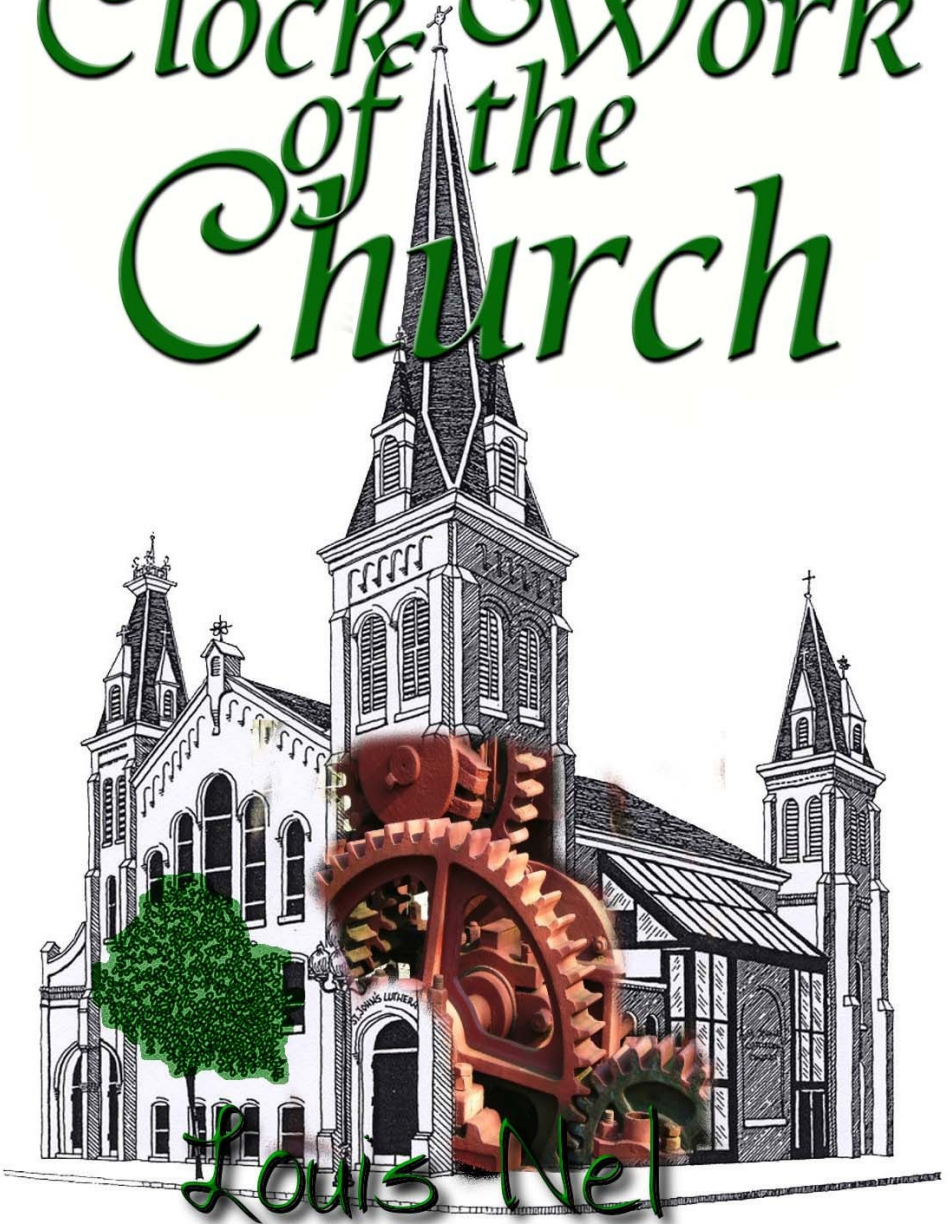


Clock Work of the Church



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Devotionals on Ephesians

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The Exciting Church!

Introduction to the Book of Ephesians

I was very impressed with the beautiful, massive building. However, when I walked into the church, it took my breath away! It was exciting! The dramatic pulpit, the beautiful woodwork, the breathtaking stained-glass windows - everything makes my heart beat faster!

Is this what a church should look like?

Then I thought, what is the church really? Is this one better than the old dull building around the corner, that one where people sing so wjoyously?

The question is, which church is the right one? And what does the ideal church look like? What does the gearing of a good church look like?

You will of course agree with me that that impressive church building is definitely not the church and neither is the old dull building around the

corner. It's just a dead building!
Name it rather the
congregation's workshop,
because this is where work is
done and where the
congregation members are
trained in true practical
discipleship.

The question of which church is
now the right one is actually
misleading. There are no
different Christian churches!
No, there is only one church,
the church of Jesus Christ!
Indeed, there are many
different congregations and
denominations and all have

different worshipping styles. They even interpret certain parts of the Bible differently and so there are certain things on which they certainly do not agree. But despite this, they eventually form only one church. In fact, every believer is individually-collectively the church.

Maybe we can see the church as a train heading to heaven. Faith in Jesus is the only ticket that gives you the right to be on this train. However, the train cannot run if someone does not keep it going and the staff

is responsible for that.

On this heavenly train, however, things work a little differently. For a start, there are no ranks. Every member of staff is on exactly the same level, whether you are the driver, conductor or waiter, everyone is the same. However, they have a wide range of duties and to keep the train on track, some of the staff have to work very hard, while most of the passengers sit peacefully and sleep!

The ideal heavenly train is the

one where all the passengers themselves also jump in and work together in order to lighten the burdens of the staff. Not only does this make the journey more enjoyable for the passengers but also for the staff. In this way, everyone on the train becomes staff. If only one starts and jumps to work, there will very soon be others to follow!

In most congregations, passive passengers are by far the majority, who participate as little as possible. Can't they then realize how exciting it is to

be a part of everything? There is such a rich variety of things to do in the church. Once you get started, you will soon realize how wonderfully exciting it is. In the letter to the Ephesians, the church is compared to a body. Just think for a moment how many widely differing subdivisions your body has and each one has an essential function! The church is also often compared to a bride or a soldier. But Paul also sees the church as a temple. From these four images alone we see the

amazing variety. No one will be able to say that there is no place or task for him or her anywhere in the church. There is room for everyone in the team.

This letter from Paul helps us to put the church in the right perspective and to be able to think right about the church. It is important that we notice that the church is actually a collection of people, people who belong to God and have an intimate connection and relationship with Jesus. Indeed, it is a mixture of people from

every conceivable background, language, race and nation and they are bound together into a close unity in Jesus. Yes, the one great unifying factor is indeed Jesus. They love Him and they acknowledge Him as the only Lord. They therefore place themselves under His rule and they serve Him.

When Paul writes this letter, he is somewhere in prison. We are not sure from which prison he wrote this letter, it could possibly have been Caesarea. Here he was imprisoned for 3

years. It could also have been Rome, where he spent a few years behind bars. We can assume that it was probably in Rome.

We can further accept that this letter was not actually addressed to the congregation in Ephesus, but that it was a circular addressed to all the congregations. In verse one it does say that he wrote to the Ephesians, but in the earliest manuscripts this verse does not appear at all, so it might have been inserted later.

I dealt with this letter of Paul about five years ago. However, I will try to look at it with completely new eyes and see it from a different angle. In this it is my heartfelt prayer that the Holy Spirit will lay every word in my heart in this short series of daily passages. Without Him it is completely impossible for me to put my pen to paper.

At the same time, my prayer is that this series will be a great blessing to you, and that you will be able to grow spiritually through it.

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for making your church so exciting. I want to pray that You will work in every heart that reads this series, that everyone will experience Your church in this way.

Grace and Peace to You!

Ephesians 1: 1,2

Shalom! Peace to you! So Jesus greeted His followers when He saw them for the first time after His resurrection.

What's in a greeting? When I see a famous person in the street, I say kindly: "Good morning" without even thinking about what I say to him. Do I really mean it deep down in my heart that I will pray for that person for a fine day?

And when I do not rush past

him too hastily, I casually ask, "How are you?" Just so automatically without me really being interested in the person's well-being, but just out of good manners. Then I just hope that he will say: "Fine, thank you," even if it is not going well, because you do not want to listen to another guy's lamenting and certainly do not want to carry his problems on your shoulders either!

Why do we say something when we do not mean it at all? And why do we enquire

about someone's well-being when we are not really interested? It's hypocrisy, isn't it?

When was the last time you visited a lonely old lady and just listened with attention and interest? If you are willing to listen, the person will open up her heart to you. She tells you about her fears, her pain, her longing for her husband who shared her life with her for 50 years and is no longer there. But she also tells of her joys and the beautiful things from her youth. "How are you?" is now

sincerely asked. And the wonder is that that person again feels like a person who means something to someone. Now she feels that someone is really interested in her. And I promise you: for yourself it is just as enriching and uplifting!

It was quite difficult for Paul to say "good morning" because he was locked up in prison! He could not even give the people he greeted a hug!

The prison was a horrible place, but Paul did not sit and worry about it. We do not even

read in a single letter from him that he complains about his circumstances! Paul never blames God for allowing him to sit in jail. On the contrary, Paul sees the wonderful opportunities in prison. Here, where he is locked up, he has plenty of time to write letters. If he cannot talk to the people directly, he writes to them! In addition, he gets the opportunity to share the gospel with the prison authorities and soldiers.

So Paul does not start his letter with a lament about his

personal circumstances, but he starts with a song of praise about the Lord's wonderful electing love (Eph. 1: 3-14). We'll talk about this song of praise a little later.

Right from the start, Paul wants to point out to his readers that they belong to God. By the way, it seems that the words "in Ephesus" may have been inserted later and that the sentence originally read: "... .. to the saints, the believers in Christ Jesus... .." This letter was most likely not just addressed to the church in Ephesus, but

to all the churches and therefore also directly to you and me today! With his greeting, Paul wants to instill in our hearts that we can know for sure that we belong to God if we only believe in Jesus.

There are so many believers who walk around with uncertainty in their hearts. These words place security in our hearts, for what greater security is there not in life, than to be assured that the Almighty God, the Creator of the universe, is your owner? He bought us out! We are His!

Of course, this has enormous consequences, because it also means that we are under His protection, that He takes care of us and that He gives us everything we need. But on the other hand, it also means that because we are His property, we are also in His service. And no, it's not forced labour - it's voluntary. You will not be "paid off" if you do not bring your side, but He lovingly gives me and you the wonderful opportunity to work for Him.

I believe in Jesus! I belong to

God! Is this not the most wonderful thought that can ever wash through anyone's frame of mind?

Then Paul comes with his greeting - not a meaningless "I'm fine - how are you?" Paul's greeting gives his readers something very precious: "Grace and peace to you!" This is not just a wish or a hope that Paul expresses. It is not even a prayer to ask the Lord to give it to the readers. Paul is convinced that the Lord has already made it available to him and now he is giving it to

everyone who reads this letter. Paul makes, as it were, God's grace and peace the reader's gift.

I belong to God. That is why I also receive, now as I read here, God's grace and peace!

Isn't that a wonderful thought? Come, I want to invite you to join me today in making this wonderful grace and peace of God our own and enjoying it with all that is within us. But you cannot keep such a precious gift to yourself! Let us pass it on to everyone who

comes our way today and especially to fellow-believers, others who also believe in Jesus. Remember, it's a gift for all of us to use and enjoy!

Prayer:

Lord, it rejoices and bubbles in me because I can once again realize that I belong to You and that You give me grace and peace in abundance!

Johnny Makes Breakfast

Ephesians 1: 3-5

Do people like you? It's an awkward question! Well, I would like to believe that most people like me! Why would people like me? Maybe because I try hard to always be kind to everyone. I even wear a mask with a broad, hearty smile painted on it and many strangers first stop to comment! It immediately puts a smile on the most sour face! I like to believe that I mean a lot

to other people. Each of us wants people to like us.

The problem is, we so easily also want to think that God loves us for our beautiful qualities. He loves me because I work hard in His kingdom or because I do so much good for other people. He loves me because I go to church every Sunday and read my Bible and pray regularly. He loves me because I sing to Him so beautifully - I even sing praises to Him in my heart!

It's a myth! God's love for me

has absolutely nothing to do with everything I do for Him. Nor even about how much I love Him. Indeed, there is a "because" involved, but this "because" lies with God. He loves me because He wants to love me. He loves me despite all my flawed efforts to try to love Him and try to do things for Him.

Maybe I could try to explain it with a story. I have told it often, but every time it brings tears to my eyes again. So, forgive me if you've read it a dozen times already!

Little Johnny decides one Saturday morning to surprise Mom and Dad and make breakfast for them. It's still a bit dark when he jumps out of bed. What would they enjoy for breakfast? Maybe he should bake crumpets - it's delicious! He opens the fridge and takes out four eggs. Then the first oopsie already happens, because four eggs are too much for his little hands to handle. Two eggs slip out of his hands and fall to the floor completely smashed! What a big mess!

Johnny gets the fright of his life! However, there is no time now to fret over that sticky mess, the crumpets need to get done! He climbs onto a chair to take the bag of flour off the shelf and almost, loses his balance! He gets a bowl and pours in a few cups of flour. He struggles to get the fine white powder out of the bag and some of the flour ends up on the floor, right on the spot where the broken eggs are still lying. Now this is a horrible, sticky mess! Fortunately, Johnny does not notice it,

because he is standing working high above the earth on a chair.

Step one is to get the eggs into the flour. He taps an egg against the edge of the bowl, as he has seen Mum do. However, it does not want to work so nicely, because only half of the egg ends up in the bowl, shell and all. The other half splashed over the counter! The second egg ends up in the right place with only a few pieces of shell in the flour.

Johnny pulls the sugar bowl

closer and carefully measures out a few handfuls of sugar. Now his hands are one sticky mess and his fingers are clinging to each other. He reaches for the milk, but in the process he bumps the sugarbowl off the counter so that it falls to smithereens on the floor and sugar covers the entire kitchen floor. However, Johnny does not have time to worry about it now, because there are crumpets to be baked! He adds milk to the flour and begins to stir vigorously.

At that moment, Mr Cat comes marching into the kitchen and jumps on the counter, because something exciting is going on here! The mixture in the bowl is now a sticky mess. Cat smells the bowl. Johnny grows angry with the animal and swings a wild blow at him with the spoon. In the process, he accidentally hits the bowl. It tilts. Johnny tries in vain to grab the bowl. Slowly the bowl spins and tumbles off the counter. Confused, Johnny sees how all his hard work splashes across

the kitchen floor causing an even bigger mess of the huge mess on the floor.

This is the last straw! His lip begins to tremble uncontrollably. When he looks around, he sees Dad standing in the doorway. Now Johnny bursts into tears. All his best efforts came to nothing! His body jerks as the raw sobs tear through him. Dad has to step very carefully into the sticky mess so as not to step on a piece of glass as well. He picks Johnny up off the chair and presses him tightly against his

chest. "Daddy loves you very much!" he comforts as he kisses him lovingly.

The Lord has chosen you and me to be His children, despite the fact that we have lived in enmity with Him. He has richly blessed us with all the blessings of the Spirit that are in heaven (verse 3). We will never really be able to understand our salvation because it is so incomprehensible. He already made His decision even before we were born. If it were up to us, we would never be able to become children of God!

How should I respond to this? To praise and glorify God! Not with reproach because He has chosen only some people and not all and accusing Him of being unjust. I must rather be surprised that He chose me in spite of the mess I made. Then I, like Paul, must rejoice in praise of how great and good the Lord really is. His grace over me is breathtakingly great. I can never thank Him enough for that.

Prayer:

Lord, all my praise and

thanksgiving and worship go to
You, for You are great and to
Your grace there is no end.

Only a Number?

Ephesians 1: 5-14

It is January 1966 in Potchefstroom. On the parade ground, our men are lined up like prawns on a skewer. Prawns indeed, because the bloody sun burned us all blood red!

"Number 25087932, step out!" the Sergeant barked.

"What is my number again?" I need to dig deep into my memory to dig up that important number.

“Number 25087932, where are you? Why do I have to wait for you?!” Then it strikes me that this is my number. I get reprimanded with spicy language because I did not respond quickly enough. I've never been good with numbers! They do not make sense to me. Words are pictures - they are something with a face and a shape. But numbers, they mean absolutely nothing!

Do you sometimes feel like you're just a worthless number? Is everything ever worth it? Do

you get discouraged because you're just a tiny speck in the big universe and nobody's really interested in you? The book of Ecclesiastes begins with such discouraging words: "Everything comes to nothing, says the Preacher, to nothing. What does man get for his toil, his toil in this world?"

Maybe you're really lonely. Maybe you have no one who truly cares about you. However, rest assured today: you are definitely not just a number! Ephesians 1:11 makes you realize very quickly that

you are definitely not just a particle of dust in the vast universe. You are very special to God! So special, that He once, long ago, even before there was time, already decided to make you part of His people. Yes, even more: to make you His child! He even went so far as to sacrifice His only Son as a ransom so that you could become part of His family. So we are truly children of God!

Actually we are adopted children, but does it really matter that we are adopted

and not own children? Jesus is God's Son and in Jesus we are God's "adopted" children.

According to the Roman legal system, in those years an adopted child received exactly the same rights and privileges as his own child. Because God made us His "adopted" children, we now have exactly the same rights and privileges as if we were God's own children. In Galatians 4: 5-7 Paul writes more about this. He says that God redeemed us "so that he might redeem them under the

law, that we might be adopted as his children. And because ye are his children, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit calling, Abba, Father. So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if you are a son, you are also an heir through God."

So I am no longer that simple number I used to be in my army days, but I have an identity! I'm somebody! Indeed someone who belongs to God! On top of that, I am also someone who has been personally made new by God.

Totally new!

However, these things did not just happen by chance. It was part of God's careful planning long ago. What does it mean? That God is in total control! Not only did He plan, but His plan worked out exactly as He determined. You and I are not just surrendered to bad people or evil forces. No, God is in control. And on top of that, He is our Father in heaven who cares and cares for us.

Paul also wants to encourage us in a wonderful way with a

third thought. In verses 13 and 14 we read that God has given us a guarantee in the Holy Spirit. He is in fact the Guarantee that we will receive what God has promised us. What did He promise? That we are God's property, His children. We belong completely to God and no one can snatch us out of His hand. He has, as it were, imprinted on us the seal of the guarantee that everything is genuine.

It sometimes happens that a believer doubts his spiritual

childhood. I have talked to many believers who say they are not sure if they really have eternal life. The devil is the supreme liar and he will do everything in his power to cast doubt on a believer. He was already doing this in the Garden of Eden, when he asked Eve, "Did God really tell you not to eat from any tree in the garden?" Today he asks, "Do you really think that you can be saved by only believing in Jesus?"

Have you ever doubted? Or maybe I should ask if there is

anyone who has never doubted for a moment? If you ever have such thoughts, you can just read Ephesians 1:13 again and keep it deep in your heart: "In Him you were, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and came to faith, sealed with the Holy Spirit, as promised. " This is final! The stamp of authenticity has been imprinted by the Holy Spirit so that we can know for sure, without any doubt: We are God's property! We are God's children! So we have eternal

life!

Prayer:

Lord, thank You that I can know for sure today that I belong to You and that I am Your child.

Thankyou!

Ephesians 1: 15-23

This morning's Scripture passage is overflowing so with messages that I hardly know where to begin and where to end. Isn't it wonderful how some verses often just bubble with God's words to me?

In verses 15 and 16, Paul thanks God for the love of the believers. I often feel very uncomfortable when someone thanks me for something I did. To give an example:

My job in our congregation as communications person is rather very diverse. This means, among other things, that I have to design and keep our website up to date. These devotionals are also part of my job. I am also responsible for making videos of the worship services and broadcasting them on Youtube. Our pastor often compliments me with: "It was well done!" Now I realize all too well that I cannot do it out of my own strength or cleverness. The Holy Spirit lays the thoughts in me and He

expects me to do my best to perform the task He gives me and for which He equips me to the best of my ability.

How do I say "thank you" to someone for something beautiful that the person did, without it sounding like I was soft-soaping him? The secret is to think carefully about the motive for your "thank you". In fact, your thanks should always go to God first. After all, he is the One who has given the person you want to praise the ability, wisdom, and will to do what he has done.

But it is also important that you tell the person how you feel, and that you thank God for what He has done through the person. So say to the person, "I thank the Lord for what He has done through you today." That way, it's not a soft-soaping, but a God-given compliment. So the next time your pastor delivers such a moving sermon, do not say to him, "You preached so beautifully that you drove me to tears," but rather say, "Reverend, I praise the Lord that He touched me deeply with the

wonderful message He gave me through you.”

And that is exactly what Paul is doing here. He tells the readers that he cannot stop thanking the Lord for the beautiful things he hears about the believers, about their faith in Jesus and their wonderful love for their fellow-believers.

In the second part Paul writes that he constantly intercedes for the readers. It's something that does not come so easily. It is very easy to pray for yourself and for your own needs. It is

just as easy to pray for your own family, your close family and friends. But dedicating people who are often unknown and far away from you to the Lord is not so easy at all. Most of us rather leave it out of our prayers or we pray an insignificant prayer.

Paul gives us an example of how we should pray. We really need to take other people's interests to heart, even though we often do not even know them personally. We need to be specific when dedicating such a person to God. In this

case, Paul prays that the Lord, through the Holy Spirit, will give wisdom to the readers of this letter and that the Lord will reveal Himself to them in such a way that they will truly come to know Him. He also prays that the Lord will give them clarity so that they can come to the realization of what great hope is locked up in their calling and what breathtaking richness there is in the inheritance that every believer receives. He also prays that the reader will realize what tremendous power lies locked

up there, available to anyone who believes.

Of course, Paul has already experienced these things personally in a miraculous way and he prays that every reader, you and me included, will also experience it like that. Of course, this also means that it is his prayer for me and you today, because two thousand years later we are the readers today.

This is a wonderful example of what our intercession for other people should look like. Now in

theory it all sounds very nice, but how does it work in practice? Where do I begin when I want to pray for other people?

A good way is to start with the prayer list of one of the many organizations that urgently need intercession. Open Doors is such an organization and you can access the weekly prayer list at

www.opendoors.org.za/ewelcome-series-prayer-calendar.

There are many believers who live in the greatest need in countries where the Gospel is

forbidden. They need our intercession. Closer to home, for example, you can think of the problems and challenges your own congregation's pastor and church council face every day and pray for them for wisdom. Currently, there is the horror that has hit our KZN coastal area over the past week. And do not forget the war in Ukraine!

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for so many people You have given in my life who pray for me. Also

teach me to pray for others.

From Lost to Saved

Ephesians 2: 1-10

We can briefly summarize Ephesians 2: 1-10 in this sentence: We were dead because of our sins, but God created us in Jesus, so we must do the good works that He expects of us. Short & sweet!

However, I do not think we realize every day the full extent of this short thought. Allow me to try to explain. Someone comes to me with a request: he wrote a book and now he

wants me to print it for him. Simple! Before I can print it, however, his writing must first be edited, because right from the start I already see some spelling mistakes. The first step is to process the manuscript so that it is in printable form and then I print out one copy. My Mosbolletjie is the language expert and she gets the first printed book. Now begins the great task of reading the book word-for-word, red pen in hand and marking every mistake. It takes weeks of careful, time-consuming hard-

concentrating reading,
because literally every comma
needs to be checked.

When she finally gets to the
last page, I'm pulled closer.
Now we go through the book
together and discuss every
mistake and correct it. When I
have fixed everything on the
computer, it is printed out
again and then she reads it
carefully a second time by
looking for errors that may
have been overlooked
somewhere. Only when she is
done with this can the book
finally be compiled and

printed and bound. Then a cover is designed and converted and the books have to be trimmed neatly with a giant guillotine. Hard work! "Print a book for me quickly!" becomes a huge task that can easily take a month!

What has to happen so that I, a lost sinner, could be transformed into a fruit-bearing believer? It's like describing the process where raw cocoa beans are transformed into heavenly Belgian chocolate! It does not just happen that way! But the result Wow!

Reflect back on your own life: Before all this happened, your life was very different. You have been deceived by Satan, even though you may not want to admit it for a moment! Your sinful desires have so dominated your life that you have simply done what you wanted to. You faced the damnation daily and often laughed about it. When you live in sin, you cannot give the devil only all the credit for it, as Eve did. You sin because you enjoy it and because you are deceived by

your desires. Let's make a little list of what your true circumstances were at first:

You were cursed by God.

You were dead because of your sins.

You followed the mainstream.

You were spiritually dead.

You were God's enemy.

You would be punished by God.

You were in the service of Satan.

You have been deceived by your sinful nature.

Yes, and then that wonderful thing happens in your life and out of God's great grace He saves you from this swamp of lostness. Now the list looks a bit different:

You are now the object of God's love.

You were made alive with Christ.

You choose Christ's path.

You live forever.

You are a child of God.

You are saved by grace.

You are in the service of Christ.

You let yourself be led by the Spirit.

However, to accomplish this transition from one state to another has taken a process that has shaken the heavens to it's foundations. It cost the Creator of the universe to leave His throne and come to humble Himself among the filthy, sinful, Satan-serving brood. He, the One who holds the highest authority of all time, voluntarily came to subject Himself to mockery, cursing and even torture to death in order to pay the full

price for you and my salvation. It is pure grace, a gift from God, which He gives free, gratis and free. So no one can ever boast by saying, "I have changed my life from a lost, sinful life to a saved, God-centered life." Everything, everything is grace!

If I then see what God has done with my life, without having earned any of it, it may only lead to one thing: to say thank you over and over, not just with words, but with my whole life! It should be a natural response to serve that

God who saved me from the clutches of Satan and praise Him through everything I do. In other words, not working for a reward, but purely because I want to say thank you and because I love Him deeply!

Prayer:

Thank you, thank you, thank you Jesus, for all you have done for me, and for saving me! Teach me to put my gratitude into practice.

One in Christ

Ephesians 2: 11-22

This morning we are going to talk church for a change. As we have already said, the church consists of all the believers, regardless of what denomination they belong to and regardless of their race, culture and so on. Paul addresses this very issue, where Christ broke down the dividing wall between Jews and gentiles so that there is now only one mankind in Christ. All

who were not Jews were considered gentiles. They were so-called "uncircumcised" and the Jews believed that they were far removed from God because God's covenant and promises were limited to Israel. However, Jesus removed this dividing wall so that gentiles were now also part of God's covenant. Were it not for this, then only Jews would be able to partake of God's kingdom and promises. We would be excluded!

Jesus breaks down many walls - walls that often bring totally

unnecessary separation between believers. Some believers are already old, seasoned Christians who have already gone through the mill of life and stand strong in the faith. It is so easy to become spiritually arrogant because you have already "arrived". However, there is no reason to be sneering about it, because after all, it is not you who made the difference, but Christ! You may even be able to boast of an elongated ancestry of believers who have risen in the life of faith.

However, it means absolutely nothing!

However, the reverse is just as true. If you are a new Christian who is still in your infancy in the life of faith, you do not have to feel inferior for one moment. In Christ you and the seasoned Christian are in exactly the same place. Christ totally broke down the wall of distinction.

Indeed, there are often sky-high walls that separate believers from one another. Sometimes it is beliefs like

baptism, where some believe that one should be baptized as a baby, while others believe that one should not be baptized until one has a firm faith in Jesus. Some believe that you should sit dead still in the church and behave, while others clap and dance to live out their spirituality. But there are other walls that separate us, such as age differences. Young people have a totally different style of worship than older people. Differences such as appearance, intelligence, political persuasion, financial

position, race, status and many others can build dividing walls. Now If you really want to kill Jesus' love, you have to form a "click" with people who think like you, or to whom you naturally feel attracted. By doing so, you limit your love to a handful of select people only!

Jesus broke down these walls with which people lock themselves in, so that all believers are equal, even if we belong to different races or cultures and even if there are beliefs that you can potentially

argue about for hours. Poor and rich, young and old, gifted and simple - in Christ there is absolutely no difference! Christ made us one and He also put an end to the enmity, so that we all have free access to the Father through one Spirit. This is a wonderful gem that we need to cherish and share with each other. We must look for positive ways to put reconciliation into practice.

Indeed, Jesus had already begun to break down these walls during His ministry, 2,000

years ago. He never made a distinction between people and so He came to set the example of how it should be done practically. Where no Jew ever spoke to a Samaritan, Jesus struck up a conversation with a Samaritan woman, rather with a long-drawn, infamous reputation! He invited himself to visit and dine with an abominable tax collector. This was absolutely taboo for the Jews, because tax collectors were "traitors"! Moreover, to make matters worse, this tax collector invites

all his bad friends to come and eat with him! Of course, the arrogant Pharisees were disgusted by His actions!

We must clearly realize that there is no such thing as a first-class and second-class Christian in the church. All believers are equal. Every Christian believer is a full citizen with equal status in God's kingdom! There are no attendees!

Every Christian believer is a member of God's household. God made each one his own

child and connected everyone with the blood of Jesus. So we are brothers and sisters!

All Christians together are the spiritual house of God, His holy temple. Every believer is part of that building, like bricks built in to form the structure. Just as citizens have equal status, and family members are brothers and sisters and a building is a unit, so believers must also form a close unit. We are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ as our Cornerstone

(verse 20). As Cornerstone, He binds the whole building of the church together into a mighty unity and a holy temple for God, a temple in which the Holy Spirit dwells (verse 21,22).

Let's live that wonderful unity in practice today.

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for breaking down the walls between us. Please save us from rebuilding the walls again.

The Thirteenth Apostle

Ephesians 3: 1-13

What a wonderful privilege to be a messenger of God! If God uses you as an ambassador and sends you to carry the glad tidings of His glorious grace and love, it is such a great privilege! Originally there were about twelve men, personally chosen by Jesus for this task. For three years they received intensive practical training. However, God decided to appoint a

thirteenth apostle as well, someone who, unlike the others, had an intensive theological training which would enable him to later on write letters covering the full meaning and scope of the gospel and described in fine detail. And so it happened that the brilliant theologian, Paul, was completely stopped by God against his will on the road to Damascus, where Jesus came to speak to him in person.

At first the other apostles were very sceptical about this

sudden change of life of Paul, and the Jewish Christians were very wary of this man who first persecuted them and now suddenly wanted to preach to them. Only several years after his Damascus experience did Paul receive the command from God to go and preach the Gospel, not to his fellow Jews, but to the gentiles.

As a staunch Jew and, on top of that, a Pharisee who was narrow-mindedly bound by the law, it must have been very difficult for Paul to say "Yes" when God sent him. He literally

had to throw overboard everything he had learned over the years and gain a whole new perspective on religion. It was hammered into him that gentiles were "unclean serpents," so now it would mean he had to give up his chastity. However, Paul was very excited about his commission and he threw all his weight into it. Nothing, absolutely nothing stood in his way, not even death was an obstacle for him! And when he ended up in prison, he simply continued writing letters to

spread the Gospel further.

Paul sees this command to preach the gospel to the gentiles not as a burden on his shoulders, but as a great privilege. Moreover, not one that he has earned by his dedication or learning, but pure grace from God. Even his imprisonment is not the end of the world for him, but he encourages the readers of this letter from prison. No, they did not have to feel sorry for him because he was in jail. Even less did it have to discourage them. It was a great honour for

him to be in prison for their sake!

It sounds so terribly unfair and you struggle to understand it. Paul preaches the gospel with so much passion, but his own people, the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, do not want to accept him. On the mission field it is not easy either, time and time again he experiences rejection, especially from the Jews. Yet he carries out God's command. Many times he is thrown out of a city when things start to get too

uncomfortable for the residents. Then Paul simply goes to the next city and starts all over again.

Then came his last journey to Jerusalem, where the Jews had him arrested. They had been looking for his blood for a long time and here finally was their opportunity. The worst was that Paul had expected it! He was sent to Rome where he was first placed under house arrest and later imprisoned.

Unfair? No, definitely not! God ordained that the Jewish

Christians should reject Paul so that the gospel could be spread over the rest of the world. If people made it very comfortable for Paul in a city, he might just want to stay in one city. It was necessary for the gospel to be preached as widely as possible and Paul travelled the world over. Then came prison. Why did he have to spend so many years in prison, when he might have been able to preach the gospel much more fruitfully elsewhere? Very simple: many letters were published

because he was forced to write. Many of these letters have been preserved and for the past two thousand years millions of people have been reading Paul's "sermons" daily. How wonderful did God not provide here, for if he had not been in prison, we might never have had that precious treasure of letters. Whether Paul ever realized the true purpose of his captivity we do not know, but what we do know is that he accepted his fate with joy and rejoicing. God provided it that way and

therefore he was content without murmuring.

We are often guilty before God, because with every little thing that happens to us we put on a long face. When life's shoe presses a little on our corns, we whine! Often we do not understand why things happen to us and we plead with God to deliver us from our misery. Know today that God has a purpose for every thing in your life! Live, like Paul, fully for Him and when the hardship befalls you, be thankful, because somewhere behind it

is a great purpose that you may not understand now. But God knows what it's all about and therefore we can accept it with trust.

Prayer:

Lord, please teach me to accept Your will with joy, even if I have to suffer.

A Special Prayer for You

Ephesians 3: 14-21

People love to complain about a pastor's sermons: they are either too long, too boring, too sweet, too uncomfortable. And then the one I've heard so many times is that he repeats things too much. A pastor once said, when someone complains again because he has allegedly repeated something too much, that if necessary, he will repeat it again and again!

Is it then really necessary to say things over and over?

If you are a parent with young children, you will surely know that you have to repeat the same rhyme every night at bath time: "Wash behind your ears; remember your hair; do not wet the whole bathroom!" If you do not repeat this over and over again, it simply will not happen. "But I'm not a child!" you might want to protest. Maybe! But there are some things in life that you have to hear over and over again, otherwise you forget

very quickly and your faith weakens.

Someone who does not come to church often wanders far and wide away from God, even though he is a believer. In church you are reminded of your relationship with God, not only by the sermon but also by fellow-believers. You have probably noticed that some ideas are also repeated over and over in these meditations. We can simply never hear enough of God's love and grace!

Indeed, Paul is no exception in this regard and he repeats the fact over and over again in every possible way that believers owe their salvation to God alone. In no other way is there salvation except through Jesus Christ! If God had not saved the believer and made him His child, he would certainly have been lost. Can this ever be said enough? Oh, from my own experience I know that if I do not hear it often, I start to forget about it afterwards and start thinking I can work out my own

salvation. I start to believe that it is my own achievements and good qualities that bring me salvation!

Paul intercedes for the readers in this passage of Scripture. Maybe Paul needed it so much at that point in prison, to think for himself and maybe ask God to deliver him from his misery. Yet it is not even mentioned. His prayers are not about his own miserable fate, but about those who read his letter.

However, pay close attention

to what his prayer is about. It's definitely not about material things! Not asking for great wealth, or that it will go well with them physically. No, his prayer is about the most important of all things - the things that really matter! He prays that everyone who reads the letter (and of course that includes you and me today) will become internally, or rather spiritually strong! That God, through the Holy Spirit, will give us that power from the riches of His glory. That wonderful "Power Source" is at

the disposal of each of us. It is an absolutely inexhaustible Source, nourished by the immeasurable riches of God. Then why should we not use it?

He also prays that Jesus Christ will dwell in our hearts through faith. The fact is that Jesus does not have to be begged to dwell in our hearts. He is already waiting in anticipation for us to open up. It is actually us who are begged to allow Him!

Furthermore, Paul prays that we will be rooted and

grounded in love. Jesus has already done everything! He redeemed us, gave us salvation and life and also gave us the Holy Spirit. He even came to set an example for us on how to put love into practice. Now He begs us to implement that love in our lives in all areas of life. No, not just a sign of love here and there, but it must become an integral part of our daily existence.

I do not think we can ever comprehend how far Jesus' love extends. However, by living love, you begin to

experience something of the immeasurable extent of His love. Paul's prayer then, is that we will become intensely aware of that love that transcends all understanding. He wants us to be completely and utterly filled with the love and with it the fullness of God.

You might say that these high thoughts are all just wishful thinking? No, definitely not! It is within the reach of every believer. Just open up your heart, life and mind to it and the Holy Spirit will do the rest.

The day when it happens to you that you are carried to a spiritual climax, you dare never become spiritually arrogant. You must then realize where your power and spirituality have their origin. It is God alone who can give you those things undeservedly, and yet infinitely more than our human mind can process. Yes, to Him alone comes all the honour, praise, thanks and worship! We never dare claim the glory for ourselves because in Him, through Him and to Him are all things, in heaven and on

earth.

Prayer:

Lord God Almighty, I fall down before You this morning in worship, for without You I am nothing. You are the One who gives me life and strength. Thank you Lord, thank you!

Is Church Unity Possible At All?

Ephesians 4: 1-16

Colonel James Stevenson-Hamilton was the first park chief of the Kruger National Park, or Sabi Park as it was then known. Nature and the veld were in his blood, and with great passion he began to build up the game reserve. He worked very hard to turn this patch of barren earth, which was then almost stripped of all its animals, into the world-famous park where people

could partake of nature and enjoy wildlife. However, he misunderstood a few things. His one big goal was to get rid of all the predators that devoured the precious antelope. Lions were exterminated to create a safe unit in the game reserve. Today, of course, it is common knowledge that most visitors go to see the lions! It was almost a fatal mistake. The success today in the Kruger National Park lies precisely in the variety within the unity and the wonderful balance of

nature where everyone has their niche, whether it is antelope, fish, bird, elephant, tree or predator.

Exactly the same applies in the church area, where the traditional churches (Dutch Reformed Church etc.) were very toxic to the churches that maintain a more comfortable style of worship, such as the AGS and Full Gospel. They were branded as "sects" and "very dangerous!" Later, the picture was reversed, when vicious attacks came from their ranks against the

traditional churches, because they were "stone-dead" and baptized completely wrong.

Thank goodness, that time is over! Church leaders have begun to realize that there can be differences within the Church of Christ while still maintaining a close church unity. After all, in Christ we are all one in spite of our differences. If we think carefully about the differences, you will see that different worship styles are needed, because people are differently inclined and the

variety offers each one his place where he feels happy. Indeed, there are still people who are fighting over these differences, but they are fortunately in the minority.

The question is, how do you maintain a working unity in the midst of great differences? Paul explains that your confession must match the way you live practically. Unity can therefore not be justified, but it begins with every believer to live it practically right. For unity it is of the utmost importance to make Ephesians

4:2 your own: "Endure one another with complete humility and meekness, and with patience in love." Church unity is impossible without these qualities. But then we must also remember that unity does not start with people but with God. In verse 3, Paul writes, "Strive to preserve the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." We do not dare throw this unit away! We must pursue it positively and work for it by living in peace with one another. It's definitely not easy, especially if the other party

starts throwing stones and you still have to stay friendly and patient and tolerate while dodging the stones!

Sometimes it seems to us that the differences are simply too great. The various churches of Ballito held joint services a few years ago, where each church had the opportunity to handle part of the service. There was usually an awkward silence when it was the turn of the Dutch Reformed Church, because some groups were used to participating live and now almost nothing happens!

When it's their turn again, the traditional groups stand around awkwardly, because they are not used to dancing and all the "noise". How can there be unity if the differences are so great?

Paul emphasizes that we must clearly realize that there is only one body and only one Spirit and one hope and one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God and Father of all (vv. 4-6). What God has made one we dare not tear apart!

Unity in the midst of differences

means that we must give space to each other. We may not try to prescribe to each other what is the right thing to do, because let's just say I'm actually the one who's wrong! Similarly, it is wrong to artificially add together what cannot work together. Attempts have been made for many years to unite the three "sister churches" (NG, Reformed and Reformed churches), but time and time again the talks have failed. Why? Even between these three churches, totally different styles of worship have

developed. Although they share almost exactly the same thoughts, one is very conservative and stiff while the other sometimes tends towards the charismatic.

Church unity does not start with church leaders, but with you and me personally. If you and I look at each other and do not notice the differences but rather the wonderful Scriptural truths we share, half the battle is won. Now we can grant each other the differences with modesty, patience and kind, heartfelt

love and talk together about the things that really matter!

Prayer:

Lord, I praise and glorify and thank You for the wonderful unity that is taking hold among our various churches. Help me to positively and practically pursue and live further unity.

Desires

Ephesians 4: 17-24

Paul pleads with us this morning: "Do not live like the heathens with their insignificant thoughts." The pagans of that time were, of course, all the non-Jewish peoples who lived around the Mediterranean. The stories you hear of how most heathens lived, make the hair on your neck rise up! Drunk parties and sex orgies were commonplace. The shocking

thing is that many of these vulgar things were practised in the temples of their idols! In some cases temple whores were even officially appointed in the temples! From Greek history you can see a myriad of idols that people worshipped. Some of the most breathtaking temples still stand today.

On the other side of the picture were the Romans. They conquered the whole world through their war machine that simply steamrolled over everything and everyone. Those who did not want to co-

operate were simply destroyed! The Romans were bloodthirsty, not only in their wars but also in their leisure. The Colosseum still stands today in Rome as a monument to the many people, especially Christians who died a horrible death there. Friends were forced to fight each other to the death. Christians were fed alive to lions or crushed by gladiators to great amusement of the Romans! All just to satisfy the people's insatiable bloodlust!

But then, of course, there were

all the undercurrents between the men in the upper ranks in their desires for power. Betrayal, corruption, murder, backstabbing (literally and figuratively) were the order of the day and even the emperors did not escape it!

Terrible! Horrible! Yes, that's right, but is that not exactly what's happening today? Often it is even much worse today! Drunk parties are still the order of the day and the shocking thing is that nowadays it is not a disgrace to show up at work with a

hangover, you rather brag about it! In the bar the men brag about how many “innocent” girls they already have to account for and when a bunch of women party you just hear how many men have seduced them!

The idol temples of today may have changed a little, but they are still there. The flashing lights of the many gambling houses in our country shine brightly day and night. Slavishly people come to sacrifice their money and possessions to the god who asks for more and more

and more. Sometimes he gives something back, only to swallow it all again later. Another type of idol temple is the numerous strip clubs and the hordes of brothels. Indeed, brothels are illegal, but for the sake of convenience, the authorities turn their heads away and pretend not to see anything, because many of them visit there themselves!

Nor did the bloodthirsty violence of that time escape us today. Murder, rape, robbery, hijacking and molestation are

commonplace. Corruption, backbiting, fraud and theft are but part of life, down to the very highest levels in our country.

When Paul asks that we please do not live like the gentiles, our first reaction is immediately: "But Christians do not make themselves guilty of such things!" Really? A very well-known pastor launched an urgent campaign against gambling a few years ago after he himself fell for it and was engulfed by the gambling devil. Only grace saved him

from that pool of sludge. Yes, tragically, it is usually only the ministers who stumble who make the news. Some time ago, some ministers were in the news for involvement in molestation and adultery. On one occasion, someone told of a pastor who came to him pleading for help because he was trapped in a rotten pool of pornography!

I mention these things only to show that no one is infallible, not even the reverants and pastors. Many Christians were sucked in by the gambling

houses. It starts with an innocent evening of fun with a few friends, and before you know it, you're trapped in that net! The same goes for all the other seductive things of the world. It has everything to do with desires, sinful desires that are consuming you more and more. An "innocent" flirtation can arouse desires in you that later become an unquenchable fire and end in tragedy.

Paul pleads with us today, that if we have fallen into such things, we must get rid of that

old man who perishes because of his deceptive urges. (v. 22) "You must rather be renewed in the nature of your thinking and clothe the new man as a garment," he requests in verse 23.

Christ set an example for us on how to live. He showed that you can live fully without surrendering to debauchery. A believer's life does not have to be boring and long-faced, but stay away from the things that can arouse sinful desires in you. Fill your life with beautiful things, and there will be no

more room for sin. If you engage in exciting activities that are according to God's will, there will simply be no time to brood over desires that lead you to perdition!

Prayer:

Please direct my life today so that I will live completely according to Your will and be holy as You ask of me.

Guidelines for Life

Ephesians 4: 25-5: 5

Susan was in love with John, he was her hero, her knight on the white horse. John asked her to marry him and they became engaged. But then a terrible accident happened and just before their wedding he died. Susan was crushed! She never wanted to go through that trauma again, so she became an old maid and sat on the shelf!

For thirty years she did what

she wanted and often got involved in all sorts of indecent things. On top of that, she became a difficult person who got her own way in life.

At 50, however, she met Carl, an attractive widower, and suddenly the love blossomed again and the two got married. Gradually, Susan begins to realize that she is making Carl very unhappy with her selfish behaviour. She would have to drastically change her life to maintain his love. It was certainly not easy to reverse her behaviour,

which had been ingrained in many years.

Yesterday we saw how sinful desires can ruin the lives of not only your own but others' as well. Paul now gives practical guidelines on how to deal with those desires. That day when you are in a relationship with Jesus, it also means that certain responsibilities come your way to make this relationship work. It means that you will have to break with those sins in your life and that you will strive to live perfectly according to God's will and be

holy. Paul's guidelines are just a few examples of how a believer's life should change.

His first guideline is to speak the truth among one another. Lying is poisonous and it will destroy any relationship. Lying in a marriage, for example, is the easiest way to get any marriage to end in divorce. Within a church, lies destroy the unity of the church and it brings conflict. Mutual trust is undermined and then quarrels and bad friendships in store for the congregation. The truth may hurt in the short term, but

in the long run it binds the church together as a close unit.

Paul's second guideline is to not sin when you get angry. No, it does not mean that you should never get angry, but your actions when you get angry determine whether you sin or not. Even Jesus became angry when He saw the temple being desecrated. Good advice is to always count to ten first if something upsets you bitterly, so that you have enough time to think soberly about your reaction.

An example: Someone drives into your brand new car, and you are furious. "What do you think you are doing!" you yell at him as you jump out of your car. Your anger evokes his anger, and you yell at each other.

Think soberly about the situation before you react. Yes, he may have been wrong and he may not have looked where he was driving. But do you think any right-thinking person would have done it on purpose? Then why shout at him? To calmly get out and

discuss the matter reasonably with him, defuses the situation and ten to one brings a solution. Road rage has already killed many people. It destroys your own health, ruins relationships and gives the devil a hold on your life! Every believer has the wonderful benefit of having the Holy Spirit to help you channel your anger. Trust Him in it!

"Thieves must stop stealing," says Paul, "and work to be able to give something to someone else." If you are a believer, you must stop taking

what does not belong to you. Unauthorized private phone calls on your work account, taxes that are sneakily withheld from the state, working hours where you pass the time with small talk and thus steal your boss's time there are a multitude of examples.

A big scape-goat in the lives of many believers is foul language. That filth may not form part of your vocabulary. The proverb reads: "What the heart is full of, the mouth overflows." If your mouth is

overflowing with foul language, it indicates a nasty inside. I sometimes wonder about some of our country's top comedians, who cannot give a show without an avalanche of vulgar language. I just cannot handle it! If Christ is the centre of your life, foul language will not even be an option.

"Be kind and compassionate to one another and forgive one another." God has forgiven all our sins. Of course, this means that I will also forgive others and so reflect on

God's unconditional forgiveness. After all, we pray that God will forgive our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us!

Kindness and goodness must be an integral part of any believer, for it is a characteristic of love.

Paul asks of us something that seems almost impossible: "Live in love, as Christ also loved us." Of course, we cannot even get close to Jesus' love, but we must strive to live out our love practically to everyone, even

to our enemies!

The last guideline Paul gives is that dirty talk, immorality and greed are never part of a believer's life. We get used to dirty talk so easily that it does not bother us after a while. Next to the braai fire you take part in it yourself! It certainly does not bear witness to your salvation. Even less immorality or greed, for these are things of the world, personally incited by the devil! A joke does not have to be dirty to be hilarious. Some of the best jokes I've ever heard in my life were

clean. Fill your life with the beautiful things so that there can be no room for the ugly!

Prayer:

Lord, please help me to get rid of all the ugly things in my life. Fill my life with Your wonderful love, and help me to put it into practice.

Light and Dark

Ephesians 5: 6-20

Twenty-five years ago, Marloth Park:

Mosbolletjie and I sit snugly in the warm glow of a crackling fire. The dancing flames create a peaceful, safe atmosphere and dispel the pitch darkness that engulfs the bush around us. The night is beautiful when somewhere a Scops owl is talking quietly, coo-cooing with his partner. In the distance a lion grumps "Oomph-

oomph." The old "wolf-with-the-limp-leg" (that's now a hyena) chants "hoeeeeep-hoeeeeep", limping in search of a juicy bone, or is it maybe after his partner? We feel safe here by the fire. But do we really feel safe?

A twig cracked. Mosbolletjie and I spin around with pounding hearts. The beam of the powerful flashlight crackles through the pitch darkness. There is nothing! What would it be? Every dark corner of the bush is carefully combed with the blinding ray of light.

Satisfied, we sit back and relax. Yet somewhere in the back of your head there is a voice whispering: "There is something in the pitch dark! He is watching over us and he is very unholy!"

A lion suddenly roars very loud and I jump with fright! I'm trying to calm myself, convincing myself that that lion is still far away, probably down there by the Crocodile river. Nah, we are safe here! But the little voice speaks again: "That lion can easily run thirty kilometers per hour - so he can run this

single kilometer in two minutes!" I move closer to the fire

At regular intervals, the darkness around us is combed for any form of life - you never know! It's not just lions lurking in the dark - there can be crooks here too!

It is interesting, after all, that all that is unholy happens in the dark. Robbers usually wait until it is pitch dark before robbing your home. Lions lie down and sleep during the day, but when the night throws it's dark

blanket over the bush, they are up and awake! And hungry! I still remember very well how my heart was pounding in my throat that night when my car got stuck in a mud puddle down by the Crocodile River. A friend and I had to walk home in the pitch dark through predator-infested bush, armed only with a flashlight with flat batteries! I have never in my life been so happy to see the house!

All sorts of other evils also hatch at night. It's the time when brothels do a lot of

business and the gambling houses fill up. This is also exactly when the men can get drunk and everything that is irresponsible and licentious happens. It's like everything bad is afraid of the light! Even in the wild, it is all the dangerous and sinister creepy crawlies that lurk in the dark like predators, blood-sucking bats, rats and scorpions. However, in the bright sunshine, the colourful, cheerful, chirping birds, buck and butterflies come out to brighten up life!

Now Paul is playing the darkness off against the light. Unbelievers once lived in darkness, but now God's bright light illuminates our lives. Therefore, we should no longer live like someone who is still in the dark, but rather like people of the Light. Nor should I be deceived by people who are still living a dark life. That does not mean I should not have anything to do with such people! On the contrary, it is precisely the duty of every believer to offer the Light to such a person as a wonderful

alternative to the lostness of the darkness in which he lives.

As a person of the Light, I have to constantly ask myself whether what I am doing is acceptable to the Lord? Would He really want me to do that? If I cannot answer this question positively, then I must leave it at that! "Do not participate in the fruitless practices of darkness!" Stay away from them! Do not even talk about the secret things of the wicked, for it is a disgrace! It's not me who says so, but Paul!

That does not mean I should simply close my eyes to all that is wrong. On the contrary, I have to do something about it. "Expose it!" says Paul. No, I do not have to make light talk about it, but I have to point out the evil things and take a stand against them. Silence is also a form of approval!

The idea is that dark things should be replaced by light. Bad things must therefore be replaced by the good and useful. Do not just sit with your hands folded and look beautiful, but take advantage

of every opportunity. Buy out the time! Instead of hanging out and drinking in a bar, I should focus on a Spirit-filled life. Rather than sing dirty songs at a rough party, my life should resound with songs of praise to God, sincere and deep from my heart. I must seek the will of God. Look for answers from the Scripture and dig deep to find out what the Lord's purpose is with my life and what He wants me to do.

Finally, I must live gratefully and say thank you for every thing that comes my way!

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for saving me from the darkness into Your wonderful light. Please give me a joy in my heart today.

Marriage Relationship

Ephesians 5: 21-33

Have you ever watched birds during the breeding season? How they nest and hatch young? I am often amazed when I observe all the activities. The passion with which weaver males deftly braid a nest only to be rejected by a picky female! However, it is especially the Hornbills that capture my imagination. The female is closed in together with the

young in a hole in a tree trunk, with only a small slot left open. And there they stay until the little ones are big enough to get out.

Mom's job is simple: she has to raise the little ones successfully and they get her undivided attention 24 hours a day. Dad's task is equally simple, that as much food as possible is brought to the nest, so that the little ones can grow quickly. Of course mom has to survive too! After all, she has plucked all her feathers for the offspring and enough food is now

essential to restore her feather plumage to it's former beauty again.

Dad-Hornbill has only one thing on his mind: wife and the kids. From dawn to dusk he wears himself out for them, without thinking of his own well-being. He just stops every now and then to swallow something quickly and then it's work, work, work again. Every now and then you hear the little ones shouting that Dad must hurry up now, because they are hungry! For Mom, though, you never hear her screaming

at her hard-working husband.
Makes one think, right?

The biblical prescription for relationships within marriage is often deliberately misunderstood. We like to read: “Wives, be subjected to your husbands” (verse 22), and then we just get stall there, and do not read the rest. To understand the whole passage correctly, however, we must start reading in verse 21, because it says that believers must be submissive to ONE ANOTHER out of reverence for Christ! The command to the

wife to be submissive to her husband has been horribly abused through the ages. Nowhere does it say that the man is master and the woman his slave! Yet this is how many men often interpret it and then force it on his poor wife.

Because it's Biblical!

It is only when we read further, that we see that the command to the husband is to love his wife as much as Christ loved the church. How much did He love the church? He even laid down his life for it!

These two commands, as well as the one in verse 21, must be read together as a unit. The husband and wife must therefore be submissive to each other. However, the wife has a special assignment to accept the guidance of the husband in the marriage. At the same time, the man has a special assignment, not to be the boss in the marriage, but the love thing. We have read over and over again that we as believers must love one another, but in marriage this love must be taken a step

further. Just as that Hornbill is selfless, does not think of himself, but only seeks his wife's interest, so the husband's love for his wife must be totally self-denying!

The relationship within a marriage is compared to the relationship between Jesus and the church. If we just look at Jesus' life as a human being, there are some very interesting things that come to mind. Jesus took the lead unconditionally in all areas, yet he did not dominate the disciples or His followers. We

never saw Him sit back and they had to do the work. No, He was in the rig with them all the time. We see nowhere that they had to serve Him. In fact, he rather washed their dirty feet! And when the difficult times came, He was willing to walk the path alone and sacrifice His life for His followers. However, the disciples were expected to follow His guidance and be submissive to Him.

If this kind of guideline applies in a marriage, it can only be a huge success. If I love my wife

as self-sacrificingly as Christ His church, it cannot be difficult for her to be submissive to me and accept my guidance. At the same time, it is also true that if a woman makes her husband feel very special through her actions by showing, for example, that he is the only one for her and that he is the king in their house, then he cannot otherwise but encourage his love for her to great heights.

Marriage is certainly not a one-man business, but a close partnership that both parties

work equally hard on. Each must bring his side with full commitment. At the same time, both must also realize that Christ alone is the Head of the household.

How wonderful, that the reverse is also true, that marriage is used to demonstrate the relationship between Jesus and the church. In verse 32 Paul applies this relationship and says that my marital relationship should be such that people can see the church in it. This places a huge

responsibility on my marriage, because I must realize that God is using my marriage to make the unbeliever understand something of the wonder of the relationship between us, the bride and Jesus Christ the Bridegroom.

Prayer:

Lord, there are so many areas in my marriage where I fall short by far. Please help me to work hard on it.

Rebellious Children

Ephesians 6: 1-4

If we thought that relationships in marriage were a problem, then we need to think again, because here Paul is now addressing two very thorny relationship problems: those between parents and children as well as those between slave and owner.

Today, the relationship between parents and children in many households is a very delicate matter! It just seems

as if parents have no control over their children anymore. Children get totally out of hand and they are often totally out of control, especially when they reach their teens. Often, however, it is the little ones who are already getting out of hand and making their poor parents grey before their time.

Here in Ballito we see the results very clearly every year after the matrics have written their final exam. Our town is literally flooded with the young people who come here to

enjoy the holiday of a lifetime. Vandalism is high, drunken parties, deafening music and noise throughout the night. Holiday apartments are littered and damaged and there is often a fight. If you let their parents know about it, then the answer is like clockwork: "My child will never do such a thing!"

Unfortunately, it does not end with the matrices' breakaway holiday. They are followed by the students who also come to make life miserable for everyone.

What has become of our society? What went wrong? What happened to our children? Where has our education of our children gone wrong?

For what it's worth - one of the great philosophers (I think it was Plato) wrote that "now a days' children have become totally out of control!" He made this statement long before Christ's birth. The problem is already as old as the mountains. It is often called the "Generation Gap".

But let's start at the beginning: In a believing family, parents and children have a responsibility to each other - a great responsibility! Children should honour their parents, even if they are demanding and unreasonable. But parents must also raise their children with love, even if they are difficult and unpleasant. However, these two things can only happen if they are done out of reverence for Christ, as we read in Ephesians 5:21.

Paul starts talking to the children and he gives them

two instructions. They must obey their parents and honour them. These are two totally different things. Until the day when a child is no longer under the authority of his parents, he must obey them. Respect for your parents, however, should last a lifetime. It is so tragic that some parents are thrown away when they grow old. They are placed somewhere in a home for the elderly and forgotten about! As a child, you have a responsibility to your parents when they are old one day.

They must still receive honour!
This can contribute to their age
becoming a blessing and not
a burden.

However, parents also have a
great responsibility to educate
their children with love.
Discipline is a very important
tool for educating children.
However, we must understand
very well what discipline
actually means, that it is not
punishment, but rather an act
of love to teach a child the
right way. Screaming and
fussing simply does not work!
To get angry, even less.

Corporal punishment is a very tender issue, which I do not want to comment on. However, it is important to act in a way that does not make your children rebellious. Your actions should teach your child what God's love and discipline is. It should definitely not show that you are an unapproachable or fickle tyrant!

Personally, however, I think the problem lies much deeper than the fact that children are not disciplined. The fact is that children are often not taught

all the biblical truths at home. Children raised with Bible knowledge and taught what it means, rarely grow up to become rebellious and uncontrollable.

Unfortunately, parents are often too busy to teach their children about Jesus. Often they cannot, because they themselves do not have the basic knowledge to do it! The only solution is to take the children to church so that they can be taught about the Lord and the Bible. However, we must not leave it only in the

hands of the church, because what a child learns at home is invaluable. If you do not have the knowledge, there are many great books you can use to teach your children about God.

The other issue that is of course also of utmost importance is the example set by parents. I often see parents arriving at church to drop off their children for Sunday school and then return home without attending a worship service. What kind of example is this? And then I also often see

parents who suddenly attend worship services regularly while their child is in the final year of catechism class, only to never come to church again after the child's confession of faith!

Then we still wonder what went wrong with our children! However, these are only the hippo's ears! We can talk for hours about this sensitive topic!

Prayer:

Lord, our education of our children falls so far short. Please help us to remedy this.

Labour Relations

Ephesians 6: 5-9

We are still dealing with relationships - those in marriage, those between parents and children and now we come to labor relations.

The next relationship situation that Paul addresses is that between master and slave. Slavery was an integral part of society in those years. It's interesting that Paul never even tries to condemn it because it would only mean

trouble. In any case, it was something that had been an integral part of society for many thousands of years. Indeed, until fairly recently, legal slavery was still a common practice. Even our own South African history is characterized by slave labour and many South Africans today are descendants of slaves.

Slaves were "property" without any rights. The owner of a slave could therefore do with him whatever he wanted. He was not obliged to give him

any compensation. However, he was morally (not legally) obliged to take good care of his slave. He was therefore a prisoner who could not legally claim any privileges.

However, when a slave became a believer, he discovered a new freedom. Suddenly he now had to learn that all were equal in Christ. So now there were no ties that bound him because Jesus set him free! This would mean that he and his owner, who was possibly also a believer, would also be equal! After all, there

was no difference between them anymore!

Paul wanted to prevent slaves who came to faith in Christ, from abusing this newfound freedom, because it would disrupt the order of society. Therefore, he gives clear guidelines on what their relationships with their owners should look like. In short, it meant that slaves and bosses had to act responsibly towards each other, out of reverence for Christ.

It now puts a whole new

perspective on that slave's work situation. In verse 6 he writes: "Do not just work to be noticed by your owners and thus come into people's favour; work as servants of Christ who do the will of God from the heart. "

Some slaves rose through hard work and eventually reached very good positions in life. One such example was Joseph, who eventually became the Prime Minister of Egypt! Same with Daniel. However, Paul wants to emphasize that it should not be about putting

yourself in a better position. The emphasis must therefore shift from yourself to Christ. The slave must therefore do his best to radiate the Light of Jesus in that way. So if his master may still be an unbeliever, he must somehow be able to read the message of the Gospel in the thorough and joyful way that this slave does his work. His work is no longer a burden but a challenge to proclaim the Gospel, even if it is not with words, but with his deeds.

In our situation today, you as

an employee are often also employed by an unreasonable boss who regards you as his "property" with which he can do what he wants. When this is the case, you need to look beyond the situation and see your true "Boss", Jesus Christ. Do not do your job half-heartedly and with a long face. Also, do not do it simply to please your boss or to work out a better position for yourself. However, work with devotion and joy for Jesus, the true Master in your life. Radiate His love and kindness in spite of

your working conditions. Why? In the first place to thank the Lord for His great mercy on you. But also to spread the Gospel with this. You can "preach" without saying a single word! Someone who radiates love and joy and, on top of that, does his best in difficult circumstances, makes other people hungry to want what he has too. This is the strongest Gospel sermon anyone can ever preach!

Remember: Paul's working conditions were miserable! He was in a dirty, smelly prison! Yet

many people came to repentance simply because he radiated love and joy.

However, Paul also speaks to the believing owners of the slaves. The same attitude he asks of the believing slaves, he also expects from the believing owners. Treat your slave with love. He is also a human being and on top of that he is a creature of God! You have exactly the same Lord, even though this slave may still be unbelieving at this point.

As a believing boss, you also

have great responsibilities on your shoulders today. You must be master in such a way that it testifies that you have accepted the Lord's Mastery over your life. You are not really the big boss anymore, but Jesus is the real Boss! You must also clearly realize that in Jesus all are equal and that the one is not exalted above the other. Take an intense interest in your employees, not from a height, but personally on their own level. You might just be surprised that they show a whole new kind of respect

for you and on top of that
provide a much better service!

Prayer:

Lord, my relationships often fall
so far short. Please help me to
remedy it with love.

In God's Army

Ephesians 6: 10-17

In January 1966 I boarded the train in Durban with a bunch of other young men. We're going to the Army! Us poor guys were being shouted and cursed at, chased around and terrified. Systematically, the angry men with the stripes on their arms had miraculously managed to make us fit, disciplined and ready to be full-fledged soldiers. At that time, the enemy was still something

fictitious - something that lived in the officers' imaginations. A few years later, however, it became a reality, with a Communist army gathering up on our northern borders. Eventually it ended in a full-blown bush war. I was never called up to fight in this war. It seemed so pointless to me anyway and I took my soldiery up very lightly. At the same time, I was scared because I heard reports of men being shot dead and maimed by landmines. When the war finally came in my direction, I

prayed myself out of it! My army dismissal came just before I had to go to the border

Yes, indeed you and I are soldiers too! We are soldiers in God's army. It is so tragic that we do the same with our spiritual soldiers. Often it is not necessarily because we are unwilling, but out of ignorance, or because we are afraid that we are not well enough equipped for it. If this is your problem, Paul has wonderful news this morning: he describes the armour God

gives you to fight fearlessly in His army.

The fact is that we are involved in a war and that fact we cannot ignore! This war will continue to rage until the day Christ comes again and the final battle is delivered. All believers are citizens of God's Kingdom and as a citizen you are automatically part of that army. You must not remain neutral! It also does not help to just lie in the trenches and hope that no bomb falls on your head. We must face the enemy head on, also not just

by looking only, because in this way no war can be won. You must have the right weapon and you must use your weapon!

This enemy is also not just a minor threat. In 1 Pet. 5: 8 he is described as a roaring lion seeking to devour someone. This is an extremely formidable, dangerous and cunning enemy! However, it is not people we face, but invisible evil forces. That army is made up of fallen angels under Satan's control. They form a huge and formidable army

that is out to crush the church of Christ and to take over the power from God. However, Jesus said that the powers of hell, or Satan's army, would not overwhelm the church (Matt. 16:18).

However, to stand firm in this terrible war, you need power, power that God gives us through His Spirit with the armour He provides. God's armor is infallible, unlike the armour used by the mundane army. Just listen to how nicely Paul describes the armour. He does this from images of a

soldier's equipment. Paul, of course, had to deal with soldiers every day while he was in prison. He could therefore reflect properly about the purpose of each item in a soldier's outfit before he applied it spiritually.

That outfit was to mostly protect the soldier so that he could not be easily overwhelmed by the enemy. On top of that, it had to protect him from the elements. Imagine the situation: you dare tackle the bush war dressed in a T-shirt, jogging shorts and a

pair of slops! Around your neck hangs your "faithful" catapult to chase away the "dangerous" birds! That's ridiculous! You will not survive for five minutes in those dangerous conditions! Without the right protective clothing and equipment you are lost!

In the spiritual realm, we are already in the midst of the spiritual warfare that is raging around us. I cannot bury my head into the ground like an ostrich and pretend not to see it. It is a reality that happens around me and that affects

me personally. If I try to maintain myself with a T-shirt and slops, I will not survive. Besides, I would not be of any use in the fight. I need to wear the right equipment. Paul knows exactly what it takes for me to stand firm and, moreover, to be useful in the Kingdom.

I need: the girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, and the shoes of willingness to walk in carrying the gospel. Moreover, the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation are absolutely essential. And of

course you must be able to fight and for that you need the sword of the Spirit - the word of God.

In the next few days we will look at how Paul describes the soldier's equipment, as well as what I need to be a full-fledged soldier in God's army.

Prayer:

Thank You for the wonderful weapon You have given me, Lord. Make me willing to take up Your weapons and fight in Your army with confidence.

A Belt for My Hips

Ephesians 6: 18-24

Firstly, as part of the soldier's equipment, his belt is a very important thing in a man and especially a soldier's clothing. We can describe it in modern language as the soldier's "webbing", that multi-purpose canvas strap that not only holds his pants up, but on which hangs his water bottle, ammunition, weapon, backpack and much more. In Paul's day, the waist belt was

extremely important to a soldier. Not only did his sword and dagger hang from it, but it also had to hold his clothes together so that he would not stumble over it. Today we would say that it keeps a man's pants up! Without the belt, the pants easily end up around your knees and then you fall very hard!

Paul compares the belt to the Truth. One of the most powerful weapons of our enemy is lies. Satan was already using it in the Garden of Eden when he seduced Eve

with a blatant lie about God's intentions: "Is it really so that God said you may not eat from any tree in the garden?" (Gen. 3: 1). He often camouflages it very well to look exactly like the truth!

Today, the lie-question is often used to cause even believers to stumble: "Do you really think that that exalted God will concern Himself with you, insignificant person?" or "Do you really believe that you can have eternal life just by believing in Jesus? That's ridiculous!" Our modern

technology today makes it very easy to spread lies. Every day millions of blatant lies fly around on social media and they are often so well disguised that we easily take everything for gospel-truth! The enemy is so cunning that he often even quotes a verse from the Bible, the Word of God and builds a lie around it! He even quoted from the Bible when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness! (Luke 4). Each verse in the Bible must be read in its context and measured against the message of the Bible as a

whole.

Lying makes you stumble, but with the girdle of truth to protect you, it prevents you from falling. The question is, where do we get that truth?

The answer is actually very simple: we find it in the Bible, the Word of God! Among other things, the Holy Spirit uses the Bible to reveal the truth to us. When I open my heart to the whispering of the Holy Spirit, He opens my eyes when I read the Bible so that I can see the truth in it and take it to

heart.

The following is an age-old question: "What then is the truth?"

The Bible is overflowing with truth, from the very first page of Genesis to the last page of Revelation. It tells of God's omnipotence, His love, righteousness, grace and many other things. The truth includes many promises that are locked up for us in the Word. It also contains numerous warnings about sin and the cunning and power of

the enemy.

Here are some examples of the truth we find in the Bible.

In Exodus 20: 2, the Lord introduces Himself as the Living God who personally cares for us: "I am the Lord your God."

In John 3:16 Jesus says that He is a loving God who cares: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

In John 3:18 Jesus makes it clear that there is a judgment,

but that there is salvation in Jesus: "He who believes in Him is not condemned, but he who does not believe is already condemned because he did not believe in the Name of the unique Son of God. "

In Romans 3:23 we see that no one is innocent, but that God is gracious: "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; and yet they are acquitted by virtue of his grace through the deliverance in Christ Jesus. "

Romans 6:23 tells of judgment

and grace: “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

1 John 5:13 gives every believer the assurance of salvation: "This I have written to you, that you may know that you have eternal life, you who believe in the name of the Son of God."

These are just a few examples of the truth described in the Word. Dig into the Word and make it your own!

Prayer:

Wonderful Lord, as I turn the pages of Your Word, the truth grips my heart. I read in it that You expect me not to sin, but at the same time I see Your immeasurable love and grace. I cannot praise and thank You enough for that!

Protection for my Heart

Ephesians 6: 18-24

Your heart is a soft target. These days, police wear bulletproof vests to protect the heart. Spiritually, however, your heart is just as vulnerable and when it is hit, you doubt whether you truly have God's acquittal. For that reason, the breastplate is for Paul such an important part of a soldier's outfit but also that of the believer. So if you put on God's breastplate of aquittal, your

heart is safe.

But what does it all involve? In fact, it joins the previous section on the truth. Virtually every believer has occasionally experienced doubts about whether they have been acquitted by God. It is the work of the Evil One to plant such lies in your heart. God's assurance that He has acquitted you works like a breastplate that protects your heart. Put on this harness and your heart will not be hit.

But what does this acquittal

mean? That He forgave all your sins. Isaiah 1:18 describes it so beautifully: "Now, let's settle the matter. You are stained red with sin, but I will wash you as clean as snow. Although your stains are deep red, you will be as white as wool." His acquittal is therefore complete!

The next piece of equipment may seem insignificant, but it's of the utmost importance - shoes!

Have you ever tried to walk barefoot through thorns or

over sharp pebbles? That's ouch! You'd rather not walk at all! So a good pair of shoes is absolutely essential, especially over rough terrain. So you can convince yourself that the field where the Gospel is to be carried is littered with thorns, so it is too painful for you to walk the path. This is especially so when there is a negative reaction to your attempts to testify of Jesus. Or you may be scared of the sheer scope of the task. Sometimes it seems like you can never get it done. With a good pair of shoes,

however, it's child's play. Do not be put off by the thorns! Put on the shoes that God gives you, the shoes of willingness to carry His Word. If He then sends someone across your path, testify of the Gospel. You will be amazed at the quality of God's shoes!

What does God's shoes entail? In the first place it is the Holy Spirit, He gives you the right words in your mouth as well as enough wisdom. However, it also requires something from you, to prepare yourself for such a situation that may

come your way. The Holy Spirit offers you the knowledge, but it requires you to open and study the Word in order to utilize His source of knowledge.

The biggest factor, however, is to declare yourself willing to carry the gospel. Willingness is 90% of the shoes!

Suffering and set-backs are like deadly arrows that make you doubt, and often turn your back on God. It is for such arrows that God gives you the shield of faith to protect you. Faith, however, goes hand-in-

hand with confidence. Without trust there can be no faith! I can explain this with the story of the tightrope walker who stretched his rope over the Niagra Falls and then walked over with a crowd that gave applause for his amazing performance. When he asked if they thought he could carry someone on his shoulders over the dangerous waterfall, everyone said "YES!" They definitely believed it! However, when he asked for a volunteer to climb on his shoulders, there was no one. So no one really

trusted him. Put all your trust in the Lord, no matter how difficult it may be. He will make everything happen for the best. So use that shield!

If a bomb falls on your head, it's disastrous! Your mind's dead! If your mind tells you that your salvation is worthless, it is deadly. This is why you need to wear the helmet of salvation on your head to protect yourself. Believe, not only with your heart, but also with your mind! Put on your helmet!

Without weapons, a soldier means nothing. However, if you give him a sword in his hand, then he is very dangerous and he can overwhelm the enemy! Really? If he does not know how to use the sword, it is still useless. He must first learn how to use the sword, and the longer and harder he exercises, the more skillful he becomes with it.

The Word is the believer's powerful sword with which he can attack and neutralize the enemy. However, the Bible in someone's hand is useless in

itself. It is only when a believer studies it's contents, understands and makes it his own, that it begins to become useful to him. The more often and the more intensely he reads and studies the Bible, the more adept he becomes at using it. So make sure you know and understand that formidable weapon of yours through and through. On top of that, practise hard to be able to work with this sword and to be able to use it effectively. Read and study the Bible and make it a part of

your life. Then you are armed!

The Lord has given us this wonderful armour - let's make full use of every part of it!

Prayer:

Thank you for the breastplate, the shoes, the helmet and the sword that you gave me, Lord. Please give me the full trust in You and especially the willingness to carry the gospel fearlessly!

Pray For Each Other

Ephesians 6: 18-24

Prayer is the lifeblood of every believer. It is an absolutely essential part of being a Christian without which you cannot remain standing. In the last two devotionals we have seen how Paul describes the armour that God gives a believer to face the dangerous enemy. However, there is one extremely important element that is still missing in this weapon: Prayer!

I have mentioned it on previous occasions, that prayer is your spiritual breathing, your dialogue with God. He has created for us this wonderful communication channel that is open day and night. No thief can steal those telephone cables, and even the biggest thunderstorm cannot break the "satellite connection". The number is also never, ever occupied and you never talk to an answering machine on the other end. And best of all, you do not even have to go through a lot

of choices. Imagine: to complain, press 1; to ask for help, press 2; to beg for forgiveness, press 3

In my young days I was a signalman in the army. It's now the guys who bring about the radio and telephone connection between different departments. The radios were very primitive: they were big, clumsy and not terribly user-friendly. Yet they were absolutely essential because without them there would be no communication. The situation we often dealt with

was in the artillery to create a connection between the observation post (it's now someone sitting alone on a hill and watching the enemy), the command post (the mathematicians working out the trajectory of the cannonballs), and the cannons. When there was a contact situation, it went rather rough, because you as a signalman are the centre of everyone's commands and everything must be passed on one hundred percent correctly. Sometimes,

however, it happened that three groups shouted orders on all sides simultaneously on the same frequency and then it was absolute chaos. To be able to cope in such a situation and get the right information at the right place was almost an impossible task. I certainly do not understand how God can make sense of the Babylonian confusion of millions of people seeking His attention at the same time. Fortunately, He does not ask me to understand, but only to believe!

When Paul calls for prayer, he is not asking you to pray for yourself. This is something that comes very easily and naturally anyway. No, he asks that we constantly pray for other believers. I am thinking, for example, of the many believers who have to survive in appalling conditions in war-torn countries such as Ukraine. By praying for one another, we not only ask the Father to support our fellow-believers, but it also brings us as believers closer together. It binds us tightly, because now the

other's problems also become part of my own. I feel now what he feels. He is no longer someone who stands far away, but he is an intimate part of me.

There is also another aspect of intercession that shifts the emphasis slightly. He asks the believers to pray for him as a preacher, so that God will give him the right words to carry the Gospel pure and with boldness. No preacher can survive without intercession, not even the great missionary Paul. How much more so the

"ordinary" ministers, pastors, evangelists, lay preachers and so on who have the task of proclaiming the Word of the Lord. Each of them is extremely dependent, not only on their own prayer life with God, but on other believers to carry them through their ministry.

My request to you this morning is therefore that you will constantly pray for me for this huge task that lies on my shoulders. What makes it so much harder for me is the fact that I am not a pastor, and have no formal theological

training. Yet God has opened the door for me to carry out His wonderful Word to thousands of people through the daily passages. This is a frightening responsibility, because I dare not preach a heresy. Oh, I know that there are many believers who are already praying for me, because the Lord puts the words for the passage in my mouth every time! I am often amazed at what I have written because it is far beyond my own abilities. Thank you for your prayer! If you may not be doing it yet,

please pray for me!

We came to the end of an inspirational letter from Paul - I hope you enjoyed it as much as I did. For me it was a wonderful experience. I want to end with Paul's blessing in the Ephesian letter: "Peace be with you, and love and faith of God the Father, and of the Lord Jesus Christ. His grace remains with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ immortally. "

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for the wonderful inspiration we were

able to draw from Paul's letter. This morning I want to dedicate to you in prayer everyone who carries the Word of God in one way or another. I want to pray, Lord, that your Word will be preached pure. I also want to dedicate the reader of this devotional to You in particular. Bless him/her generously today.