

A photograph of the Aurora Borealis (Northern Lights) in shades of green and blue, illuminating a dark, starry night sky. Below the sky, a rugged, snow-covered landscape with dark rocks is visible. The overall mood is serene and majestic.

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THE HAND
OF GOD
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A series of messages
preached by Bro. Dixon

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Hand of God Chapter 1 Found by God

Act 11:21: *“And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.”*(KJV)

We know that the Lord wills to save everyone, and if the hand of the Lord will be with us, then through us many will come to the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

On whom does the hand of the Lord rest?

This is the testimony that the Lord gave regards His servant David:

“I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him: With whom my hand shall be established: mine arm also shall strengthen him.” **Psalm 89: 20, 21 (KJV)**

We will take a closer look at David’s life to see, why the Lord found (chose) him, and the reason why the hand of the Lord was entrenched so firmly on his life. We usually say we found someone, only when we are searching for them. The question then is, why would an Almighty omniscient God, have to search for someone to accomplish His work? The reason is that, the kind of people the Lord is seeking after, whom He can take and use, are very few and far between. But when the Lord finds such a person, His hand will rest firmly on him or her.

What made David so special?

The LORD asked Samuel, "How long are you going to mourn for Saul now that I have rejected him as king of Israel? Fill a flask with olive oil and go. I'm sending you to Jesse in Bethlehem because I've selected one of his sons to be king." **1Samuel 16:1 (GW)**

So Jesse brought seven more of his sons to Samuel, but Samuel told Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen any of these." **1Samuel 16:10 (GW)**

Let’s get a little background to the life of David, who was the son of Jesse. David was the youngest in his family. David’s elder brothers were strong young men, and some were in the army of Israel. David on the other hand, being the youngest, was left to tend his father’s sheep.

The Prophet Samuel was sent by the Lord to the house of Jesse, with the instruction that one of Jesse’s sons were chosen by him to be the King. Jesse is convinced, that the Lord had most probably chosen one among his elder sons, as they seemed the likely candidates for the post of a king. When seven of the sons of Jesse passed before Samuel, the Lord clearly revealed to him that He had chosen none of them.

It is at this point, that Samuel enquired of Jesse if he had any more sons. Hesitantly, Jesse informed the prophet, that there was the youngest son David, who was tending sheep. Jesse himself was not too confident to even introduce David to Samuel, but Samuel said to Jesse, *“Send and bring him. For we will not sit down till he comes here.”* **1 Samuel 16: 11 (NKJV)**

In worldly standards, it seemed that David’s brothers were the ones who were qualified and had some kind of a social status, whereas David was just a shepherd boy. He had no qualification, appearance or standing to be chosen for a special task.

The world generally appraises people by their external qualifications like, their possession, position, popularity and other worldly values. However, when the Lord evaluates someone, He looks deep down at their heart. God’s standards are totally different from that of the world and that’s why the Lord found David.

When the Prophet Samuel came to visit Jesse’s home, it was a very special occasion but sadly no one remembered to invite David to it. It seemed that everyone had forgotten David, all including his father and brothers. But the good news was that the Lord remembered. He commemorated David’s humility and faith, which was why the Lord chose to honour him at the right time.

We may be facing a situation of neglect and rejection. We need to remember that at the right time, when the Lord’s command comes, others will come searching for us. God will make us the most important person in that very place, where we were overlooked and ignored. He Himself will bring us to the place of honour.

We will truly agree that, the one who received and brought David in to be anointed as the King of Israel, was not his father or brothers but the Lord alone. Let us never forget, that it is the Lord alone who can intervene and change our situations, as He is the source of all our advancements. The Lord performs this so no man, but He alone should get all the glory. It is very crucial for us to understand, that our promotions and blessings come only from the hand of the Lord, and not from any man.

What was so special about David that the Lord found him?

1. David believed and honoured the Living God

As Goliath challenged the armies of Israel, everyone was afraid, including King Saul. Listen to the dialogue between the King of Israel and a shepherd boy

David told Saul, *“No one should be discouraged because of this. I will go and fight this Philistine.”* **1 Samuel 17: 32 (GW)**

“Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear, so this uncircumcised Philistine will become like one of them—since he has defied the ranks of the living God.” **1 Samuel 17: 36 (TLV)**

King Saul and his entire army failed to remember the fact, that they had a Living God on their side. They were filled with fear, because they forgot this reality. All they could see was

Goliath and defeat. They were unable to look beyond Goliath. Saul even discouraged David from fighting Goliath, because he was too young and inexperienced. However, the reason David wanted to fight Goliath was, he could not bear the thought that Goliath dishonoured the armies of the Living God, and in so doing dishonoured the Lord Almighty. David was filled with zeal for the Lord.

We worship a living God who sees, hears, feels and understands everything about us. This is one of the reasons why the Lord hates and is angered with idolatry, because a Living God can never be reduced to be depicted by a graven image.

Since we believe and worship a Living God it implies that He is constantly watching us and there is nothing that is hidden from his eyes. Psalm 139 says that He even knows our thoughts and is aware of our words, even before they come out of our mouth.

Many people continue in sin only because they are not filled with the conscious thought that our God is a Living God who can see, hear and feel with us. If we are permeated with this thought, it will affect the way we speak, the things we hear and the things we do. We will surely become the men and women whom God is seeking. Honour and blessings will be ours if we live with this thought, as the hand of the Lord will be upon us.

2. David was totally dependent on God and acknowledged that he could do nothing on his own.

David added, "*The LORD, who saved me from the lion and the bear, will save me from this Philistine.*" "Go," Saul told David, "*and may the LORD be with you.*" **1Samuel 17:37 (GW)**

David tried hard to convince King Saul to let him fight Goliath. David explained to King Saul how he saved his father's sheep from the mouth of a lion, and from a bear. He acknowledged that it was the Lord and Lord alone who delivered him. So he assured Saul that he could do the same to Goliath the Philistine too. David was affirmed his total dependence on the Lord and recognized that he could do nothing in his own strength.

What kind of a person is the Lord seeking after and what kind of people ought we to be?

When David defeated Goliath, the whole of Israel and King Saul turned to the Lord. What the entire army of Israel with all their training and King Saul could not accomplish, a young Shepherd boy did only because the Lord was with him. The Lord found David and His hand established him.

The Lord is looking for those who will inherently live every moment of their life with the thought that we serve a God who is living. Next in order, He is also seeking those who will endorse God's presence and His blessings in their lives, and give God alone all due credence and honour.

When this happens, the promise of the Lord in **Act 11:21**: "*And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.*"(KJV) will certainly become a reality.

Hand of God Chapter 2 Receive His Anointing

Act 11:21 *“And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.” (KJV)*

What is the purpose for which, the hand of the Lord rests on us?

“I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him: With whom my hand shall be established: my arm also shall strengthen him.” Psalm 89: 20, 21

In the previous chapter we looked at some of the reasons as to why the Lord had to search and find David, and how the Lord is still seeking for such men who are truly a rarity. Between the Lord finding David and His hand establishing Him, the Lord did something very special when he anointed David as King. The Bible says, God anointed David with His holy oil.

Today the word anointing has somehow been widely misinterpreted and misrepresented. However, we need to study the word of God and on the basis of His word try to understand what the true meaning of anointing is, and also find out how and why we need to receive this anointing in our lives.

Let's study some of the passages where the Bible talks about anointing

The Anointing of Aaron

“Then dress Aaron in the holy clothes, and anoint him. In this way you will dedicate him to serve me as priest.” Exodus 40:13 (GW)

When the Lord anointed Aaron as a priest, He did so, so that he would be ‘set apart’ by the Lord to serve the Lord. The role of a priest was to stand in the presence of the Lord, and to intercede to the Lord, on behalf of the sins of his people. He would also offer regular sacrifices on their behalf, and literally be the one who stood in the gap between God and men.

The primary purpose of God's anointing is that we should also be ‘set apart’ for Him. His desire is that we should be those like Aaron who will pray and intercede for those around us, who do not know the Lord. We need to desire to rise above our complacencies and our traditional forms of worship, and seek to be a distinct people, so that those around us can recognize God's anointing on us.

It is indeed a morbid thought, that many who claim to have received the Lord's anointing are leading dichotomous lives. As there is no real transformation from within, the life within the church and the life outside are in contradiction. We really need to desire to be those

special people, chosen by God and who are totally separated for the Lord, whose lives will impact others to come into the Kingdom of God.

The anointing of David

....."The LORD said to Samuel, "This is the one---anoint him!" Samuel took the olive oil and anointed David in front of his brothers." **1 Samuel 16: 12,-13 (GNB)**

The reason God sent the prophet Samuel to Jesse's house, was to anoint one of his son's as King. It was imperative that the one who was to be chosen as King was first to be anointed by the prophet. As Samuel and the family of Jesse wait for David to come, the Lord commands Samuel to rise and anoint David.

"After removing him, God made David their king. This is what God said about him: 'I have found that David son of Jesse is the kind of man I like, a man who will do all I want him to do.'"**Acts 13: 22 (GNB)**

Once David received the anointing he was separated from tending sheep, from the life in the wilderness, from his family so that the Lord could elevate Him to the position of king that the Lord had planned for him.

First and foremost it is the Lord Himself who calls us, and anoints us. The intendment of His anointing on us, is that like David we too will seek to do the will of God, and fulfil all that the Lord has purposed for us. If we look at the Lord's Prayer as taught by Jesus, He said pray, "...your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." **Matthew 6:10(NKJV)**, that is precisely the reason why the Lord has given us His anointing, to be His instruments to fulfil His divine will on earth.

God has chosen us to be Kings and Priests

"And hath made us kings and priests to God and his Father; to him beglory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." **Revelation 1:6(KJV)**

Isn't it an overwhelming thought, that the Lord has anointed us with His Holy Spirit, so that we too can be kings and priests. Kings so we can rule and accomplish the will of God on earth, and priests so we can be those intercessors for those around us.

The anointing on Jesus

Jesus has gone to Nazareth his home town. On the Sabbath Jesus went into the synagogue and took the scroll to read the passage from Isaiah as recorded in **Luke 4: 18, 19** "The Spirit of the Lord is with me. He has anointed me to tell the Good News to the poor. He has sent me to announce forgiveness to the prisoners of sin and the restoring of sight to the blind, to forgive those who have been shattered by sin, to announce the year of the Lord's favour." **(GW)**

Jesus revealed that the Spirit of the Lord rested on Him, and anointed Him, so that He could fulfil the very purposes of the Father while He was here on earth. His only goal was to serve the people the Father had entrusted to Him. So also, the Lord anoints us and sets us apart so that we can serve Him, to fulfil the purposes and works that He has planned to complete through us.

The anointing in the upper room

After His resurrection and just before his ascension, Jesus commanded his disciples to wait for the promised Holy Spirit. They were all in prayer and in one accord in the upper room.

“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” Act 2:4 (Webster)

To accomplish this great commission as recorded in **Matthew 28: 19, 20**, *“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you:”* they needed the power of the Holy Spirit. Every single person who was there in that upper room was filled with the Holy Spirit without exception and every one of them spoke in various tongues. What happened as a result was that many who came as merely spectators were so filled with awe and wonderment that thousands believed and were saved.

Each one of us is representing the Lord in some way wherever we are. For example, when an officer is in uniform, then there are certain expectations from him or her. While wearing that uniform, if he or she were to do wrong, it would be glaring, and also in a way be a disgrace to the position they represent.

So also we are exemplifying Christ here on earth. We are robed with the armour of God; the belt of Truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the helmet of Salvation, the sword of the Spirit and our feet fitted with readiness to share the gospel of peace. The Lord calls us to consecrate all of ourselves, our body, soul and spirits to Him. Only when we live as those set apart will others believe and turn to the Lord. Diversely, if we don't lead exemplary lives, it will truly bring dishonour to the Lord we represent.

Even if we have never led anyone to the Lord in the past, if we truly seek this kind of anointing, the Lord will use us to lead many into His kingdom. The same is true today as was on the day of Pentecost. The Lord will fill everyone with His Holy Spirit who is willing to be totally set apart, and consecrated for Him alone.

Peter explains this anointing to the crowd that was amazed

As the crowds stood amazed at the demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit in the upper room, Peter stood up and explained it this way.

But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel, *“And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:*

And on my servants, and on my hand-maidens I will, in those days, pour out of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:” Act 2:17, 18 (KJV)

The outcome was unbelievable

“Many of them believed his message and were baptized, and about three thousand people were added to the group that day.” Acts 2:41 (GNB)

This is what each one of us should desire, that the Lord separate us, take us, cleanse us, consecrate us and anoint us so that like the early church we too can lead many people into the Kingdom of God.

Hand of God Chapter 3 The Qualities of an Anointed Person

Act 11:21 *“And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.” (KJV)*

We looked at **Psalm 89:20, 21** where it says, *“I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him: With whom my hand shall be established: my arm also shall strengthen him.”(Webster).*

In the previous chapter we looked in detail at how the anointing of the Lord was needed for David, for the hand of the Lord to rest mightily on him, and for him to perform great things for the Lord. We also looked at the other people who received this anointing and the purpose of the same.

Many people are apprehensive about the topic of the anointing of the Holy Spirit only because they have many misconceptions. Also the ones who claim to have received this anointing by their lack of consistency in their Christian walk, have in a way hindered others from experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit. Let us therefore, on the basis of God’s word look at:

What are the characteristics that will be evident in a person who is anointed by the Holy Spirit?

The anointing of the “Holy Spirit” as the very word suggests, is the power or the anointing of God in our lives to lead a holy life. It is not just an emotional experience, but the fact that we belong to the Lord Jesus who lives within us, and we are also the temple of the Holy Spirit who enables us to live a life of godliness and holiness.

We will study the life of Joshua to learn some important lessons

Numbers 27:18, says, *“So the LORD said to Moses, “Take Joshua, son of Nun, a man who has the Spirit, and place your hand on him.” (GW)*

We see at the very outset that **Joshua was a man anointed with the Spirit of God.**

Exodus 17:9, *Moses said to Joshua, “Choose some men for us and go out, fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.” (NRSVA)*

Joshua respected Moses’ authority and was obedient

When Moses commanded Joshua to go and fight the Amalekites, while he himself stood on top of the hill with the staff of God in his hand, Joshua obeyed and went out to fight the Amalekites without questioning. Joshua was a man who could take on responsibility and fulfil it. He respected authority and was obedient to Moses.

All authority is God ordained, so if we don't respect those who are in authority, then the ones under us will not respect us. For instance, if the father of a family does not respect his employer at his work place, and has a rebellious attitude, he will very often end up at some point, in a similar situation, sometimes in his own home where his children will not respect and submit to his authority. The reason for this is that, if we don't give respect where it's due, we will surely not receive the respect that is due to us.

In a home for example, the Lord ordained that the husband is the head of the family, not to rule and dominate his wife but to give leadership, take responsibility and love his wife, so that there is order in the home. The wife on the other hand is required to be obedient and in agreement with her husband's decisions, so that the home can be a joyful place. For a family to be a happy place there should be mutual love and respect. A truly anointed man will be a loving husband to his wife, and a truly anointed wife will be a submissive and loving partner to her husband.

We also need to teach our children to respect elders, speaking and treating everyone with respect. We must instruct them to be obedient to rules set by those in authority. If we don't teach them when they are young, they will one day embarrass us before others, and bring disgrace to us.

An anointed person will know how to submit to every authority that God has established. We need to submit to authority at our home, work place, at school or college and church as appointed by the Lord. God is a God of order, therefore all authority is God ordained and we need to have a willingness to submit to them. It is indeed difficult to do this in our own strength, but the Lord anoints us and enables us to be submissive.

Joshua had firm faith in the Lord, and was not swayed by the opinion of the majority.

***Numbers 14:9** "Do not rebel against the LORD and don't be afraid of the people who live there. We will conquer them easily. The LORD is with us and has defeated the gods who protected them; so don't be afraid." (GNB)*

Twelve men go to spy on the land of Canaan. Ten of them were filled with fear and returned saying that they couldn't conquer the land as the people in it were giants, too powerful for them. Joshua and Caleb spoke in total contradiction. They saw the land that the Lord had promised them, an exceedingly fruitful place and have that unshakeable faith that the Lord was on their side, to give the land to the people of Israel as He promised. Twelve men are faced with the same situation; ten of them looked at it with fear and apprehension, while only two looked on with eyes of faith. Joshua and Caleb realized that God who was on their side was far greater than the giants in the land.

An anointed person will never be disturbed by any situation no matter how difficult or overwhelming it is. Many people are so overpowered by their problems that they believe that even God cannot intervene and help them. A truly anointed person will not only look at a situation only with their physical eyes, but perceive in their spirit that the Lord who is in them is greater than any situation they are facing.

Ten of the men who spied gave a grave picture of the promise land, but only Joshua and Caleb were able to see that the Lord was with them. They say to the people of Israel *“Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them.”* **Numbers 14:9 (GNB)** Joshua refused to go with the assessment of the ten, though they formed the majority.

A Spirit filled person will not go with the majority opinion. He will take a stand and choose to be different. Many people are swayed easily and prefer to go with the persuasion of the masses. They are unable to take a stand in very crucial matters also. An anointed person will choose to be distinct, and will always stand out in a crowd.

Joshua loved the word of God

Joshua 8:34-35 *“Joshua then read to them all the blessings and curses Moses had written in the Book of Instruction. Every word of every command that Moses had ever given was read to the entire assembly of Israel, including the women and children and the foreigners who lived among them.”* (NLT)

Notice how it is mentioned that Joshua read every word of the command that Moses gave. In the assembly there were not only men but also women and children. The word of God was read, loud and clear for all to hear.

As parents we give so much of importance for our children to do well in academics. But we don't take the responsibility to teach our children to read and understand the word of God. We need to encourage our children to fellowship with others, attend Sunday school and youth groups. Children must be given freedom, but at the same time trained to make the right choices, within the right boundaries.

As we read the word over and over again, we will discover new truths from the very same and familiar passages. So many people are misled by false doctrines and teachings, only because they haven't read the word in its fullness and entirety. For example, we will never read a novel that we like in bits and pieces, only because we will never get the full story as it was intended to be. But very often when it comes to reading God's word we choose to read the word sporadically and not in its wholeness, and hence are not able to comprehend its depth and meaning. We should also practice to read the word loudly and as Joshua did.

Psalms 1:2, 3 *“But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in his law he meditates day and night..... and whatever he does shall prosper.”* (JUB)

If we truly love the word of the Lord, and meditate on it day and night then the Lord promises the he will have success in whatever we do.

Joshua obeyed the word of the Lord implicitly

Joshua 6:2-3, *“The LORD said to Joshua, “I am putting into your hands Jericho, with its king and all its brave soldiers. You and your soldiers are to march around the city once a day for six days.”* (GNT)

Joshua was a soldier and the leader of the army of Israel. He knew all about warfare but when the Lord told him to go around the city of Jericho six times, he never questioned the Lord. He knew the walls of the city were so huge and thick that it would be impossible to break-through, but just because the Lord told him to do so he obeyed without a doubt. Just imagine the scene, as Joshua called all the other soldiers and told them that the Lord just asked them to walk around the city of Jericho. It might have seemed such a strange and absurd instruction. They nevertheless obeyed, and were jubilant at the victory that the Lord gave that day.

We need to appropriate the word of God first to ourselves and be obedient to the word. Many people as believers are still shaky in their faith, and failing repeatedly in many areas of their lives only because they do not obey the word of the Lord as they ought to do. We need to learn to obey God's word and heed his counsel without a question or doubt, and only then we will have victory in our lives.

Joshua sought to honour God's name even in defeat

Joshua 7:8-9 *"Lord, what am I to say, now that Israel has run away from its enemies? The Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of this, will surround us, and eliminate us from the earth! Then what will you do about your great reputation?" (ISV)*

After an amazing victory over Jericho, Joshua decided to go against the city of Ai. The army of Israel face a major defeat, which the Lord allowed as a result of sin in the camp. Joshua goes into the Lord's presence and enquires as to why they had to face this defeat and the thing that bothered him more was the fact that the people around them would take advantage of this defeat and dishonour the name of the Lord. He was more concerned about the Lord's honour and reputation, than about the actual defeat itself.

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray *"Our Father in heaven: May your holy name be honoured;"* **Matthew 6:9** (GNT), it was an instruction that we need to honour the Lord in everything we do, and in every area of our life. When we honour the Lord this way, He turns our failures into victory.

In conclusion, a truly anointed person is someone who is submissive to authority, has firm faith in the Lord, loves word of the Lord and is obedient to the word of the Lord no matter what and one who only seeks to honour the Lord in their life in every situation. It is truly the Lord's desire to anoint each one of us with His Holy Spirit, so that the true characteristics of the Lord's anointing is evident in each one of our lives. It is only then that the hand of the Lord will rest on us, those around us will believe and be drawn to the saving knowledge of the Lord.

Hand of God Chapter 4 Lessons from the Early Church

We have been considering God's promise for His people from **Act 11:21**: "*And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.*" (KJV)

We will consider in detail the life of the early church, and see what we ought to do, in order for the Lord to fulfil this promise to bring many people into His Kingdom.

1. The believers were a **Praying People**

Acts 1:14, "*They gathered frequently to pray as a group,*"

Act 2:1, "*When the day of Pentecost came, all the believers were gathered together in one place.* (GNB)

Act 4: 30-31 says, "*Reach out your hand to heal, and grant that wonders and miracles may be performed through the name of your holy Servant Jesus. When they finished praying, the place where they were meeting was shaken. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to proclaim God's message with boldness.*" (GNB)

The early church was a praying church. We read how they gathered frequently to pray together. They were all in one accord in prayer, and the very place where they met was shaken. What happened as a result was that all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit. They were also specific in their prayer. In **Acts 4:30** we read how they were praying that the Lord would stretch out His hand, do mighty wonders and miracles, and heal people so that the name of Jesus could be greatly honoured among the non-believers.

The call of God today to the church is that we be a praying church. A praying church is a powerful church. Prayer is waiting in the Lord's presence. Only if we take time to pray as individuals, as families and collectively as a body of Christ will God's promise to bring in souls into the church, be fulfilled. Today the church is sadly lacking in the dynamic of prayer. We come together for worship and to listen to the word, but there are very few who are willing to spend time in prayer. Revival begins only when the church prays together. Moreover, our prayers need to be precise, as was the prayer of the early church. We must seek the Lord to perform wonders and miracles through us, so people will come to believe in the Lord. Only as we become a praying people, will the Lord be able to fulfil His promise to lead the multitudes into His Kingdom.

2. The believers were a **Power-filled People**

In **Act 2:4**, "*They were all filled with the Holy Spirit.*" (GNB)

Act 4:31, *“When they finished praying, the place where they were meeting was shaken. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to proclaim God's message with boldness.”* (GNB)

We also realize that the early church was a power filled church. As they prayed and waited on the Lord the entire meeting place was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. The power of the Holy Spirit in our life, is so that we can lead the holy life that the Lord requires of us. Without the power and the filling of the Holy Spirit, we will never be able to fulfil God’s plans and purposes.

3. The believers were a **people who preached** the word

Act 4:31, *“When they finished praying, the place where they were meeting was shaken. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to proclaim God's message with boldness.”* (GNB)

Act 2:14, *“Then Peter stood up with the other eleven apostles and in a loud voice began to speak to the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, listen to me and let me tell you what this means.”* (GNB)

Act 2:41 *“Many of them believed his message and were baptized, and about three thousand people were added to the group that day.”* (GNB)

What happened as a result of being filled with the Holy Spirit was that, the believers began to preach the word boldly. Once they were filled with power of the Holy Spirit, they did not just stay inside the comfort of the building, but went out into the world and preached with boldness. We see how the Lord transformed Peter, the one who denied Jesus earlier that he stood and preached fearlessly to the entire crowd in Jerusalem. The outcome was unbelievable. Three thousand people who heard the message believed and were baptized and added to the church that day.

Each one of us is called by the Lord to be those who will preach and teach to those in our own neighbourhood, and the people we come in contact with every day. This mandate is for every believer. We are called by the Lord not just to be members of His body, but to be the ones who proclaim the gospel to those outside so they too can come in and join us.

4. The believers were a **practicing people who practiced** what they preached

Act 4:32, *“The group of believers was one in mind and heart. None of them said that any of their belongings were their own, but they all shared with one another everything they had.”* (GNB)

The believers in the early church also practised what they believed and preached. They all gave up what was theirs, and shared everything with everyone. It is not easy for us do this, but the Lord gives us the Holy Spirit who enables us to accomplish this. Only because they put into practice what they professed, did 3000 people come to believe and be added to the church.

So we see how the believers in the early church were a praying people, a power-filled people, a people who preached the word and those who practiced what they preached. Only if we emulate these four characteristics found in the early church, will we be able to have a definite impact on our society. Those in darkness will come into the light, the ones in bondage will be freed, people will be rid of their problems, those with infirmities will be healed and most assuredly God's promise to add people to the body of Christ will be achieved.

The miraculous healing

In Acts chapter 3 there is this amazing incident of Peter and John encountering a man who was 40 years old, crippled from birth, left to beg at the temple gate. Day in and day out many people including the priests and leaders had passed him by and all they did was giving him alms. Not one of them could change his situation. When Peter and John saw this man, who also begged them for money, they said to him, we do not have silver or gold, but we have Jesus and in His name you rise up and walk. What happened as a result was astonishing. The man who was begging outside the temple in **Acts 3:2** was walking, leaping and praising the Lord inside the temple in **Acts 3:8**

To be agents of change in someone else's life, we need to have what the believers in the early church had. If only the church functioned outside as the Lord designed it to, many who have never stepped into the Church will do so gladly.

The problem from without

In **Act 4: 5-6**, we read *"On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. (ESV)*

The ones who were questioning Peter and John were the very leaders from the temple.

Act 4:16 *"What should we do with these men?" they asked each other. "We can't deny that they have performed a miraculous sign, and everybody in Jerusalem knows about it. (NLT)*

Suddenly Peter and John were getting noticed because of the miraculous sign the Lord performed through them in healing the lame man, and they started to wonder what should be done to them.

Act 4:21, *"When they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which to punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened;" (NASB)*

As the great crowd that gathered, were filled with awe and were glorifying God for the miracle the leaders were unable to do anything except threaten the apostles and release them.

We need to pray and desire that the Lord will use us to perform mighty miracles through us just as He did through the believers in the early church. The reason God brought us into the church is so we can bless those outside and also be channels to bring them in.

The church was growing in leaps and bounds. Acts 4:4 says more than 5000 were added to the church. In the Old Testament only a few men were chosen and filled with Spirit of God to accomplish a particular task. But in the New Testament the Holy Spirit is available to everyone who believes, and the reason for the Lord's anointing is so that the church will be built up. Peter and John were ordinary and unschooled men, but when the Holy Spirit of God filled them they became extraordinary men whom none could reckon with.

The one's, who opposed the apostles, were the priests and leaders of the temple. The only reason as we can see was jealousy. When people of God come together to pray, there will always be another group that will work against them. The reason for this is that, while the Kingdom of God is being built the kingdom of Satan is being shaken. Jesus said the gates of hell will never prevail against the church. It doesn't matter who comes against us, we have the assurance that He who is in us is greater than he that is in the world. We need to always remember the fact that the Lord who called us is faithful.

There are so many hurting and needy people outside the church and they hesitate to come in. But when the church of God, filled with the power of the Holy Spirit makes an impact, those outside will come in to the Church to worship and fellowship.

At the end of it the leaders could do nothing to Peter and John, because the people themselves began to glorify God. The people became a security for the apostles. No matter what we go through, if we are bold and fear no man and do what the Lord says, the Lord Himself will be our greatest defense.

The problem from within

Acts 5:1, 2, *"Ananias and his wife Sapphira also sold a piece of property. But they agreed to cheat and keep some of the money for themselves."* (CEV)

The early church members came and sold their property and left it at the apostle's feet. There was no compulsion to do this, but they did it willingly and with sincerity. However, there was a couple, Ananias and Sapphira, whose heart was not really right but simply wanted to receive recognition from the leaders and members of the Church. They sold their property and connived to keep part of it for themselves. With each other's consent and knowledge they laid the rest at Peter's feet, pretended that they gave it all up. The Holy Spirit of God revealed this hypocrisy to Peter, and both of them had to face death as a punishment.

They were so concerned about the praise of men, that they forgot that they were standing before a God who sees everything. Nothing is hidden from the eyes of the Almighty God. We must never ever give up or compromise our relationship with God for anything or anyone. This was the challenge within the church. They were seeking praise of men more than the approval of God, and so were covering their true self with hypocrisy.

The challenge and call from the Lord for the church today is that we need to be the true body of Christ as the Lord intended us to be. We must long to be a the body of Christ who are a praying, power-filled, ready to preach the word in season, out of season and those who will choose to practise what we profess. Only then can we most assuredly see the Lord using us to lead many into the wonderful saving knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Hand of God

Chapter 5

Being Sure of Our Salvation

Act 2:47 ... *“every day the Lord was adding to their number those being saved.”* (TLV)

As we study the latter part of **Acts 2: 47** we take special note of the fact *“that every day the Lord was adding to their numbers those being saved.”* Firstly it was the Lord Himself who adding the people to the church, and secondly they were being added every single day and not just once in a while.

As we look closely at the way the early church functioned, we will then understand the reason why they were a strong church. Only if we can comprehend this fully, can we also become a strong church that the Lord desires for us to be. The church is God ordained and if it is the Lord who brings people in, He does so for a reason. If the Lord was daily bringing into the fold those who were being saved the question we need to ask is:

What is salvation or what does it mean to be saved?

Many people including those who have been part of the church for many years, are still not sure if they are saved. The word of the Lord is uncompromising on the fact that only a person who is saved, can enter into the kingdom of heaven. It is therefore imperative that everyone needs to have the assurance that they are saved for sure.

We will look at the Parable of the Good Samaritan as recorded in Luke 10 and see the allegory we can draw from the same, and see how the Lord worked out His divine plan of salvation for us through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Below is the question that was raised to Jesus by a man who was an expert in the law.

Luke 10:25, *“Then an expert in Moses’ Teachings stood up to test Jesus. He asked, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”*(GW)

If we read the passage carefully we see that the expert in the law asked Jesus two questions. The first question was, *“Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”* and the second one was *“who are my neighbours?”* It was in connection with this man’s questions that Jesus narrated this parable. Many are of the opinion that this parable was an answer to his second question but if we read closely, we see that Jesus was answering the previous and more important question of the man namely *“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”* In simple words he was asking Jesus how he could be saved and get to heaven.

Luke 10:30 reads, *“ And Jesus, answering him, said, A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he got into the hands of thieves, who took his clothing and gave him cruel blows, and when they went away, he was half dead.”* (BBE)

Let’s look at this parable in detail. A certain man was travelling from **Jerusalem (represents a city of peace)** to **Jericho (represents a city of peril, with no walls)**. In a way this man who

was in a place of peace (Jerusalem) was journeying to a place of danger (Jericho) and this he is doing of his own accord and not on compulsion from anyone.

The man is probably a representation of Adam. In the Garden of Eden, Adam was enjoying himself, he had everything he could ask for, God's peace, His presence and the absence of fear. Everything changed when Adam and Eve decided to disobey the Lord, gave heed to Satan's lies and fell into the trap he set for them. The consequence that Adam and Eve had to face was an eternal one. They were chased out of the presence of God, and were now in their fallen state, exposed to every form of sin and danger.

One of the reasons many people are going astray is they are being ensnared by the cunning and craftiness of Satan, deciding to do as he prompts, not aware of the aftermath of their choices.

When this man decided to move away from Jerusalem, which was a place of peace to Jericho, a place of peril what happened was inevitable. He fell into the hands of thieves who stripped him, beat him up and left him half dead. The man made a wrong decision and was now in a place of danger and deep trouble.

The thieves are a representation of Satan. The only aim of Satan is to kill, steal and destroy. He tricks people into his schemes and then leaves them in a deplorable condition. Let us never think for a moment that we will receive anything good from following Satan's plans.

If we find ourselves in a situation where our peace is removed or in a place of unforeseen danger and desperation, where we are unable to pray or worship the Lord we must remember that this is not from the Lord, but most certainly the work of Satan.

That's the reason we need to seek the Lord's guidance and counsel for every decision we make. For example a person in a job, who is facing some small issues there, may decide to move to another job, only to find it is far worse or someone thinks that the person they married is not suitable and so looks for another spouse only to realise they made a bigger mistake. Many of the decisions we take are predominantly based on our senses (what we see and hear) and our emotions. We need to constantly remind ourselves that every decision we take has a consequence.

For instance many people while choosing their marriage partners only look on outward things like age, appearance, education, caste, dowry etc. and never bother to seek the Lord. When the marriage runs into trouble, then they seek God. Let's decide to pray about everything, wait for the Lord's word, and then do what He says. When we pray and wait, that the Lord will reveal His will leading us to make the right decision, which will eventually be for our good.

The man who fell into the hands of robbers was in a very pitiful and distressing condition. He was in a state wherein, if no one came to help him he would have probably died.

The situation of the man was the exact condition of all mankind after the fall. Man, who was made to enjoy himself and live in the presence of God, was now in a place of sin, suffering

and hardships. This was because man chose to listen to the lies of Satan and disobey God. Satan always tempts us with temporary pleasures that bring about permanent damage. For instance a person is lured into the habit of smoking or drinking which later becomes an addiction thereby ending up with destroying their vital organs.

The first thing the thieves did was they stripped the man of his clothes.

The ***robe refers to the righteousness*** that the Lord gives. It is that privilege to have a right standing before God, and this was removed. It was sin that separated man from God, and made him relinquish the beautiful union that Adam enjoyed with God in the Garden of Eden. Many people have brought themselves to this place where they are not only filled with a deep sense of guilt about their sins, but are also in doubt if the Lord will even listen to their prayers and cries for help, because they are filled with the guilt of sin.

The Law could not save fallen man

Luke 10:31, *“And by chance a certain priest was going down that way: and when he saw him, he went by on the other side.”(BBE)*

A priest who passed by saw the man wounded and bleeding, but he quickly turned aside and passed by the other side.

The priest in the Bible is a symbolism to the Law. There were a total of 613 laws in the Old Testament, none of which could save man from sin. For example, when the Law commanded, *“do not commit adultery”* in the Old Testament, only a person who was actually caught in the act was punished. However, when Jesus explains it in the New Testament He said, *‘if a man looks at a woman lustfully he has already committed adultery with her in his heart.’*

There was also the law that commanded that one should honour their father and mother. The people thought instead of having to take the responsibility to help their parents why not give a gift (corban) to God, and in this way be free of the obligation toward their parents. Instead of upholding the law they were trying to find a way around it, and so be free from its commitment.

Many people are also hung up about which day of the week Sabbath needs to be upheld, but conveniently ignore all other rules and regulations that went along with keeping the Sabbath in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament the people laboured the whole week and then they had to observe the Sabbath to rest and worship the Lord. In the New Testament however, we observe the Sabbath to celebrate and remember that the Lord fulfilled all the requirements of the law, and by taking all our sins and curses on the cross he has won the victory for us. Repeatedly in the New Testament we read how the people gathered together on the first day of the week. When Paul went and reasoned with people on the Sabbath day it was only to help them understand the message of the Gospel, and remove the people’s blindness. One of the reasons the religious leaders were very angry and wanted Jesus crucified was because he healed and delivered people on the Sabbath. We as believers, can worship the Lord every single day of the week.

A lot of people are still made to believe that they need to fulfil certain rituals and traditions to be accepted by the Lord. Let's be certain that the outward keeping of the law can save no one. The Bible says those who follow the Law do so by the letter only. We on the other hand need to follow the Spirit of the Law because it clearly says *'the letter kills but the Spirit gives life'*. The Law only condemns but it is only God's grace that lifts us up.

Sacrifices could not save fallen man

Luke 10:32, *"And in the same way, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, went by on the other side."* (BBE)

The next person to pass by and not help the wounded man was a Levite. ***The Levite symbolises the sacrifices*** that were offered.

The main purpose of the Levites was to offer various sacrifices. The Old Testament is replete with requirements for numerous sacrifices and none of them could save anyone. The greatest and only sacrifice that could really atone all of our sins, was the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. If we can only comprehend the true meaning of this supreme sacrifice, we will be filled with love for the Lord and worship Him with all our heart.

Jesus alone can save

Luke 10:33, *"But a certain man of Samaria, journeying that way, came where he was, and when he saw him, he was moved with pity for him,"* (BBE)

The next person passing by the wounded man was the Samaritan. He was truly moved with compassion when he saw the condition of the wounded man. We must note that the Jews and Samaritans never mingled with each other, and yet the man reached out to the wounded Jewish man.

If we think about it ***the Samaritan in a way symbolises Jesus***. A holy God can never associate with sinful humans, and yet the Lord Jesus came down willingly to save and redeem a lost and sinful mankind, only because of a heart overflowing with love and compassion for us. **Romans 5:6** says, *"For when we were still helpless, Christ died for the wicked at the time that God chose."* (GNB)

While we were in a desperate and despicable condition with no hope, the Lord came and chose to die for us on the cross.

In **Philippians 2:7**, we read, *"Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human!"* (MSG)

Jesus emptied himself, took a form of a slave, became a human and came down from heaven itself only to save sinful man. If we could only fathom the depth of God's love for us in sending Jesus down to the earth, it will transform us to worship the Lord, praise Him and thank Him with our whole heart the whole time.

Let us see what the Samaritan did **Luke 10:34**, *“And coming near, he bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. And putting him on his own animal, he brought him to an inn and cared for him.”*(LITV)

The Good Samaritan comes to the wounded man and pours oil and wine on his wounds and binds them. He not only did that but also laid him on his donkey and took him to the inn and cared for him.

The oil represents the Holy Spirit to heal a man in his spirit and ***the wine the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ*** to heal the man in his body. ***The inn is a representation of the church.***

Salvation therefore can be explained this way. When man was in a sinful, desperate and helpless condition, in his fallen state nothing could save him. Not the law or any form of sacrifices. A man who is not saved is only doomed for hell where the Bible says the fire is never quenched. The pain and agony will be so real, but death will evade those there even though they desire it.

Salvation is the Lord Jesus saving mankind from this eternal destruction. That’s what the Lord Jesus did for us in reality. He came down to the earth shed his precious blood **(Symbolised by the wine)** for our sins, redeemed us from damnation to hell and places us in the church **(Symbolised by the inn)**. He gives us His blessed Holy Spirit **(Symbolised by the oil)** to live this life on earth.

Just like there would have been all sorts of people in an Inn, so also we have all kinds of people who are part of the church. People in the church are with various needs, and are at varying levels in their walk with the Lord. The purpose of the church is to welcome, accommodate and help all these people be saved, grow in the fullness of the Lord and be prepared to enter into the Kingdom of heaven. This is an important reason why we should not neglect the coming together to church for fellowship. We need the fellowship of other believers to grow and be totally healed, in order to reach the fullness of life that the Lord intends for us.

Salvation brings man back to that pristine state in his body, soul and spirit that the Lord intended for us to be in and enjoy, the place that He actually intended for Adam and Eve when God first created them.

The Priest and the Levite noticed the wounded man but walked away. Only the Samaritan chose to come near and help the wounded man. It was up to the wounded man to accept the help that was offered. If he refused the help even the Samaritan could not have assisted him.

The offer for salvation too is like that. The Lord comes close to us and offers this gift of salvation to each one of us. It is up to us to accept it or reject it. The Lord will never force this on anyone.

There’s an illustration of a man who knew very little swimming who started to drown at sea. A man on the shore who was a good swimmer was summoned and asked to go in and help

him. He waited for a long time until he saw the drowning man almost helpless, and only then he ventured in, saved him and brought him out. Later, his friends asked him why he had to waste so much time to save the drowning man and he replied, 'I had to wait for him to come to the point of helplessness, and only then I could help him. If not he would have pulled me in and I would have drowned along with him.'

All of us must come to that point of total helplessness, the realization that we need the Lord to save us and only then the Lord can intervene. We ought to let the Lord bind all our wounds, and heal us of all the sins that still enslave us. We need to have the assurance of Salvation that Jesus offers. It is also important for us to be in the church, in fellowship of believers and grow in the fullness of the life that Jesus offers by praying, hearing the word and living in obedience to God's word.

For the man who is saved and has the assurance of salvation that Jesus offers, the physical death he will face is not death, because the moment he breathes his last on earth, he will be found in the Lord's presence, but for the one who is not saved he not only faces death on earth but eternal death (separation from God) in hell. May the Lord help us to be filled with the assurance of this salvation that He so graciously offers us, so we can enjoy the bountiful life He promised right here on earth which goes on into eternity.

Hand of God Chapter 6 The Power of Oneness

We read in **Acts 4:32**, *“The whole congregation of believers was united as one — one heart, one mind!”* (MSG)

The testimony about the early church was that though they were numerous, they were all with one heart and one mind. When we hear such a declaration, probably the question that arises is, ‘How was this achieved?’

As human beings we feel with our heart, and think and reason with our mind. Sometimes we may feel good about something, but then as our minds begin to analyse these feelings we may find them not appropriate, and soon we will find that the feelings may also change. A good example for this is of a newly married couple, who have great feelings toward each other in the initial period of their marriage, but later as they face the realities of life, they may start to evaluate their relationship to find that the heart and mind may not say the same thing.

The success and effectiveness of the early church was the fact that in spite of being great in number, they were able to feel and think with one accord, because they were one in heart and mind. That is why the early church could turn the world upside down, and impact those around them. If we as a church want to influence the world around us, we need to have the same oneness that was there in the early church. If it was possible for them, it is certainly feasible for us too.

The same is necessary for a family to be happy and successful too. Wherever there is no singleness of heart and mind, we can be sure that there will be various problems. Time and again there may be disagreements between couples over various decisions that need to be taken – for instance at which hospital should they have their baby delivered or to which school do they admit their children. Invariably if something does go wrong in the choice that was made, the spouses end up blaming each other. If a family wants to be joy filled and a blessing to others, it is imperative that the husband and wife must strive to be one in heart and mind.

Today the church has lost its effectiveness. The church is not a place to come to for special occasions like birth, marriage and death, but a place where every individual member is built up in the word and in faith. Somewhere along the way we have lost the vision and purpose of the church. Every member of the church must go out into the society, and be those who make a difference in those places where the Lord has kept us.

We need to be planted in the right place so we can fulfil God’s purpose to bear fruit, and be a blessing. The Lord comes seeking for fruit in our lives. We need to therefore, search ourselves to know if we are accomplishing the purposes of God in our lives and truly bearing fruit. We have received so much from the Lord that it is time for us to be a blessing to others, rather than being obsessed with wanting more and more. We must truly desire to be beneficial to the Lord.

Any company or firm has a purpose for its existence, and for that objective to be fulfilled they need to be innovative. For those changes to be implemented they need to have single mindedness. Some years ago before cell phones and digital cameras came into vogue, people used to use cameras with rolls. People were very cautious to take good pictures with these rolls, as one never knew what the outcome would be until the photos were developed. One had to pay for every single photograph to be developed, both good and bad. There were a few people in the company that manufactured these film rolls who saw that the future of these rolls would soon be meaningless, and this was going to be taken over by digital cameras but the majority of the employees too did not agree or foresee this outcome. The result was that the company had to face closure and many employees were left jobless.

Whether it is a company, family or the church, if there is no singleness of heart and mind they will never accomplish the purpose for which they were constituted in the first place. To be single minded does not mean that when one says 'Yes' everyone else nods in agreement or if one says 'No' everyone disagrees. That would only make us robots. We are human beings who can think and feel and that's what makes us distinct from robots. So how were the believers in the early church though numerous in numbers able to function with such solidarity in mind and heart?

Paul writing to the Philippians says **Philippians 2:2**, *"Fill up and complete my joy by living in harmony and being of the same mind and one in purpose, having the same love, being in full accord and of one harmonious mind and intention."* (AMPC)

We see Paul encouraging the church at Philippi to live in harmony with one another. When we apply this to marriage, it does not mean that both husband and wife will see eye to eye on everything and agree to everything, but when it comes to implementing a decision, both must come to a consensus to decide to do what's best for the family.

Let's take an example of an orchestra. If there was just a drummer, who was drumming all alone or a guitarist or piano player all playing singly, the music that is produced may not be so pleasing to the ears. On the other hand, if all were playing together in one accord the symphony that will be produced will be glorious. Also the ones who are playing the musical instruments must understand the purpose why they are playing. Only when we focus on the purpose will we be able to achieve the unity and oneness. The only purpose of all of the playing and singing is to worship the Lord. The Lord alone must have the primary place in all of our worship. We magnify and glorify the Lord in worship.

Whether it is the church or our family we need to always remember the true purpose for which the Lord has ordained both of these, for only then we will have oneness. God is the originator of marriage and His purpose for marriage and families is to raise a godly generation. If this is at the heart of every marriage we will not have unnecessary misunderstandings and quarrels, as we would want the Lord to be glorified through our families, desiring be exemplary to those around. So also the purpose of the church is to be in unity of heart and mind so as to glorify the Lord.

In **1 Corinthians 10:31** Paul says, *“Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” (ESV).*

We need to glorify God in every area of our life; simple things like playing an instrument, our WhatsApp status, through our families, our speech, our actions and our relationships with others.

We take note of the fact that even in the early church when people were in one accord, there was a couple like Ananias and Sapphira, who lived contrary to God’s purpose. We need to be those who stand firm and guard our faith. If the supreme thought in our mind is to glorify God in everything, we will most certainly lead a holy life and there will be no place for sin. God’s purpose for our life is that he should be glorified through our life.

Let us look at three ways in which the Church must glorify God

1. We glorify God by worshipping Him in Spirit and in truth

Luke 2:13 -14, *“Suddenly a great army of heaven’s angels appeared with the angel, singing praises to God: “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom he is pleased” (GNT)*

When the angels came to announce the birth of Jesus to the shepherds, they sang praises and gave glory to God. When Jesus taught the Lord’s Prayer to his disciples, the first line of the prayer in **Matthew 6:9**, *“our Father in heaven, let your name be kept holy” (GW).*

Our primary purpose then is to bring glory to God in every area of our life. The Lord who called us is a God of holiness, glory and might, but so many people in the church today have taken Him for granted only because He is also a God of grace. That is one of the reasons we are seeing no real change and transformation. The Lord is gracious but He warns us to repent and change, as there is a day of reckoning at hand. The primary purpose of the church therefore is we come together to glorify the Lord in all we do, and sincerely be those who worship Him in Spirit and in truth.

2. We glorify God by edifying one another

The second purpose of the church is that we should grow and increase in our faith and edify one another. Let us look at this incident from Luke 13.

Luke 13:10-13, *“Jesus taught in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath day. A woman was there who had an evil spirit inside her. It had made the woman crippled for 18 years. Her back was always bent; she could not stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called to her, “Woman, you have been made free from your sickness!” He laid his hands on her, and immediately she was able to stand up straight. She began praising God.” (ERV)*

When Jesus was teaching in the synagogue, there was a woman possessed by an evil spirit that had crippled and bent her for 18 years. She was in the synagogue but was in bondage and of no use to anyone. The moment Jesus healed her, she not only stood up straight but gave glory to God and praised Him.

That's what we need to see happen in church. Those who are bent with sin being straightened up, saved and their heads are raised up. Those who come into the church must be edified by the word. We need to desire to grow in our spiritual life, the same way we desire to see our children grow physically every year. If we want to see this happen we must pray and ask the Lord to make us a church where people will come in to be healed, saved and edified.

3. We glorify God by reaching out to those outside the Church

John 5:5-6, *“One of the men lying there had been sick for 38 years. Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been sick for a very long time. So he asked him, “Do you want to be well?”(ERV)*

John 5:8-9, *“Then Jesus said, “Stand up! Pick up your mat and walk.” Immediately the man was well. He picked up his mat and started walking. The day all this happened was a Sabbath day.” (ERV)*

John 5:14, *“Later, Jesus found the man at the Temple” (ERV)*

In John Chapter 5, we see Jesus going out to meet a man who was sick and lying near the pool called Bethesda for 38 long years. Jesus not only taught in the synagogue, but He also went out of the way to meet this man and speak to him. He speaks healing to this man, and if we read the account we see that the man took up his mat and walked away not even knowing who it was that healed him. Later however, when Jesus met him again, we see that the man was in the temple. Now when the people asked him who it was who healed him, he told them it was Jesus.

The purpose of our being a part of the church and being edified is that we will go out to be a light to those outside the church. We have the duty to not just be inside the church, but also to go out to seek out and bring others into the church.

Generally many people are hesitant to go out and minister to others because the ones they reached out to earlier and helped, either did not acknowledge their help or took them for granted. Let us continue to serve and share the Gospel with others outside, not expecting anything in return. The ultimate purpose of us reaching out to people is that they will be saved, and be brought in to become members of the body of Christ.

Each of us must realize that there is a purpose for which we were created. We can choose to either fulfil the purpose of God in our life, or continue to live a life that is meaningless and of no consequence to anyone.

The church in Laodicea was in a heart breaking condition as we see in **Revelation 3:20**, *“Look, I’m standing at the door and knocking.”(GW)* that the Lord who is supposed to be inside the church was standing outside knocking. If we as a church forget the purpose for which we are existing, we would be committing the same mistake of the church at Laodicea and will leave the Lord standing outside the church while we continue with all our formalities inside. We need to be filled with the longing that the Lord will use each of us to fulfil His purpose for our life personally, as a family and as a church. May we truly aspire to glorify the Lord in each and every area of our lives.

Hand of God Chapter 7 Let's Stop Murmuring

If we as a church today desire to resemble the early church, and if our aspiration is that people should be added in great numbers, then it is only appropriate that we not only evaluate ourselves in the light of God's word but also investigate to see what the early church did differently that made this a reality.

In **Acts 2:46-47**, we read that, *"They worshiped together regularly at the Temple each day, met in small groups in homes for Communion, and shared their meals with great joy and thankfulness, praising God. The whole city was favourable to them, and **each day God added to them all who were being saved.**" (TLB)*

Here were some key features we note in the functioning of the early church from the above mentioned verses that made people flock to them in huge numbers.

They were **all with one mind** (We studied this in detail in the previous chapter)

They **gathered together daily** – they did not neglect the coming together for prayer and fellowship and did this with regularity.

They **met in homes for communion and fellowship** -They met in homes, broke bread, to constantly remind themselves of the death and resurrection of the Jesus thereby stayed in constant fellowship. The thought that reigned supreme on their minds was the finished work of Christ on the cross.

They were **filled with great joy** – The believers were brimming with the thought that the Lord of the universe had saved them from our sins, adopted them to be His own children, delivered them from eternal death and had promised them eternal life in heaven. Therefore, the overflowing joy in their lives was so evident to those around them.

They had **simplicity of heart** (NKJV) - One of many reasons why Jesus chose ordinary fishermen and others common people to be His disciples was because they were simple in their heart and not complicated. The early believers were a simple lot who knew that being a follower of Jesus was simple and not complex.

They were constantly **praising God** – the reason for their praises and thanks giving was because, their hearts were filled with gratitude for all that the Lord had done for them. Coming together to worship was not a burden but a matter of great Joy.

They **found favour with everyone** – by exemplifying all of the above mentioned qualities, the result was that they found favour with those around them.

It is no wonder then, that the Lord was adding to the church a large number of people daily. However, as the church was growing in numbers, they also started to face certain challenges.

In **Acts 6:1**, we read, *“But in those days, the disciples multiplying in number, there arose a murmuring of the Hellenists against the Hebrews because their widows were overlooked in the daily ministrations.”* (DARBY)

There was a discord that arose between the Hellenists and the Hebrews over ministry to the widows, and so there was a murmuring among the believers.

If we were to define what murmuring is, it is basically to blame or find fault and it is usually directed towards a person or some persons.

Most of us are guilty of murmuring and complaining in our daily lives. As husbands and wives we often murmur and find fault with each other, as children we sometimes grumble against our parents, as employees we complain about our employers or about issues at our work place and very often we also end up finding fault with our churches. Especially in a church we must keep in mind that, as the numbers increase there will be several reasons to murmur and complain.

For instance, when a person finds a new job, they are so excited about their prospects in the new endeavour. However, as days go by, they may find things don't function as they expected and gradually they begin to compare, find fault and end up murmuring. The more they complain the more difficult it becomes for them to continue in that place, and also give of their full potential. When one sets out on this path of murmuring and complaining, they will find that eventually they will lose their joy and peace. The same is applicable to our life and relationships in family or church too.

God's response to Murmuring

Our God is a living God who is in constant relationship with us, so when we start murmuring here's how He responds.

In **Numbers 11:1**, *“And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp.”* (JFB)

The Lord was faithfully leading the people of Israel from Egypt to the land of Canaan however, oftentimes when the people murmured against Him, not only did it displease Him but also angered Him a great deal.

Whenever we murmur, we must remind ourselves that this is the exact same way God reacts to all of our grumblings, He is not only annoyed with us, but is also enraged. None of us can stand against God's wrath. We should recall how angry Jesus was at the temple, when he overthrew the moneychangers who were not treating the house of God as a place of prayer but as a den of robbers, and drove them all out with a whip. It is indeed true that

our God is gracious, but we must also remember that He is also our heavenly Father who will discipline His children. So whenever we murmur and complain, we are warned that we will become targets of God's displeasure and anger.

Why was God Angry?

In **Numbers 10:34**, *"Moreover, the cloud of the LORD protected them during the day when they left their camp. (ISV)*

God in his love and kindness was leading the people of Israel every step of the way. He even taught them how to set up camp, he trained them for war (he even taught them how to blow the trumpet), He provided manna for them every single day for forty years and more than anything else the presence of God overshadowed them in the form of a cloud. God Himself accompanied them all the way. So when they turned ungrateful, and complained about every little thing that went wrong, the Lord's kindness turned to anger.

The Lord Jesus in **Matthew 28:20** promised us, *"And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."* (KJV) but like the people of Israel, many a time, we don't value or acknowledge the presence of the Lord in our lives. Every time we murmur and complain, we are in a way decrying His presence with us.

Reasons why we Murmur

1. When we forget all the good things God has done for us

In Psalm 103: 1-2, David says, *"Bless the Lord, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits:"* (NKJV)

David could recount with a heart full of gratitude, all the blessings that the Lord had graciously bestowed on him. We must truly seek to have such a heart of thankfulness like David. Let us sincerely thank God for everything in our lives; our spouse, our children, our jobs and everything we have. When we begin to complain, we could end up losing the good things we have. On the other hand, as we thank the Lord for every little blessing in our life, He will start to bless us with greater ones. Every day may we constantly remind ourselves of all the blessings that the Lord has graciously lavished on us.

2. When we start to compare ourselves with one another

We read in **Matthew 20:12**, *"They took their money and started grumbling against the employer."*(GNT)

In this parable the owner of the vineyard hired labourers to work. The first group come to work at 6 am and he agreed to pay them a day's wages which was about a penny. He went out again and hired men at 9 am, 12 pm, and 3 pm and at 5 pm. When the time for payment came the one who was hired last was called first and paid a penny. The others who worked longer, assumed that they will be paid more for working longer hours, but the owner of the vineyard paid all them alike. The one who came in first started to complain and

murmur against the vineyard owner. The owner had paid him justly as he had promised, but the labourer was not satisfied as he was comparing himself with the one who came in last.

We often start to murmur when we compare ourselves with others. Murmuring is always against somebody. Instead of comparing we need to be thankful to the Lord for the position He has placed us in. Murmuring is also serious, because it turns us against those whom God has placed over us. Instead of comparing and complaining, if we can learn to thank the Lord, He will intervene to change our perspective and often times our situations too. It is necessary for us to learn to be submissive to those whom God has placed over us.

So also we should never compare our children with each other or with those outside, but value them for who they are, learning to value the image and uniqueness with which God has created them.

3. When we make wrong assumptions

The man who worked the whole day assumed that the owner would pay him more than the man who came in last. It was his assumption that was wrong. The owner kept his word and paid him the wage that was due to him, but the labourer was grumbling only because he thought that he would be paid more.

We should take caution not to presume or infer things that are not true, but rather choose to clarify if ever we are in doubt.

4. We murmur when someone performs better than us

In **Luke 5:29-30**, *“And Levi made him a great feast in his house; and there was a large company of tax collectors and others sitting at table[a] with them. And the Pharisees and their scribes murmured against his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” (RSV)*

When Jesus called Levi to follow Him, he immediately left his tax collecting booth and followed after Jesus. Levi was so thrilled at becoming a disciple of Jesus that he called all his friends and arranged for a feast at his house in honour of Jesus. Since he was a tax collector, most probably, all his friends were also Tax Collectors. Tax Collectors were widely disliked because they were mostly dishonest, they worked for the Roman Government and also troubled the people much. They were therefore considered by many as sinners. The ones who grumbled against the Tax Collectors, were the Pharisees and the Scribes. They were the leaders of the temple whose job was to lead sinners into the way of righteousness. Jesus was doing what they were supposed to do, and this was the reason why they were murmuring against Jesus. Instead of thanking Jesus for reaching out to the sinners, they were complaining.

When we don't do what we are supposed to do, the Lord will use someone else to fulfil the task. When He does that, we will see this and begin to grumble. Instead, let us fulfil what God had chosen us to do and accomplish his purposes for our lives.

Murmuring is usually under one's breath and never in the open. Let us not be jealous and try to pull down those who are more accomplished than us, instead when we lift someone up, we will find ourselves improving as well. Also when we choose to encourage others and build others up, the Lord will surely draw near and elevate us as well.

5. We murmur when we see things only with our physical eyes

John 6:41, ESV: *"So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven.""* (ESV)

When Jesus declared to the people that *'he was the bread that came down from heaven'* the Jews were puzzled. They could not comprehend that Jesus was speaking about His body being broken in death for the sins of the people, and from the physical point of view they found this unacceptable and began to murmur. From a fleshly and earthly angle, this seemed impossible and so they began to grumble against Jesus.

Whenever, we face opposition from others, we should not look at everything from a physical and worldly perspective, but rather realize that often times Satan is using these people to antagonize us. So, instead of opposing them, we must learn to pray and bind the powers of darkness that are working behind the scenes. When we start to observe things with our spiritual eyes and pray about the person who is troubling us, the Lord will intervene to break those evil forces at work against us.

How can we stop murmuring?

Here are some steps we should take to stop the habit of murmuring and grumbling in our lives. Firstly, let us be thankful to the Lord for every little blessing in our lives. Secondly, let us refrain from comparing ourselves with others but remind ourselves that we are unique. Thirdly, let us never assume about people or situations, but clarify matters immediately. Fourthly, let us always motivate and encourage those who are more accomplished than us. Finally, let us look at everything from God's perspective and not just with our physical eyes. Only then will there be no place for murmuring and complaining, and instead we will have a life filled with thanksgiving and joy.

Hand of God

Chapter 8

Selfless Giving

Acts 4:32, *“Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.” (ESV)*

One of the secrets for the tremendous growth of the early church was that the people had a change of heart from being a self-centred to selfless people. All of them willingly gave up what was theirs, and no one claimed anything to be their own.

The main purpose and function of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer is that our hearts be changed to become like that of our Lord Jesus. It is therefore essential, that those of us who claim to be filled and anointed with the Holy Spirit should become selfless as Jesus was. We must be willing to let go of all those things that make us self-seeking.

We read in **John 3:16**, *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son,” (NKJV).*

God’s immense love for humanity is what prompted Him to give ‘His only Begotten Son’. The Spirit of God is a Spirit of Love. God the Father did not just stop with simply saying He loves us so much, but displayed it by willingly sacrificing His Son for us. When Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, the voice of the Father in heaven attested it with these words *“this is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.”* **Matthew 3:17** (NKJV). However, when Jesus was in agony on the cross and cried out to His Father *“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me”* **Matthew 27:46** (NKJV) there was no answer from heaven; the reason was that God the Father had willingly made the ultimate sacrifice in giving of His only Son for the sins of the world. There was no greater act of love that could be performed to demonstrate the exceedingly great love of God for all of us.

If we study the parable of the Good Samaritan that Jesus shared in **Luke 10:25-37**, we will realize all that the Samaritan gave up to bless the wounded Jew. Samaritans and Jews never mingled with each other and also had no dealings with one another. The Samaritan was probably going on his donkey to carry out his own work, but when he saw a Jewish man wounded and in trouble, he didn’t for a moment think about withholding, but was willing to give all he had; the oil, the wine, his own donkey, his time and energy. He even changed the direction of his travel to get the bruised man safely to the inn and also gave the inn keeper money to take care of him. The love and compassion he had was so genuine, that he willingly gave up all that was his, to help a man whom his community disliked and considered as worthless.

Let’s see what Jesus Himself said about this in **Acts 20:35**, *“In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” (ESV)*

“It is more blessed [and brings greater joy] to give than to receive.” (AMP)

It might be a great feeling to receive, but if we were to compare between receiving and giving to see which is better, the word of God is clear-cut; it is indeed far more blessed to give than to receive, because it is only in giving that we receive greater joy. So, instead of constantly requesting for prayers for ourselves, expecting everyone to love us and always waiting for others to give to us, we should start looking to see how we can pray, love and bless others around us who are in far greater need. We must make a conscious decision to become loving and generous givers.

It's only when we have God's Spirit of love in our hearts, that we too will be transformed into a selfless and bestowing people. When our hearts become willing to give to others, the Lord will change us from being a self-centred people to those who genuinely care about others around us. Often we have gotten so used to receiving all the time, that it has become quite difficult to tune our minds to think how we can bless someone else. However, it is important that we consider all the ways we can to go out and bless others in need.

Joseph of Arimathea – How he Gave it All

Matthew 27:59-60, *“Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had carved out of the rock. After he rolled a large stone at the door of the tomb, he went away.”(CEB)*

All four Gospels record this incident about Joseph of Arimathea, who played a vital role in the burial of Jesus. We pick up various important points about Joseph from the four Gospel accounts. Joseph of Arimathea it says, placed the body of Jesus in the tomb that he had kept prepared for himself, rolled a large stone at the entrance of the tomb and then went away. We never hear about Joseph after this incident. However, this selfless act of Joseph was taken note of by God, and recorded in all four Gospels, reminding us that whatever is given selflessly is taken note of by our Father in Heaven.

Many people seek recognition and praise for every little act of kindness and generosity, but we must remember that whatever we give to others, be it our love, our time, our energy, our finances, resources or whatever else it may be, the Lord is surely observing and taking note of it.

In **Isaiah 53:9** it says, *“They intended to bury him with criminals, but he ended up in a rich man's tomb, because he had committed no violent deeds, nor had he spoken deceitfully.” (NET)*

Isaiah had prophesied nearly 700 years ago, about the fact that a rich man would give up his tomb for Jesus to be buried. The intention of the Romans and Jewish leaders who crucified Jesus was to make Jesus look a criminal, and that's why they even hung him on a cross between two criminals. However, God had prepared the heart of a man named Joseph, who was instrumental in preventing them from carrying out this devious plan and giving Jesus a respectful burial in his own new tomb.

Who was this Joseph?

In **Matthew 27:57**, it is recorded that, *“In the evening a rich man named Joseph arrived. He was from the city of Arimathea and had become a disciple of Jesus.”* (GW)

Mark 15:43, *“Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent and respected member of the Council (Sanhedrin, Jewish High Court), who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God.”* (AMP)

Luke 23:50, *“Now there was a man named Joseph who was a member of the council. He was a good and righteous man.”*(CEB)

John 19:38, *“Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one because he feared the Jewish authorities.”* (CEB)

From the above mentioned verses in the four Gospels, we ascertain that Joseph was a rich man. He was a good and righteous man. He was a disciple of Jesus but a secret one. He was also a prominent and respected member of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin or Council was the highest judicial body which comprised of 71 Jewish leaders. So, Joseph being a member of this Sanhedrin, held a key and prominent place.

Being a member of the Sanhedrin meant, that Joseph was well versed with the Old Testament Scriptures. The purpose of the Sanhedrin was to determine the time of the coming of the Messiah, and they also awaited the coming of the Kingdom of God. However, over time, they were so engrossed in their traditions and positions, that they forgot the very purpose of their existence. Joseph was probably a motivated and hard-working man to have been elected to be part of the Sanhedrin. The fact that he had a new tomb reserved for his own burial, points to the evidence that he had given forethought even to matters pertaining to his death.

Joseph had apparently seen and heard about Jesus and that is why he had become His disciple. However, he was probably so caught up with his position as a leader of the Sanhedrin, and also in another place it says, *‘he was afraid of the Jews’* that he decided to stay a secret disciple of Jesus.

In **1 John 4:18** *“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has punishment. He who fears is not made perfect in love.”* (WEB)

Something happened to Joseph when he witnessed the cruel and painfully agonizing death of Jesus on the cross. Suddenly his love for Jesus overcame the fear and self that had gripped him all along.

In **Mark 15:43**, it says, *“He boldly went in to Pilate, and asked for Jesus’ body.”*(WEB). The man who was believing Jesus in secret, went boldly to Pilate and asked him to hand over the body of Jesus to him.

Many people are still living in fear of their families and relatives that they refuse to take a stand to follow Jesus. As long as we are not consumed by love for the Lord Jesus, we will

continue to live and be gripped by every kind of fear. Only when we experience the Love of Jesus in a real way we will not fear but be filled with boldness.

Matthew 27:59, says, *“Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth,”* (WEB).

Being a devout Jew and also a member of the Sanhedrin, Joseph was bound by tradition. For a Jew to touch the body of a dead person would have made him defiled. Jesus became so important to Joseph that the traditions no longer seem to make any sense to him that he was willing to personally take the body of Jesus, wrap it with his own hands and place it in his own tomb.

When we like Joseph can understand and comprehend the magnitude of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, only then will we step out and be willing to lay aside all our traditions that hold us back from being true followers of Jesus.

In **Matthew 27:60** we read, *“He laid it in his own new tomb, which he had carved out of the rock.”*

Joseph who was holding back all along was now willing to lay it all down for Jesus. His self, his position and his prominence meant nothing. He had come to a point where he was willing to give up for Jesus the very tomb that he had prepared and kept for himself.

The Lord is calling us to become givers like Joseph was. Some of us are scared that if we give to others, we will lose what we have. But the opposite is true. We should remember the parable of the rich fool, who thought he could keep storing up a lot for himself and finally lost his soul. The Lord referred to him as ‘a fool’ because he was so self-centred that he gained worldly wealth but forfeited his own soul.

We can give our love, time, money, energy, concern and prayers for other around us. When we give more of our time to the Lord, His word and work we will find everything else will fall into place.

We must also die to ourselves and constantly remind ourselves that as long as we are self-seeking we cannot seek the things of God, nor can we accomplish anything meaningful for the Lord.

The early church was in constant anticipation of the second coming of the Lord Jesus. They often prayed and said ‘Maranatha’ which means ‘come Lord Jesus’. Only we live with the same expectation and eagerness of Christ’s return will we be able to lead selfless lives. Only as we do so will we hold on to those things that will really matter to the Lord and not be engrossed in the temporary material things of this world. It does not mean that we live a monastic life, we do need family, finance, place to stay and other things but our mind and heart will not be only set on these things the whole time. Our desire will be to be a true givers and always seek to be a blessing to others around us. Let us seek earnestly to be perfected in the love of God.

In **Matthew 7: 24-27** Jesus spoke about two houses. Both houses looked alike but one was built on rock and the other on sand. The real test was when the storm came. The house on the sand was destroyed, but the one on the rock stood firm. Jesus admonishes us to be wise and be those who build on the rock; we do so only when we listen to the word and put it into practice. Let's decide to be doers of the word and not hearers only. Let us on the basis of this passage decide to give up our self-seeking and selfishness and sincerely seek to be generous givers who will truly be a blessing to others.

Hand of God

Chapter 9

Breaking Bread

In **Acts 2:46** we read, *“So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were sharing food with joy and simplicity of heart,”* (EMTV)

As we continue to study the life of the early church, we recognize that the hand of God rested powerfully on them and they increased numerically. The believers in the early church were spiritually strong and hence a threat to the evil one. We have been considering several reasons that attributed to their growth and strength and one vital aspect that enhanced this was that they broke bread from house to house or had communion regularly.

What was the significance of breaking bread or communion?

There are some misconceptions about the practice of breaking of bread as something to be observed only on a Sunday, that one has to be holy during the communion and later one can go out and live any way they want to. This sort of a misunderstanding stems from the fact, that many have not understood the true meaning and significance of breaking of bread, and also because they are not aware as to the reason for which the Lord instituted it in the first place. The early church on the other hand, were well informed and understood the depth of this celebration, and so they were not only strengthened in their inner beings, but also impacted the society resulting in revival and growth.

In **Exodus 2:23**, we read, *“Years passed, and the king of Egypt died. But the Israelites continued to groan under their burden of slavery. They cried out for help, and their cry rose up to God.”*(NLT)

The people of Israel were in slavery to the Egyptians. Their slavery and bondage was so intense and gruesome that they cried out to the Lord in their distress. The Lord heard their cry for help and sent Moses to deliver them from the cruel hands of the Egyptians.

Today people are in bondage to many things; to debts, bad habits, sickness, anger, hatred, jealousy etc. When God created us He had a plan and purpose for each one of us. Whatever comes in the way of fulfilling that plan and purpose of God for our lives is a bondage. The Lord’s design for our lives is always for our best and it’s only when we are freed from everything that enslaves, can we effectuate the real purpose for which the Lord created us.

Who were these Israelites who were in bondage?

God’s promise to Abraham in **Genesis 12:2**, *“And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.”* (ESV)

When the Lord called Abraham, He promised him that He would make him into a great nation, would bless him and make his name so great that through him many nations will be blessed. The descendants of Abraham were the Israelites and so the promise was theirs as

well, but they were in a pathetic condition in bondage to the Egyptians. The reason for this was not that the promise of God failed, but that it could not be fulfilled because of their lack of faith and obedience. The life of slavery was grim and appalling. They had no freedom to do or live the way they wanted to, but were in total oppression to their masters. From morning to night they were enslaved to execute what was ordered by their masters and could see no progress whatsoever.

If we were to relate this to our lives, the implication is that if we allow anything of anyone, for instance money, habits, relationships etc., to have mastery over us, we too will be ensnared and entangled into a life of bondage and enslavement. However, if we like the people of Israel, sincerely cry out to the Lord, He will surely give heed and liberate us. When God promises deliverance we must remember that He will accomplish it not matter how impossible the situation or how long we have been in that hopeless condition because He is always faithful to His promises. However, it's only when one lives in obedience to God's word and His will, can those promises be realized in our lives. It's not enough to just hear the word of God, but we must decide to obey and do exactly what the Lord wants us to do in our day to day lives, for only then will we see God's promises actualized and His blessings materialize in our lives.

In **Exodus 12:1-2**, *“While the Israelites were still in the land of Egypt, the LORD gave the following instructions to Moses and Aaron: From now on, this month will be the first month of the year for you.” (NLT)*

As long as the people of Israel were in slavery, days, months and years made no sense to them. Their life was one of drudgery and travail with no relief in sight whatsoever. The first thing the Lord does as He begins the process of liberation for them is, He puts them on track by giving them a calendar and initiates the first month of the year. It was as though God was starting them off afresh, on this great journey of deliverance, and he was offering them a brand new start.

Instead of living a life of daily grind, being satisfied with the meaningless routine, we must so live a life of purpose and meaning as the Lord willed for us, that when we come to the end of our lives we will be able to say that we have indeed accomplished the purposes of God in our life time. We must allow the Lord to begin this new journey in our lives.

Most people are sentimental about the beginning of the New Year and so they consider it mandatory to go to church just once a year and seek God's blessings. There are others who are satisfied with attending Church on special occasions like New Year, Christmas and Easter. There are still others who will go only on the first Sunday of every month just to take part in the communion. However, when we observe the strength of the early church we see that they met daily, fellowshiped regularly and broke break from house to house.

In **Exodus 12:3** we read, *“Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month, each man is to take a lamb for his family one lamb for the household.” (TLV)*

In **Exodus 12:5** – *“a male, one year, unblemished”*

In **Exodus 12:6**, says, *“Then, on the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, the whole community of Israel will kill the animals.”*(GNB)

In **Exodus 12:7-8**, we read, *“They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.”* (NRSVA)

The command of the Lord to the people of Israel was to take a male lamb, a year old without any blemish to their house on the tenth day of the first month. The lamb became a part of the family for four days and on the fourteenth day in the evening the lamb was to be killed. Their hearts must have been broken as they killed the lamb, but they did not question but obeyed because they were wanting their freedom from their life of slavery and bondage. They were then to take some of the blood of the lamb and put it on the two doorposts and lintels of their houses. That night they were to eat the meat roasted on the fire, along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

In **Exodus 12:23** we read *“For the LORD will pass through to strike down the Egyptians; when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over that door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you down.”*

What was God’s purpose for this event in the life of the Israelites?

The Lord was delivering the people of Israel from slavery and bondage to the Egyptians. That night was a memorable night. The unblemished lamb was a symbol of a sinless sacrifice. The blood on the door posts and lintels were an outward protection for the children of Israel. The meat and food was given so they could have the strength to continue on the long journey ahead of them. God was providing protection and provision for inner strength. The Lord does everything for a reason. They were instructed to eat unleavened bread. The unleavened bread was a sign of a sinless state that God desired for His people. They had to get rid of all the yeast from their houses symbolizing elimination of everything sinful.

This is what happened that night. The Lord came to strike down the Egyptians. As the angel of death passed by, whichever house had the blood of the lamb on their door and lintels escaped death. All those who by faith obeyed the instructions of the Lord were spared from death in the family. For all who disbelieved and disobeyed, there was death of the first born son in their homes. There was an unimaginable wailing and crying that arose that night. It was a night of life and deliverance for those who believed but one of death and sorrow for those who did not.

The sound that arose that day was like the sound of hell – an unending agonizing sound. That historic night by the blood of the unblemished lamb, God broke the bonds of slavery for the people of Israel. God broke the strength of the Egyptians and delivered his people. This was the great Passover. The people of Israel were instructed by the Lord to celebrate this Passover Festival year after year. As the families celebrated this historic event of God’s liberation for His people, it was the duty of the Father of the family to recite to his children

as they asked him the purpose for the celebration the entire story of God's great deliverance from the Egyptian slavery. The bitter herbs were eaten to share the painful and bitter experiences of the people of Israel who lived in bondage and slavery.

It's a good practice for parents to take time to have meals with their children and use the time to share the wonderful things that the Lord has done for us. It's an opportune time to share our testimonies of God's workings in our lives and to teach them about the Lord. It is our duty as parents to disciple our children and encourage them to be part of groups and fellowships that will make them grow spiritually.

As we look at the history of the people of Israel we will then understand why Jesus Himself was searching for a place to celebrate the Passover Festival. Jesus was Himself a Jew and knew the significance of this event in the life of the Israelites.

In **Luke 22:7-8** we read, *"The Day of Unleavened Bread came. This was the day when the Jews always killed the lambs for the Passover. Jesus said to Peter and John, "Go and prepare the Passover meal for us to eat." (ERV)*

As Jesus asked the disciples to prepare the Passover meal, they may have had many questions. Up until now they probably were used to celebrating the Passover festival with their families, but now they were preparing the Passover to commemorate it with Jesus. Jesus was however, observing this Passover differently.

In **Luke 22:19**, we read, *"And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." (EMTV)*

In **Luke 22:20** we read, *"Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you." (EMTV)*

Jesus was all of a sudden personalizing the Passover by telling His disciples that the bread is 'My Body' and the cup is "My Blood" of a New Covenant. It was just as God initiated a new month for the people of Israel, Jesus was now commencing a new beginning for all who will believe in Him.

Jesus became that sinless lamb without blemish, whom God the Father gave up so He could take on Himself the sins of all mankind. His sinless body (which the bread without yeast symbolizes) was broken, so we could be set free from all our sins, sickness, curses and bondages. It was a costly price Jesus had to pay with His own sinless life, so we can partake of this New Covenant where Jesus Himself became the Passover Lamb, whose blood was shed so we could pass from death to life.

It's only when we come to the Lord and believe that the blood of Jesus indeed can cleanse us, will we be set free from all our sins and every kind of bondage. When one comes into this New Covenant relationship with the Lord, he or she can be freed to live the abundant life that the Lord has promised for us.

In **1 Corinthians 5:7** reads, *“Take away, then, the old leaven, so that you may be a new mass, even as you are without leaven. For Christ has been put to death as our Passover.”* (BBE)

Jesus the sinless Passover lamb was sacrificed for the sins of the whole world so that we can be transformed into a new creation, cleansed, holy and become that new unleavened lump whom the Lord can take and use. When one comes into this personal relationship with Jesus we must remember that the enemy is not pleased and will pursue us to seek to ensnare and bind us again.

That’s what happened to the People of Israel. As they left Egypt with joy, they were pursued by the mighty Egyptian army whose only aim was to capture and enslave them again. As the Israelites stood facing the Red Sea ahead of them, and with the Egyptian army in hot pursuit it seemed like the end had come. They cried to the Lord and the Lord parted the mighty sea with just the breath of His nostrils. The people of Israel walked through the Red Sea by faith and triumphed. The Egyptian army thought that they too could do the same and took the same path through the sea only to be swallowed up and destroyed by the mighty waters. The Egyptian they saw that day the Lord said they would never see again.

In **1 Corinthians 10:2** Paul refers to the Israelites passing through the Red Sea as an imagery of a person who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, repents and is passed through the waters of baptism. It is important therefore that for one to come into this New Covenant with the Lord Jesus that they not only believe and accept Him as their King and Master but must also be baptized.

That is the significance of the communion or breaking of bread that we celebrate. Every time we participate, we do so by faith, reminding ourselves that it cost Jesus His precious, sinless life and that He took our sins so we can live a life of freedom from every sin and bondage. It was this tremendous truth that the early church understood that made them break bread from house to house, which in turn brought multitudes into the Kingdom of God.

Hand of God

Chapter 10

Insignificant but Important People

We read in **1 Corinthians 1:25**, *“This foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength.”*(NLT)

As human beings, the two aspects of life that we seek and pursue after are worldly knowledge and strength. However, the truth is that if we were to simply function on the basis of our own wisdom and strength we will hardly achieve anything. On the other hand if the Lord were to work in and through us, we will observe as we have studied in the previous chapters, that multitudes will be added to the Kingdom of God.

In **1 Corinthians 1:25** Paul highlights the fact that even the so called foolish plans of God are far wiser than all of man's wisdom and His weakness far outweighs man's strength. We will in this chapter look at the insignificant people that the Lord chose, to fulfil His great plans, many of whom were anonymous.

It's only when we as children of God do what is required of us to do, that the Lord can do His part and perform wonders in our lives. It is erroneous for us to think that we should do nothing and the Lord will do everything for us. For instance, for Lazarus to come out of the grave, the people had to roll the stone away. In order for Jesus to turn the water into wine, the servants had to fill the jars with water and only then they could experience the miracle. God is willing to intervene and accomplish the impossible, but often we hinder God's blessings by not cooperating and doing our part.

The feeble lamb to break powerful Pharaoh

Previously, we considered in detail as to how the people of Israel in their bondage were crying out to the Lord in their distress to have mercy on them and save them. The solution that the Lord gave them might have seemed foolish to them. He instructed them to take a one year old male lamb without blemish and sacrifice it. The lamb as we all know is a gentle and feeble animal. Pharaoh on the other hand was a strong and mighty king. The Lord used the sacrifice of a meek lamb, to gain victory over powerful Pharaoh. That is God's ways; God uses the weak things to nullify the strong one.

Sometimes when we go to the Lord with our problems, He may counsel us to do something that may not fit our pre-planned notion or ideas as to the way the problems should be solved. At such times, it is only necessary that we heed the Lord's advice and do exactly as He instructs us, for He alone is all wise and knows exactly what is right and best for any difficulty we may face.

When the weak, useless and worthless are placed in the hands of God, He can do the amazing with them. That is the reason none of us should feel we are worthless or nobody because, the Lord chooses to use such people for His greater glory. Look for example at

Peter, the disciple of Jesus, who denied Jesus three times. He was a scared and timid man but the Lord strengthened him and filled him with His Holy Spirit. What happened as a result was that when the very same Peter stood up and spoke God's word boldly, 3000 people were added to the Kingdom of God in one day. The one who is in us is a great God, and He can do things far beyond our thinking and understanding if we are willing to submit to His will.

Satan the enemy had dominion and rule over us, but because Jesus the Lamb of God shed His precious blood on our behalf, He abolished and destroyed the power of Satan over our lives. We are now able to live victorious lives as children of God.

The man who carried a water jar

Mark 14:12, *"On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, Jesus' disciples asked Him, "Where do You want us to go to prepare the Passover meal for You?"*

Mark 14:13, *"Jesus said to two of the disciples, "Go into the city, where you will meet a man carrying a jar of water. Follow him," (CEV)*

The Jews celebrated the Passover Festival year after year. They observed every detail of the first Passover event as a reminder of the mighty way the Lord delivered them from the cruel hand of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Jesus being a Jew Himself, wanted to celebrate the Passover. He called two of His disciples and asked them to go into Jerusalem to meet and follow a man who would be carrying a jar of water. Jesus was still outside of Jerusalem, and He knew that if He went into Jerusalem, the Jews and the religious leaders were on the look out to find Jesus and have Him arrested and killed. However, it was very important for Jesus to celebrate the Passover, as this was the time when He would announce to His disciples that He was indeed the Passover Lamb who was going to be sacrificed for the sins of the world. The sign given to the disciples, was that they follow a man who would be carrying a water jar. In the Jewish society it was more common to see women with water jars and so the uncommon sight of a man carrying the water jar was what led the disciples to the house where the Passover was to be prepared. We see how this man whose name has not been mentioned, became the important link only because in his small way, he was doing what the Lord wanted him to do at that point of time.

Whatever the Lord commands us to do, if we do so willingly, we too can become a significant part of God's plan and purposes. So often we are unable to be those tools that the Lord can use only because we are so worried about people's opinions of us and are more concerned about pleasing others than the Lord Himself.

The man who gave his room for the Passover

In **Mark 14:15**, we read, *"The owner will take you upstairs and show you a large room furnished and ready for you to use. Prepare the meal there."* (CEV)

Jesus told his disciples to follow the man who was carrying the water jar and to go to the house that he would enter. They were to ask the owner of that house to show them the

place where the Jesus could celebrate the Passover with His disciples. Sure enough they enter the house and the owner willingly shows them the room ready and furnished where they could prepare for the Passover. They required a suitable place, the Lord had prepared both the man and the place for the same.

Here was a man, anonymous again who welcomed Jesus and his disciples to use his house and thereby was instrumental in being a part of God's great plan of salvation. He must have known that the Jews were on the lookout for Jesus, but he was willing to take the risk and allow Jesus to celebrate the best Passover ever. Right there in his house the greatest revelation was made; that Jesus was indeed the Passover Lamb of God who was going to be sacrificed for the sins of all mankind.

Isn't it an awesome thought, that even before we go to the Lord with our needs and problems, He already has a solution at hand? When we are willing to offer what we have to the Lord without hesitation, we too become those channels through whom God can accomplish His divine plans and purposes.

The man who gave his donkey and colt

Matthew 21:2-3, *He said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you. You will find a donkey tied there and a colt with it. Untie them, and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them. That person will send them at once."* (GW)

The Lord was in need of a donkey to make His entry into Jerusalem. He instructs the disciples to go to the village, untie the donkey and a colt and bring it to Him. The man who owned them both, on knowing it was for Jesus, willingly sent them to Him. When most people concentrate on the triumphant entry of Jesus, and still others even speak highly about the donkey Jesus rode on, no one takes time to think about a man, who willingly gave his donkey and colt without a moment's hesitation. It was a valuable asset to him that he willingly gave to Jesus.

It is always a far greater blessing to give than to receive. We may often consider what we are able to give as insignificant, but let us remember that every little thing that is given to God, however small or inconsequential it may seem, plays an important part in God's divine plan. Also, nothing that we do for the Lord, goes unnoticed by Him.

The lad who gave up his lunch

In **John 6:9**, we read, *"There's a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish—but what's that for so many?"* (TLV)

When Jesus wanted to feed over 5000 people who were hungry, it was young boy who willingly gave up his lunch of five loaves and two fishes, who made the miracle a reality. By giving up his lunch, he was expressing the tremendous faith he had in Jesus. His willingness to part with his lunch, turned out to be a huge blessing for over 5000 people who ate and were satisfied.

When we give up those little things into God's hands He will always do the greater things for us and make us a blessing to many.

The mother who refused to give up her baby

Pharaoh had commanded all the Israelite families to throw their new born baby boys into the Nile River. There was one woman who had faith in God who refused to do that. She was the mother of Moses. She knew that the Lord had given the baby to her and she was unwilling to throw him into the river like many other mothers did. She kept the baby in a basket and let him out into the river. Pharaoh's daughter herself sees baby Moses and adopts him as her son. By doing what she could do, Moses' mother not only saved baby Moses from death, but also played her part to the astounding work of the Lord letting Moses grow up in Pharaoh's Palace.

Such little acts of faith can accomplish much for the Kingdom of God.

The servant girl who helped her ailing master

It says in **2Kings 5:2-3**, *"In one of their raids against Israel, the Syrians had carried off a little Israelite girl, who became a servant of Naaman's wife. One day she said to her mistress, "I wish that my master could go to the prophet who lives in Samaria! He would cure him of his disease."* (GNB)

She was a young Israelite girl who was captured and brought to be a servant for Naaman's wife in Syria. Her situation was definitely not the best. However, she had faith to believe that the Lord could use her to be a blessing to her master Naaman. Her little introduction of Naaman to Elisha, not only cured him of his leprosy but also made him a believer in the Lord. Though a slave girl, she must have had a good testimony at her work place, for her Master and Mistress to heed her suggestion and go seeking after Elisha.

It is important for us to those who bear a good testimony and must also be those who make use of every opportunity to share about the Lord no matter where we are placed. Let us never shy away from sharing or doing something for the Lord under the premise that we are insignificant. God is not a respecter of people, nor does He show favouritism. If we are willing to do anything, maybe give away something, open up our home or just share a testimony the Lord will use it to build His Kingdom through us. Instead of constantly waiting on the Lord to bless us, we should be those who desire to bless others in every possible way.

Let's recap on all the people the Lord used, most of whose names are not known. Firstly, the people of Israel who might not have had much money and resources and who probably only had their lambs, which they willingly sacrificed. The man who simply carried a water jar, the man who opened up his house for, the man who willingly gave his donkey, the boy who gave up his lunch, a lady who didn't give up her baby and a young girl who gave a little introduction. May the Lord help us to be those who give willingly and generously. We must always remember that we are not insignificant, nothing we do is inconsequential in God's eyes, when done for His glory and we will surely receive the blessings due us at the right time.

Hand of God

Chapter 11

What is in your Hand?

1. The hand of God

In **Exodus 15:6**, we read *“Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power.”*(NRSV)

God’s hand is not only ‘glorious in power’ but as we read in another version His hand is also ‘majestic in power’. The question that may arise in one’s mind as we read this verse is that, ‘If the hand of the Lord that is glorious and majestic or in other words strong and powerful rests on us, why then do we have to face so many trials, struggles and difficulties in our lives?’ If we delve deeper into God’s word, we will be able to analyse our lives in the light of God and His word, and understand what needs to be set right in our lives, so we can live the way God intended for us to live and also experience His mighty hand at work in every situation.

2. The hand of the enemy

In the same chapter we also read about another hand that is at work in **Exodus 15:9** *“The enemy said, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil, my desire shall have its fill of them. I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.’”* (NRSV)

The hand of the enemy has only one intention and that is to destroy us. Sometimes when faced with sickness, debt or other shameful situations we despair that these problems will overcome us, and the reason for this is only because we do not realize that when the powerful hand of God rests on us, nothing that the enemy does can devastate us.

In **Exodus 15:9** we read, Exodus 15:6, (2nd part) we read, *“Your right hand, O LORD, shattered the enemy.”* (NRSV)

The aim and purpose of Satan is to destroy God’s people. However, the assurance we have from the Lord is that His powerful right hand alone can shatter or destroy the enemy completely. Often when in some difficult or challenging situation, we wonder why things are so complicated for us. If we were to evaluate ourselves, we might realize that the problem often lies entirely with us. Only when learn to submit to the Lord and choose to do what He wants us to do, will we experience God’s mighty hand at work in ways beyond our understanding. He will most certainly intervene, and thwart every plan of the enemy in our lives.

3. Man’s hand

In **Exodus 3:10**, God told Moses, *“So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.”* (NRSV)

Moses was tending his Father-in-law's sheep in the wilderness for forty long years. God's purpose for Moses was not to just keep watch over Sheep. The Lord had chosen Moses to be the man whom He would use to deliver the people of Israel with His own mighty hands, from the cruel hands of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. God's plan and purpose for Moses was far greater than he had ever imagined. Moses was content with his life of tending sheep but God had chosen him to be the deliverer for God's people.

If we find ourselves caught up with the mundane, ourselves, our families and our work all the time, it's a clear sign that we are leading a selfish and self-centred life. We have forgotten that the Lord has a purpose for us, that He wishes to accomplish through us. God's ultimate purpose is for everyone to be saved and set them free from the clutches of Satan, and all of us have a part to play to fulfil this divine plan and purpose of God.

None of us should be satisfied with the fact that, we are saved from sin and are now members of the church. The purpose God chose us is that we should go out and share the Gospel with others who are lost, and bring them also into His fold. When Jesus called the twelve disciples, he called them to leave their professions not simply to follow Him, but to go out and lead others into God's Kingdom. When Jesus spoke about His impending death on the cross, the disciples were unwilling to let go of Him. However, Jesus encouraged them that it was only in His going away that they would receive the Holy Spirit, who would empower them to be His mighty witnesses. Later, the disciples took the great commission of Jesus seriously and went out into all the world and preached the gospel. The Apostles also were scattered and wherever they went they shared the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It was only because every one of them obeyed the word of God, that we have had an opportunity to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ and have been saved.

Let us never forget that the primary reason God has chosen us to be His children is so we can go out, and deliver those who are in darkness and bondage and bring them in to be part of God's family.

We read in **Exodus 4:1**, *"Then Moses said to God, "But the Israelites will not believe me when I tell them that you sent me. They will say, 'The LORD did not appear to you.'"* (ERV)

When God called Moses to go to Pharaoh and deliver the Israelites, Moses cited several reasons why he could not obey God's call. One of his speculations was, that the people of Israel would not believe that God had indeed sent him to deliver them.

When the Lord calls us to do something, we can be assured that He considers us capable of fulfilling the task that He commissions us to do. The Lord will never expect something from us that is beyond our strength and potential. We may have numerous excuses why we don't do many things for the Lord. Instead of rationalizing, we must decide to do all that God wants us to accomplish through us. Let's choose to be in constant fellowship and prayer with other believers, and overcome all those hindrances that prevent us from achieving all of God's plans and purposes for our lives.

What was in Moses' hand?

In **Exodus 4:2**, we read, *“And the LORD said unto him, What is that in thine hand? (KJV)* When Moses made the excuse that the People of Israel would not believe that it was the Lord who sent him, God asked Moses, *‘What is in your hand?’* All that Moses had at that point in the wilderness, was his shepherd’s staff.

What was in their hands?

David had a sling (1 Samuel 17) in his hand which slayed a mighty giant. Samson had a raw jaw bone of a donkey (Judges 15) with which he defeated the Philistines. The poor widow (Luke 21) had two coins in her hands all of which she gave away. The Lord took note of the sacrifice she made by giving it all to the Lord. Mary (John 12) broke the alabaster jar of expensive perfume on Jesus’ feet, it was probably all the inheritance she had in her hand. When Mary did so, she had the greatest revelation that she was indeed preparing the Lord Jesus for his death and burial something that even His disciples failed to understand and comprehend. Tabitha a widow (Acts 9) only had a needle in her hand, with which she clothed so many poor and needy people. She was such a blessing, that the Lord raised her up again from the dead to continue to serve the poor.

Whatever is in our hands, however insignificant it may seem, if we willingly give it to the Lord He can take it and use it mightily. Let us use all that God has entrusted to us for His glory. If we can lead one person to the Lord, the joy we will have is nothing compared to all the treasures this world offers. If it means sharing the word, we should share whatever we know and the Lord will multiply it and help us understand and expound deeper truths from His word. All that the Lord has given us is only for the building up of His Kingdom. Whatever is done for the Lord, however small it may seem, never goes unnoticed by Him. Often the problem lies with us in that, we don’t fully comprehend all the Lord has entrusted into our hands.

In **Exodus 4:2**, we read, *“And the LORD said unto him (Moses), “What is that in thine hand?”And he said, A rod.The LORD said, “Throw it on the ground.When Moses threw it down, it turned into a snake, and he ran away from it.” (KJV)*

When God met Moses in the wilderness all that He had in his hand was ‘A rod’. However that was more than enough for the Lord to use to demonstrate His power and might. God asked Moses to throw the staff down. He must have thrown his staff down many times earlier, but that day it was very different. When he obeyed the Lord’s command and threw his rod down, it became a snake.

When God asks us do something, it may seem mundane and ordinary, a thing that we have done in the past, but when we in obedience do what He says, we will see the mighty wonders and miracles that He can perform in and through us.

When Jesus told Peter to throw the net into the deep, he might have thought to himself, ‘I am a seasoned fisherman who knows all about fish and fishing and Jesus is just a carpenter.’ However, he believed and obeyed Jesus and what happened was unimaginable. They got such a great catch of fish that their nets almost broke. It was only the word of God and absolute obedience to His word that made a dramatic difference. When Joshua walked

around the walls of Jericho, it was an ordinary event, but because it was done in obedience to God's word there was a mighty victory.

When the Lord tells us to do something, we just obey and do it with implicit obedience. We do not know what will happen as a result. When Moses threw the staff down he did not know that the staff would become a snake, nor did Peter know that the nets would be full of fish, neither did Joshua know that the walls of Jericho would come crumbling down. They simply had to obey and the Lord did the miraculous that astounded everyone.

All of God's deeds are marvellous but can be experienced only if we are willing to obey His word. God in His great wisdom often does not tell us beforehand what is going to happen when we obey His word.

God gave Gideon victory with just 300 men in his army. When Jesus and Peter had to pay tax, Jesus asked Peter to catch a fish and when he did so, he was astonished to find the exact tax money in the mouth of the fish. When a blind man came to Jesus, Jesus made a mud paste, applied it on his eyes and told him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. As the blind went in obedience and washed in the pool, he received his sight.

Whatever we have with us when we are willing to give it to the Lord; our time, money, resources, talents etc., The Lord will take it and use it for His great glory.

In the latter part of **Exodus 4:3**, we read, *"When Moses threw it down, it turned into a snake, and he ran away from it."* (KJV)

As Moses threw the staff down he had no clue what would happen. A dead rod became a live snake and Moses fled from it in fear. Moses was brought up in Pharaoh's Palace, with all the pomp and might of Egypt. However, after he fled Egypt he spent forty years in the wilderness, just tending sheep. It was only when the rod turned into a snake and power of God was manifested so mightily, that Moses realized that God was serious about calling him to go back to Egypt to save the Israelites. As Moses saw the snake, all that he could probably picture was cruel Pharaoh, on whose head was the symbol of a snake. As a shepherd in the wilderness, Moses must have encountered lots of snakes but this one was different, it was the demonstration of God's mighty power that filled Moses with fear.

Only God can give life to that which is dead and no one else can turn a dead and dry rod into a living snake. So also for all those who are dead in their sins, Jesus alone is able to give a brand new life. In order to receive it we must be willing to throw away all that we hold dear, and come to the Lord believing that He alone is able to save us.

In **Exodus 4:4**, we read, *"And the LORD said to Moses, Put forth thy hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand."* (Webster)

Generally no one ever catches a snake by the tail, as one could get stung by its venom. When God told Moses to take it up by the tail, he did so and the living snake became a dead staff in the hands of Moses.

Let us remember that Satan is the defeated foe. When the head of a snake is crushed, only the tail wags. So also it is with Satan. He is a defeated foe whom Jesus has crushed by His death, burial and resurrection. We are not in a war with the Devil. The Lord who is in us is far more powerful and the enemy has no power over us. Instead of fearing Satan, we must resist him and he will flee from us. God will give us victory in all areas of our lives.

Let us be reminded then that the hand of the Lord is glorious and mighty. The hand of the enemy only seeks to bring destruction. But for us to experience the powerful hand of God in our lives, we must in total obedience do what the Lord says, and willingly surrender everything in our hands, however small or insignificant into God's Almighty hands, so He can take it all and use it for His great glory and the extension of His Kingdom.

Hand of God

Chapter 12

Sowing Hands

In **Exodus 14:15-16** we read, *“The LORD said to Moses, “Why do you cry to Me? Tell the sons of Israel to move forward [toward the sea]. As for you, lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, so that the sons of Israel may go through the middle of the sea on dry land.”* (AMP)

In Moses’ hands

This is a familiar incident from the history of the people of Israel. The Israelites are fleeing from Egypt, and are faced with the Red Sea ahead of them and the Egyptian army in hot pursuit of them. As they face this serious situation, they cry out to the Lord to deliver them from this impending peril which seemed the most acceptable thing for them to do when in such a crisis. The Lord’s response to Moses was *“Why do you cry to Me?”* The Lord instructs Moses to lift up the staff and stretch out his hand over the sea so that it would divide and make a way for the people of Israel to go through. The Lord’s directive to Moses and the people of Israel was simple; God was affirming the fact that He had given the authority to do the miraculous into the hands of Moses and all he had to do was to believe and execute the same. The power and authority to part the Red Sea was truly in the hands of the Lord but the Lord gives that authority to Moses, so that the multitudes of Israelites would also know that God had placed Moses in that position of authority. It was only then, that they too would be willing to submit to the leadership and authority of Moses.

We too must recognize that our hands are not ordinary hands, and that the Lord has invested His extraordinary power into our hands. Often we don’t recognize this authority that the Lord has entrusted to us and keep calling out to the Lord not realizing the potential inside of us. If we are willing to stretch out our hands with faith in the Lord, we too will see signs and wonders.

Whenever the Apostles in the early church stretched out their hands and prayed, the power of the Holy Spirit came down on all who were there and the Lord worked mighty miracles through them. We too have the same power of God in our lives as did the Apostles. If we exercise that anointing and place our hands by faith on the sick or pray for a person who is facing an adverse situation, the Lord is able to intervene to do the miraculous and bring healings and deliverances. So also when we have issues related to our children, we should learn to claim God’s promises and pray with faith over every things that concerns us about them. God’s word is full of promises that we must personalize and claim for our every point of need.

As long as we are hesitant to exercise our faith and are unwilling to perform what the Lord instructs us to, we will not witness the mighty acts of God in and through us. Whatever is placed in our hands, we should learn to use it by faith and when we do so the Lord will be glorified through our lives.

In Isaac's Hands

In **Genesis 26:1** we read, *"Now there was a famine in the land [of Canaan], besides the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham."*(AMP)

In **Genesis 26:12** it says, *"Isaac planted crops in that land. In that same year he harvested a hundred times as much as he had planted because the Lord had blessed him."* (GW)

There was a severe famine in the land of Canaan during the days of Isaac. As the situation turns grim, Isaac thinks it best to move out of Canaan and go into Egypt as he heard that there was food in Egypt. God's instruction to Isaac was to not move to Egypt but stay on in Canaan. Isaac decided to obey the Lord. All that Isaac had in his hands was a little grain. Instead of using it all for food for his family and himself, Isaac decided to do something by faith and decides to sow some of the grain that was in his hand. At the time of severe famine when every situation was unfavourable, by faith he decided to sow the seeds and the outcome was that the Lord blessed him and he harvested a crop a hundred fold that same year.

In times of crisis when we go to the Lord, we must be willing to obey His word and remain the place that He has determined for us. It is in staying rooted to the place where the Lord wants us to be, will we be able to bear much fruit. Only when we are willing to sow will we reap a harvest. We can be people of two categories, ones who give or ones who receive. When we sow generously we will surely harvest abundantly. If we are constantly seeking to be on the receiving end, it only implies that we have not come to the place of sowing as the Lord expects of us and as long as we are not sowing we can never experience God's blessings in our lives.

One of the secrets for the growth of the early church, was that they received much and gave much more, which was why the Lord blessed them beyond measure. They went out into the world and placed their hands on the sick, and the sick received healing. They went out to preach the Gospel and thousands responded and came into the Kingdom of God.

Let us be like the early church believers and choose to be those who will go out to sow love and mercy. Let us pray for those outside the church. It is only when we reach out to those who are in various kinds of needs, and by faith stretch out our hands in prayer over them, can we see the demonstration of God's power in their lives.

We read in **2 Corinthians 9:10**, *"He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness."*(NRSV)

There is an incredible truth in the above mentioned verse. God gives seed only to the one who is willing to sow. For one who is content to just receive, He will only give bread for food. The reason God gives more to the sower, is so that he will multiply the seeds and thereby increase his harvest.

The multitude of more than 5000 whom Jesus fed with the five loaves and two fish, after they had had their fill, they just returned to their homes and a little later they were also part of the crowd that wanted to crucify Jesus. One of the reason for much of the discord, disharmony and politics within the church today, is because the purpose of existence has been forgotten. We have consumed so much and have forgotten to sow and give as the Lord intended for us to do. Let us pray much, that the Lord will make us those who are willing to go out and sow and not be content with just receiving and consuming. Food that we receive will perish in a short while, but when God places seed in our hands and we are willing to sow, we will reap a great benefit and harvest.

In the hands of the widow from Zarephath

In **1 Kings 17:7-9**, we read *“After a while, the stream dried up because there had been no rain in the land. The Lord told him, Get up, go to Zarephath in Sidonian territory, and live there. I have already told a widow who lives there to provide for you.”*(NET)

In the above mentioned chapter we read about another famine. The stream that provided water for Elijah dried up because the land had no rain and now God instructed the prophet to go to Zarephath and look out for a widow, who would provide for him. She was a poor woman, with nothing in her hand.

Let’s read to see what she did have. In **1 Kings 17:12** She said, *“As certainly as the Lord your God lives, I have no food, except for a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. Right now I am gathering a couple of sticks for a fire. Then I’m going home to make one final meal for my son and myself. After we have eaten that, we will die of starvation.”* (NET)

All that she had in her hand was just a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. When Elijah requested for a drink of water and a piece of bread from the poor Widow, her response was one of despair. She told the prophet, the little I have is only enough for my son and me to eat and then wait for death. She had come to the end of her resources.

If we were to take a look at ourselves, we too may realize that each of us only have a little in our hands. That little could be God given talents, time, profession, income, family and so many other blessings and it’s up to us to choose to use it all on ourselves or sow these blessings so that they will bless others. That in turn will multiply and come back to us a hundred fold, helping us to sow more. If we are not willing to sow, the end that awaits us will only be death. Many believers are unwilling to sow what the Lord has committed to us, but it is only when we are ready to sow will we bring life to those around us. The greatest blessing of sowing is that we will reap the benefits, and so will all those around us.

We read in **1 Kings 17:13-14** Elijah said to her, *“Don’t be afraid. Go and do as you planned. But first make a small cake for me and bring it to me; then make something for yourself and your son. For this is what the Lord God of Israel says, ‘The jar of flour will not be empty and the jug of oil will not run out until the day the Lord makes it rain on the surface of the ground.’”* (NET)

The Prophet Elijah encourages the widow to lay aside her fears and instructs her to go and do as she planned, but he requested her to go and also bring him a small cake from the little flour and oil that she had. As she went home, she must have been in a dilemma; should she use the flour and oil to make cake so that she and son could eat and die, or should she obey the Prophet and be willing to make that cake and take it to him. She believed the word of the Prophet who said, *'The jar of flour will not be empty and the jug of oil will not run out until the day the Lord makes it rain on the surface of the ground.'* The widow decided to be a sower. God's word to her was clear, and the Prophet affirmed it but now it was in the hands of the widow to obey or not to. It was now in her hands to sow or just consume the little that was left. By her sowing, the Lord honoured her faith, and truly the Jar of flour did not get empty and the jar of oil never did run out.

A little later, the son of the woman got ill and died. By the widow's obedience to provide for the Prophet, she kept the Prophet alive all through the period of famine. Because the prophet lived, she got her dead son back to life.

If we want to see miracles in our life, our faith has to be tested and only when we pass the test will we see the mighty wonders of God. This is also our constant dilemma should we be caught up with ourselves or should we sow. All of us must by faith consciously decide to be those who sow. This lies entirely in our hands. Let us use all that God has placed in our hands, for His glory and use all of our talents and not bury them.

In a young boy's hands

When we think of the young lad who gave up his lunch of 5 loaves and 2 fish to the disciples, we can't help but wonder at the faith of his mother who packed the lunch for the young boy, probably knowing that he would have to spend many long hours listening to the words of Jesus. The Lord tests his disciples by asking them to find a way to feed the over 5000 people who were hungry and tired.

The disciple who found the boy's lunch and took it to Jesus must have also had tremendous faith that the Lord could do something miraculous with the small lunch. The young boy gave his lunch away with faith and the disciple also had much faith in the Lord. The little boy could have decided not to give his lunch to the disciple when he asked him for it. Generally, children will not part easily with anything that belongs to them. The faith in this young boy who was hearing the words of Jesus, started to grow in his heart. He decided that if he gave what he had to Jesus, he will not go back hungry and that the Lord could bless and use the little to bless the great crowds.

There are some of us who feel, that what we have in our hands is meagre. However, if we are willing to give it up, the Lord can take it and make it such a great blessing that we too will become partakers of the abundant blessings from the Lord. All of us can give many testimonies of the many blessings we received from the Lord; could be about healing, finances, and protection, provision etc. These testimonies are those shared by those who only are content to receive and not from those whose intention is to sow. However, the testimony of those who sow will be about, how they were used by the Lord to bless and restore others around them.

In Abraham's hand

When God wants to bless us He will first test our faith to see if we are willing to be those who sow willingly.

In **Genesis 22:2**, God said, *“Take your son—your only son, whom you love, Isaac—and go to the land of Moriah! Offer him up there as a burnt offering”* (NET)

Genesis 22:10 *“Then Abraham reached out his hand, took the knife, and prepared to slaughter his son.”* (NET)

Genesis 22:11 *“But the LORD’s angel called to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”* (NET)

God told Abraham to take ‘your son, your only son, whom you love’. God wanted Abraham to give up his son, knowing full well that Isaac was very precious to him. When the Lord started to speak to Abraham, he probably thought that God was going to bless Isaac just like He blessed him. Abraham would not have expected in the least that God would ask him to sacrifice the son of promise whom he loved dearly. Abraham was more than a hundred years old and his wife was way beyond child bearing, but he was willing to obey the Lord whole heartedly. He was willing to lay his son on the Altar and with a knife in his hand was ready to sacrifice the only son whom he loved greatly. He had utmost faith that the Lord could raise his son from the dead or he could give him many more sons more than Abraham could imagine.

Most of us would never want to be where Abraham was. But Abraham believed in God fully and received his son literally back to life. God blessed Abraham in ways beyond human understanding. He blessed Abraham by saying in **Genesis 22: 17-18**, *“I will indeed bless you, and I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be as countless as the stars in the sky or the grains of sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the strongholds of their enemies. Because you have obeyed me, all the nations of the earth will pronounce blessings on one another using the name of your descendants.”* (NET)

Only if we are willing to sow with extraordinary faith, will we receive extraordinary blessings from the Lord. Consuming and receiving is always temporary but when we sow the secret is we will keep on reaping an eternal harvest.

Let’s recap how the rod in the hand of Moses parted the Red Sea, the grains in Isaac’s hand brought a hundred fold harvest, the widow’s giving hand brought her dead son back to life, the lunch in the hands of a young boy fed thousands and Abraham’s willing hand made him and his generations a great blessing to many nations. The question before us is **‘what is in our hands?’** Instead of keeping it to ourselves and spending it on ourselves, if we are willing to sow whatever is in our hands generously, by faith, as the Lord leads us, we will certainly reap an abundant harvest a hundred fold.

Hand of God

Chapter 13

The Impact of Our Hands

Many people have a misunderstanding that everything that happens in their lives depends on God alone, and that there is nothing that they can do or accomplish with their own hands. Some others have resigned themselves to a fatalistic view that everything is controlled by God and that therefore there is nothing left for them to do. The truth of the matter is that, it is only when our hands are willing to do all that is within our ability that the Lord steps in to do His part. As we look at various incidents recorded in the Bible, it will help us understand that the Lord intervened to do the impossible in that situation, only when the people involved in it were willing to do what was required of them.

The impact of man's hands in:

A hopeless situation

In **John Chapter 11**, we read of how the Lord Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. In order for that to happen not only did the Lord expect the people to roll the stone away from the mouth of tomb, He also expected them to untie Lazarus' grave clothes, when he came walking out of the grave. As the people responded to the Lord's instruction and did what they could do, only then the Lord intervened and turned the hopeless situation to one of hope, by raising dead Lazarus back to life.

We understand then, that when we are willing to do what is required of us, the Lord will mediate and change a hopeless situation into a hopeful one. So also, if we are to be set free from the bondage of sin and death, we must be willing to do what's required of us so that Lord can work in us and bring about the freedom and transformation in our lives.

A fearful situation

We read about this incident in **Exodus Chapter 2**. When Moses was born in Egypt, Pharaoh issued an edict that all the male babies of the Israelites must be thrown to death into the River Nile. While all other mothers followed the orders of Pharaoh, there was one mother who believed that the Lord had given her baby boy in her hands, because He had a purpose for him. Knowing this she did all that she could do, to protect the baby boy for as long as she could. However, when the time came when she could no longer hide her baby, she decided to put her baby in a papyrus basket and left him among the reeds in the River Nile. The basket was noticed by none other than the Princess (Pharaoh's daughter), who on opening the basket saw the baby boy, took pity on him and decided to take him to the Palace to bring him up as her son. Even in such a fearful situation, when Moses' mother did all that was in her hands to do, the Lord stepped in, did the unimaginable and placed the baby in safe custody of Pharaoh's daughter herself. And a greater miracle was that, the Lord also made the Princess give back baby Moses to his own mother, to raise him up for a few more years.

An obstructive situation

In **Joshua Chapter 6** there is the amazing story of God's deliverance of Jericho into the hands of Joshua and his army. If the Lord wanted to, he could have brought down the walls of Jericho in an instant but He expected Joshua and his men to do what was required of them to do. Not only did Joshua and the warriors have to go around the walls of Jericho, the Lord also expected Him to fight the battle once the walls came crumbling down.

An impossible situation can be changed, only when we are willing to do all that God expects of us to do. When we do so, the Lord will definitely break down all barriers and make a way for us in the midst of our difficulties.

A lacking situation

In **John Chapter 2**, Jesus was at Cana of Galilee, when there was a want for wine at a wedding. When the need was brought to the notice of Jesus, he instructed the servants to fill the jars with water. It was the task of the servants to fill the jars and also their duty to pour out the water to the guests. As they did what the Lord commanded them to do, only then the Lord did the mighty miracle of changing water into wine. If the Lord wanted He could have changed the water into wine as soon as the water was filled in the jars, but the Lord wanted them to do their part of believing and pouring the water out and only then the Lord performed the miracle.

We may be in a hopeless situation like Lazarus, a fearful situation like Moses' mother, a situation with great obstacles like Jericho that Joshua faced or one of lack like the situation at the marriage at Cana. Whatever our circumstance may be, if we are willing to do what is in our hands to do, the Lord will surely do His part and work beyond our thinking and expectations.

The impact of Moses' raised hands in battle

In **Exodus 17:9**, *So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand."* (ESV)

In **Exodus 17:11** we read, *"Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel would start winning the battle. Whenever Moses lowered his hand, Amalek would start winning."* (CEB)

In the battle between Israel and Amalek, Joshua was leading the battle while Moses was on top of the mountain, praying with his staff held high in his hand. As long as Moses' hand was raised, the Israelites were winning and as the long hours of battle proceeded Moses' hands grew weary and lowered, the Amalekites began to win the battle. As the battle proceeded it must have dawned on Moses that the victory or defeat of the Israelites that day had been committed by the Lord into his hands. The raised hands of Moses brought the people of Israel victory and the drooping of his hands brought Israelites defeat. As a leader standing on top of the mountain in prayer on behalf of God's people, Moses with his raised hands was bringing victory to the people of Israel.

So also, it is only when we kneel in the presence of God, with our hands raised and with a heart of faith, will we too experience victory and the Lord will defeat Satan's evil plans in our lives. He is the Lord who hearkens to our cries, hears our prayers and answers us. Some of us have grown weary in our prayer lives. We try to pray but we don't see much change. Our physical eyes may not see the transformation, but the Lord is working on our behalf every time we kneel in prayer. We must learn to pray individually, pray as families and pray with our colleagues, pray wherever possible and most certainly we will experience transformation and victory in every area of our lives.

The blessings of God on Abraham

When we look at the life of Abraham, God promised to bless Abraham in two areas of his life.

In **Genesis 22:17**, God said to Abraham, *"I will multiply your seed..."*

Genesis 2:18, God also said *"And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."*

The blessings that God showered on Abraham was the physical blessing of multiplication of his seed, and also the spiritual blessing that all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him.

It is important for us to understand therefore, that the blessings of God are always two-fold, one which pertains to our physical life and the other pertaining to our spiritual life.

Esau and Jacob -The battle between the flesh and the Spirit

Esau and Jacob were the twin boys of Isaac and Rebekah. In a Jewish family, the first born son had the blessings of birth-right, which meant that he had the privilege of carrying the family name and becoming the head of the family. So as the first born son, all these blessings of birth-right were due to Esau. The second blessing they were entitled to, was the blessing their Father bestowed on them, before his death. The first blessing was a worldly blessing and the second blessing was a spiritual blessing.

In **Genesis 25:29**, we read, *"One day when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau arrived home from the wilderness exhausted and hungry."* (NLT)

Genesis 25:30- 32, *Esau said to Jacob, "I'm starved! Give me some of that red stew! "All right," Jacob replied, "but trade me your rights as the firstborn son. Look, I'm dying of starvation!" said Esau. "What good is my birth-right to me now?"* (NLT)

Esau and Jacob were quite different in their personality and temperaments. Esau was a wild man, who loved the outdoors and was a hunter. Jacob on the other hand was the quiet, who loved to stay home. Esau came home one day after one such hunting trip, totally exhausted and hungry when he saw Jacob preparing stew. When he asked Jacob to give him some of the stew, Jacob made use of this opportunity and asked his brother Esau to sell him his birth-right. While Esau's eyes were on the temporary and sought after the physical food which would satisfy his immediate hunger, his brother Jacob's had his eyes fixed on the

blessing of Esau's birth-right. In order to satisfy his temporal hunger, Esau treated the great blessing of his birth-right with disdain, and sold it to his brother Jacob. Later Jacob even deceived his father Isaac by pretending to be Esau and received his father's spiritual blessings as well. After having received this blessing Jacob also wrestled with God Himself, and did not let go of God till the Lord blessed him. Even though Jacob was a deceiver and far from perfect, the Lord chose to bless Jacob and honoured him, because he earnestly sought after God and the spiritual blessings that the Lord could give him, and did not treat it with contempt as Esau did.

That is also the reason why when God refers to Himself, He introduces Himself this way. *'I am the Lord of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob'* **Acts 3:13** and not as the God of Esau, because sadly Esau forfeited this blessing that was duly his. Even till today we refer to God as the God of Jacob, only because it was Jacob who earnestly sought after the spiritual blessing that the Lord wanted to lavish on him.

The Lord is ready and willing to bless us with both of these blessings even today. The question is, 'What are our eyes fixed on?' If our eyes are only on the temporal blessings like money, our own house, bigger vehicle, better job, marriage alliance etc., always comparing ourselves with those around us, our prayers will also be directed to God only to meet these material and temporal needs. Instead we must set our eyes and hearts to seek the spiritual blessings that the Lord is willing to bestow on us. We give very little importance to the word of God, prayer and fellowship only because our hearts are set on meeting our temporal and physical needs only. If we give God the rightful place in our lives, and do what we are required to do, the Lord will doubtless keep His promise and bless us in every way possible.

The blessing that King Saul lost

King Saul was the first King of Israel chosen by God. However, Saul was so obsessed by his position and was so filled with self, that he sought do his own thing and disobeyed the Lord repeatedly. The Lord therefore, decided to set Saul aside and made David King in his place, only because the Lord found David to be a man after His own heart. The blessing that David received was the blessed privilege to have Jesus come in his lineage and be referred to as *'The Son of David.'* If we think about it, Saul being the first in the line of kings, Jesus should have been referred to as *'The Son of Saul'* but Saul forfeited it, because the choices he made did not honour God.

The blessing that Gehazi lost

When the Prophet Elijah was taken up to heaven and the mantle fell of Elisha, the Lord gave Elisha a double portion of the blessings and power that Elijah had. Gehazi who was the servant of Elisha, therefore stood a great chance that he could have received a four-fold blessing from the Prophet Elisha. Instead, because of Gehazi's greed and his carnal mind, he not only lost the blessings due him, but sadly also contracted Naaman's leprosy. The reason was that he sought after the worldly things and lost the spiritual blessings in the bargain.

The association between Jacob and Esau and Israel and Amalek

The descendants of Esau were the Amalekites and the descendants of Jacob were the Israelites, and there was constant war and enmity between them. The Amalekites we could say correspond to those who live according to the flesh, satisfying the temporal while the Israelites are a semblance of those who walk in obedience to the Spirit, seeking after the eternal, and these two are in constant conflict.

So too, we have within us a continual struggle between our flesh and the Spirit. Every day we must choose to obey the promptings of the Holy Spirit in our lives. All of us have a daily constant battle as to whether or not we should wake up early to pray, spend time with the word of God, to be in fellowship with other believers or to spend time in corporate prayer. Inside of each of us is an Esau and Jacob (flesh and the Spirit) and we are called to make a choice to follow after the Spirit and not walk according to the flesh. It is understandable that we all have physical needs and desires, but the secret is that when we seek first the spiritual things of God, He takes over and takes care of everything else.

In conclusion we read **2 Corinthians 4:17- 18**, Paul says, *“For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.”* (NLT)

Paul's encouragement to us in the above mentioned verses is that, as long as we live in this world and seek after the Lord who is unseen, we may be faced with certain trials and troubles, but these are light and momentary. On the other hand, there is an unending trouble in store for those who live on this earth, only seeking after the worldly and temporal things, a place of unending sorrow and pain. The struggles we face as those who desire to follow the Lord is nothing compared to the eternal and great glory the Lord has stored up for us in heaven. The things that are seen are all temporal but the things that are unseen are eternal. If we fix our eyes on the eternal we will experience victory in all aspects of our life. Let us choose to daily strengthen the spiritual man and not carnal man. Let us persevere steadfastly in prayer and never give up, lifting up holy hands to the Lord in supplication and prayer so we can live victoriously.

Hand of God

Chapter 14

Strengthen the Feeble Hands

We remind ourselves that this series of messages are based on **Act 11:21** “*And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.*” (KJV)

The Lord’s hand is a powerful hand, a hand that helps, a hand that exalts us and His hand is at work in all areas of our lives. However, as we studied in detail in the previous chapter, only when our hands are willing to do all that is required of us to do, can the Lord’s hand intervene to do His part on our behalf and eventually bless the work of our hands. Each one of us have certain responsibilities entrusted to us that the Lord expects us to fulfil, in order for His blessings to be bestowed on us.

People who sought after God....

The man with a withered hand

In **Mark 3:1**, we read, “*Jesus went into a synagogue again. A man who had a paralyzed hand was there.*” (GW)

When Jesus lived here on earth, not only did He teach, but often He demonstrated what He taught and thereby set an example that others could follow. If we think of it, Jesus was probably the only one who had no need to go to church. However, an important part he modelled to his followers, was His regular attendance and participation at the local synagogue. The word ‘*again*’ in the above mentioned verse, clearly meant that Jesus used to visit the synagogue frequently. It was at one such visit to the synagogue, that Jesus met a man with a paralyzed or withered hand.

We can also recall another incidence where Jesus modelled humility and servant leadership to His disciples, when he put a towel around his waist, took a basin of water and stooped down to wash all of their feet. No words could have demonstrated more powerfully Jesus’ lesson on being humble and a servant leader to His disciples. It was an unforgettable practical lesson, deeply etched in the minds of His disciples that holds good for all of us even today.

That day when Jesus went to the synagogue, there was present a man with a withered hand. If we could for a brief moment put ourselves in his situation, we would probably understand that he must have come in, and sat there with a heavy heart and a deep sense of helplessness and embarrassment. He was unable to do things with his hand that everyone else could with ease, and therefore would not have been able to mingle freely with others because of his malady. In spite of his limitations that could have kept him away from the synagogue, he decided to be there and not let his infirmity be a hindrance to being in a place of worship and fellowship.

Often we make many excuses to not be in church and in fellowship with other believers. It’s good to remind ourselves that church is not a place of social gathering, but one where we

come together to seek God, worship Him, desire to be in fellowship with other believers in order to be strengthened in our faith, and thereby bless one another. Our motive to come to church should not be just to be on the receiving end, rather to look for ways whereby we can give of ourselves to the Lord, and be a blessing to others.

If the man with a withered hand chose not to be at the synagogue, he had every reason to do so and no one could have blamed him for that. He had enough reasons to justify himself to not be in fellowship with other people. However, there must have been something that motivated him to overlook his infirmity and be present at the synagogue. He must have realized the fact that if he used his physical infirmity as an excuse to stay away from the synagogue, it would result in him becoming weak spiritually and that this would pose a far greater problem than his physical weakness.

In **Matthew 18:20**, we read, *"For where two or three come together in my name, I am there with them."* (GNB).

Every time we gather together as a church or the body of Christ, we must remember that the Lord is there in our midst. The Lord's promise is that even if there are only two or three people gathered together in His name, He will certainly be present there among them.

When we come to meet the Lord with the rightful expectation and motive, we will surely go out a transformed people. Whenever we come to church we do so with the eager expectation that the Lord who is among us knows our hearts, is aware of all our needs, is ready and willing to bless us, revive us, strengthen us and send us out with His divine presence and blessings.

We should never allow our physical weakness to hinder us from attending church for when we do so, we are weakening the spiritual part of us, which requires to be strengthened regularly. Only as our spirit and soul grow in the Lord, will our physical body also receive wholeness and well-being.

We read in **3 John 1:2**, *"Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers."* (NASV) Our soul prospers only as we hear the word of God continually, and as we spend time in the presence of the Lord.

Noah

In **Psalm 53:2**, we read, *"God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek after God."* (RV)

God is looking down from heaven and searching for those who are truly seeking after Him. In the days of Noah, while all the people were doing whatever was right in their own eyes and living wicked lives, we read that *'Noah walked with God'* because of which the Lord chose to save Noah and his family. As Noah and his family walked in obedience to the Lord, the Lord sought after them, and saved them from the floods and destruction.

Jacob

We also read about Jacob, whose heart's desire was to receive the blessings of God in his life. Though Jacob was the younger of the twin boys and was not entitled to any of the blessings that were rightly due only to his elder brother Esau, he sincerely longed for the blessings of Esau to be his. However, in order to obtain it he cheated both his brother and father and received the blessings, but as a result of his deception he also had to face the consequence of being cheated many times later on in his life.

We must desire the blessings of God, but we should not defraud anyone to obtain them for if we do, we too will have to face similar consequences like Jacob did. God's word is straightforward, that whatever a man sows that is what he will also reap.

As a result of his cheating and deception Jacob was forced to leave home and run for his life in order to escape his brother's raging anger. He reached a point in his journey, when he had to stop and take a break because the sun had already set. And here's what Jacob did in **Genesis 28:11**, "*At sunset he stopped for the night and went to sleep, resting his head on a large rock.*" (CEV)

In **Genesis 28:13**, we see, "*The LORD was standing beside the ladder and said: I am the LORD God who was worshiped by Abraham and Isaac. I will give to you and your family the land on which you are now sleeping.*" (CEV)

As Jacob laid himself to rest with a stone as his pillow, he saw in a dream the most amazing sight of the angels of God ascending and descending on a ladder, with Lord Himself standing above them. Though Jacob did wrong and deceived his brother and father, deep down in his heart he sincerely sought after God and His blessings. In his darkest hour of loneliness and distress, the Lord sought after Jacob to comfort and bless him with the promise that the very place where he laid down as a stranger, would one day belong to him and his descendants.

Some of us may be in a place where we are not sure of the next step like Jacob. Everything is dark and gloomy around us. If we can look to the Lord, He will lighten up our path and guide us in the way forward. No matter how bad or grim a situation we may be in, if we are willing to seek God and commit everything to Him, He will intervene and do the miraculous, way beyond our thinking and imagination.

Samson

I think no one could have been in a worse situation than the one Samson was in. Samson was a judge chosen by God, endowed with God's Spirit and a man with tremendous strength. He was a mighty warrior. However, Samson lost it all because of several wrong choices he made in his life. At the end of his life as a prisoner of the Philistines, he became an object of contempt and scorn. At this point he lost his strength, his eyes, his anointing and the power of God's Spirit that rested on him mightily. Samson was in a most deplorable condition. In was in such a moment of total desperation that Samson cried out to the Lord.

In **Judges 16:28**, we read, *"Then Samson prayed, "Sovereign LORD, please remember me; please, God, give me my strength just this one time more, so that with this one blow I can get even with the Philistines for putting out my two eyes."* (GNB)

Samson who was caught in this most pathetic and desperate situation, called out to the Lord and pleaded with Him to have mercy on him for one last time. The purpose God chose Samson as a judge of Israel, was mainly to subdue the Philistines who caused Israel great harm. On that last day of Samson's life, with that one prayer, was fulfilled all of God's purposes in a mighty way. God answered Samson's prayer, and he brought down the entire temple killing more Philistines that day than he had ever done in his entire life.

The story of Samson gives us a warning that we ought to be cautious about the choices we make, especially with regard to our friendships. However, Samson's life also is an encouragement to us that even if we have made wrong choices and have gone down a wrong path and walked away from the Lord, we can still repent and call on the Lord and He is willing to mediate and deliver us. Maybe some of us have even given up praying, because we feel our situation has gone way beyond our control and we feel so let down. The Lord can change any situation, and can honour us in that very place where we stood disgraced. We should never be discouraged, because the word of the Lord promises us that, though the righteous fall many times, the Lord will always raise him up. We just need to call on the Lord and believe that He is able to deliver us from every predicament.

The thief on the cross

In **Luke 23:42** we read, *"Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come in Your kingdom"."* (EMTV)

There was a man, convicted as a thief, who was crucified on a cross adjacent to where Jesus was crucified. He too like Jesus was in the last moments of his life. He realized that he was hung on that cross for the wrongs he had done, but he also had the revelation that Jesus hung there next to him, as the sinless Son of God, to bear the sins of the whole world. He must have been a man of tremendous faith that at that crucial hour, he not only perceived who Jesus was, but was willing to put his trust in Jesus. By doing so, he became a partaker of the salvation that Jesus offered to him, right on the cross and so close to death.

This clearly reminds us that our situation no matter how hopeless it may seem, is never beyond God's intervention and deliverance.

On the other side of Jesus was another man who was also a criminal, hung on a cross. Here's what he said, **Luke 23:39**, *"Then one of the evildoers who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us."* (EMTV)

Though he was in a similar predicament as the man on the other cross, his attitude to Jesus was one of contempt and disbelief. The sole reason this man called out to Jesus, was the selfish motive that Jesus should save him from his painful situation.

There are always these two categories of people we will come across. Those who believe and those who don't. There are many examples of this in the Bible; Cain and Abel, Esau and Jacob, Ishmael and Isaac and the two men hung on either side of Jesus, one had a heart of belief and the other one of disdain and unbelief. Sadly, at the foot of the cross where Jesus hung, amidst all the pain and agony, we encounter these two groups of people.

The second group of people are those who seek God only for their own personal gain. To some people God is like an ATM (Automatic Teller Machine). They only go to God for their time of need and once it is met, they forget about Him and will go back to Him only when another situation arises. The only thought on the minds of such people is never about *'how can I be a blessing for the Lord'* rather *'how can I use God to meet my needs'*. Some treat God like they would a Doctor. They run to him in times of sickness and once they recover, they find no need for Him. The next time they go to Him, is when they have another bout of sickness.

If we were to introspect ourselves to see which category we belong to, here's a good indicator. In our personal prayer time, if we spend most of our time talking to God only about our personal needs and blessings we desire, then we can be certain that we are probably in the second category. Instead, we should ask the Lord to change our hearts so we desire Him, for who He really is and to give us hearts that are truly burdened about the things that are on the Lord's heart.

In ancient Tamil literature, we read of poets who came seeking after Kings and the exclusive purpose was that as they presented their songs to the Kings, they did so with the expectation to receive something from them. However, when the Magi who came seeking after Jesus the King of Jews, they came with the only intention to worship Jesus and give Him their gifts. As they sought the Lord for the right reason, the Lord granted them protection from Herod without them having to ask Him for it. Like the Magi, we too must seek the Lord only with the true intent to worship Him, and present ourselves as offerings for His glory.

The man with a withered hand receives healing

Jesus' reaction to the second group

As we look back on the man with a withered hand who came to the synagogue, there was another group of people who were also present that day.

In **Mark 3:2**, *"Some people were there who wanted to accuse Jesus of doing wrong; so they watched him closely to see whether he would cure the man on the Sabbath."*

In **Mark 3:5**, *"And looking around at them with anger, grieved at the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored." (LEB)*

As the man with the withered hand came to the synagogue seeking after God, there was a group of people who were also in the synagogue with the singular purpose of finding fault

with Jesus. Isn't it ironical that created men stood in the presence of the creator, with the purpose of finding fault with Him? As Jesus looked at this group, He was filled with anger and grief when He perceived the hardness of their heart. Probably, the man with the withered hand was insignificant to others, but the Lord did not miss him or his condition. Jesus spoke healing and restored his hand to perfection and wholeness, so that everyone there were totally amazed. Those who probably avoided him or looked down on him earlier would have come close to touch him, to feel the hand that was perfectly healed and restored by Jesus.

It is important for us to remind ourselves, that we too should come to church, and seek God for only the right purposes. When the Lord looks at us He must be pleased with us, and not be grieved at us. We may be in an impossible situation like the man with the withered hand, but the Lord will honour us, if we sincerely seek Him with all our heart. We will go out with healing, strength, wholeness and blessing from the Lord.

There are two groups of people in the church, one who are sincerely seeking after God and the other who are there just to find fault. Let us choose to be in the group of people who come only to worship the Lord giving Him all the glory due to His name and seeking nothing for ourselves.

Hand of God

Chapter 15

Don't Let Go of God's Hands

We read in **John 21:4**, *"Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus"* (ESV)

When they failed to recognize Jesus

It was indeed an unusual situation on the sea shore that day, as the resurrected Jesus stood on the shore, and his own disciples who had been with him for three and half years failed to recognize who He was. They had been with Jesus, walked with Him, ate with Him, saw the wonders and mighty miracles He performed and yet on that day, they failed to perceive the Lord Jesus as He stood before them.

It may bewilder us as to how this could be possible, but this incident serves as a word of caution to all of us who follow Jesus, that if it could happen to Jesus' disciples who were so close to Him and saw Him with their physical eyes, such a situation could also befall us, who have not seen Him and experienced Him as they did.

For a little background to the above mentioned verse; When Peter informed the other disciples that he was going fishing, immediately six other disciples joined the bandwagon and went along with him. All of a sudden their focus had shifted from Jesus, and turned to fishing and fending for themselves. As they toiled all night and caught nothing, they return to shore to find Jesus standing there waiting for them, but they failed to recognize Him.

As long as Jesus was with them for three and half years, every day the disciples woke up with much anticipation to witness the mighty deeds that Jesus would perform each day. These disciples of Jesus were not only eyewitnesses, but were participants of all the amazing miracles that Jesus performed. However, they had come to this juncture where they forgot their call, and could not even identify Jesus.

For those of us who have decided to follow Jesus and be His disciples, we must be aware that we too will be confronted with situations, wherein we may not be able to see and perceive Jesus, who is the core of our faith.

When they chose to go back fishing

We read in **John 21:2-3**, *"Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you."*(ESV)

There was nothing wrong with the disciples wanting to go fishing, but the wistful part was that they had given up following Jesus, to go after their profession. It was Peter who initiated the move to go back fishing. As long as Jesus was with them Peter was happy and

content, but after he had witnessed the arrest, trial, death and burial of Jesus and he had lost all hope and become totally discouraged.

Peter is talked about even today, only because He was a disciple of Jesus and we would have never heard of him if he was just another ordinary fisherman. He received fame, blessings, had his daily needs met, saw miracles and wonders only because He was with Jesus, and now unexpectedly everything seemed to have come to an end with Jesus' death. This same Peter was the one who gave up everything to follow Jesus, walked on water, trusted Jesus and caught a fish which had his tax money in its mouth, experienced every awesome miracle that Jesus performed and yet he was disheartened, even tempted to give up on the Lord to go back to where he started.

If we are not watchful, it is possible that we too can backslide like Peter and the disciples did. The only way for one to not go astray, is to be rooted and built up firmly on the word of God. We must allow the written word of God, to be deeply embedded in our hearts, which alone grows our faith in the Lord and keeps us on course.

When they did not heed what Jesus said

In **Matthew 16:21** we read, *"From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."*(ESV)

The disciples of Jesus were clearly instructed by Jesus while He was with them, that certain events were bound to happen. He told them that He would go to Jerusalem, where He would be tried, arrested, crucified, buried and rise again on the third day. Though the disciples heard these oft repeated words of Jesus, they did not pay close attention to listen and take note of what He was telling them and probably forgot Jesus' predictions of what was to come. That is the reason why they thought everything was over when Jesus died, and did not fully understand or comprehend the fact that Jesus would indeed rise again from the dead to be with them forever.

Some of us may be in such a situation where we too hear the word of God regularly, but are not really paying close attention to listen conscientiously to what the Lord is saying to us. It is only when one firmly believes and accepts the word by faith, will our faith stand strong in the midst of trials, difficulties and discouragements.

It is a remarkable thought that this episode of Peter and the other disciples deciding to go back fishing, as recorded in John's Gospel, happened after the resurrection of Jesus. It makes us wonder as to why they would have decided to go back to fishing when they had been eyewitnesses of the resurrected Jesus who appeared to them.

The chief priests on the other hand, whose only aim was to do away with Jesus paid more careful attention to Jesus' words than did the disciples of Jesus.

In **Matthew 27:62–63**, we read, *“On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, saying, “Sir, we remember, while he was still alive, how that the deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise’”. (NKJV)*

The chief priests and Pharisees were more keenly listening to the words of Jesus and therefore went to Pilate to take extra precaution to see that Jesus’ words that He would rise again would not be fulfilled, and saw to it that the tomb of Jesus was safely guarded.

When Jesus calls us to be His disciples, He in no uncertain terms declared that we will certainly face problems and difficulties as long as we are here on the earth, but that also goes with the assurance as promised by Jesus in **John 16:33**, *“I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.”*(NKJV) The assurance we have is that no matter how daunting the situation we face, the Lord who called us is faithful and He has promised us victory over every circumstance we face, no matter how grim it may be.

As long as the disciples were walking close with Jesus, there was only eager expectation and no room for doubts and fears. It was only when they walked away that they started to stumble. If we do not chose to walk with Jesus every day. we too can easily become dejected and discouraged. Each new day is God’s gift to us, and we must wake up with anticipation as to what the Lord will do for us and through us. Instead of having a fatalistic view on life, our lives must be firmly set on God and His word, if we seek to live a life filled with meaning and purpose. It is the Lord alone who can turn all our hopeless situations to hopeful ones and transform our areas of defeat to those of victory.

Here is a good way for us to check to see if God’s word is truly entrenched in our hearts. When faced with problems and difficulties, if all we do is grumble and complain, we can be sure that God’s word has no place in our hearts. On the other hand, if His word is deeply rooted inside of us, we will choose to speak words of faith and victory.

The Bible says that in **Proverbs 18:21** that *“death and life are in the power of the tongue”* which means that it is within our power to speak positively words of faith, and victory over our situations instead of doubt and defeat. It is important for us to learn to instead of constantly complaining to others about the hardships we face, to hand over everything to God and allow His peace to rule in our hearts and minds.

Most certainly if the disciples had listened to the words of Jesus, and had taken it to heart, there would have been no way they would have gone back to fishing. By not remembering the words of Jesus and the assurance He left them, they were filled with fear, uncertainty, despondency and decided to walk away from Him, back to where they were earlier as they trusted only what they saw with their physical eyes. The call to follow Jesus and be His disciples is not a simple task, it is a call to walk by faith, totally trusting in God and His word.

When Jesus first called Peter

In **Luke 5:1-3**, we read, *“One day Jesus was standing on the shore of Lake Gennesaret while the people pushed their way up to him to listen to the word of God. He saw two boats pulled*

up on the beach; the fishermen had left them and were washing the nets. Jesus got into one of the boat, it belonged to Simon and asked him to push off a little from the shore. Jesus sat in the boat and taught the crowd.” (GNB)

Jesus was on the shore of the Lake Genneseret, and as he was teaching, he asked for Simon Peter to push his boat a little further, so He could get into it and teach from there. The Lord chose to use Peter’s boat only.

It is the Lord who has chosen and called each one of us to be His children. We often question the Lord when we are in a quandary, but we often we forget that the Lord in His grace chose us to be His children, which is far greater than any problem we face. The one who called us is faithful, and He will take us through right to the very end.

The Apostle Paul understood this calling of God most vividly. Before his encounter with the Lord Jesus, he was a persecutor of the church of Jesus. However, after his conversion Paul realized that God had chosen him even before he was born as he aptly says in **Galatians 1:15**, *“But God in his grace chose me even before I was born, and called me to serve him.”* Not only did Paul know that God chose him, but he had the firm belief that nothing in all the world, not tribulation, famine, hunger or persecution could separate him from the love of God.

When the Lord first called Peter he was in a similar predicament. He and the other fishermen, three of whom also became Jesus’ disciples had fished all night and caught nothing. However, when Jesus told Peter to cast his net again he did so, only because he believed the words of Jesus. It was Peter giving heed to the words of Jesus that built up his faith in Jesus. After a whole night of wasted efforts, when morning came, it was only when Peter listened and obeyed the words of Jesus that their empty nets were now filled and teeming with fish like they had never seen before. If Peter had decided to go by his own logical thinking and refused to obey Jesus’ simple instruction, they would have caught nothing.

Our faith is built up as we constantly hear the word of God. When the Lord instructs us to do something and we obey implicitly, only then we will find victory in all that we do. When the Lord first placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden they did not need to toil and sweat. Sweat and toil was God’s curse on fallen man. All our human efforts are useless and in vain, unless the Lord blesses our efforts and labour. Hearing the word of God increases our faith, and faith is what helps us overcome every difficulty, giving us victory in the world. Instead of leaning on our own mind and thinking, we should learn to trust in the Lord with all our heart and success will be ours.

When Peter gave it all up

After the miraculous catch of fish, Peter and the other disciples bring their nets full of fish to the shore. All that Peter toiled for the whole night was now accomplished but what Peter did was astounding. When Jesus asked Peter to follow Him, He willingly left it all and followed Jesus. It seemed strange that after having received this miraculous catch of fish that Peter was longing to have, that he willingly gave it all up to follow Jesus. The obvious

reason for this transformation was that Peter realized that after he had found the Lord, the true giver of all blessings that he henceforth decided not seek after the blessings, but rather pursue the Lord, who is the originator and giver of all good things. Peter may have gone hungry before he met Jesus, but we can be sure that once he decided to follow Jesus there was not a day when his needs were not met by Jesus. Peter who had willingly left his profession, his boat and his nets to follow Jesus, was after three and half years tempted to go back to where he started.

To those of us who hold on to Jesus and follow after Him, the Lord promises to supply all our needs, and we will never be in want. There may be times of trials and temptations that confront us, when we too may be tempted to give up. Sometimes the temptation to give up on this journey with Jesus may come from those around us. Instead of being satisfied with leading mundane and mediocre lives, let us surrender our lives to the Lord, who can strengthen us and build up our faith, so we can be a great blessing to others.

Peter's decision to get back to fishing also affected the faith of six other disciples who decided to go along with him. The result was that they were back to square one, a place of toiling and emptiness. They laboured all night and ended up only with exhaustion and failure.

When we chose to walk away from the Lord, not only does it affect us, but also our family and those around us. Our backsliding will usually result in others following suit. If we keep our eyes focused on our faithful God, we will not go astray. Also the kind of people we associate with will in many ways affect our walk with the Lord. It is beneficial to have fellowship with those who love the Lord and are being used by the Lord, as this helps us to keep focused and to shine for the Lord. Let us always remember that we are called to the salt of the earth, those who will influence others positively. If we like Lot's wife look back, we will become pillars of salt that will be of no use to anyone.

When Jesus first called Peter and the others he called them from being '*fishermen*' to becoming '*fishers of men*'. The difference between '*fishermen*' and '*fishers of men*' is huge. '*Fishermen*' catch live fish and then kill them whereas '*fishers of men*' are those called by the Lord to find men who are dead in their trespasses and sins and help them find eternal life in Jesus Christ. Every one of us must choose to be either a '*fisherman*' or '*fishers of men*' those who take life or those who give life to others.

God's call to us is to be those who give life to others. If we backslide and go back to our old way of living, our lives will become fruitless and worthless to others. Let us decide to remain faithful to the Lord and to His calling for our lives. May the Lord on His return find each one of us standing firm in our faith. As those who have decided to follow Jesus, let us press on with perseverance, and never turn back but keep running forward, looking only to Jesus who is the author and the finisher of our faith.

Hand of God Chapter 16 The God of Comfort is Close at Hand

In **Mark 16:1**, we read, *“And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.”*(KJV)

The Lord Jesus as He had already predicted to His disciples on several occasions, was crucified on a cross at Calvary, died and was buried in a tomb. After the burial of Jesus, the disciples were filled with a sense of fear and hopelessness, as they thought that their journey with Jesus had come to an end. Having been closely associated with Jesus for three and half years, the death and burial of Jesus, spelt a sense of finality for the disciples, that they even decided to go back fishing.

While it did not even occur to the disciples of Jesus to check on the tomb where Jesus had been laid, Mary Magdalene along with other women were waiting for the Sabbath to be over, so they could go to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus with sweet spices. Though these women had a faith combined with love that prompted them to go to the tomb with their sweet spices, they too did so with a sense of doubt as they wondered as to who would roll the stone away, so they could anoint the body of Jesus. Though the Lord had repeatedly spoken about His death, burial and resurrection, it seemed that the disciples and the women who followed Jesus closely gave no heed or had forgotten the Lord’s exhortation.

Often times, we too when faced with difficult situations lose heart and despair only because we have forgotten the word of God, and His promises to us. It is only when the word of God is firmly rooted in our hearts and our faith immovably established on it, will adverse situations not affect us. However, when the word of God is absent in our lives, we will certainly be shaken. For those of us who are discouraged and downcast because of any burdensome circumstance, let us be encouraged that the risen Lord is with us, and He has power to totally transform every arduous situation.

The disciples willingly accepted Jesus as their Lord, master, miracle worker and provider. Strangely though, they could not perceive that He was also the one who could overcome death and would rise again from the grave.

Let us look at three Mary’s in the Bible who were so close to Jesus, but whose circumstances so blinded them, that they struggled to comprehend His lordship and presence right next to them.

Mary Magdalene

Among the group of women who went to the tomb early that morning was Mary Magdalene. Let us study the word to see who she was.

We read in **Luke 8:1-3**, *“Now it came to pass, afterward, that He went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. And the*

twelve were with Him, and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities—Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others who provided for Him from their substance.” (NKJV)

As Mary was a common name in Jesus’ day, and many of the women who followed Jesus had this name, Mary Magdalene was referred to as one who was delivered of seven evil spirits. Most of us would not prefer to be identified with our past life, but Mary Magdalene had experienced such a powerful transformation and deliverance that her heart was filled with love and gratitude to the Lord for His intervention, that she decided to follow and serve Jesus wholeheartedly.

Many of us have received much from the Lord, the very breath we breathe is God’s gift to us, but so often we remain ungrateful to the Lord for all His goodness and keep complaining about the things that we still lack. It is indeed a sad thought that a majority of people take God’s gifts for granted, and there are only a handful who are truly grateful to the Lord for all that He lavishes on them.

We read in **John 20: 10-11**, *“Then the disciples went away again to their own homes. But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb.” (NLT)*

Read **John 20: 14-15**, *“Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, “Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away.” (NLT)*

On observing that the tomb of Jesus was empty, the disciples of Jesus who had witnessed so many might miracles of Jesus didn’t stay back and decided to go back to their homes, but Mary Magdalene whose heart overflowed with love for Jesus, refused to go back. As she stood there with her heart filled with sorrow, she looked back and saw Jesus standing next to her, but did not recognize Him.

This is the assurance the Lord gives to those of us who follow Him irrespective of what our circumstance may be. Next time we are faced with those hopeless health reports, financial crisis, relationship issues, or whatever else it may be, we must remind ourselves that the Lord has promised, *‘I will never leave you, nor forsake you’* and *‘lo, I am with you to the very end of the age’*. He is our faithful God who will never leave our side, the one who will never put us to shame and the one who has promised to abide with us until the very end of our lives.

As Jesus spoke to Mary Magdalene and said, *“Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?”* she simply failed to recognize the voice of Jesus, the voice that she had heard many times in her close association with him. Her heart was so filled with sorrow and her eyes away from the Lord that she failed to realize that the risen Lord was right beside her, and also speaking so directly to her, and thought instead that He was a gardener.

If we too allow our situations to overwhelm us, and fix our eyes only on our problems, we will most certainly not be able to perceive the presence of the Lord or recognize His voice, even though He is close at hand. The Lord who overcame death itself is right beside us, and He is able to help us overcome every hurdle and adverse situation that each of us may face. When our minds and hearts are focused only on our problems, it also becomes impossible for us to hear the word of God, and appropriate it to our lives. It is only when God's word is deeply rooted in our hearts, will we be able to stand firm in the midst of every sort of trials and difficulties.

Mary, the sister of Lazarus

John 11:3, *"So the two sisters sent a message to Jesus telling him, 'Lord, your dear friend is very sick.'" (NLT)*

John 11:6, *"So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was." (NKJV)*

John 11:32, *"Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hast been here, my brother had not died." (KJV)*

The second Mary we are looking at was the sister of Martha and Lazarus. Lazarus was sick and his sisters sent word to Jesus through some people with a message to Him, that the one whom Jesus loved dearly was very sick. In spite of knowing the situation, Jesus did not hurry to go back to Bethany but chose to stay on for two more days. When Jesus went to meet Martha and Mary, it was then that Mary came running to Jesus with these words, *'Lord, if thou hast been here, my brother had not died.'* Mary believed that the Lord was definitely able to heal her brother of the sickness he faced, but she had no hope that Jesus had the power to raise her brother from the dead. The Lord came at the right time to affirm to Mary that He was indeed able to raise her dead brother back to life. After four days of being in the grave, the Lord raised Lazarus and brought him back to life, to prove that He had power over death and the grave.

Have you noticed how when we encounter any sort of health issues, our first thought is to go looking for a specialist who can set things right, and we turn to the Lord only when the physicians give up hope. Instead, we must learn to call on the Lord immediately and seek His healing and intervention, and He should be our first option and not the last.

Many of us may be in a place where Mary was, and probably like her we too have questions as to why the Lord allows us to go through certain situations and wonder if in those times the Lord is really there. We often find it easier to trust the Lord when our problems are small, but lose hope when the challenge is huge. Maybe like Mary, we call Jesus our Lord, but are not in total submission to His Lordship. Let us be encouraged to know that the Lord's timing is always perfect. Though at times it may feel like He is delaying in answering us, we must be patient and trust Him implicitly because His ways are always perfect and His timings accurate. We rejoice in the Lord right in the midst of all our troubles, because He is able to turn everything around for our good.

There is also another important aspect for us to learn and that is whatever may be the things that we desire to have, it is vital that we wholeheartedly submit our desires to the Lord, and pray that His will be done in every decision we take because He is the all-knowing God who alone knows what's best for us.

In situations that appear to be lifeless, instead of doubting and complaining we must speak God's word of promise and assurance and victory will be ours. Most of us murmur and complain when things get tough and here's a great lesson for us to learn from the people of Israel.

The people of Israel who were led by Moses and Aaron witnessed the marvellous deeds of God in Egypt, the mighty deliverance from the Egyptians when the red sea parted, they tasted the bitter waters of Mara that turned sweet to satisfy their thirst, and yet they constantly grumbled and complained against Moses and Aaron. Here's what the Lord did to stop their grumbling and proved to them that He had entrusted the authority to Moses and Aaron.

In **Numbers 17:5**, we read, *"And it shall come to pass, that the man's rod, whom I shall choose, shall blossom: and I will make to cease from me the murmurings of the children of Israel, whereby they murmur against you."* (KJV)

In **Numbers 17:8**, we read, *"And it came to pass, that on the morrow Moses went into the tabernacle of witness; and, behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds."* (KJV)

As the people of Israel questioned the authority of Moses and Aaron and also grumbled against their leadership, here's what the Lord did. God heard their grumbling and asked the twelve leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel to bring a rod with the name of the tribe written on it. On Levi's rod the name Aaron had to be written and all of the rods were to be kept in the presence of the Lord.

The next day, as Moses went into the tabernacle of witness, the rod of Aaron had brought forth buds, was in full bloom and also yielded almonds. The rod of Aaron was placed permanently before the Ark of the Covenant to serve as a warning to the people who rebelled. By performing this outstanding miracle, God warned the people of Israel that if they continued to murmur against Him and against the leaders He had appointed, the impending punishment for them was death. This was God's way to stop the people of Israel from constantly grumbling and complaining.

If any of us have those dry or dead situations in our lives, where there seems to be no hope, let us take it to the Lord who can change it instantly. It is an effortless task for the Lord to change any lifeless condition overnight, and make it one that is abounding with fruit. What we are unable to accomplish with our own effort for many years, the Lord is able to do instantly if we come to Him by faith and hand it over to Him.

Mary the mother of Jesus

In **Luke 2:48-49**, we read, *“So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, “Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously.” And He said to them, “Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?”* (NKJV)

Though Mary was the mother of Jesus, she still did not realize who He really was. When Jesus was 12 years old, Mary and Joseph who thought that Jesus was lost, and after two days of searching got back to the temple, to find Him sitting with the religious leaders and discussing the scriptures with them. That is when Mary said to Jesus, *“Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously.”* Jesus had to explain to Mary, that He was here on earth to accomplish His Father’s business. The sorrow of having missed Jesus so filled Mary, that she could not recognize that Jesus was sent down to earth to fulfil the Father’s divine purpose.

Mary also forgot the word of God that was given to her even before the birth of Jesus in **Luke 1:32** which reads, *“He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:”* (KJV)

Mary could not comprehend that Jesus was first the Son of God, even before being born on earth as her earthly son. Many people even today revere Mary, as the mother of Jesus forgetting the fact that she was just an instrument God used for Jesus to be born on this earth, and that Jesus is the son of God from the very beginning and was actively involved in the creation of the world itself.

In **Colossians 1:16**, we read, *“For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created through Him and for Him.”*(NASB)

It was only because Mary failed to perceive that Jesus was indeed the Son of God who was omniscient and omnipotent, that she started to worry about Jesus needlessly. We too are prone to make the same mistake if we look at Jesus as the son of Mary, and do not believe and acknowledge Him as the Son of God.

What happened to the three Mary’s can easily befall us if we worry and sorrow about our difficulties, and fail to realize that the risen Lord Jesus is really close at hand. Our hearts must be filled with the word of God and the promises of God. The words that proceed from our mouth must be those of faith and praise, not words of sorrow and complaint. Though all three Mary’s were close to Jesus, in times of confusion and turmoil, they failed to recognize who Jesus really was. Let us be reminded that even before we go through a trial or hardship, the Lord has already prepared a way for us to be delivered out of it. We are the children of God and we have an all-knowing and all-powerful God always by our side. Let us praise the Lord at all times, and let His praise alone fill our hearts and our mouths.

Hand of God Chapter 17 The Power of a Praying Church

We read in **Act 4:31**, *“When they finished praying, the place where they were meeting was shaken. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to proclaim God's message with boldness.”*(GNB)

As the believers in the early church met together for prayer, there was a mighty manifestation of God's power that day. Their place of gathering was shaken, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they went out to declare the message of God with much boldness. The early church was strong, and made a tremendous impact on those around them.

Today's church is in complete contrast to the way the early church functioned. The growth in our churches is biological rather than the inclusion of new believers being added, which is what the Lord desires for the church. Many members of the church today are weak spiritually only because they have not received the anointing and power of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Church is a place where the Lord resides, and where the Spirit of God moves in a mighty way. When we are part of such a fellowship, we too will be filled with the same power of the Holy Spirit and the Lord will use us to be a blessing to others. As we gather together to worship we do so with the expectation that the Lord will strengthen us, provide answers to the questions we have and give us guidance for every decision we have to take. As parents if we want to see our children and the generations to come being impacted in a powerful way, we must pray with the expectancy that the Lord will bring about a mighty revival. Also our witness must be such that those around us will realize, that we are a people belonging to God.

Sadly today, many a church has become all about a building, and once the building comes up it becomes the property of the Pastor, his children and their children and what happens as a result is that the vision and burden with which the church began fizzles out. The reason the word of God has recorded the acts of the early church, is to motivate us to understand that all of the mighty deeds that the Lord accomplished then through the apostles and believers, the Lord is willing to perform amongst us even today.

The power and strength of the early church was that they were a praying church. For those who are wondering as to how we too can experience the anointing and power of the Holy Spirit that was so evident in the early church, the secret is to spend time together in prayer. As we pray, we are filled with the Holy Spirit who enables us to be victorious over sin, sickness, the world and the Spirit of God removes all fear and inhibitions so that we are able to freely and boldly share the word of God with others.

In **Acts 4: 24 -31** we read, *“So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: “Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: ‘Why did the nations rage, And*

the people plot vain things? ²⁶ The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together Against the LORD and against His Christ.’ ²⁷ “For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together ²⁸ to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. ²⁹ Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, ³⁰ by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.” ³¹ And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness. (NKJV)

Prayer is the foundation for a strong church. The first thing the early church did was they lifted their voice together in one accord and called on the name of the Lord. They begin their prayer acknowledging that God is the creator of heaven, earth, the sea and everything in it and the reason is primarily to affirm who God really is. It is important and beneficial for us to endorse who God is in every situation of our lives.

In the next part of their prayer, they mention how David had prophesied that the gentiles and the people of this world would be enraged against the Messiah, and also the kings and rulers would plot against Him to bring him down. This was rightly fulfilled when Herod and Pontius Pilate along with the religious leaders and crowds of people, plotted and sentenced Jesus to die on the cross. The only reason they were all against Jesus was because what Jesus taught was contradictory to the standards they held, and He exposed them of all their evil thoughts and deeds.

When Jesus is Lord of our life, He will use us to accomplish mighty wonders. When He does this, we should not be surprised when those outside the church are angry and upset with us. The call of God to the church is to be His agents who will have a great impact on society. If we compromise and go along with the standards of this world, we will certainly impact no one. We are an extraordinary people, called by an Almighty God, to achieve extraordinary things for His glory.

The Lord is willing to use us to be His ambassadors, who will caution and stop those who are going down the path of destruction, and lead them on towards the path of life eternal. We as a church have in many ways become one with the world. Our desires are essentially for the temporal, not realizing that we can take nothing from this world but only the precious souls whom we have led to the Lord, when we leave this world. The only investment that will stand secure in our eternal account, is the people whom we have shared the gospel with and led into the saving knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Everything else will be considered rubbish and of no eternal consequence.

Everything that happened to Jesus including his death, was foretold and prophesied and was all part of God’s divine plan. In **Acts 4:27** we read, *“They gathered to do everything that you by your power and will had already decided would happen.”*(GNB) It’s an incredible thought that everything that happened to Jesus till the very end of his life was pre-planned and permitted by the Father in heaven.

We too therefore, can rest assured that when we are God's children, nothing ever happens in our lives without the knowledge and consent of God. If we take a stand for Jesus, we can be sure that there will always be some who will rise up against us. Many people have blended themselves with the world and its ways, forgetting the fact that we are a chosen people, set apart by God for His great purposes.

In **Acts 4:29**, they prayed, *“And now, Lord, take notice of the threats they have made and allow us, your servants, to speak your message with all boldness. Stretch out your hands to heal, and grant that wonders and miracles may be performed through the name of your holy Servant Jesus.”*(GNB)

By taking a stand to live for Jesus and proclaim His message, the apostles were now facing serious threats from those outside the church. In the midst of severe opposition the entire church had gathered together to pray for boldness to preach, and also that the Lord would use them to accomplish mighty wonders and miracles in Jesus' name.

For those who choose to proclaim the message of the Gospel, we can be sure that we will face opposition in various ways, and if we haven't been confronted with resistance it is probably because we have not yet taken the risk to share the good news with those around us.

We often find excuses to come together to pray, but the power of the church is only when the members assemble in one accord to pray. We are joyful recipients of all God's goodness, and yet we think it a burden to spend time praying to our gracious God who is the giver of all good things.

The hand of the Lord is mentioned twice in the above mentioned passage, in Verse 28 where God's hand had purposed that Jesus be crucified, and in verse 30 when they prayed that the hand of the Lord be stretched forth to perform wonders and miracles. It is by the hand of the Lord that we have been saved and redeemed. It should therefore be our prayer as God's children, that the hand of God be manifested powerfully through us to touch and bless the lives of those around us.

In **Acts 4: 5-6** we read, *“And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes, ⁶as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.”* (NKJV)

The opposition and threats to the apostles in the early church came from the rulers, elders, scribes and high priests and their families, all of whom were actually appointed to serve the people of God. The only reason for their threats was that the Lord had performed a marvellous miracle through Peter and John by healing a man who was crippled from birth, who was over 40 years of age, and many who witnessed this amazing healing, began to believe in the message of the apostles and put their faith in Jesus. The religious leaders were displeased with the apostles, because they were carrying out the work that the religious leaders failed to do though they were chosen for the same.

When others around us are blessed by us, we can be certain that this will disturb some people who will turn antagonistic only because they are filled with fear and insecurity. Irrespective of where we are placed, our homes, places of study, work etc., we are positioned there by God to be His witnesses and as we live with this thought, our lives will become a blessing to others. As we serve the Lord truthfully and sincerely, we can be sure that we will be faced with obstruction from people which gives us the assurance that we are in the right path. We must keep going strong and not loose heart knowing that the Lord is with us. We must not be surprised if the resistance to our walk with the Lord often originates from those closest to us. This is Satan's cunning scheme, and that is what he did even with Jesus and his disciples by turning Judas Iscariot who was one of the chosen twelve against Jesus and prompting him to betray the Lord.

To understand this further we will look at an incident from the Old Testament. We read in **1 Kings 18:39**, *"And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God."* (GNB)

Let's take a quick look at the background to this verse. The King of Israel was Ahab and his wife was Jezebel and during the reign of King Ahab, Israel was filled with idolatry with special allegiance to the god Baal whom Jezebel promoted greatly. The Lord detests idolatry and the land of Israel had become defiled with idols. The prophet Elijah was so grieved in his spirit, that he called the 450 prophets of Baal to Mount Carmel and challenged them with this test. They were to offer a sacrifice to Baal and Elijah would sacrifice to the Lord and the God who answered by fire from heaven would be declared the true God. The prophets of Baal called out all day to their god and nothing happened. Elijah rebuilt the altar and sacrificed to the Lord and the Lord sent down fire and consumed the sacrifice entirely. It is at this point that the people fall down on their face, and acknowledge that the Lord is God indeed. All those who were divided in their allegiance were now fully convinced that the Lord was God indeed. The 450 prophets of Baal were all killed after the failure at Carmel. King Ahab who heard this message was silent but his wife Jezebel was furious and this is what she did.

We read in, **1 Kings 19:2** *She sent a message to Elijah: "May the gods strike me dead if by this time tomorrow I don't do the same thing to you that you did to the prophets."* (GNB)

When the prophet Elijah heard this threat from Queen Jezebel, he was filled with fear and ran for his life. That was almost the end of Elijah's ministry. After he ran and hid himself, the Lord graciously encouraged Elijah, but the Lord also handed over the mantle of Elijah's ministry to Elisha.

The early church too was threatened in the same way, but they prayed and the Lord strengthened and encouraged them in such a way that they went out to speak the word of God even more boldly.

Let us not lose heart when challenged by threats of any kind. Challenges could also be in the form of sickness, finances, work related or in relationships and no matter what our situation we must go the Lord in prayer immediately. It is important we uphold one another in prayer so that the Lord can intervene in every situation and do the miraculous. In the midst of all

sorts of dangers and peril we must gather together to pray, to experience God's divine deliverance. Prayer alone can change any and every situation, no matter how difficult or complicated it may be.

Let us be a praying church through whom the Lord will do His mighty wonders. As individuals, as families and as a church let us join together to pray whenever and wherever it is possible. When confronted with antagonism let us be strong in the Lord and not run in fear as Elijah did but come together to pray and be encouraged and strengthened to serve the Lord with boldness. Let us spend much time with the Lord and in prayer, as only prayer can help us overcome the cunning darts of the enemy. May we also be those who stand in the prayer on behalf of others.

Chapter 18

Hand of God

Faithful in small things

In **Judges 6:12-13**, we read, *the Lord's angel appeared to him there and said, "The LORD is with you, brave and mighty man!" Gideon said to him, "If I may ask, sir, why has all this happened to us if the LORD is with us? What happened to all the wonderful things that our fathers told us the LORD used to do---how he brought them out of Egypt? The LORD has abandoned us and left us to the mercy of the Midianites."* (GNB)

In this incident that is recorded in the book of Judges, the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, who is discouraged and disheartened to give him the message of encouragement that the Lord was with him. Gideon was at a point in his life where he failed to recognize that the Lord was indeed with him, and the Lord sent His angel just to reassure Gideon that He was most assuredly with him.

Though Gideon was scared and timid, the angel of the Lord addressed him as a brave and mighty man. The confidence that the angel of the Lord imparted to Gideon was the fact that when the Lord was with him, there was no room for fear and discouragement, because the Lord considered him as a man of valour.

We studied in detail in the previous chapter how, Mary Magdalene and the disciples of Jesus themselves were unable to recognize the risen Lord who was so close at hand. Often times we too are overwhelmed by our situations and difficulties that we don't perceive that the Lord is with us, and our hearts are in doubt if the Lord has abandoned us. The circumstances in our lives are prone to constant change, we will have seasons of joy, seasons of sorrow, seasons of challenges and trials, but through all of it, we have the assurance from the word of Lord that the Lord is with us, and He will never leave us not forsake us no matter what we are going through. Our God is a personal God, and his desire is to transform us into robust men and women of God.

The people of Israel had rebelled against God and had walked in disobedience, as a result of which the Lord delivered them into the hands of their enemies. Gideon and the Israelites were constantly attacked by the Midianites, who raided their land, plundered all their fields and belongings and left them destitute and helpless. Therefore when the angel of the Lord came to Gideon, the one query that was topmost on Gideon's mind which he asked the messenger of God was, *"If I may ask, sir, why has all this happened to us if the LORD is with us?"* **Judges 6:13**

In many of our lives we work and labour so hard, but at the end of it, we are not enjoying the fruit of our labours and often like Gideon we too wonder why this is so.

Israel was oppressed and called out to the Lord

In **Judges 6:6** we read, *"And Israel was brought very low because of Midian. And the people of Israel cried out for help to the LORD."* (ESV)

The people of Israel were in a deplorable situation because of the Midianites. It was in such a despicable circumstance that they called out to the Lord. The people of Israel were God's people, but they were in this crisis only because of their wilful disobedience and rebellion. They refused to let the Lord lead them and be their shepherd.

We read in **Judges 6:1**, "*The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD.*"(ESV)

The reason for the low and distressing plight of the Israelites was that they had done evil in the sight of the Lord. They had forgotten that the Lord was watching over them, as they continued to live in disobedience and wickedness. God handed them over to the Midianites, not to abandon them as they thought, but to discipline them, for only when they were in dire straits they earnestly sought the Lord and called on Him.

In recent years we may have noticed that several residential building, shops, offices have CCTV (Closed Circuit Television) cameras installed in them. The reason for this is that in general people tend to behave differently when they know that they are under surveillance, and also the fact that they are being watched prompts people to be more disciplined. It is far more important for each one of us to be aware that the Lord is watching our every thought, word and deed and if we don't submit to the Lord and allow Him to be the shepherd of our lives, we too will face similar situations of want and abandonment that the Israelites faced. Just as the Israelites were subjected to the Midianites, we will fall prey into the hands of the evil one, when we choose to disregard the fact that the Lord is watching us and deliberately choose to walk in disobedience to His word.

The people of Israel called on the Lord only when they were faced with insurmountable troubles. Just like the Israelites, we too seek the Lord when in tough situations, but once things get better we forget the Lord and get back to the place of complacency and don't seek Him as we should. When we are brought low at certain times in our lives, it is always good to examine ourselves to see if we have failed, dishonoured or not glorified the Lord in some way. However, when we repent and turn back to the Lord, He is gracious and willing to forgive and restore everything to us.

God is always watching us and for those who live with this thought, this is the fear of the Lord which the Bible talks about. Many children behave a certain way in the presence of their parents and are totally different when their parents are not around. It is good to remind ourselves that we can never hide anything from the Lord, and instead of being people pleasers, if we live with the consciousness that God is watching, our lives will be totally pleasing to Him.

Gideon was concerned for others rather than himself

It was at this point of total fear and abandonment that the Israelites and Gideon faced, that the Lord sent the angel to Gideon and encouraged him with the words, "*The LORD is with you, brave and mighty man!*" Gideon didn't take pride in the fact that God was with him, but he sympathized with the people of Israel and that is what prompted him to ask the angel of the Lord why they had to go through so many hardships at the hands of the Midianites if the Lord was with them. Gideon was a man who was not self-centred but

whose heart was for the people of Israel who were facing untold hardships at the hands of the Midianites.

God is looking people like Gideon who are not self-absorbed, but whose heart is filled with burden for those who are lost and it is to such people that the Lord sends His angels to. If we have such concern for those in our families and those around us who are without Christ, the Lord will certainly use us in a mighty way. For those of us who are so caught up with our personal and family lives and our own needs, it is important that we take our mind off ourselves and ask the Lord to burden us instead for people in our family, our city, our state and our country.

Gideon was faithful in what he was entrusted with

We read in **Judges 6:2**, *“The Midianites were stronger than Israel, and the people of Israel hid from them in caves & other safe places in the hills.”*(GNB)

The people of Israel were so in dread of the Midianites that that they hid in caves and other safe places. The ones who were bold at one point were now running and hiding in fear of their enemies.

In **Judges 6:11** we read, *“Then the LORD's angel came to the village of Ophrah and sat under the oak tree that belonged to Joash, a man of the clan of Abiezer. His son Gideon was threshing some wheat secretly in a wine press, so that the Midianites would not see him.”* (GNB)

While everyone else feared and hid, Gideon didn't run away but was stayed right where he was and threshed wheat in a wine press. It is a good reminder to us that when God is with us, we have no reason to despair or flee. Whatever was in Gideon's hands to do, he continued to do that faithfully. Gideon was not willing to give up doing what best he could do even in the most stressful situation.

We must check to see if we are faithful in all that God has committed to us. We read in **Luke 16:10-11**, *“Whoever is faithful with very little is also faithful with a lot, and whoever is dishonest with very little is also dishonest with a lot. So if you haven't been faithful with unrighteous wealth, who will trust you with true wealth?”* (ISV)

The Lord expects us to be upright and honest with the little that he has handed over to us. This faithfulness is achieved only when we live with the awareness that the Lord is with us and watches us all the time. Only when a person is dependable with a little, will God entrust more and more. On the other hand if a person is unfaithful with the little that God has committed to them, they cannot be confided with much. When we talk about unrighteous worldly wealth it may very well include our time, our family, our work, our finances in all of which we are expected to be conscientious and true.

Faithful in finances

Many people struggle with being honest in money matters. If we desire that the Lord bless our finances, here are a few areas in our lives we must check to see if we are following God's principles.

Let us start with three everyday situations:

When we are invited to a wedding or birthday party, we do not go empty handed but go with a gift that in a way reflects the kind of relationship we have with the ones who invited us. The closer the relationship the greater the value of the gift.

Some people when invited to a wedding or birthday party, will first partake of the food that is served, and then decide to give a gift amount that they think appropriate for what they received.

When receiving a dignitary or a person of honour, every person who is part of the team that is welcoming him or her is expected to bring either a bouquet or a shawl as a mark of respect to the position held by the dignitary. No one is permitted to receive the dignitary empty handed.

1. Giving to God

Similar to the situations cited above, there are three primary reasons why we give to God. Firstly for the great relationship we have with God, whereby we can be called children of God, secondly, we give to God in gratitude for all the material blessings He has bestowed on us and thirdly and most importantly we give to God to honour and respect Him for who He is, the Almighty God who is King of Kings.

In **2 Corinthians 9:7** we read, *"Each of you must give what you have decided in your heart, not with regret or under compulsion, since God loves a cheerful giver."* (ISV)

Our giving should always be willingly and never out of compulsion. We primarily give out of a heart full of love and when we do so the Lord is pleased because *'God loves a cheerful giver'*

In **Deuteronomy 16:17** we read, *"Each man must bring a gift in proportion to the blessings the LORD your God has given him."* (GW)

Here the Lord clearly commands that each man who comes into His presence comes with whatever he is able to bring to the Lord. The first principle for God's blessings to remain on us is to honour God with our finances.

2. Giving to the Government

In **Romans 13:7**, *"Give to everyone what you owe them: Pay your taxes and government fees to those who collect them,"* (NLT)

One of the areas where many people fail is in this area of paying taxes to the government. Instead of paying what is due, they devise ways and means to evade the payment or circumvent the rules and even engage in misrepresentation of facts just to pay less than what is due. The word of God is concise that the Lord expects us to be honest in paying our dues to the government. When we disobey God's word, we will lose out on the blessings that He desires to shower on us.

3. Giving to the Poor

Have you noticed how we are so willing to pay any amount of money when we shop at huge malls and yet we bargain with a poor vendor on the street? This is an important principle we must practice in our lives, the principle of giving generously to the poor. It is also imperative that when we engage people in daily labour, we pay them their dues immediately and not procrastinate their payments.

In **James 5:4**, we read, *"I tell you that the pay of the labourers who have gathered in your crops--pay which you are keeping back--is calling out against you; and the outcries of those who have been your reapers have entered into the ears of the Lord of the armies of Heaven."* (WNT)

The word of God cautions us that it is our duty to pay those who work for us. When we withhold the money that belongs to the poor and the labourer the blessings of the Lord will certainly evade us. If they cry out to the Lord in their distress, the Lord will listen and mete out justice for them. Let us be those who give lavishly to those in need and be upright in paying those who work for us, so we can enjoy God's abundant favour on us.

4. Giving to our family

In **1Timothy 5:8**, we read, *"But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."* (ESV)

In many homes both the husband and wife are employed but the responsibility of taking care of all the expenses of the home is expected to be taken care of by the wife with her salary. There are many religions in our world today that may justify this where there is a big divide between the spiritual life and daily practical living. However, the Bible does not teach such dichotomy because what we believe has got to be translated into our daily living. The word of God is clear that it is the duty of the man to first take care of the needs of his family and relatives. If a man fails in this responsibility, he had not only denied the faith but is considered worse off than an unbeliever. God's blessing rests on the family who are obedient to this principle and fulfil their obligation to their families.

5. Giving to ourselves

We are certainly exhorted to take care of our personal needs as well. The Bible clearly teaches us that we must indeed love ourselves and take care of ourselves as well, but sadly this has become so predominant in our lives that we have totally changed the order of giving and have become self-centred and content with only taking care of ourselves. Let us

remind ourselves that we must always follow God's principle of giving, if we want to be recipients of His manifold blessings.

In summary, if we aspire God's blessing on our finances, let us practice being faithful in giving to God, giving to the government, giving to the poor, giving to our family and finally take care of our needs as well. It is mandatory for us to be faithful and trustworthy with the little that the Lord has entrusted to us. We must learn to be content with what we have and practice living within our means and God will positively bless us immeasurably more than we can ask and imagine. Our hands must become hands that give generously, instead of hands that keep on receiving. Like Gideon, may we have hearts that empathize with those around us and like Gideon may we be faithful to do whatever is entrusted to us faithfully and sincerely. Let Jesus be our shepherd and lead us every day and may we learn to listen and obey His voice, so we can be blessed and be a blessing to others.

Hand of God Chapter 19 Go in God's strength

*We read in **Judges 6: 13 -14**, "Sir," Gideon replied, "if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? And where are all the miracles our ancestors told us about? Didn't they say, 'The LORD brought us up out of Egypt'? But now the LORD has abandoned us and handed us over to the Midianites. Then the LORD turned to him and said, "Go with the strength you have, and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I am sending you!" (NLT)*

The people of Israel were going through a period of distress and discouragement, and Gideon was also experiencing the mood of gloom and doom that seemed to hang over their heads. That is precisely the reason why Gideon questioned the Angel of God who appeared to him, as he could not understand how they could be in such a predicament, if the Lord was with them. Gideon's mind was filled with questions for which he had no answer, and he felt the sense of being abandoned by God.

Many believers who have been in much prayer for our country too are deeply disappointed. The question in many a heart is, 'why did Lord not answer our prayers in a way that we expected Him to?' There are many others who in their personal lives also are disheartened and discouraged that their prayers are still unanswered and their deliverance seem distant. If like Gideon, we too are in state of mind that is confused with many unanswered questions, faced with situations that seem overwhelming, we can be assured that we have a God who has answers for all our questions, clarity for all our confusion and can deliver us from all our difficulties.

It was at this juncture that the word of God came to Gideon, encouraging him to go forward with all the strength he had, as the Lord promised Gideon that He would go with him, and would rescue the Israelites from the hand of Midianites. The four aspects of God's word to Gideon in **Judges 6:14**, were;

- 1. Go**
- 2. With the strength you have**
- 3. Rescue Israel**
- 4. I am sending you**

Jesus' invitation to come

*In **Matthew 9:9** we read, "As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's desk and told him, "Follow me." So he got up and followed him. (ISV)*

Matthew was a tax collector by profession, sitting at his work desk, but when Jesus beckoned him to come and follow him, he immediately left it all and decided to follow Jesus.

In **Mark 1:17**, we read, *"Jesus told them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishermen of people!" (ISV)*

The above mentioned verse, describes the call that Jesus gave to Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, to leave their nets and their fishing and to follow Him, so He could make them fishers of men. Here again both of them left their all and followed after Jesus.

In **Matthew 11:28**, we read *"Come to me, all of you who are weary and loaded down with burdens, and I will give you rest. (ISV)*

Here the invitation from the Lord is for everyone who is wearied and burdened with worries and cares to come to Him, and He promises rest for all who comes to Him, a rest that He alone can give.

Most of us are jubilant when invited or welcomed by someone, but the greatest invitation that should make us ecstatic, is the one we have received from the Lord who has called us to be His children, and be a part of His family. The reason God invites us is to grant us rest, lighten our burdens, heal us and strengthen us, so that we can go out in His strength, to fulfil His purposes for our lives. Many of us are satisfied with the thought that the Lord has called and blessed us, but have forgotten the fact that the main objective for God's calling, is to send us out as His ambassadors to bless others.

Jesus commands us to 'Go'

As Gideon stood discouraged and dejected, the word of the Lord came to embolden Gideon to go out with the strength he had, to save and deliver the people of God.

God is calling His people to go out and share His love with those around. We do not need to fear governments that oppose or anyone who threatens, because there is no authority that is higher than the Almighty God who is the King of Kings.

When praying also we must remember to seek the will of God in everything, and not desire to have our prayers answered the way we think it fit. Even Jesus when he prayed in the Garden of Gethsamane, prayed in total submission to the Father and His will, when He said *'Father if you are willing, take this cup from me, yet not my will but yours be done.'* **Luke 22:42**. If we do not submit to the will of God, we will be depressed, for often His response to our prayers may not be in keeping with what we expect or think appropriate, but one thing we can be assured of, is that it will always be for our good.

We read in **Mark 6:7**, *"He called the Twelve and began to send them out two by two, giving them authority over unclean spirits."* (ISV)

Jesus called the twelve disciples and after He taught them all about the Kingdom of God and its values, He sent them out to preach, serve, heal and teach.

We also read in **Luke 10:1**, *“After this, the Lord appointed seventy other disciples and was about to send them ahead of him in pairs to every town and place that he intended to go.”* (ISV)

Apart from the twelve, Jesus also chose and appointed seventy others whom He also equipped and sent out to be his witnesses.

The main purpose of the Lord calling and choosing us, is that we go out and share the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ with those around us. This should be the aspiration, vision and goal of every believer. Many have become content with only attending church on Sunday, and have failed to take the message of the Kingdom of God to those outside. We have also floundered and failed to maintain our testimony, and hence have made no impact on those around us.

We read in **John 20:21**, *“Jesus told them again, “Peace be with you. Just as the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.”* (ISV)

When the Father sent His son Jesus into the world, Jesus came down to earth gladly, in total obedience to the Father’s will. He willingly laid down His life to redeem us and transform us into His likeness. Jesus has now commissioned all of us who believe in Him to go out into the world, and to bring in those outside into His kingdom.

The Lord desires to use each one of us to bring about a revival to those around us, but for that to happen the revival must begin with us. Heaven rejoices when we one sinner repents and enters the Kingdom of God. The Lord wants to use us as those instruments through whom this can be accomplished. Instead of complaining about the opposition and difficult circumstances that daunt us, let us do all that we can to share the love of Jesus with others, inviting them to join in the fellowship of the church.

Go with the strength you have – no excuses please

When God commissioned people to go, there were many who rationalized as to why they couldn’t or didn’t want to go.

Let’s look at **Moses** in **Exodus 4:1**, *“Then Moses answered, “Look, they won't believe me and they won't listen to me. Instead, they'll say, 'The LORD didn't appear to you.'”* (ISV)

When the Lord called Moses to go and deliver the people of Israel from the hands of Pharaoh, Moses’ excuse was that the people of Israel wouldn’t believe him or give heed to his words, and that they would never accept the fact that the Lord did appear to him. However, when Moses obeyed God and went, the Lord used him to stand before Pharaoh, to bring about a mighty deliverance to the people of Israel from the cruel oppression of Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

When God called **Jeremiah** this is what he said in **Jeremiah 1:6**, *“I replied, “Ah, LORD God! Look, I don't know how to speak, because I'm only a young man.”* (ISV)

Jeremiah was called to be a prophet of God and there is an entire book of prophecies by Jeremiah, but when God first called him, the apology Jeremiah gave to God was that he did not know how to speak, as he was just a young man

We read about **Gideon** in **Judges 6:15**, *“Then he said to him, “Me, my Lord? With what would I deliver Israel? Look, my family is the poorest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house.”(TLV)*

The excuse that Gideon gave was that his family was impoverished and he himself was insignificant in his family.

Though Moses, Jeremiah and Gideon made excuses initially, later they obeyed the Lord and went forward to do what the Lord commanded them to do. By obeying the Lord, they were used by the Lord to bring great deliverances and be a great blessing to many.

Many of us don’t invite our friends, neighbours or co-workers to join us at church, because we assume that the ones we invite won’t come. There are many outside the church who are reluctant to come in, only because they don’t feel welcomed. It is our duty and responsibility to invite others to come and hear the word of God. We may be ordinary people, but we are called by God to do extraordinary things for Him.

As the situation in our country changes, the call of God to his children is that they should no longer be unconcerned and make alibis, but be willing to obey the Lord and His commission to us to ‘Go’ and if we do so the Lord will pour out His healing and blessings on our nation.

Here are some vital lessons we can learn from a farmer. He goes out to buy the best seeds, tills and ploughs his field, plants the seeds, waters it and then waits patiently. After all his labour has ended, it is God alone who can make it grow and flourish. The Lord has called us to be like a farmer, to go out and share our testimonies, sow the seed of the word of God in the lives of people and bring them in. If we do so the Lord will bless our labour and some day we too will experience the joy of being a part of the revival where many people will flock into the Kingdom of God.

There are lots of people who advertise lots of products these days. Those who are gullible get trapped into believing these wholesale, and also go around canvassing others to buy these products. When people are so enthusiastic to promote these worldly goods that perish with time, how much more zealous should we be to share the message of the gospel that can transform a person’s life for eternity.

Let us stop giving all kinds of reasons and excuses for not sharing the gospel, or not inviting others to come and be part of our church and fellowship. Let us not waste our time like Moses did, when he laboured as a shepherd for forty years. Let us not procrastinate, for every minute that we waste, we are responsible for someone missing out on hearing the good news of the gospel and thereby heading towards eternal destruction.

Rescue the people from destruction

In **John 4:39**, we read, *“Many of the Samaritans from that town put their trust in Him because of the word of the woman testifying, “He told me everything I ever did!” (TLV)*

If we study the life of the Samaritan woman whom the Lord used to lead so many to Jesus, she was probably not the kind of person anyone would think could be used by God to reach out to others. When Jesus met her, she was a lonely woman, who led an immoral life, she had had five husbands and was living with a man who was not her husband. However, something happened that day when she met and spoke to Jesus. The one who avoided socializing with people, ran to inform the people of her town that she may have found the Messiah, and it was her word that made the entire town believe and come to meet Jesus.

If God can use such a woman, He is willing to use each one of us to be those who will share the good news of the gospel with others and bring them to the Lord. This is the call of God to every believer, to be the ones who will save and rescue those who are lost, without hope and without the Lord.

The Lord Himself will go with us

In **Mark 16:20**, *“And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word by the signs that followed. Amen.”*

When the Lord Jesus commissioned and sent His disciples, they had the blessed assurance that the Lord would go along with them and establish the word by the powerful working of the Holy Spirit. He did so by working wonders and signs among the people, thereby attesting the word of God that was preached.

The Lord promises to go with us, equip us, anoint us and use us. When we venture out in obedience, He will demonstrate His power by the working of His Holy Spirit in and through our lives. When a policeman in uniform stops us we do so because we respect the authority that has been placed on him by the government. So also when the Lord calls us to go we do so, with the authority that the Lord Himself has placed on us and with the affirmation that the Lord is working alongside us. The Lord is in partnership with us to preach the word and He will confirm the word that is preached with miraculous signs and wonders. We therefore don't need to be fearful about anything.

Where does revival start?

We read in **Judges 6:25**, *“That night the LORD said to him, “Take your father's bull, and the second bull seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal that your father has, and cut down the Asherah that is beside it.”*

The Lord called Gideon to deliver the people of Israel, but for Gideon to accomplish that, he first and foremost had to set things right in his own family. The Lord commanded Gideon to primarily destroy the altar of Baal and to bring down the Asherah that Gideon's father had built and worshipped at.

If we are yearning for revival to break out in our nation, let us submit to the Lord so that it begins with us. May we set right things that are displeasing to the Lord in our personal lives and in our families, so we can be worthy vessels whom the Lord can use to bring revival and transformation to all those around. May we be revolutionized to be those extraordinary people, who will bring revival in our homes, our city, our state and to our entire nation.

Hand of God Chapter 20 Seeing Ourselves as God Sees Us

In **Judges 6:11-12** we read, *“Gideon was threshing some wheat secretly in a wine press, so that the Midianites would not see him. The LORD’s angel appeared to him there and said, “The LORD is with you, brave and mighty man!” (GNT)*

The people of Israel were in an arduous situation, as they were constantly attacked and plundered by the Midianites. The Midianites invaded their land, ransacked and looted all their produce and left them bare and depleted of everything. It was during these troublesome times, that Gideon had to thresh wheat in a winepress for fear of being plundered by the Midianites. In this hopeless situation, it was apparent that Gideon became discouraged, fainthearted, timid overtaken by feelings of insignificance and worthlessness. However, when God saw Gideon he saw in him a gallant and heroic man and that is why the angel of the Lord who greeted him addressed him as a ‘brave and mighty man’.

This is a reminder to us that, God does not look at people and situations the way man does. While we judge by outward appearance and circumstances, the Lord sees things differently as He perceives things that we cannot.

In **Judges 6:6** we read, *“And Israel was brought very low because of Midian. And the people of Israel cried out for help to the Lord.” (NLT)*

There were two reasons why Gideon felt so crestfallen and disheartened. Firstly, the Midianites were oppressing the Israelites far beyond what they could bear. As Gideon stood before the angel of the Lord with countless questions, the Lord encouraged him with these words from **Judges 6:14**, *“Go with the strength you have, and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I am sending you!” (NLT)*

In **Judges 6:15** we read, *And he said to him, “Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house.” (ESV)*

Secondly, Gideon’s inadequacy arose from his family and background, as his clan was considered the weakest and his family the most insignificant. He could therefore not accept the fact that God had chosen him to go and lead the people of Israel, as Gideon had resigned himself to the thought that he was a nonentity.

How often have we been where Gideon was, overwhelmed by difficulties that seem far too much to handle. There are also no answers as to why we go through these hard to handle seasons, if the Lord is with us. We limit ourselves when we allow our past experiences, present circumstances or the opinions of others shape the way we look at ourselves. When degraded and despised by others, our tendency like Gideon is to allow discouragement and disappointment get the better of us. It is dismal though that sometimes, parents demean

their children and their capabilities, so that they often grow up feeling worthless and inconsequential.

The good news is that the Lord is willing to use each one of us, no matter who we are if we accept God's plan and purposes for our lives. Often times fear prohibits us to venture out in faith because we have permitted our circumstances and the opinions of others to overpower us, and have thereby failed to fulfil God's purposes for our lives. It is only when we learn to regard ourselves the way the Lord perceives us, can we see ourselves changed and transformed, and when this change happens, not only will we become a blessing to others, we too will be blessed in the process.

The way God saw Abraham

Genesis 15:1 -2, *"After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." But Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"* (ESV)

When God visited Abraham and told him that He was His shield and great reward, all that Abraham could think about was the fact that he was childless. God looked at Abraham as the father of many nations but Abraham could not comprehend this, as he was an old man and had no children to call his own. Abraham could not accept the promises of God only because he was engulfed by the personal needs in his life, and often he must have been scorned for not having been able to have a child, which might have left him disheartened.

Abraham had every reason to not be excited about God's promise. His situation seemed grim, he was old, his wife way beyond the age of child bearing and there was no hope of having one child of his own. It was to such a man, God promised the vast and numerous blessings and offspring of his own. From Abraham's viewpoint the situation was unattainable, but from God's perspective there was nothing that is impossible for Him. Furthermore He is the God who is always faithful to keep His promise.

In **Genesis 15:4-5** we read, *"And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."* (ESV)

When Abraham assumed that the heir the Lord spoke about would be Eliezer, the Lord reiterated that his heir would be his very own son. The Lord did something intriguing with Abraham, he called him out of his tent inside of which he would have had nothing to see and made him look up towards the heavens. That night the Lord lifted Abraham's gaze upwards, to see the numerous stars in the vast heavens, and gave him an assignment to try and count them if he could. Obviously Abraham failed and the Lord promised Abraham that his offspring would be as copious as the infinite number of stars in the heavens at night. It seemed that God had to literally change Abraham's narrow mindset and enable him see things from God's broader perspective. By making him look up, God wanted Abraham to realize the power of God's mighty arm.

In **Psalm 147:4** we read, *“He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names.”* (KJV)

The stars that Abraham couldn't count and we can't, God can. He not only knows the number of the stars in the heavens, He also calls them all by their names. This was the mighty God, who brought Abraham from the confines of his tent and gave him that absolutely amazing upward look.

We must train ourselves to think thoughts of faith, and not let those around us or our challenging circumstances influence our faith walk with the Lord. When faced with those impossible situations, the Lord wants us to be rid of the negative mentality that makes us disbelieve, and doubt the power of God in our lives. Many people have resigned themselves to their problematic situation and are unable to exercise their faith in God, because they have allowed their difficulties to overwhelm them. The wonderful news is that the Lord sees way beyond our circumstances, and the one who indwells us is a mighty, miracle working God. He is the one who created the world and everything in it with just the power of His word, and His plans for us are far greater than our problems.

It is simply not enough if we acknowledge God as Jehovah Rapha (our healer), Jehovah Nissi (our banner), Jehovah Jireh (our provider) and Jehovah Shalom (our peace giver) only during times of worship. Our worship must become a reality in our everyday lives as we experience the power of this mighty God, as our healer in our time of sickness, as our banner to deliver us from trouble, as our provider who takes care of all our needs and as our peace-giver in seasons of turmoil. We must ask the Lord to transform our minds and confess the promises of God in our lives daily, believing that the Lord has marvellous plans for us and for our children.

In **Romans 4:17** we read, *“As it is written, I have made you the father of many nations. [He was appointed our father] in the sight of God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and speaks of the non-existent things that [He has foretold and promised] as if they [already] existed.”* (AMPC)

In the above mentioned verse, the Lord is aptly described as the one who gives life to the dead things and can speak life to those things that are completely non-existent. When God saw Abraham, He envisioned him as the father of many nations though Abraham himself could never envisage God's promise for his life.

We read in **Genesis 15:6**, *“Then Abram believed the Lord, and that faith was regarded as the basis of Abram's approval by the Lord.”* (GW)

Though the promise of God came to Abraham, there was no change in his situation and no evidence that the promise would actually be fulfilled for many years. However in spite of adverse circumstances and the long delay, Abraham still believed in the Lord and the Lord accounted it to him as righteousness.

There are many incidents in the Bible where impossible situations changed because people believed like the marriage at Cana, where the water turned to wine or the woman who had

an issue of blood for twelve years who was healed instantly, because she believed in Jesus and had faith to simply touch the hem of his garment.

When faced with burdensome and demanding situations, we must go to the Lord and believe that He can intervene and alter everything for us. We must not allow the bitter experiences of the past, the problematic situations of the present or fear to grip our mind but rather place our faith on God and His word. Let us decide to look at everything in our lives from God's divine perspective. All of us by placing our faith in Jesus have become children of Abraham and we must have the faith that our father Abraham had, and trust the Lord to effectuate all of His promises in our lives.

We read in **John 1:12**, *"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,"* (NASB)

The blessing of God to those of us who believe in Him and received Him is that we have been given the right and the authority to become children of God. The authority to be His children is already given, but it is up to us to believe and appropriate it in our day to day lives. When we live with this thought, the way we live will be revolutionized and so will our prayers for we can come boldly to the throne of grace with no fear whatsoever.

When we believe in the Lord Jesus, the heavenly Father beholds us the way He beheld Jesus when he came out of the waters of baptism when the heavens opened and God the Father declared in **Matthew 3:17**, *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."* (ESV). It was also this same Jesus who cried out to His Father on the cross of Calvary 'My God, My God why have you forsaken me'. There was a great exchange that happened that day on the cross, the sins of each one of us and of the entire world, past, present and future was placed entirely on Jesus and He became sin for us. The face of the Father turned against Jesus who became sin for us, so that God's grace and favour could rest on each one of us, enabling us to become sons and daughters of God.

As children of God we will sometimes fall, but the Lord will not reject or deny that we are his children, but rather his word assures us in **Proverbs 24:16**, *"for though the righteous fall seven times, they will rise again..."* (NIV) When we sin we need not hide our sins, but can run to the Lord who has promised us mercy and forgiveness for we read in **Proverbs 28:13**, *"He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy."* (NKJV)

We also read in **2 Corinthians 5:21**, *"God made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we would become the righteousness of God."* (CSB)

The sinless Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross so that each one of us can be made just and receive His righteousness. Let us pray, walk and live as the true children of God as we represent Him and His righteousness in this world.

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