatians due to his sickness and vulnerability.

When I go to Africa, I can afford to take the latest expensive anti-malarial tablets. Many of my African colleagues cannot and are sick. In fact, disease and ill health seem so common. Many of the eleventh hour workers for the final ingathering of souls may well have A.I.D.S. Dr Patrick Dixon in his book, *"The Truth about A.I.D.S,"* writes:

"In some towns and cities in Central Africa, up to a third of all young adults are now thought to be infected. In some hospitals between eight and twenty three pints of blood out of 100 are infected with HIV. One relief agency has talked unofficially about pulling out of Central Africa."

"What's the point in drilling more wells when most

of the people will be dead in a few years."

The World Health Organisation says 9 million were infected by early 1994. In 1991 I was told by a trusted colleague that he thought it would be hard to find a family in the African city where he lived who was not attending an A.I.D.S. funeral on average once a month. In Africa they call it the 'slim' disease. The children's wards are 'full of dying children'. Many are babies under one or two years old. Many are not dying of famine but of A.I.D.S. A terrible tragedy is that many caught the virus not while in their mother's wombs, but from the use of unsterilized needles."

Already, some of my most valued colleagues in the Central African Republic have died of A.I.D.S. since we began working together twelve years ago.

Is A.I.D.S. a curse from God, or a global opportunity, demanding a response from the nations? God hates sickness, and I in no way want to glorify it. However, the vulnerability it brings can be a "*redemptive opportunity*" for others. We see this clearly in Isaiah 53:4-5, when the suffering servant, the Lord Jesus, takes upon himself our sicknesses in order to bring our healing.

"Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows...and by his wounds we are healed."

"When did we see you in prison?"

What an opportunity for closed country evangelism.

Many little brothers of Jesus in China, North Africa, North Korea, Pakistan, Eritrea, Iran, and many other lands, know the prison experience like their predecessor, the apostle Paul, who had,

"worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again." 2 Corinthians 11:23

Who knows how many pagan peoples have been given redemptive opportunity by the kindness they have shown to such heroes of the faith while they were in prison, or how many have confirmed their lostness through their cruelty?

Such incarcerated little brothers and sisters have indeed been following Christ in *"triumphant procession"* throughout the ages. Their weakness, vulnerability and brokenness have been:

"Spreading everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task?" 2 Corinthians 2:15-16

It is hard to be dogmatic about such mysterious truths, but I would venture to conclude that the missionary endeavour must dare to be vulnerable. Do you dare to be vulnerable? Will your prayer life be stifled in materialism, inaction and fantasy or will it dare to incarnate itself into a vulnerable body

which follows Jesus?

The new African, and other missionary movements from the Global South, have a distinct advantage over the West in this area.

Their weaknesses - far from disqualifying them for missionary service, are in fact their strengths.

God bares His holy arm to the world in raising up these redemptive incarnations, emblems of His love for the nations.

"And who indeed is equal to the task?"

May our lives make a grace filled attempt to answer that positively. May we humble ourselves to learn from the past and get empowered from the synergy of God's prayerful purpose through the generations. May we learn to "love Leah" and embrace our every day realities, and may we have the courage to become vulnerable.

Heaven opens as we follow a barefoot Christ into mission.

6. TO ALL NATIONS

All prayer must have a goal. It must be full of movement and mission. I asked you in a previous chapter to think of what might be one of the greatest prayers you could pray. Praying for God's Kingdom to break into all the nations of the world must figure amongst such noble intercession. Prayer is also strengthened by understanding God's heart through His word. This chapter is written to help you catch some of the Bible's missionary passion as we unpack God's mission mandate in Scripture.

What were Jesus' and the apostle Paul's Bible? Answer, the Jewish scriptures of the Torah, the Prophets and the Psalms. This is the scriptural base Jesus uses to teach his disciples the major truths of Christianity. And what are those truths? Let us look at Luke 24:44-47.

"Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them. "This is what is written":

"The Christ will suffer..."

This is a major truth of Christianity - the atonement of Christ. We might imagine Jesus citing Isaiah 53 or Psalm 22 to make His case.

"And rise from the dead on the third day..."

Again, Jesus may have cited Psalm 16:10, Hosea 6:1-2, Isaiah 26:19 and Jonah 1:17 to illustrate this other major foundation of Christianity - the resurrection of Christ.

And the third major truth that Christ mentions:

"And repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

Jesus himself underlines mission - reaching all nations with the gospel, as being a major element of Christianity. The Church is badly lacking when she possesses no missionary identity!

The apostle Paul in Acts 26:22-23 uses the same argument with Festus and Agrippa as he explains the major truths of Christianity, ending with the importance of "*proclamation*" to the nations.

"I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen - that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles."

But what may have been the scriptural arguments that Jesus and Paul would have used to underscore the missionary mandate of the Old Testament? There is little doubt that Genesis 12:1-3 would have figured strongly and we will look at five missionary mandates springing from this first book of the Bible. The important thing to note here is the

two tiered blessing.

"I will bless you so that you will be a blessing to all peoples on earth."

Unfortunately, both Israel and the Church, too often put the full stop behind *"I will bless you,"* without looking to be a blessing to the nations. God's ability to bless His Church is limited by the Bride's unwillingness to cross her borders to reach others. She is fearful of losing out if she commits herself to mission. In fact, the very opposite is true. In giving out our best to the world we make space for God to be able to bless us. More giving equals more blessing. The lack of missionary zeal and endeavour in the body of Christ today is probably the major reason for lukewarmness and decline. Each new generation has to face up to the missionary mandate given to Abraham, the Father of nations.

Genesis 18:17-18 re-emphasises the two-tiered promise and sets it in the context of prophetic revelation of God's will for nations. It underlines our own premise in this book that mission and prayer flow together as Abraham illustrates in his intercession for Sodom.

"Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all the nations on earth will be blessed through him."

The two-tiered blessing mandate is carried over

into the episode of Abraham offering up Isaac in Genesis 22:15-18.

"I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

This promise is given in the context of sacrifice and obedience, pointing us towards Christ's own sacrifice and obedience in going to the cross. Not withholding and obeying are attributes which will bring God's blessing on the nations. In contrast, our disobedience and fear of giving will slow down the advance of the reign of Christ on the earth. God is committed to sacrifice. He even takes an oath of commitment to bless. As the writer of Hebrews emphasises, God did this,

"to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised confirming it with an oath." Hebrews 6:7

God's unchanging purpose is to bless the nations! The sacrifice of Christ and the oath of the Father himself make this purpose indestructible and eternal.

Isaac takes up the same promise in Genesis 26:4.

"I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed."

Jacob - the next generation in Genesis 28:14, inherits the same promise:

"Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring."

Just as the promise was passed down each generational line, so each generation – right up to our present age, has the privilege and responsibility to take up its challenge. God speaks about the descendants being as numerous as sand on the shore, dust on the earth and stars in the sky. Ever tried counting? No-one could even begin the task. This confirms the prophetic statement in Revelation 7:9, concerning the mighty blessing which was to extend north, south, east and west, multiplying out from Abraham's descendants and into the world. Great multitudes from every nation whom *"no-one could count."*

Five covenant promises already and we are not yet out of Genesis! The entire Old Testament contains elements of this two tier blessing.

King David, caught up in the worship of the Lord, understood this principle well in Psalm 67. This psalm is taken directly from the Priestly blessing

given to Aaron and his sons for Israel in Numbers 6:24:

"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace."

Israel - in their self-centredness, had kept the blessing to themselves, but David - under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, enlarges the blessing to the world, linking it back into the Abrahamic blessing.

"May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, (so) that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations."

David even understood the very physical and temporal blessing that would prosper Israel as she obeyed the Lord's missionary mandate.

"Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us. God will bless us, And all the ends of the earth will fear him."

The biblical mandate to Abraham has to be taken seriously, and there is much evidence in socio-economic history to suggest that obedience to this promise brings the fulfilment of that promise upon the nation. It may be right to suggest that each nation has the opportunity to peak - and subsequently decline, within this covenant. It would be a mistake to over simplify and generalise

in suggesting a universal panacea for every nation's woes, but obedience to God's command will always bring restoration and blessing.

Isaiah 49:6, expresses the same thing. God called his chosen to be not only his,

"servant to restore the tribes of Jacob,"

but also,

"a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."

Once again, we notice the two tiered, double blessing.

The Israelite Kingdom, like the Church today, was intended to be missionary in character. They were indeed God's *"treasured possession,"* a *"kingdom of priests and a Holy nation,"* destined to *"declare his glory among the nations his marvellous deeds among all peoples."* Exodus 19:5 and Psalm 96:3

Unfortunately, far from fulfilling their missionary vocation to the nations, Israel became absorbed with internal strife, corruption and apostasy - a state of affairs which eventually brought the judgement of God, the loss of their land and their dispersion amongst the nations. The book of Jonah gives a vivid picture concerning what should have been the vocation of Israel in bringing repentance and salvation to the gentile nations. As David Clifford writes in the *Moorlands'* mission's course:

"Jonah is a rebuke to the intense nationalism and a picture of what Israel should have been in the purposes of God."

Jesus called Peter to be a *"fisher of men."* We, the Church, are to carry on the call and catch men for God. However, the book of Jonah teaches us that if we refuse this vocation, if we run away from the fish, the fish will run after us! Be a fisher or be eaten by a fish! Because Israel didn't go out to the Babylonians, God sent the Babylonians to them. It may be that, as we have been so slow to reach out to the Muslim lands, God is sending them to us.

For the church in many nations this is a very present challenge, as Islam takes a stronger hold on society, dominating the economy and influencing politically. The fundamentalist push from Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya Sudan and the Sahel, challenges us to take the Fundamentalist Islamic vision to build a world caliphate through *"jihad"* very seriously. Will we at last respond to the call to go out and lovingly fish for our Muslim neighbours or will we wait to be swallowed up by a *"big fish?"*

Without wanting to raise the spectre of xenophobic racism, perhaps the current influx of Muslim Arabs, Turks and Pakistanis into Europe is also a sign of our indifference in the European Church to move outwards to fish in these dangerous waters?

I wrote the above paragraphs as part of a doctoral thesis in 1997. As I contemplate the 65 million plus

refugees in the world, and the way Europe is being challenged to welcome thousands of Muslims from war-torn and impoverished nations, I sense that this prophetic echo from the past is becoming a resounding shout to the Church of today. May this call to prayer, this challenge to open heaven, lead us all to a greater prayer, understanding and commitment to the present refugee crisis.

Jesus cited Naaman, Elisha, Elijah and the widow of Zarephtha, - Luke 4:25-26, to illustrate how God wanted Israel to reach out to the alien. Unfortunately, the violent, nationalistic response he received in Nazareth illustrates how far Israel had slipped from her vocation. Jesus also spoke about the Queen of Sheba and Nineveh coming to Israel for salvation -Luke 11:29-32.

As Jesus continued his missionary Bible study to the disciples, he may well have made mention of Ruth - a gentile Moabite, loyally coming to Israel and being included in the Messianic line. He might have quoted from the last book of the Old Testament which previews the greatness of the gospel era:

"My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun; In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations... says the Lord Almighty." Malachi 1:11

It is clear that both Jesus and the apostle Paul would have found ample evidence to back up the

church's missionary vocation from the Old Testament. We have looked at the five missionary mandates at the beginning of the Old Testament. Let us now turn to the five missionary mandates which we find at the beginning of the New Testament - in its first five books. We will look at four endings and one beginning! Each gospel mandate reflects something of the diversity of the Church.

Perhaps, the most well known call to mission, often cited in our Bibles as "*The Great Commission*," is found in Jesus' words at the end of the gospel of Matthew 28:18-20:

"Then Jesus came to them and said: 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'"

It is the mandate of the four "*alls*."

All authority - Jesus went to the lowest place in ultimate intercession and identification with lost humanity. In so doing, he gained the place of ultimate authority. The name above every names, raised,

"far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given."

Ephesians 1:21

The Gospel message has authority and the power to save. Mission work begins not in man's ability or endeavour, but in the delegated authority of Christ to his Church. Because of this authority we are summoned to "*therefore go!*"

All nations - The Bible has a clear concept of the word for "*nations*," taking it beyond a simple definition of geographical boundaries. The Greek word used - "*ethnos*," gives us our word "*ethnic*." From this, we can see clearly that when the Bible speaks of "*nations*" it is referring to each separate ethnic group of the world. The ex-Soviet Union and Yugoslavia illustrate this difference well. Political and geographical barriers made two nations in the past but, as we see today, they represent many people groups - Russians, Ukrainians, Kazaks and Serbs, Croats and Bosnian Muslims, each with their own specific linguistic and cultural identity. Jesus is calling us to reach each ethnic group with the gospel. It is estimated that there are about 5.000 unreached people groups in the world today. This requires a specialist, dedicated approach by a Church committed to cross cultural divides, learn new languages and give herself long term and wholeheartedly to the hidden people groups still without the gospel.

Everything (All) I commanded you – Again, it's not just a question of "*giving someone the gospel*," but of teaching all that Jesus passed on, making disciples of nations just as Jesus made disciples of

the twelve. We have already seen how Jesus used the Old Testament in his teaching. The New Testament sheds fresh light on the past and gives us a grace filled, accomplished mandate to carry on what was started by Israel.

Hence, the Bible itself is central to this teaching, coupled with the action of the Holy Spirit to convict and bring the required obedience to the Word of God. If we are serious about seeing the nations restored, we need to be equally serious about getting God's word into our hearts and then through us into the world.

I am with you always - Jesus has not left us as "orphans" - John 14:8, but is with us by His Holy Spirit.

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." John 14:27

His presence is the key to global mission. We are not called to be worried workers, stressed out and burnt out like business executives in the world. He does not give as the world gives. We need to find His presence and seize His peace - the satisfying fullness of *Shalom*, even in the most difficult circumstances. Jesus' presence puts faith in our hearts and chases away fear. We must not allow our hearts to lose His presence. His presence brings a victory celebration, a new song exalting the Lamb's victory. Count Zinzendorf's definition of

the essentials of the gospel sums this up so well:

"The worship of the Lamb, and the cross applied to every man's heart."

Worship of Jesus in word, work and life is key to the missionary thrust. King David knew the Lord's presence and it was this that enabled him to reign, win his battles, receive grace and celebrate forgiveness.

"I will fear no evil, for you are with me; Your rod and your staff, they comfort me...Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Psalm 23:4-6

The emphasis of the Matthew missionary mandate is on cross cultural mission. It speaks of tribes, nations and teaching which implies a more specialist, long term, strategic approach to world evangelisation where the power of intellect, administration and communication are very important. Missionary statesmen such as Ralph Winter, Cameron Townsend and Donald McGavran would be good examples of how these verses have incarnated themselves in the Church of today.

Mark's ending is less specialised and more about reaching as many individuals as possible with its emphasis on quantity - *"all creation,"* and power.

J. Herbert Kane expresses this different emphasis between the two mandates in another way:

"Evangelism has a twofold purpose, one immediate and the other remote. The immediate purpose is the conversion of the individual and his incorporation into the Christian church. The remote purpose is the proclamation of the lordship of Christ over all creation and extension of the Kingdom of God throughout the earth. The first is emphasised in Mark's account of the Great Commission, the second is found in Matthew's version."

Reinhard Bonke, John Wimber and other leading Pentecostals represent these verses from Mark 16:15-18 in the Church today.

"He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation... And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.'"

Although it is absolutely right to be concerned with the unreached tribes, it is also absolutely right to get as many converted right where we are now. "All creation," spreads the net as wide as possible and Mark's gospel is all about action and doing the job.

The Pentecostals have certainly got on with the job since their explosive beginning in Azusa Street at the turn of the century. According to the 1989

Lausanne II official statistics, the top ten largest churches in the world are all either Charismatic or Pentecostal and it is estimated that soon the largest 100 will all be of this same vibrant identity. The major growth has been in the 2/3 world countries where the power of the gospel to overcome disease and demonic powers has been a vital element in bringing folks to the Lord.

"Demons, snakes and deadly poison" are much more everyday affairs in an Asian or African context than in a Western environment.

A French missionary from *"La Porte Ouverte,"* M. Claude Moser, who pioneered a work amongst Tuareg and Fulani peoples in Agadez Niger, spoke to me about the relevance of Mark's commission in his own ministry. He remembered how several snake charmers set loose their venomous snakes upon him. As they advanced, he pushed away the fear and commanded them to leave. They turned and fled, but one later attacked him from a roof, clinging to his head and face. He was able to pick it off and throw it down without sustaining injury.

Charles Marsh, who worked for many years in Muslim countries, recounts the threat of poisoning of the early converts as does the pioneer missionary to North Africa, Lilius Trotter, in her book *"Until The Day Breaks:"*

"We are coming to the conclusion that many of these backslidings among the converts out here are due to drugging... We think that datura is largely

used, as it can be introduced unnoticed into food and drink; it seems to excite the emotions and paralyse the will-power."

It would be unwise to suggest a universal panacea in these verses going beyond God's sovereignty in the matter of life and death, but Mark certainly gives strength and promise to those who find themselves working amongst unreached Muslims, on the cutting edge of world mission. John Wimber, in his book *"Power Evangelism,"* presents a strong theological and historical argument for signs and wonders being an integral part of the gospel message and argues that:

"Western Christians must undergo a paradigm (or perception) shift to become involved in a signs and wonders ministry. This is a shift towards a worldview that makes room for God's miraculous intervention. It is not that we allow God's intervention; he does not need our permission. The shift is that we begin to see his miraculous works and allow them to affect our lives."

The inclusive African worldview has an enormous advantage over the Western one in respect to *"allowing"* signs and wonders in ministry and is another argument in the favour of the establishment of indigenous African mission movements.

J. Herbert Kane, in *"Life and Work on the Mission Field,"* emphasises 3 forms of evangelism.

"Presence evangelism, Proclamation evangelism" and "Persuasion evangelism."

It seems that the Marken postscript introduces *"Power evangelism"* to that list.

As we have already seen, the third mandate in Luke is based solidly on Old Testament scripture. It appeals to the classic evangelistic approach of a man like Billy Graham with its emphasis on *"repentance"* and *"forgiveness of sins."* It is a call to conversion, a call to turn, *"from sin to righteousness, from death to life, from idols to God."*

Both Jesus and John the Baptist preached repentance. Matthew 4:17 and Matthew 3:2.

The Greek for repentance is *"metanoéo"* which translates *"to think differently"* or *"to reconsider."* Repentance is a re-alignment of our thoughts - and necessarily a re-alignment of our lives, so that they line up with God's intention for us. Most of mankind is presently dislocated from God's desires and love for them. Luke calls for this possibility of re-alignment to be heralded to all nations. Jesus spoke about being *"born again."*

"I tell you the truth, no one can enter the Kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit."
John 3:5

Much has been written about these words concerning Christian initiation and David Pawson's book on the subject, *"The Normal Christian Birth,"*

goes into detail about this passage – and others in Matthew and Mark which we have already looked at, explaining their application to Christian initiation. Pawson himself makes this conclusion.

"In a nutshell, I believe that the 'normal Christian birth' consists of true repentance and genuine faith, expressed and effected in water-baptism, with a conscious reception of the person of the Spirit with power."

Pawson goes as far as seeing the "water" as the necessary process of adult water baptism and "the Spirit" as being the necessary process of spirit baptism, both being the expression of "true repentance" and "genuine faith."

For a man and woman to have a child there has to be some agreement to come together. If they are on opposite sides of the Channel, no new life will be possible unless they agree to move and meet. For the miracle of new life to happen to man, he has to change his position and come alongside God. This is the "repentance," the "thinking differently" and the "agreeing with God" which, when mixed with the faith that the Holy Spirit brings to the heart of man through the living word of God, creates the conditions for "new birth." Luke's ending here is commissioning the Church to call the nations to re-align with God.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer considered it "cheap grace" to preach "forgiveness without requiring repentance," so he would probably have appreciated the

requisite pairing of Luke who places the repentance before forgiveness. However, the forgiveness of sins is the heart of the gospel message. J.I. Packer, in *"Knowing God,"* says that:

"The gospel centres upon justification; that is, upon the remission of sins and the acceptance of our persons that goes with it."

King David celebrated the happiness man experiences in knowing the remission of his sins in Psalm 32:1-2

"Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit."

The Lord Jesus himself, in Matthew 26:28, introduces the atoning gift of His blood:

"This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

This is indeed the good news the nations of the world need to hear. So many are bound in guilt and need to know the message of forgiveness. John Noble, in *"The Forgiveness Equation,"* shares how the Lord brought home his own personal need for forgiveness in a powerful way during a visit he was making to the Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland. He was particularly outraged and shocked by the memories of the horrors which were on view.

"I'd finally had enough. Thoroughly sickened, I went to leave...Then I cried out in anger and confusion to the Lord: "Am I part of the same race of beings as the monsters who committed this horrendous crime against humanity, Father?" And he didn't leave me in silence; the Lord spoke clearly to me, in an almost audible voice: "Yes, son, all those seeds of sin were in you, only the ground was different; what's more, I would have had to suffer and die on the cross in just the same way if you had been alone on earth and these wicked men had never existed!" It suddenly dawned on me that sin was sin."

Because sin really is sin, because all mankind carries its evil seeds and fruits, the message of forgiveness is essential. As we leave Luke to move on to John, the obligation upon ourselves to also forgive those who have sinned against us cannot be forgotten. Our message of forgiveness carries weight only in as much as we ourselves are able to forgive. In fact, holding on to an unwillingness to forgive others, separates us from God's forgiveness. Forgiving always leads us to the cross.

John's gospel begins with *"the word"* and ends with a great *"world library."*

"If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written." John 21:23

This in itself might be seen as a prophetic statement concerning the multiplication of Jesus'

life into a world Church. One word becomes many books! However, the key missionary passage is found in John 20:19-22.

Jesus appears and greets his disciples.

"He then showed them his hands and side."

Amidst the joy of receiving the glorified risen Christ, the disciples were clearly shown the fruit of His passion. His pierced hands and ruptured side.

"Hands that flung stars into space, to cruel nails surrendered,"

is the gritty truth of sacrificial love as portrayed in the Kendrick song *"Servant King."* Having seen the cost of His service, having contemplated the physical manifestation of a life gifted to the Father for service, the disciples hear the following words:

"As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

One missionary leader has summed this up in the following way: *"If you come back without wounds, that is a bonus!"*

Bonhoeffer's famous words from *"The Cost of Discipleship"* sum up the cross-centred consecration this mandate demands.

"When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die. It may be a death like that of the first disciples who had to leave home and work to follow him or it may be a death like Luther's, who had to leave the

monastery and go out into the world. But it is the same death every time - death in Jesus Christ, the death of the old man at his call."

The apostle, the missionary, the "*sent one*," goes in the same sacrificial reality as Christ himself, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the World.

Having confronted them with the reality of sacrifice, he

"breathed on them and said "receive the Holy Spirit."

It is as if the disciples needed the encouragement of the Holy Spirit to lead them into consecration.

Identifying with Christ in His mission will lead us into moments of suffering. We too will need Christ to breathe on us to see us through. Luther reckoned suffering among the marks of the true Church, and one of the memoranda drawn up in preparation for the *Augsburg Confession* similarly defines the Church as the community of those,

"who are persecuted and martyred for the gospel's sake."

We must also reckon on suffering and identification with Christ as part of the missionary mandate. This is far from being a sad, dour thing! The book of Revelation reveals to us the slain Lamb right at the heart of God's throne. Far from being a subject of sadness, far from being weeping wounds of

despair, these scars of love are transfigured as emblems of worship and celebration - emblems which,

"purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation."
Revelation 5:6-14

Bridges and Thring, in the wonderful hymn "Crown Him with many Crowns," capture the mysterious beauty of such sacrifice.

*"Crown Him the Lord of love:
Behold His hands and side.
Those wounds yet visible above
In beauty glorified:
No angel in the sky
Can fully bear that sight
But downward bends his burning eye
At mysteries so bright."*

Men of God throughout the ages have followed Jesus in suffering on the mission fields of the world. They too will wear their scars as trophies of victory, shining in heaven.

The prophet Isaiah echoes the same mandate as he shows how the father sows into the ground the precious seeds he loves. He presents us with a kind of missionary contract.

*Since you are precious and honoured in my sight,
and because I love you, I will give men in
exchange for you, And people in exchange for your*

life. Do not be afraid, for I am with you." Isaiah 43:4-5

People in exchange for your life!

There are no short cuts, no hidden clauses. Be loved and give yourself away for others. Real mission is as simple as that. Before moving on to Acts, we come back to Bonhoeffer to write the final words concerning such self denial and cross-centred living.

"Self-denial is never just a series of isolated acts of mortification or asceticism. It is not suicide, for there is an element of self-will even in that. To deny oneself is to be aware only of Christ and no more of self, to see only him who goes before and no more the road which is too hard for us. Once more, all that self-denial can say is: "He leads the way, keep close to him.""

From looking at four endings we finish with a beginning. The mandate for missions from Acts 1:8. Acts is a beginning, and the book - with its rather unfinished ending, invites us to join in and take up our part in action for world evangelisation.

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Following on from our analysis of John's commission to sacrifice, it is fitting to note William

Barclay's comment that,

"in Greek the word for witness and the word for martyr is the same (martus). A witness had to be ready to become a martyr."

The book of Acts, the history of the early Church and even recent Church and missionary activity give ample testimony to the reality of martyrdom throughout the centuries. This reality is often overlooked in the Western world with its protective comfort zones, but so clearly lived out in the emerging missionary nations. China is a prime example and Danyun's book *"Lilies Amongst Thorns"* is a moving account of the many martyrs for Christ in China. The author himself challenges us as he writes in his preface:

"Are you living in a democratic, free country relishing real freedom; as you are sitting in your comfortable churches worshipping God; as you are in your warm homes cherishing family happiness, do you realise that the Christians in China are today still confronting extreme brutal persecution?"

The persecuted Eastern Orthodox Christians in Syria today might well issue the same challenge to us all.

Jesus calls us to be his witnesses. For the natural man these are *"hard sayings"* and martyrdom and service of Jesus are not dependent on our own strengths but on him who gives us the ability to follow. Often, it is when we reach the point of saying *"I can't"* that He steps in to give us the faith

to say *"I can!"* The apostle Paul understood the principle of weakness and brokenness leading to ability when he wrote in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, that he,

"will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses so that Christ's power may rest on me... For when I am weak, then I am strong."

The power of God rests on the brokenness of His people. His power is not the iron fist or the crusader's sword but the power of a slain Lamb, the perfume of sacrifice, the power of Love. For true love to be expressed it requires release from a broken jar of clay.

God promises us power - *"dunamis,"* to do the impossible, to become like Jesus and to become witnesses to the world. The power - we get our words dynamite and dynamo from this, is not an end in itself but an essential means for the missionary task. The power rests on our own weakness and our desire to tell others about Jesus. The power is for evangelism. John Wimber's *"Power Evangelism"* gives many examples of specific supernatural equipping for reaching the lost.

"Everyone, according to Acts 1:8, can receive power from the Holy Spirit. Power is the ability, the strength, the might to complete a given task."

The *"given task"* that Jesus presents to His Church is that of reaching the world. The apostle Paul talks of:

"Incomparably great power for us who believe."
Ephesians 1:19

What is the Church doing with such power? I once had a picture from God concerning this. There was an immense hydro-electric dam, holding back millions of tons of water, with generators and turbines turning at full speed. There were cables branching out in several directions from this dam. I followed one cable which led to an individual's power point. From the power point someone was using an electric toothbrush. All that potential power - power to light up hundreds of cities, being used to simply brush teeth! The power God has on offer must be for more than our cosmetic church services and posturing performances. We must plug in to the nations. God's power is for lighting up the towns and cities of this dark world with the love of Jesus.

"For God, who said: 'Let light shine out of darkness', made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." 2 Corinthians 4:6

The prophet Isaiah said it was,

"too small (qâlal - easy, trifling, vile) a thing"

to only restore Jacob's local tribes: *"I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."*
Isaiah 49:6

Jesus, echoing Isaiah's words, lets the disciples know where he wants the power to flow to:

"the ends of the earth."

Expressions of local church alone are not enough for the flow of the Holy Spirit's power.

The current is pulling us to move out. Should we abandon all local work and move to the world's edges? Or should we build things up in stages, starting with a strong base in our "Jerusalem" and then, after many years - or never, reach out to the other stages? David Hesselgrave, in his book *"Planting Churches Cross Culturally,"* gives us some helpful advice here:

"Grammarians are quick to point out that the Greek construction in Acts 1:8, binds "Jerusalem", "Judea", "Samaria", and the "uttermost parts" together in one inseparable entity...The field is the world, and its parts are tied together here in a way that will not allow us to think of one part to the exclusion of another. It seems that in most cases, a world vision is required to win our Jerusalems!"

The lighthouse beam which reaches out the furthest is all the more bright at its source! When the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, God truly birthed the Church in an explosion of missionary passion from His own heart. Luke 6:45 tells us that: *"Out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks."*

God himself spoke out the light, the trees, the mountains, animals and stars of creation from His own inner abundance and made a beautiful world. The ultimate beauty and mystery was highlighted when God spoke out the lamb-like love that was within the Godhead - this word of love becoming flesh in Christ. On the day of Pentecost, the disciples' little human hearts were invaded by a powerful infusion of the Father's heart. They could not contain such abundant love for the world, but were overwhelmed, rushing out into the streets, their mouths overflowing with heavenly harmonies.

"We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" Acts 2:11

This was the crowd's commentary on such a thing. The tongues and wonders were born in a powerful Holy Spirit baptism into World Mission. Don Richardson, in his book *"Eternity in their Hearts,"* expresses it well:

"Seen in the context of Jesus' ministry and His clearly calculated plans for the whole world, the bestowal of that miraculous outburst of Gentile languages could have only one main purpose: to make crystal clear that the Holy Spirit's power was and is bestowed with the specific goal of the evangelisation of all peoples in view!"

How can it be possible to seek the power of the Holy Spirit without having with it a passionate commitment to the evangelisation of all peoples?

Richardson goes on in his discussion of Acts to show how reluctant the early church was to press on to the ends of the earth because of their cultural ethnocentric conditioning. He shows how God used persecution - Acts 8:1, and the "*chosen instrument*" Paul, before they finally got the message.

What will it take for our own churches to grasp the priority of world mission? How heaven needs to open above us, sending its inspiring, gracious waves of power, prayer and passion.

We have had quite a long plod through the five Old Testament and five New Testament mandates for reaching the nations. The Bible is clear. How can we as Christians disobey such clear commands? His love compels and persuades us. Allow scripture to birth a Joseph spirit in you. There is no conscription, we all go as volunteers.

To conclude this section, we will hear from Don Richardson again from his essay, "*A Man For All Peoples*," as he looks at God's ultimate missionary mandate from the perspective of man's ability to choose or disobey.

"Persuasion, not compulsion, is what even He must rely upon. And persuasion, by its very definition, must be resistible. Yet the God who thus renders Himself resistible is so intelligent that He can overrule every consequence of His own self-limitation with ease. Working around and through human resistance as easily as through response,

He still achieves His own eternal goals.

Ultimate suspense, then, does not hang upon the eventual success of God's design; for that success is assured. Ultimate suspense hangs rather upon questions like, who among the sons and daughters of men will recognise the day of God's privilege when it dawns around them? And which men and women, among those who discern the privilege, will choose to scorn it as Esau scorned his birthright? And finally just how will God accomplish His goal when even the men and women who love Him and make His purpose theirs turn out to be spiritually vulnerable, physically weak, and oh so limited in understanding?"

7 THE ELEVENTH HOUR WORKERS

Prayer opens heaven and incarnates mission.

Our last chapter put a lot of Biblical flesh on the bones of our prayers and longings for the peoples of the world.

Oswald Smith - the great missionary statesman, said:

"The supreme task of the church is the evangelisation of the world."

With half the world still waiting to hear the good news of Jesus' victory over death, sin and Satan, this task of the Church becomes ever more urgent. However, this present urgency doesn't undermine the past capital of mission that has already been accomplished and which spurs us on for the future. Just as our prayers have roots and synergy with the past, so our incarnation of mission is buoyed by past endeavours. We are not alone. We have already considered the three "synergies" of generations, prayer, and denominations. This chapter introduces a fourth synergy:

The Synergy of Mission

Cheered on by a great cloud of heavenly witnesses, God is raising up new missionary armies from the four corners of the earth to facilitate this task. A prophetic word given during a prayer vigil, held in Jerusalem in May 1989 over Pentecost, gives an

encouraging confirmation of all that is in God's heart for the last days.

"Today is the time of harvest and ingathering, a time when the Spirit is being poured out upon all flesh in these last days...Through the centuries, he has called workers into his fields and has promised that they are worthy of their hire...These have indeed borne the burden and the heat of the day. And still, the harvest is not finished.

Now, the Lord says, I will send to work at your sides eleventh hour workers, those who have been idle because no man would hire them...This army of workers will be mostly young people who will go forth to proclaim the gospel without fear or compromise ...They will come from the nations and peoples that you least expect. They are a great company that you do not know at this time, but the Lord is preparing them even now ...

You must pray for and welcome these eleventh hour workers that I will give to you. You must not be jealous of them but rejoice at the reward that I will give them - for they were willing to come at the last hour - and without them the harvest would not be complete ..."

These "eleventh hour workers" are emerging from Asia, South America and Africa where God has been pouring out His Spirit in revival power over the last years.

The beautiful biblical book, "Song of Songs," also

contains a powerful prophetic statement about these new emerging mission movements.

"Awake, north wind, and come, south wind! Blow on my garden, that its fragrance may spread abroad. Let my lover come into his garden and taste its choice fruits."

Song of Songs 4:16

The "*north wind*" of traditional, Judeo, Greco, Roman, Western mission has blown over our history. It is a wind that has grown cold. It is time to "*awaken*" the missionary zeal of our Fathers. Much of this awakening process will happen as we cry out a generous "*come*" to the warm "*south wind*" – the emerging mission movements of the Global South nations. Seventy five percent of all Christians now live outside of the traditional missionary sending nations. The Holy Spirit is beckoning to them and calling them to rise up in beauty – each bringing its own distinctive culture and theology, and enter "*the garden*" of world evangelisation. In a heaven born synergy, the two winds can "*blow*" together in a fresh wave – perhaps the final wave, of missionary endeavour that will see the Gospel preached as a "*fragrance of life*" throughout the world. "*And then the end will come,*" and the lover will return to claim His Bride – the Church, and taste her diverse and multicoloured fruit.

This overview of history is designed to "*awaken*" a slumbering Western Church and cry "*come*" to the emerging nations of the world. Whether you be a

prophet or priest, a man or woman, a writer or refugee – “Come!” Be inspired and grafted into God’s purpose throughout the ages, bring your talents and your dance, your language and liturgy, your life and gift of sacrifice.

God has a special time for Africa. The Holy Spirit is calling into being “*a new Africa*.” A Continent rising up from the ashes of slavery, disease, poverty and war, transformed by the power of a holistic gospel, and playing a vital role on the world stage. Through His written word, God is bringing new light to the Christians in Africa concerning their role in the transformation of nations and the missionary mandate. This word is beginning to be made flesh - black flesh, in the form of hundreds of men and women organising themselves into many indigenous enterprises and world missionary movements. All nations have their role to play. A beautiful multinational symphony is quietly learning to play new notes of love to an awaiting world.

Let's take a closer look at Matthew 20:1-16 - the parable of the workers in the vineyard, which has proved to be quite a prophetic rallying cry for these new missionary movements.

Jesus, as he has already done in the other kingdom parables in the gospels, is communicating something about the Kingdom of God. Here, he is emphasising that God's reign is definitely linked and concerned with the recruiting of men and women to service in the mission fields - the global vineyard. The “*landowner*” is God Himself:

"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;"
Psalm 24:1

He hovers over history, sending forth, at just the right time, the Holy Spirit to bring His key resources – men and women fitted for His kingdom purpose, into play.

"Early in the morning,"

From the dawn of creation, God has had this burden on His heart. The first man hired was Adam – partnered by Eve, and placed in the Garden of Eden *"to work it and take care of it."* Genesis 2:15. God also gave them His first missionary mandate:

*"Be fruitful and increase in number;
Fill the earth and subdue it
Rule over... every living creature."* Genesis 1:28

Where there was *"no man to work the ground,"* Genesis 2:5, there was also no rain sent from heaven. God is longing to send the rain of the Holy Spirit onto the earth so that born again believers multiply and fill even the ends of the earth, manifesting and proclaiming the glorious reign of the Lord Jesus. He needs men and women to get the job done.

Throughout each hour of history, God has been seeking the men and women who would mark their generation as workers worthy of their hire in the Lord's vineyard.

"About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the market place doing nothing. He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.'" Matthew 20:3

Perhaps this third hour represents a time when an ageing Terah was feeling the pull to move out of the Ur of the Chaldeans to make a new start in Canaan. The settler spirit overcame his pioneering dream of a future land of promise and he resigned himself to live in Haran - a parched place, where he, along with his dream, died. However, God broke into history with a fresh word of summons to another potential worker, Abram. The comfort zone of a fixed and mundane life was blasted away in the Lord's opening words.

"Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you." Genesis 12:1

Abram needed to be jolted out of the market place of Haran where routine and indifference had taken over. Physical movement, loss of nationalistic pride, new social customs and liberation from past traditions were the prescription God presented to get Abram on the move again into his family destiny. God always pays what is right to His workers and Abram was no exception. The true reward is always to recognise the Lord himself as being our portion and this is the encouragement God brought to Abram in a vision to help him overcome his fear of moving out.

"Do not be afraid, Abram I am your shield your very great reward." Genesis 15:1

Abraham received a most magnificent promise and blessing. Two thousand years later, the apostle Paul, speaking to the Galatians, makes reference to this particular blessing.

"He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit." Galatians 3:14

But what is the blessing of Abraham that is now available to the Gentiles, to the British, the Korean, the American, the Brazilian - and especially to the emerging missionary nations in Africa and beyond?

"I will make you into a great nation." Genesis 12:2

Although we see much progress today, there are still many hidden nations in the Global South - nations which rarely make international news, nations who are left to gather the crumbs from under the table of international commerce and trade. However, God's now promise to such nations is that they will become great.

"I will bless you." Genesis 12:2

The promise of God's smile upon a nation. Good harvests, prosperity and peace within their borders. God wants to bless the nations. God wants especially to bless the forgotten nations.

"I will make your name great." Genesis 12:2

Unfortunately, a few African nations are known for their poverty, corruption, tribal wars and disease. God longs to change that. He wants to put such nations on the map, not as a trouble spot, but as a place of renown. In Europe, the British Isles are known as Great Britain. It is questionable as to how "great" Britain is these days, but the title "Great" was given during a period of unrivalled missionary expansion in the nation. Here is the key to the promises we have just looked at. The inference in Genesis 12 is this.

"I will bless you so that you will be a blessing...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."
Genesis 12:3

America and Britain became world powers when their commitment to world evangelisation was strong. Perhaps, the present economic growth in Asia is related to the strength of its Church and its desire to send out missionaries. I'm not pushing this argument too far as it is fraught with danger. I don't want to make a spurious link between capitalism and Christianity. The true blessing comes when a people respond with more than just money. There needs to be a collective response of the heart.

Instead of just praying:

"God bless me."

We need to exchange the full stop for a comma and enlarge the prayer to:

"God bless me, so that I can bless others."

The desire to be a blessing for all the peoples of the earth draws a blessing onto the whole nation. If we are self-centred - only looking to what we can receive from others, we frustrate the blessing of God. The present - 2016/17, refugee crisis invites a generous, missionary response of whole hearted welcome. Economic, social and spiritual growth will follow the desire to bless others.

The road to change in Africa does not necessarily begin in the political or social arena, but within the body of Christ. Will she rise to take her responsibility for the rest of the world in sharing the gospel? Will she see her true dignity, beauty and power? Will she pray to become a light to the nations and a blessing for the peoples of the earth?

It seems that nations within Africa and beyond are indeed emerging - a chosen people of the new covenant, to take up their share in the promise to Abraham. They stand proudly alongside the long line of other Gentile nations who have loved and given their best - and sometimes hated and given their worst, throughout history.

Let's get back to our landowner recruiting his workers for the vineyard.

*"He went out again about the sixth hour
and the ninth hour and did the same thing."
Matthew 20:5*

God's methods remain constant. His answer is always a man or woman willing to be a worker in the vineyard.

God has, with relentless regularity, been calling his workers to accomplish his works at specific times in history. Perhaps it was the rough fisherman Peter, who met Jesus' passionate gaze on a beach in Galilee at some 6th hour, who responded to *"Follow me."* He became a fisher of men, one of the heralds of the gospel of grace, bringing in the new Church age following Pentecost.

It would be foolish to attempt a literal time transcript from the parable, relating it exactly to Church and mission growth in history. However, by daring to use our prophetic imagination, we might think of the landowner rejoicing at such wonderful missionary "hours" which saw the emergence of such workers as the early Benedictine monks and the Celtic missionaries.

"The monasteries of the Benedictine order were one of the principal means by which Christianity was spread among the Teutonic nations during the seventh and eighth centuries. From Ireland also, by way of the isle of Iona and through Scotland, the Columban monasteries and settlements prepared and sent out devoted missionaries into Northern and Central Europe."

The integrity and quality of the workers called is well illustrated by a description of Columba himself by Adamnan the Abbot of Iona.

"He never could spend the space even of one hour without study or prayer, or writing, or some other holy occupation. So incessantly was he engaged night and day with the unwearied exercise of fasting and watching, that the burden of each of these austerities would seem beyond the power of all human endurance.

And still, in all these, he was beloved by all; for a holy joy ever beaming on his face, revealed the joy and gladness with which the Holy Spirit filled his inmost soul."

Men such as Francis of Assisi felt called to restore the church as it slid into corruption. In 1219 he was one of the first to express concern for showing love to Muslims as he crossed from the ranks of the crusading Franks into the Saracen lines. Although there was a price on the head of every Christian, he hurried into the Sultan's presence where he declared:

"I am not sent of man, but of God, to show the way of salvation."

Lord Longford, in his biography of St Francis describes him as:

"A man drunk with the spirit or driven forward by 'a very intoxication of the Divine love."

A famous incident in his life reports how he very literally fulfilled God's words to Abraham about leaving his father's house. He was obliged to repay some money to his father. Longford continues the story.

"Stripping off his clothes, he laid them with the money at the bishop's feet. 'My Lord', he said, 'I will gladly give back to him not only the money that belongs to him but my clothes also' I wish to say only 'Our Father which art in Heaven', not 'my father, Petro Bernardone.' They gave him an old tunic which belonged to one of the bishop's farmhands. Francis took it gratefully and drew a cross on it with a piece of chalk making it, in St Bonaventure's words 'a worthy garment for a man who was crucified and a beggar!'"

Following on from St Francis, the first worker called to labour amongst the Muslims heard the call to work in the vineyard. Raymond Lull -1236-1315, who gave up a high position in the Court to follow the footsteps of Christ.

History sadly recounts how his prophetic action of love and sacrifice was overcome by the power of a church, armed not with mercy, but with a sword.

"Raymond Lull was raised up to prove what the Crusades might have done if they had fought for the Cross with the weapons of the Prince of Peace."

Hearing of Francis' covenant with God, he too vowed his consecration to the Lord.

"To Thee, O Lord God, I offer myself, my wife, my children, and all that I possess. May it please Thee, who didst so humble Thyself to the death of the cross, to condescend to accept all that I give and offer to Thee, that I, my wife and my children may be Thy lowly servants."

He wrote an apologetic book for use amongst Muslims and set up missionary colleges for training men in Arabic and other languages. He found himself in prison after preaching to Muslim leaders in Tunis. In 1307 he returned to Africa. Tradition recounts that in the market place of a Muslim town Bougie – the old French colonial name for Bejaiah in Algeria, he preached the Gospel truth powerfully and found himself in jail.

Although this information is contested, it is said that he returned to Bougie in 1314 at the age of 78 to minister to a small group of converts with whom he stayed for about a year. One day, he strode into the centre of town appealing to the people to embrace Christ. He was immediately stoned to death!

It is interesting to note that for several years now there has been a mini-revival in the same town of Bougie. Many of the Christians there report having come to the Lord via supernatural intervention and visions of the risen Christ. A few years ago, I visited the town and found it to be a place of "open heaven" - one of the most Jesus centred spaces in the whole of Algeria. The sacrifice of Raymond Lull is still bringing forth fruit today.

Samuel Zwemer, a prolific writer and a passionate advocate for the Muslim world, writes of Lull:

"The unoccupied fields of the world must have their Calvary before they can have their Pentecost. Raymond Lull, the first missionary to the Muslim world, expressed the same thought in medieval language when he wrote,: "As a hungry man makes dispatch and takes large morsels on account of his great hunger, so Thy servant feels a great desire to die that he may glorify Thee. He hurries day and night to complete his work in order that he may give up his blood and his tears to be shed for Thee."

It would be fitting to end this section on Raymond Lull with a quotation from his own writings:

"He who loves not lives not; he who lives by the Life cannot die."

Although Luther brought in the Protestant Reformation, there was a distinct absence of missionary vision, resulting in a lack of workers for the mission field. This strange blindness persisted for over 200 years, leaving the way free for the Catholic workers - notably the Jesuits who led the way into the recently discovered Americas and Asia. Francis Xavier is probably the best known of these workers and the following quote from the Moorlands Missions Paper gives a glimpse of his labours.

"At the age of 36 - May 6th 1547, Xavier landed in Goa India and began the establishment of the Church of Rome in that land. Two hundred Jesuits were installed and others followed. Xavier suffered much hardship, visited the sick and prisons. He soon counted so many thousands of converts from among the heathen that his voice often failed from weariness and his arms sank exhausted in the act of baptising. Later he went to Japan establishing the Jesuit mission there, and finally died in 1552 in an abortive attempt to enter China."

Protestantism began offering its first workers for the vineyard as a result of the Pietist movement which led to the establishment of the Moravian missionary movement. Driven from Austria, Moravia and Bohemia under the leadership of Christian David, they took refuge on the estate of Count von Zinzendorf at Herrnhut, Dresden. This was in 1722. They adopted as their seal a lamb bearing the resurrection cross on a crimson background with the motto:

"Our Lamb has conquered; Him let us follow."

Within ten years, they had sent missionaries to ten different areas of the world - the very hardest areas. In their first 150 years they sent forth 2.170 missionaries.

It would be too arduous a task to make mention of all the workers that the landowner has summoned into his fields over the last centuries but, as the hour glass of missionary endeavour empties its

grains, we need to press on to look at three men who significantly changed history and ushered in the modern era of missionary advance.

William Carey - 1761-1834, is one of the greatest names in the history of missions. Through the pamphlet entitled: *"An enquiry into the obligation of Christians to use means for the Conversion of the Heathen,"* this part time teacher and shoemaker attacked the prevailing attitude of his day that the Great Commission no longer applied to the Church and awakened the conscience of Christians as to their responsibilities towards the pagan nations. The story goes that at one meeting, where Carey was sharing his missionary burden, the chairman interrupted and rebuked him saying:

"Sit down young man, you are an enthusiast. If God intends to convert the heathen, he will do it without consulting either you or me."

Well, Carey wouldn't sit down or be quiet, but patiently laboured away. On the wall of his shop, commonly called "Carey's college," he had a map giving details of almost every known country in the world. Eventually, he succeeded in getting the group of local ministers in Kettering, England to agree to set up the very first *"missionary society,"* so launching a new era of mission via such *"means."* The society was called "The Particular Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel among the heathen." The "Perspectives" study paper continues his story in this way.

"Carey and a colleague, under the newly formed Society, sailed for India in 1793, eventually settling in Serampore, a Danish enclave near Calcutta. Carey, Joshua Marshman and William Ward, the 'Serampore Trio', translated and printed parts of the Bible into several Asian languages and founded a school for the training of Indian Christians. With little formal education, but possessing extraordinary perseverance and conviction, Carey weathered financial crises, natural disasters, family illness and criticisms from England to make advances in evangelism, philology, the natural sciences and education. He exhorted others and himself to:

"Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God."

Today, Carey is recognised as the "father of Protestant missions"; since historians date the modern era of Protestant missions back to the publishing date of his Enquiry."

God had long planned to reach all the peoples of the earth. At the time of Carey, the majority of societies contented themselves with a ministry which limited itself to the coastlands of the nations they encountered. It was also apparent that traditional methods of supporting missionaries were insufficient and that a new faith dynamic was imperative to the growth of the missionary army.

God chose a man and burdened him with the "Macedonian" call of the immense Chinese

continent. After a first term in China, he retired through ill health to England but also, strategically, to set about the creation of a new "faith mission" to inland China known as the Chinese Inland Mission.

During the first forty years of its existence, the mission saw 52 of its missionaries, plus 16 children, martyred. In spite of this, or perhaps in view of this, the mission grew. It became responsible for sending and facilitating as many as 6,000 missionaries into the interior of China.

That man, recruited into the vineyard, was Hudson Taylor. He always knew that sending people to China at that time would be dangerous. He knew people would risk death. Battling inside over the tremendous responsibility he could be carrying in setting up a "*faith mission*" - someone had said that he would be carrying the blood of the young people he would be sending to their deaths in China, the Lord broke through on a beach in Brighton, whispering into his inner ear:

"You are not sending young people into the interior of China, I am."

"*The Call to Service*" article captures Taylor's struggle and eventual victory as he walked that Brighton beach.

"Yet, what was I to do? The feeling of blood guiltiness became more and more intense. On Sunday, June 25th, 1865, unable to bear the sight of a congregation of a thousand or more Christian

people rejoicing in their own security, while millions were perishing for lack of knowledge, I wandered out on the sands alone, in great spiritual agony; and there the Lord conquered my unbelief, and I surrendered myself to God for His service. I told Him that all the responsibility as to issues and consequences must rest with him; that as His servant, it was mine to obey and follow Him - His, to direct, to care for, and to guide me and those who might labour with me."

Missions are birthed in such intimate, soul searching battles. The new mission movements in Africa and beyond will no doubt be founded on the foundation of such intercession carried in the hearts of his chosen labourers. May you also know victory as you fight your own particular battles of owning responsibility for the work of God. May heaven open and give you strength, peace and conviction to carry on.

Our final worker, Cameron Townsend, who brings us up to our present hour, is much less well known than the others, but someone who highlighted the hidden or unreached people groups to the world. While witnessing in Spanish to a Guatemalan tribal Indian, he was asked the question:

"If your God is so smart, why can't he speak our language?"

This led him to concentrate on the unreached tribal groups of the world. Ralph D. Winter in his article, "Four men, three eras, two transitions," highlights

the value of his work.

"Surely in our time one person comparable to William Carey and Hudson Taylor is Cameron Townsend. Like Carey and Taylor, Townsend saw that there were still unreached frontiers, and for almost half a century he has waved the flag for the overlooked tribal peoples of the world. He started out hoping to help older boards reach out to tribal people. Like Carey and Taylor, he ended up starting his own mission, Wycliffe Bible Translators, which is dedicated to reaching these new frontiers. At first he thought there must be about 500 unreached tribal groups in the world. Later he revised his figure to 1.000, then 2.000, and now it is closer to 5.000. As his conception of the enormity of the task has increased, the size of his organisation has increased. Today it numbers over 4.000 adult workers."

History testifies to the numbers of brave workers having already made their mark in the master's vineyard. They are those who have indeed borne the, *"burden of the work and the heat of the day."* Matthew 20:12

However, the full harvest is yet to be gathered in, with over half the world still needing a clear presentation of the gospel message. Praise the Lord for the marvellous history of missions, expanding with courage and power since the day of Pentecost, and taking about 2.000 years to get to the present situation.

Will we need to wait another 2.000 years to see the job accomplished?

In our day, the final hour seems to be approaching. Israel has returned to her homeland and many other world events seem to be telling us that this is indeed the eleventh hour - the last opportunity to volunteer for the works of missionary service.

It is most surprising to note that, despite the great urgency in the heart of God to get the job done, the vast majority of Christians are still standing around in the market place doing nothing.

"About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them: "Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?" Matthew 20:6

There is no escaping the direct challenge of this question to us all, but especially to the Christians living in the Global South. The past ages of missionary endeavour are filled with the exploits of Europeans and later Americans. Is this the pattern to be followed in the future?

In the early 1900's, 95 % of all Christians were to be found in the Western world, with only 5% in the Global South. Today, over 75% of all Christians in the world are found in the Southern nations, with by far the biggest growth point in Africa. Ralph Winter notes in his "World Mission Survey."

"Someday there will be more Christians in Africa

than on any other continent in the world! By the year 2000 – we are now 2017, the African followers of Jesus Christ in all their diversity will number 350 million."

God has saved His best wine till last

It is obvious that the landowner has in reserve a vast army of workers from Africa and beyond. These workers represent the young, adolescent African Church, coming to maturity, full of energy and a vision for the future. A mighty African warrior emerging to confront the powers of hell that hold many nations in bondage to fear and death. The enemy wants to keep the Church doing nothing for the cause of World mission. Many African nations have a Christian population numbering over 70% of the population - many of whom would call themselves evangelical, yet not yet possessing an indigenous missionary work. Surely the time has come to stand up and be counted.

"No one has hired us." Matthew 20:7

The response shows a lack of context – both inner and outer, no mechanism having been put in place to encourage the vital last hour workers to action rather than passivity. Mobilizing fresh expressions of community development - like Business for Mission initiatives or the latest Strategic Development Goals of the United Nations, and inspiring inner strength and confidence are the ways ahead.

"We have always been used to receiving missionaries rather than sending them! We have no structure or strategy. Our lands are poor and underdeveloped. We feel rejected, uneducated, scared and unfit for hire!"

Perhaps you can add or overhear your own reasons for not joining the vineyard and engaging in mission?

Excuses and difficulty do not change the eleventh hour command of the master.

"You also go and work in my vineyard." Matthew 20:7

You, God's heroes of the Global South - and the world over, take up the baton of world evangelisation, take up old Abraham's promise which will transform your own nations, enabling them to fulfil their God ordained destiny of bringing Jesus to the world. Now is your hour. Will you have the courage to respond? Surely, this glorious eleventh hour army will be no less heroic than those who have preceded it.

During a recent visit to Central African Republic, a nation nestled at the heart of this great African continent, the following vision was shared. A flash of three images was received of a young African man. In the first image he had a rifle and a machete in his hands and was filled with ethnic and religious hatred going on to kill and be killed.

In the second, was an emaciated image of the young African, dying of Aids like a lonely animal.

The third, was the same man, yet having a Bible in his hands, lovingly sharing Jesus with his Muslim neighbours, and dying the death of a martyr.

The following interpretation was given. The devil longs to destroy the emerging Christian army in Africa. Through ethnic violence, immorality and disease, the spirit of death and destruction seeks to wipe out the sons of promise as he did in Europe through the First World War. The Lord has a better plan. Rather than let your life be stolen away by the devil, offer your life to Jesus as a sacrifice. The Lord is preparing an African army of fearless martyrs willing to give their all.

"You also go an work in my vineyard." Matthew 20:7

Our missionary zeal in the West is no less undermined by the more subtle scourges of indifference, unbelief and materialism.

"Awake, north wind..."

We end this section on the eleventh hour workers with an amazing revelation.

"I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you." Matthew 20:14

What a privilege. What generosity on the part of

God. We can enter into the same promises and privileges as those who have preceded us. The same reward of a Hudson Taylor or an Adoniram Judson can be ours. Let us not lose out on this privilege. Let us not grumble and count the cost as some did in the parable - Matthew 27:14.

Workers will begin to grumble when they lose sight of the privilege of serving Christ.

Ours is the privilege of bearing, *"the burden of the work and the heat of the day."*

Our reward is the sharing in the sufferings of Christ, and also in His glory - Romans 8:17. If we lose sight of Him, our portion, we will quickly slip into legalism and grumbling. The work will become heavy and joyless rather than a glorious celebration of Christ's ultimate victory over sin and death. Christ is indeed the first and last - Revelation 1:8, the first worker at the Father's side in creation and the last worker returning for the heavenly harvest.

He fills up each hour with his life and the gift of himself. To see who truly bore the burden of the work and the heat of the day, we need only to look to that naked figure nailed to a wooden cross under the hot Jerusalem sun, bearing the sin of the world and the heat of hell upon his shoulders. No grumbling for him. Rather, the glad accomplishment of the heavenly mission.

"For the joy set before Him,

he endured the cross and scorned its shame."

Hebrews 12:2

His joy was in seeing the army of workers who were being raised up to follow him. His joy was in the emerging missionary communities - the Central African, Brazilian, Chinese and Korean missionary armies. His joy is in us! Perhaps we feel last as a person or a nation, but God wants to make us first in our desire to witness and glorify Him. We may be the last in a long history of missionary movements, but perhaps we may be the first to usher in the return of the King!

"The last will be first, and the first will be last."

A few years ago, my wife was pregnant with our third child. As the bump grew bigger, I asked the Lord to give me a prayer of blessing for the child. I laid hands on the yet unborn babe and heard the Lord give me the verses from Matthew 20. Could there be a greater blessing or privilege than being a worker for God and inheriting the glory of Christ?

"Oh God, please may there be some work left for her as she grows up! Give her the joy of serving you!"

My daughter is now 26 and using her years and strength to glorify the Lord in her life. In the same way, may he give the emerging nations of this world, may he give you, the joy of being eleventh hour workers in his harvest!

"You also go and work in my vineyard." Matthew
20:7

Working the vineyard opens heaven.

8 NOW

Our hearts still beating with the passion of mission, let us remember our quest to see an open heaven and God's reign coming to earth.

"Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Matthew 6:10

This book began with heaven opening over Jesus' baptism. It will conclude with a fresh opening as Jesus looked into the future as he faced the painful challenge of the cross. As our own commitment to prayer and mission grows, we will inevitably be faced with the challenge of trial, discomfort and suffering – we will want to run away! Jesus desired future fruitfulness and, as he contemplated the necessary death of the seed to produce further life, his heart was stirred up inside and he sought the appropriate prayer.

What can you pray now?

What can you pray when you are at the moment of costly decision, the point of crisis? What utterance comes from troubled, suffering lips?

"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say?"
John 12:27

What do you say in these troubled times? The typical, knee jerk reaction of the flesh for self-preservation will inevitably say:

"Save me!"

Jesus, in the depth of his manhood, understood such a prayer for self-preservation, but he saw beyond the immediate pain into a place of destiny. He projected his prayer above the pain into purpose.

"Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour."

Do not run away from the precious "hour" of commitment. Do not pray an escape from your unique calling. You may be experiencing troubled times, but pray beyond the pain into your life's "reason."

So what is the prayer that satisfies such an "hour?"

"Father, glorify your name!" John 12:28

Such a prayer comforts us in our trials, gives meaning to suffering and honours the Father – it opens heaven and ignites divine utterance.

"Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.' The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him." John 12:29

Heaven thunders when such a prayer rises from a smitten heart. A few weeks ago, I found myself miles high in the sky on a plane journey from Seattle to Paris. During the long night, I pulled a

blanket over my face and felt myself being led into this prayer.

"Father, glorify your name! Glorify."

All my troubles and life challenges seemed to find meaning in this prayer, but they also seemed to evaporate as my soul found a lightness, focussing down on the one desire to glorify the Father. As the night deepened, I found my prayer for the Father's glory being transformed into another prayer.

"Give me fruit. Make me – and a host of other people, nations and situations, fruitful."

It seems that there is a strong link between fruit and glory in the Word of God. The context of Christ's prayer in this "open heaven" passage is to be glorified by being sown into the ground to bear future fruit. A further passage in the Gospel of John exhorts us to remain in Christ – the vine, in order to bear much fruit. It goes on to explain:

"This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples... You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit - fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name."

John 15:8 and 16

The very first of the Father's command in the Bible is to glorify the image of the divine by a multiplication of mankind – a command that is

reiterated in the new beginning of Noah as well.

"God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground...Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth." Genesis 1:28, 9:1

The Psalmist also encourages man to glorify the Lord by meditating His Word and bearing fruit.

"He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers." Psalm 1:3

Fruitfulness is both biological and ethical. The apostle Paul exhorts us to glorify God through a Christ like character, bearing the fruit of the Spirit, which emphasises a life of love.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." Galatians 5:22-23

John the Baptist, preparing the way for God's glory to appear in Christ, appealed for the fruit of integrity.

"Produce fruit in keeping with repentance." Matthew 3:8

My aeroplane prayer continued:

"Father, give me fruit. May my family be fruitful – give us health and a strong family line that reproduces your glory. Give my church the fruit of saved souls. Multiply born again believers in France and the world. May your Word dwell richly within us. Put the fruit of your love in our lives. Glorify your name."

And above the droning sound of the engine, a still, small voice seemed to echo a reply in my heart:

"I have glorified it, and will glorify it again."

May you know an "again" of fruit and glory.

As I conclude this passage on fruitfulness, I have just heard that I am about to be a granddad for the first time.

"Father, glorify your name!"

We have just looked at the "now" prayer of Jesus and, following on from its intercessory longing, we discover the very present answer of two further "nows."

"Now is the time for judgement on this world."
John 12:30

This world in its present form is passing away. Its values and spirit are opposed to God. As God's name is glorified, as the Kingdom of Jesus

advances, the world submits to the righteous reign of justice.

Now is the time to be in the Word system and not the World system!

What is "*the world*" and why is it so flawed? The original word in Greek – *kosmos*, literally means "something ordered." More than simply reflecting the material elements of the earth, it represents the ordered system of the world. In English we get the word "cosmetic" from the same root. The trappings of this world are only the gaudy decoration which seduces us away from the reality of a genuine love relationship with our Heavenly Father.

John the apostle warns us strongly about not giving our affections to such a system.

"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." 1 John 2:15

He then goes on to define the three major seductions of this system.

"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."
1 John 2:16

These same three temptations were responsible for

Eve falling for the serpent's lies, rejecting God's order, and embracing death.

"When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it." Genesis 3:6

The seduction worked from the outside in, from the body to the soul. A craving for "food," a lusting of "eyes" – how many screens in your life set your own inner man on fire? And a prideful quest for power, possessions and worldly wisdom.

Despite the allure of pleasure, materialism and self aggrandisement, there is no sustainable future – no lasting truth or reality, in this world.

"The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever." 1 John 2:17

This world stands judged. Its cosmetic solutions to life bring no substance to human existence. It does not deserve to receive our time or affections, we should not bend our wills to its temptations. We should strive to be the man, or woman, who overcomes the world and commits to following the life giving will of heaven. Let us reverse the order – go from the inside out, from the inner Word in the spirit, to the life in the body.

Jesus, in the agony of his prayer to glorify the Father, bends his will to God's and judges the

world on our behalf.

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." John 16:33

He overcomes – the Greek word comes from the root "*Nike*," the seduction of this present system. Each one of us is called to follow Him in this quest.

"Just do it...Now!"

Jesus just did it in the desert when, in a parallel to Eve's temptation in the garden, he found himself confronted by the ancient serpent. The tempter tried the same three seductions. Food – change these stones to bread. Looking good to all – jump of the temple to test God. Power and materialism – I'll give you the world's glory if you worship me! See Matthew 4:1-11.

Jesus bent His will to the Father and, from the meditated Word in His inner man, He overcame the temptation with three bed rock proclamations from Deuteronomy.

"He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD." Deuteronomy 8:3

Again we see the principle of "Word system, not world system."

"Do not test the LORD your God as you did at Massah." Deuteronomy 6:16

Don't show off, strive and try and get God to bend to you own small, selfish ambitions. You bend to Him!

"Fear the LORD your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name." Deuteronomy 6:13

Worship the Lord. True wisdom comes from the fear of the Lord.

"Now is the time for judgement on this world."

A third "now" approaches in the same current of answered prayer. Just as the world is judged, so the prince of the power of the air, the ruler of this world, is also to be driven out.

"Now the prince of this world will be driven out."
John 12:31

Jesus was the long promised "Shiloh" of Jacob's ancient prophecy:

"The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he (Shiloh) comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his." Genesis 49:10

The sceptre of authority and kingship has always

been in his hands to drive out the evil one. He drives him out from the nations:

"Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an iron sceptre; you will dash them to pieces like pottery." Psalm 2:8-9

And He drives him out – as our great Messianic priest Melchizedek, from the people of God.

"The LORD will extend your mighty sceptre from Zion; you will rule in the midst of your enemies." Psalm 110:2

The intercession of the people of God throughout time, birth the Kingdom and overcome the enemy by taking up the same sceptre of authority with Christ.

"She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron sceptre... They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death." Revelation 12:5&11

Your prayer is a sceptre to drive out the prince of this world.

God promised to give Joshua *"every place where you set your foot."* Joshua 1:3 As you step forward in prayer and mission, God will cast out the enemy. He begins by driving out the evil from our own

hearts, filling us with the fruit of the Spirit – the character of Jesus. He is also working out His reign on earth, bringing all things under the headship of Christ.

"And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment - to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ." Ephesians 1:9-10

From the very beginning of time, God has been gradually "*crushing*" Satan like a ripe nut and driving him out of His presence. Genesis 3:15, first introduces us to this prophetic promise of Satan's shattering at the hands of Christ.

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

The apostle Paul, wanting to encourage the church in Rome to stand strong in the face of oppression, reached back into this promise to offer hope and victory. For him, peace was not the absence of conflict, but the ultimate "Shalom" that comes from a total victory over evil.

"The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." Romans 16:20

Christ came as a baby to bring about the demise of Satan who underwent a "Christmas crushing" while

the angels sang of peace to all men. The Word became flesh, unleashing a cosmic conflict that saw Herod killing babies and demons stirring up fear in a vain attempt to defend their turf.

"Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy (crush) him who holds the power of death - that is, the devil - and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." Hebrews 2:14-15

In the death of Christ on the cross, we have this ultimate victory over Satan – a victory soon to be experienced by one and all as the Kingdom of God advances.

Satan had promised Christ all the world and its glory in the temptation. Christ refused Satan's terms, but ended up winning the world on his own terms. He didn't bow down to Satan to gain power but He raised up a sacrificial cross to draw all the world to himself.

"But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." John 12:32

The principle for fruitfulness remains the same. Raise up your own cross on the piece of ground God has given you. Take selfless, Kingdom steps to advance the headship of Christ over all things in heaven and on earth. When should we begin?

Now!

9 HELP, HOW, COME

We have just learned the prayer "*Glorify!*" As we stand under our open heaven and come to the end of this book, I'd like share with you three other prayers which I have learned over the years. Like the glorify prayer, there is a note of longing – even desperation, in the heart's cry. I have learned that the Holy Spirit responds to such prayers in a specific way, bringing His own word and an aspect of His life. The open heaven always brings down the healing, empowering personality of the Holy Spirit. Three Hebrew words express something of the Holy Spirit's answer to our three prayers. *Hesed*, *Hokhmah* and *Hayah*. Love, Wisdom and Life.

Thirty three years ago, I prayed my first ever genuine prayer. I was in a troubled time and needed God's intervention in my life. I sat down with a generous friend who asked me to pray. I really didn't know what to say, but I wanted to express the deep sigh of my heart.

"Help! Help me God!" I prayed.

The word left my mouth as vibrant key which seemed to unlock a door in heaven. I felt a wave of divine love break over my whole being. Another wave came, and another – each one more powerful and overwhelming. Something deep inside of me cracked and melted as I exploded into a flood of joyful tears. I left the room a transformed personality, healed, made whole and full of God's

love to share with others.

I had cried for help, and the "Paraclete" – the helper who is called alongside, the Holy Spirit, responded to my cry as a bee responds to nectar. He came from heaven and bought me "Hesed."

Hesed is defined as covenant loyalty love. It is part of the indestructible, eternal nature of God. When God revealed His character to Moses, Hesed gets two mentions

"And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands..."
Exodus 34:6-7

As I cried out "Help" I was met with the "*abounding love*" of the Father and for the last thirty four years I have been "*maintained*" in the same unfailing mercy. The vulnerability of our prayer cry is met by the all encompassing consolation of the Holy Spirit to pour out healing, grace and empowerment to our lives. I have learnt to cry out – not in a spirit of fear or unbelief, but in a spirit of hope and faith which brings certain answer.

"And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us." Romans 5:5

The Bible tells us how Mary, the mother of Christ, received the living Word from heaven to bring

Jesus, the Saviour, into the world.

"You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; his kingdom will never end."

Luke 1:31-33

This was an immense challenge for Mary. Her little human, Jewish heart was being asked to step into a new dimension of faith and reality. She knew that the promise was beyond human ability or ingenuity – *"I am a virgin."*

What do you pray when the task God has given you seems beyond your ability? What words will enable you to "birth Christ" in your personal situation through character and deed? In my own life I have always been inspired to follow Mary in her simple prayer:

"How will this be?" Luke 1:34

"How?" This is our ultimate prayer of enquiry. Instead of trying to get God to do what we want Him to do and limit Him to our own feeble resources, we can sit back into this prayer and listen. Always choose the place of listening rather than the place of worry and stress. God will meet us on His terms, not on our terms.

The answer we will hear will be the same one that

Mary received into her humble, faith filled ears.

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you."

How will he come upon you in answer to this specific prayer? He will manifest Himself as Hokhmah – He will bring you wisdom. Not just a sudden flash of inspiration, but the gentle, warm incubation of wisdom upon your soul as you meditate His Word and listen. He will give you the necessary wisdom to undertake the project he has given. This wisdom will be very precise, practical and inspirational. The same wisdom which created the universe is made available for our own specific Kingdom creativity. Divine wisdom brings great joy, even in the face of the most demanding and difficult undertaking. We need never shrink back from responsibility, as wisdom will be the trusted friend at our shoulder.

"Then I was the craftsman at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind." Proverbs 8:30-31

Wisdom will be *"the craftsman at your side,"* enabling you to be a responsible parent, an inspired worker, an anointed church planter and an effective intercessor. Wisdom will lead you to the place where God awaits to bring you answer, it will free you from fear and worry and redeem your time. Wisdom opens heaven.

The third prayer that has slowly been born within me over the years has been inspired by the old

prophet Ezekiel as he was transported into a valley of dry bones.

Although we may not experience the same dramatic event as Ezekiel, we all live in our own valleys of unbelief, where family, friends and neighbours live separated from the life giving relationship with Jesus. Our lives and words "*prophesy*" to such dry souls. Sometimes, we see the beginnings of movement and interest, "*a rattling sound,*" as hearts begin to respond to the Word of truth. Sometimes, we are led to intercede for whole nations who may have lived for untold centuries in the dry darkness of a Christ less culture.

For over thirty years, I have been learning to articulate this missionary longing for the saving of souls. The prophetic proclamation of Ezekiel has helped me forge this prayer.

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

"Come!"

Jesus expanded the core of this longing as He taught His disciples to pray:

"Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Matthew 6:9

It is a call for the Holy Spirit to come and bring salvation. It is a call for revival. It is a call for

heaven to open and infest earth. It is also the cry that the Holy Spirit has gently infused into the vocal chords of the praying Bride. A longing for the ultimate revival, the ultimate salvation, the ultimate watering of the dry valley, a prayer for the return of Christ – the beloved Bridegroom.

"The Spirit and the bride say, Come! And let him who hears say, Come! Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life." Revelation 22:17

As our two previous prayers, the Holy Spirit responds in a specific way to the prayer. In Ezekiel we can see the immediate response and result.

"So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet - a vast army." Ezekiel 37:10

We are awed witnesses to the resurrection of a nation. Breath comes from heaven and brings revival - new life enters. There is a beautiful Hebrew word used here which means to revive, to resurrect - "Hayah." The Holy Spirit will always bring the answer of "Hayah" to our cry of "Come!"

May these three prayers be like three little eggs within you that are constantly strengthened and incubated by the Holy Spirit's particular presence. Expose them regularly to his warming wings and they will hatch much life.

"Help" is warmed by Hesed.

"How" is warmed by Hokhmah.

"Come" is warmed by Hayah.

As I enter into my fourth ten year season of ministry, I sense another prayer egg is being graciously uncovered within me. I mentioned it at length in the previous chapter. "Glorify." What is the specific response of the Holy Spirit to such a prayer? The Hebrew word for glory is "Kabod." It implies a sense of weight – the heavy glory of God bearing down from heaven to earth. So, to complete the list:

"Glorify" is warmed by Kabod.

The Holy Spirit's mission is to glorify Christ in our lives and in the world. Each one of His prayer responses also points us towards a greater revelation and experience of Jesus.

I fully accept that the New Testament revelation has come to us in the Greek language – the lingua franca of the time. This is a source for much rejoicing and blessing. When the apostle John was inspired to set out complicated explanations concerning Christ's deity, the Koine Greek lent itself well to the task.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." John 1:1

Three times the "Word" is proclaimed, using the Greek philosophical concept of "Logos." Heraclitus

first employed the term about five hundred years before Christ appeared. For him, it was a principle of order and knowledge - the logic behind an argument. Christ is the Logos made flesh. Sometimes, I long for more than just a Greek philosophical term to express the greatness of my beloved Jesus. The Jewish inheritance and Hebrew language, which longed for the revelation of the Messiah, give me a bit of an excuse to do some creative rewriting of the text, inspired by my imagination and many years of "warming" by the Holy Spirit.

"In the beginning was Hesed, Hokhmah, Haya, Kabod – and Shalom!"

May your beginning be a prayer to open heaven. Heaven is so very close to earth when we live in Christ. Take off your shoes and walk with Him. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, in her beautiful epic poem, *Aurora Leigh*, puts it this way:

*"Earth's crammed with heaven...
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes."*

Learn to live in prayer. Make your life a never ending adventure. The praying character will be well suited for the ultimate experience of heaven. May these pages prepare you for more. May you "come further up" as you discover more of your capacity to embrace the Divine, embrace God's mission to the world and embrace the Son.

C. S. Lewis, in *The Last Battle*, shares with all who

have been longing for an open heaven, a concluding word:

"I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now...Come further up, come further in."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I am a child, animal, poet and saint.

The child laughs. He enjoys life in all its simplicity and innocence, longing to share the joy with those he loves.

The animal embraces the gift of natural instinct, running to survive, blissfully at home in the gift of creation.

The poet stirs up the holy energy of creativity, savours intimate words of the divine and delights in writing.

The saint thrives on the intimacy of Christ which thrusts him out to find meaning and purpose in the world. He encourages through preaching the whispers of heaven he has faintly overheard.

This diverse personality currently lives in Northern France where he is involved with mission and church planting.