

Life in Jesus

The path of being a disciple of Jesus

A workbook - Part 1

SIT in Christ to be established

Alan Anderson

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Indian edition

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Alan Anderson

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*Jesus called to them “Come, follow me.”
Have you too heard that call? How do
we respond to that call?*

*Following Jesus as his disciple is a call
to a deep relationship with him. It is
also a call to imitate him. A call to step
into new life through a renewed mind, a
changed and loving heart, and action.*

*The aim of this workbook is to help us
step into everything that Jesus offers us
and wants us to be. Jesus offers us way
more than most of us have ever
realised.*

Thank you to the Holy Spirit for teaching me. Thank you to my friends who have shown me the way, by living in Christ. Thank you to my reviewers for their corrections, improvements, suggestions and encouragement, Sri Jim Wright, Dr John Cox and Rev Christine McPherson. Thank you to Marg Mowczko and others for their research into Hebrew and Greek. And thank you to my wife Peggy for putting up with my absences.

This edition of Life in Jesus was specifically written for Indian Pastors and is situated in their Christian and national context. Key spiritual misunderstandings often have a cultural basis. The workbook is significantly structured to respond to the Indian cultural context and issues visible in the Indian church. It is written as a personal message to a large number of pastors who know me, both in North and South India. Only a few understand English. Thus, it is currently being translated into two of their local languages. It is more verbose than would be normal for Australian readers. It sometimes uses words and ideas that are specifically Indian. At this stage I have no plan to undertake the extensive editing that would be needed for an Australian edition that reflects our cultural and spiritual biases. That doesn't give space to India only issues, is written for a broader audience of people who don't know me, and edits out the level of sticky sentences.

Alan

1. Introduction

Jesus, the source of all life, the pathway, the answer

Jesus, the Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over **all** creation.

For in him **all** things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; **all** things have been created through him and for him.

He is before **all** things, and in him **all** things hold together.

And he is the **head** of the body, the church; he is the **beginning** and the **firstborn** from among the dead, so that in **everything** he might have the **supremacy**.

For God was pleased to have **all his fullness dwell in him**, and **through him to reconcile to himself all things**, whether things on earth or things in heaven, **by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross**. (Colossians 1:15-20)

But the Holy Spirit will come and help you, because the Father will send the Spirit to take my place. The Spirit will teach you everything and will remind you of what I (Jesus) said while I was with you. (John 14:26 CEV)

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (Matthew 28:19)

The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life. (Job 33:4)

“Can I have what you have?”

LSA, you have mentioned that you feel very uncertain, and you get stressed easily, and that you don't have a sense of the presence of the Holy Spirit. You said you also don't have a sense of God's love for you. Yet, when we pray together, even though it is on the phone, you have a great sense that God is with us and that he loves you and me. You feel God's presence and it makes a difference to you.

You asked if you could get what I have?

Yes, and a whole lot more. God has given us his Holy Spirit to teach and guide and call us forward. So, I could just say, “spend more time with the Holy Spirit and he will lead you to all truth”.

You asked if you could have copies of my sermons and journal so that you could find the good bits. I realised that would be impossible. So instead, I started thinking back to the things that had helped me.

That was the starting point of this workbook. One person in India talking on the phone with one person in Australia. But behind it was the call of Jesus to go further and deeper with him. From believer to disciple. The call of deep calling to deep. The call from Jesus, come, follow me!

As I started hesitantly to write this workbook for LSA, I realised that other Indian pastors or ministry workers I knew may also be interested in going deeper with Jesus. And when I asked them, they said definitely, they too needed something like that.

I have been a believer for 60 years. When I was a young disciple, I was not nearly as certain of my faith as I am now. But as I look back over many years, I recognise that there have been some foundational truths that have been key for me. These were not part of the curriculum in discipling school. I learnt them in the reality of living. I learnt them in a jumbled-up sequence, not in a nice order. Learning them wasn't my intention, they were the path of learning that Jesus took me down.

But, as I look at these truths, I can see that each of them became the rock that I lived on. They taught me about Jesus and they encouraged my relationship with Jesus and with other believers. They gave me confidence. They gave me hope. They gave me joy. They brought light into my life and my soul. They brought me to a place of peace and rest. And they grew my love for Jesus and others.

They also called me into ministry with Jesus. That is a most incredible experience. To see Jesus and his power changing lives. Every new follower of Jesus is a miracle of grace. Every time Jesus guides my steps is a miracle of grace. Every answer to prayer. Every time I hear his voice. Every healing is another miracle of Jesus' grace. Every demon cast out another victory for Jesus. Every time Jesus comes to meet a person's need is an act of grace. Even working in business, I have again and again seen his grace. The experience of walking with Jesus has changed my life.

All of us have a different path to being a disciple. Maybe you had no difficulty with the things I struggled with. Maybe your walk with Jesus is very different. I offer you the lessons that I have learnt. Use whatever part you find helpful.

We also each have our preferred way of learning. In class, reading books, through trial and error, coached while actually doing the work. You may need to adjust how you use the material to how you best learn.

For me, the Holy Spirit was my guide, not Alan. So don't be afraid to let the Holy Spirit teach you and in the sequence that life presents to you. As you work your way through this, you will do lots of other things at the same time. If you ask him, the Holy Spirit will teach you through all these other things as well. So, in the real world, you will experience Jesus as he leads you and teaches you. The important thing is that you learn from the Holy Spirit. So don't substitute a coach or me for the Holy Spirit.

This entire journey could be called living in the Holy Spirit. Walking the Jesus way should always mean walking with the Spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit. It is only through the Holy Spirit that Jesus deals with fear and sin in our lives and leads us into his purification, joy, rest, and peace.

When I was a young believer, no one taught me much about the Holy Spirit. I knew he was living in my heart. I knew he touched me and influenced me. I certainly lived in his grace, and he blessed me again and again. I was very conscious of his call on my life. But I didn't know how to walk daily with the Holy Spirit. That came much later.

All 4 Gospels introduce Jesus as the one who will baptise us with the Holy Spirit (Matt 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16, John 1:33), so it is foundational that the Holy Spirit is an essential and deliberate part of our walking with Jesus. And use of the term baptism means that the Gospel writers were expecting we would have our lives immersed in the Holy Spirit.

Jesus emphasises this in John 3, as he explains to Nicodemus, to join Jesus is to be born again in the Spirit. This is not a theological statement, but a practical living statement that the Spirit of God will be the wind in our sails and that we need to bend to allow the Holy Spirit to direct us.

Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to

spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." (John 3:5-8)

No one can enter the Kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. That is black and white. Are you born of the Spirit? Do you experience the Holy Spirit in a way that you would describe as being born of the Spirit?

We know we are born of water. Our lives surround us. We walk and breathe. We have relationships. We laugh and cry. We feel deeply about our natural lives.

Do we experience the Holy Spirit in the same way? Do you live in the presence of the Holy Spirit? My constant friend, my guide, my conversation partner, my encourager?

Jesus promised he would be with us every step of the way through the Holy Spirit.

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever-- the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. (John 14:16-18)

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you. (John 16:13-16)

Pause for a minute and re-read those verses slowly.

Do you ever feel lost or alone, or unsure? Jesus says he has already given us the answer.

The verse also emphasises that we worship one God in three persons. But they always work together. The Father has given Jesus everything that belongs to him. And the Spirit will show us whatever he receives from Jesus.

God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit always work in complete harmony. When we talk about the Holy Spirit, he is only doing those things that Jesus wants. God the Father, Jesus the Son, and Holy Spirit always live and act in complete unity with each other.

Finally, the verse also says that the Spirit will inform us collectively. In the Greek, the "you" is plural. If I don't have the answer, the Holy Spirit will have given the answer to someone else or many others within the community of faith. So this is also a call to live closely with other believers.

Paul, in Ephesians 2:10, says, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Living life in the Holy Spirit enables us to know who God has called us to be, what God has called us to do, and brings God's understanding, authority, presence, love, and power over everything we do. Living in the Spirit this way also brings us a genuine sense of freedom in Christ and lasting soul satisfaction.

But often believers are never taught how to make that the reality of our lives.

I was taught lots about the Bible and how to use the Bible to guide my life. All of that is good, but... The Bible clearly teaches that as disciples, we should live depending on the Holy Spirit. As a young disciple, no one explained that to me. I depended on God. I loved God. I was accountable to God. But, it was much later that I learnt how to let the Holy Spirit guide my life every day. This brought a

new level of relationship into my life with Jesus and with God the Father. Some of it I learnt from friends, some from the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is Jesus Christ's gift to us. But we need to accept that gift and ask for more and make it real by inviting him to be with us. Jesus always has more for us. He calls us forward as we live in Him, to a life of love and fullness of grace and power in his name. He calls us forward to live a life of joy, happiness and soul satisfaction.

I invite you to walk with Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

The following is an action suggestion. You should stop and do it. I have them spread through every chapter.

Action:

a. Pause for a little while. Take a breath. Breathe out slowly.

- **Centre your mind on Jesus. Do you want to go deeper with Jesus? Think about the question.**
- **Stop everything and feel his presence as he surrounds you.**
- **Pray about it.**
- **Is this something you can feel Jesus calling you to?**

If so, then commit yourself to this path. Ask Jesus to bless you as you walk the path.

Note that we will walk this path with the Holy Spirit. This is a most normal thing to do. If somewhere in your past, you have believed some negative things about the Holy Spirit, then take a few minutes and talk to Jesus. Ask him to take away those negative memories and give you a clean and fresh start. Ask Jesus to bless you and stay close to you as you follow him.

When people come to Christ, we pray over them that the Holy Spirit will be strong in their awareness, that they will know his presence in their lives. In Acts, Peter and John went to the new converts in Samaria and realised that, despite being baptised, they were lacking the Holy Spirit. So they laid hands on them and prayed for them to receive the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:14-16).

If you think this is you, then invite the Holy Spirit to be present in your life. Or ask a spirit filled pastor to pray for you and lay hands on you.

*As a deer longs for flowing streams,
so my soul longs for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God.
When shall I come and behold the face of God?
My tears have been my food day and night,
while people say to me continually,
'Where is your God?' (Psalm 42:1-3 ESV)*

Some comments about culture

I am very hesitant to write something for Indian disciples. Our cultures are very different. In the west we are very individual, we are pre-occupied with "me". We are also very focussed on money and physical things that are not spiritual. We chase power in many ways. But we also have a long history of God influencing our culture. So we are strong in understanding the downtrodden and helping them. We have a focus on individual rights, which is both a strength and a weakness. But, we have made many mistakes, and there are many things wrong with our culture.

In India, there is a much greater community culture. You do things more together. There is also much greater respect for your elders, your parents, your leaders, and your teachers. Particularly with extended families, there can be a great sense of belonging across quite a wide family group that even stretches to different towns and cities. And the same can be true of a church community.

There is a much stronger spirituality in your culture. That is a major plus that the west does not have. But it also means that to influence your culture, the full spirituality and power of our God needs to be on display and practised.

But again, there are many failings. People experience domination and control. There is abuse. The poor have only a small voice.

Some of your culture strongly reflects Hindu thinking.

As with all cultures, there are strengths in my culture and weaknesses. Similarly, there are strengths about your culture and weaknesses as well.

Jesus lived in a Jewish and eastern culture. Life in Palestine in Jesus' day was very similar to life in the rural India I grew up in. You could take the parables and miracles of Jesus as recorded in the gospels and you can see exactly what he was talking about in village India. This was certainly true for most of the time I have lived in and ministered in village India, but it is becoming less true.

Jesus had his own culture. The culture rulers of the day (the Pharisees) were constantly criticising his behaviour. Jesus broke so many of their rules. He broke their rules about how to keep the sabbath day. He broke the rules about how you talk about God. He spent time with people who the Pharisees would never spend time with. This included the poor, tax collectors, women, prostitutes, sick people, demon possessed people, the uneducated people, the farm workers, fishermen. He even occasionally associated with outcasts, lepers, the invading Roman soldiers, and even the Samaritans.

The Jews treated Samaritan people as badly as high caste Hindus treat the Dalits.

Jesus taught women along with men. This again was way outside the culture of the day.

He even sometimes upset his family, because he did not follow the local customs and culture. His explanation was that he was following his heavenly father. Keeping his eyes on Father God.

Following Jesus draws us into his culture. His culture is a Jesus' culture. It is not eastern or western. Jesus would have harsh comments about some aspects of both our cultures. To follow Jesus is to discard the unhelpful bits of our cultures while we take on Jesus' culture. As we do this, we will upset some people. But we will simply follow Jesus, our friend, our guru, our Saviour, and God.

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)

Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognise what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you. (Romans 12:2 Message)

Romans 12:2 says that we both need to look at our cultures through the eyes of Jesus so that we can overcome the weaknesses of our cultures. But the passage acknowledges that this is hard and we may

need to experiment or try things and work it out with our fellow believers to find the Jesus' path. The verse uses the same Greek verb translated as transformed, which later describes Jesus when he experienced transfiguration. The expectation is that as we align with Jesus, the change will be radical and significant. We will live a whole new way.

When we look at the New Testament, we realise that our relationship with Jesus must be right both as an individual and as a group. I am accountable to God for my sin. My teacher is not responsible for my sin. And what Jesus calls me to do, he will call through my heart, rather than my leader's heart. But my leader or faith community is a great place to test what I am hearing from Jesus. My community surrounds me with all the ingredients of life and that is where Jesus calls us to be his witnesses.

Philippians 2:13-16 says that as we live for Christ, together as a community, we will shine like lights in the world. We will shine brightly and catch people's attention. Jesus calls us to live a new way and to be culture setters. To do that, we inevitably will cause some anger from those people who insist on living exactly as our grandparents lived. We need to be brave.

The New Testament teaches us that as believers, we need to live in community, depending on each other, helping each other. And the way we show love to each other will cause our witness for Jesus to shine like stars in the night sky.

In this workbook, you will see some things that reflect my culture. You will notice them because they are different. Please forgive me if they come from my western culture rather than from Jesus.

Your job, as you use this book, is to work out how to follow Jesus in your culture. Discard my western suggestions and replace them with Jesus' ideas, but done the Indian way. But also discard parts of your Indian culture. You need to look and recognise Jesus. It is Jesus' culture that is his way.

That will sometimes be quite hard for you.

Action:

b. Take some time to think and pray about culture.

- ***Can you see elements of your culture that come from Hindu thinking?***
- ***Ask Jesus to give you clarity about your native culture and understanding where it came from.***
- ***Think about the influences in your culture that take us away from Jesus.***
- ***Ask Jesus to reveal to you his culture as you walk this path.***
- ***Ask him to make you open to his way of life.***
- ***And ask Jesus to bless the discussions you have about culture with your fellow believers.***

We will talk about culture again. But from here on, when I talk about our culture, I mean our Indian culture. And I know I am generalising. Everyone is not the same. Please forgive me if I have it wrong, but press through that to discern what Jesus would say to you in your situation.

What do I need for this Journey?

Some helping people

While we stand before God as individuals, fellow believers who you live closely with will help every part of your walk as a disciple. The New Testament calls us to live closely in a community with other believers. To learn from each other and serve each other.

I would say that it will be very hard to follow this book on your own. You will need the help of others to talk some things through and to help each other along the way. Just as we cannot follow Christ in isolation from everyone else, you cannot follow this guide on your own.

You will probably need four types of help as you follow this book:

1. The Holy Spirit.
2. A coach or teacher, who is more experienced than you in hearing Jesus and following the Holy Spirit.
3. A person or small group you can trust. To ask those questions, you find hard to ask. To help you find your path. It could be a prayer partner. Maybe someone or a group doing the workbook as you do it. It could be your normal Bible study group.
4. A broader and larger community of people who live in your location. Fellow believers who will encourage you and give you the opportunity to serve and lead and minister.

The Holy Spirit will be your major help. Always expect the Holy Spirit to meet your need first. But also help each other.

Work out how you will receive the other 3 types of help. I talk about my prayer partner in the book. He is my person for number 3 above, that I can completely trust. We can talk about anything and I know he is praying for me. Over the years, I have had several prayer partners. I can also phone and talk to almost all of my old prayer partners.

The people who help you need to be the right people. They need to be people who will encourage your relationship with the Holy Spirit. Following Jesus is all about relationship. And Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit to be the person who we talk to and listen to. The Bible doesn't clearly explain everything. Our faith ancestors passed down our faith verbally, and we still have a need for that. The surrounding people need to encourage you in your life with the Holy Spirit.

For your coach, don't ask anyone who thinks being a disciple is just following the rules – "You must pray for an hour at 5:00 am." "You must read your Bible 60 minutes every day". "You must give 10% to God". "You must witness to someone at least once a day". Nothing wrong with any of these things, but that is not how to be in a relationship with Jesus.

Following rules can give us a sense of control. We know what we should do. Following the Holy Spirit is an unknown and undefined commitment. We don't know where it will take us. Jesus calls us to walk with him through the Holy Spirit. It is an adventure that takes us to fully living the way Jesus intended for his disciples.

Yes, I know many great Christians have rules they follow, and God has blessed their ministry. But Christ draws us to himself in love. Rules are not the starting place and can make it hard to find Jesus. As you follow Jesus, he will give you whatever you need.

If you are a pastor, you still need these 3 helps. Maybe you will find help type 2 and 3 in the one place with some fellow pastors. I have seen some great ministry teams that have helped each other as they followed Christ, while doing ministry together. But they had to trust each other and love each other and love God more than anything else.

Be innovative to find the help you need to grow. Use your phone. Use the internet.

Our growth in Jesus is an act of love, devotion, and relationship. Be sure that it stays that way.

The aim of being a disciple of Christ is to become more Christlike. Growing up into Jesus means reflecting his image more and more in our lives. We change. We change sometimes quickly and

sometimes gradually. But we change. And we keep changing as we keep growing. Ask yourself regularly; am I changing? Am I becoming more Christlike?

This is not a book to read quickly or a 2 week course or one session every week for a term, or a daily devotional. It is a journey of discovery. A lifelong pursuit. Use it as it helps you. Pause and put it aside and then come back to another topic. Let the Holy Spirit lead you through this. As you search, you will find the nuggets of gold that the Holy Spirit has set aside for you to discover. The workbook can take up to a year to work through properly. It took me much longer than that to learn these lessons.

Jesus is very patient. We need to give him our time to learn from him. We also need to allow him to change us in his time. He often works slowly and deeply. We need to learn to rest in him. Just as he did with the disciples, he will teach us as we go through life. It is a lifelong pursuit because we can never fully know God. There is always more. If we think we fully understand him, we are fooling ourselves. God's ways are deep and while he reveals himself to us, there is always more that we do not yet understand.

To discover more about Jesus, we read the Bible that records the written word about him. And we also talk and listen to him and he will reveal things directly to us as part of a relationship with him. He has a deep love for you and he wants to tell you that person to person. He wants to grow your love so that you can share it around.

A good Bible

You will need a good Bible. Find one that is comfortable for you to read, that you find easy to read in the language that is easiest for you to understand. I am cautious about some Indian language Bibles because I don't know the heritage of each. Avoid Bible translations that used the King James Bible as their source¹. Avoid translations that are old as they reflect the culture of the day and don't benefit from the significant learning of the last 50 years. Choose modern translations that translators have directly translated into your language from the original Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible. English is not a good intermediate language for Bible translations.

If you are OK in English, go for a modern translation. Any version will do. The messages we want to find will be there in any version. I use the NIV translation, so all the passages referenced will be from the NIV (New International Version) unless marked otherwise. CEV (Common English Version) or NLT (New Living Translation) are great if you want simpler English. The CSB (Christian Standard Bible) version is also great, but not as common.

A Journal

You will also need a journal to write in. The journal serves multiple purposes. As you do your devotions, you can write key understandings that come to you or note things you want to pray about.

¹ The King James Bible uses old language and was incorrectly translated reflecting the culture of the day. My biggest problem with it is the use of the word "son" when in Greek, the original language, the word was child and thus inclusive of women. We are all children of God and he extends the same privileges to male and female. Using "he" or "son" incorrectly limits how women see God and all he offers. The KJV Bible creates some wrong perceptions about a woman's place before God. Compared with the KJV, the NIV has removed over 300 Sons, He's, His's and Him's from the New Testament alone that should never have been there, but still left some wrong translations. If your native language Bible keeps talking about sons, then recognize that it should be translated children. But the KJV also has some pluses, The use of thee and thou when dealing with a single person allows us to separate the singular from the plural you. This is important in many verses that refer to our collected state as a community of believers.

Further down, we will use the journal to record what you hear from Jesus, and we use that in multiple ways. The journal documents your spiritual journey with Jesus. It is a great encouragement to come back and look at it later. It is also your private record of your growth in Christ. You should treat your journal as private so that you know you can truthfully write what you are feeling into your journal.

Action:

- c. Buy yourself a notebook that you can use as a journal. An exercise book will do.*
- d. Work out which Bible you will use.*
- e. Work out who is going to help you as you walk the path. A coach, one or more fellow pilgrims, and your home faith community. Ask them if they will help you.*

The Chapters

I have structured the chapters to help you adopt the heart postures that will encourage your growth in Christ.

1. First look at the aim. This is the practical outcome that we are looking for from this chapter.
2. Read the Bible passages to start with **believing** in your mind that this is for you, from God.
3. From that flows an **earnest desire** to see the topic flourish in your life, helped by my comments.
4. And then Action. **Ask** God to do the miracle of grace, to change us and start something new.
5. As we then do the action suggestions and experience Jesus, our **love** will grow. Our heart's belief will grow.
6. And finally, to **yield** all to Christ. As our heart belief grows, our desire to grow in Christ will increase. But to experience this aspect of God, he will ask us to change and do. Our feet will follow our heart. That will require that we yield. This will happen as we live out what we have learnt day by day in the reality of life.

We want the truth, lessons, and behaviours from each chapter to become our lived experience before we move on to the next chapter.

Read that again, slowly.

As we read books and even study the Bible, we forget what we learn when it is in our heads. This workbook is looking for changes in our habits, perspective, our heart beliefs, and the way we live. These changes will just become our natural way of living. But they will only do that as we apply them each day until they become second nature.

We want each chapter to be what you will do without effort before you try to pick up new practices. If you spend a month on a chapter, that is OK. If you mix it with other things that is OK. But work at making what you have learnt, just a normal part of life following Jesus, before you press on.

That way, you do not need to remember the content of the chapter, because it is now your lived experience. We want to change the way we live with Christ, to grow into him more deeply. Without having to remember any stuff.

For each of the main chapters,

- I first list the key Bible passages that lie behind the chapter. Read the bolded Bible passages to prepare for the chapter and before you read the chapter.

Take a day to read the Bible passages or if they are longer, more than one day. Having read the passages, think about what you have read for that day before you read the chapter. Allow the Holy Spirit to feed you from the passages. If something in the passage worries you, pray about it.

- I then have my story or my understanding of the topic.
- And just like the ones above (a., b., c., d., & e.), the chapter intersperses "Action" suggestions that will help you.

The action suggestions mark off how far to go each day or each session. Only do one Action suggestion in a day. The gap to the next section could be a day or could be longer depending on the action suggestion. If doing the action takes several days, or weeks, then the gap should be that long.

The action suggestions also start us on the path of walking in Christ by taking the foundational truths that we discern into our daily practice.

The gap needs to be long enough for the truth to be embedded in your heart so that you believe it all the time. Or if it relates to a practice, then long enough for you to embrace the practice and make it a habit.

What I have gathered are the practices that have helped me that are not commonly talked about. They don't get the emphasis that they need.

Along this journey, just keep asking: "Is my love for Jesus growing?"; "Is my sense of joy and hope increasing because of Jesus? "Is my relationship with Jesus getting deeper?" "Am I loving others more?" These are the marks of growth.

If you find this is not happening for you as you go through each chapter, then go through that section again more slowly. Make sure that all the foundations are in place.

If it is still not happening, you need to be truthful with yourself and work out why. What is getting in the way? Only do it while love grows and the Holy Spirit calls you forward.

If you are struggling, ask someone to help you work it out and get them to pray for you. If it still doesn't work, talk to Jesus to find another way for what is struggling in your heart to grow. Maybe throw my stuff away, but don't stop chasing Jesus. Find another way.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil. (Proverbs 3:5-7)

A note about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit and how we talk about them

Note: This description in the following paragraphs relating to the trinity and our place before God may not translate well into another language.

Naming God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit

I have tried to stay faithful to the Bible in how I talk about God (God the Father), Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit rather than using Jesus as the name of the Christian God as we would normally do in India. For Pastors and ministry workers, I wanted to stay true to scripture.

We are often not precise in our language; I am sure God understands. Using Jesus as a generic name of God encourages us to see God as a person who we have a relationship with. But I have tried to be consistent with scripture rather than local Indian practice.

In this book, we want to take you down a path of knowing God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit far more personally. The Bible teachers call this intimacy with God. James encourages us to “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you” (James 4:8).

Jesus guides us into this intimacy by the way he talks with his Father and in using Father in naming God. Father talks of a very close personal relationship and Jesus encourages us to have that with him. He encouraged the disciples to do the same calling Father God, “Abba, Father”. For the religious leaders of the day, this was enough to call for Jesus’ death for blasphemy.

The Old Testament did not encourage this level of intimacy. But Jesus was introducing a new covenant, a new era, of relationship with God.

Privately, in your journal and when you pray, use the language and words that best bring you close to God. Privately, I use Loving Heavenly Father for God and Lord or Jesus for Jesus Christ. When talking to others about them, I will use their names as in this book.

If you had a father who was unloving, then talking about Father God may not encourage you. It may get in the way of your relationship with God. Maybe use Holy Father, or Abba or Lord or Jesus, or one of the other names used of God, such as Yahweh or Adonai. Privately, think about and talk to God in the way it is easiest for you and will most encourage your close relationship with God.

Having a close personal relationship with our God is fundamental to our faith and our being disciples.

Regardless of the words we use, we know God is personal and that he is also the Almighty Redeemer who we worship and adore.

God and gender

Already in this chapter I have used “he” for both God the Father and the Holy Spirit. I have used this language because it is comfortable for me and in English it is traditional.

I also do not capitalise he as the practice is disappearing for a variety of good reasons. For all scripture references, I use the practise of the Bible version I am quoting from.

The Bible clearly teaches that God created humanity in his image, encompassing both male and female. God encompasses both maleness and femininity. Yet God is neither male nor female, he has no gender. God is a spirit. But he is a real person and has a nature and we can relate to God. Genesis says that Adam and Eve walked and talked with God in the garden.

God’s attributes are beyond our human understanding. We know he is infinite, self-existing, never changing, omnipotent, all powerful, all knowing, and everywhere.

We also know God, as a being, has character attributes; he is holy, loving, just, compassionate and gracious. We can know him and have a relationship with him. We know he is pure and loves us to the extreme. His nature exceeds ours in every way.

To talk about God, we will use our language, the best we can, to communicate aspects of his nature that we want to talk about. Talking about God in each of our languages will vary according to the constraints of that language. Each language will do this in its own unique way depending on that language's conventions and rules of grammar.

In Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament, God is referred to using masculine pronouns. But sometimes the Old Testament describes God using feminine language (Deuteronomy 32:18, Numbers 11:12, Isaiah 66:7-14, Matthew 23:17, Luke 15:8-10 and many more). Israel knew he was neither male nor female and they honoured God by not speaking and not writing his name. They used abbreviations.

In Hebrew, references to the Holy Spirit use feminine pronouns. But again, we know that the Holy Spirit is neither male nor female. The New Testament (written in Greek), uses male pronouns for God and neuter pronouns for the Holy Spirit.

In English, we would never refer to God or the Holy Spirit using a neuter pronoun as in “it”. It removes our recognition of him as a self-existing being with personality. There is justification for using female personal pronouns for the Holy Spirit, following the Hebrew pattern.

But the gender of the language used in scripture in English does not mean that God or the Holy Spirit is male or female or neuter. God is a spirit and has no gender. In English, our language is inadequate. It is simply the convention of the language trying to work out how to make God real and having life and personality. The language we use does not define God or the Holy Spirit. Both are far above these issues of language.

Jesus, the Son of God, came to earth as a man, born of a woman. Clearly, Jesus walked this earth as a male.

At different times in history, different churches have used different gender pronouns to talk about God and the Holy Spirit in their native language. Some use male pronouns, some female pronouns, and some languages have special pronouns for eternal beings. This will continue to be the case according to the grammar and traditions of each language.

Please do not take my use of male pronouns as implying anything about God or about the place of women before God. God is Spirit and is inclusive of male and female. God loves all of us; Jesus died for all of us and his Spirit is available to all of us.

[The children of God](#)

The translation of child or children into son or sons was a tragedy. This arises from the male domination in the day's culture. While it was culturally common in English, it is still a corruption of the language used in the original Hebrew and Greek text. This is tragic for all the women who read scripture. Does scripture exclude women? Not at all. The original language of the Bible embraces sons and daughters.

We can see that God used women and men, in the journey of Israel. Even though Jewish culture was very male dominated, we see women as leaders, judges and prophets.

In Genesis, when God created Eve, the words used in Hebrew are “kenegdo” and “ezer”. The best English translation of this is a co-worker or an indispensable companion. Ezer on its own is mostly used to talk about God as our helper. The other uses are in life-threatening situations. Kenegdo qualifies this to be the suitable or appropriate helper. The words together carry the implication that God had created the ideally suited companion for Adam, The word does not imply submission. Thus Adam and Eve were kenegdo and ezer or indispensable companions to each other. The reading of these words given by some churches does not reflect the Hebrew meaning. Ezer is the help you get when times are desperate and you need to call on help because you cannot do it on your own.

In the New Testament, Jesus treated women differently than did the culture of the day. He taught them, spoke to them, and travelled with them. He respected them and loved them. God used them as key messengers in key situations in the Easter story.

The New Testament also presents a picture that in God, both male and female have their origin and their fulfillment.

No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. (Act 2:16-18)

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:26-28)

Our culture positions women differently. Again, we need to step away from our culture and step into Jesus' culture. Again, all can come to Jesus. Jesus loves all. Jesus died for all.

Everything in this book is available to any man or woman as they come to Christ in submission.

A note about walking with Christ.

The Bible talks about walking with Christ. This is central to being a disciple. You will have heard the comment "You can't run till you learn to walk". Biblically I would say "you can't walk with Jesus, till you have learnt to sit with Jesus". Walking and standing call us to action and discipline and doing and serving. While these are normal results from being a disciple, they should not be our initial focus. Our starting focus needs to be on relationship with Jesus and the Holy Spirit. That is what a disciple is. The Holy Spirit will then enable us, empower us and lead us to God's good works. And we do the good works in Jesus' power, not ours. Sitting with Jesus enables us to grow from a firm foundation.

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:6-7)

Ephesians is my favourite New Testament letter. Watchman Nee points out that in Ephesians 2:6 Paul says that Christ has **seated** us with him in heavenly places. He points out that we first sit with Christ. Listening to Christ and worshiping Christ is what we do as we sit. Watchman Nee points out that this position with Christ is the foundation that equips us to **walk** and, subsequently, to **stand**, as described in the rest of Ephesians. Ephesians is an important book of the Bible for us to learn from.

Watchman Nee also wrote a book called "The Normal Christian Life" which was foundational for me and is based on Romans 1-8. You will see parts of that learning in several chapters.

So here are the topics that have been important to me.

I pray that as you work your way through this workbook, Jesus will upgrade your life. That you will find a friend and a guide for life.

This workbook covers the "SIT in Christ" sections and includes practical aspects of walking in Christ.

SIT in Christ to be established and then walk in Christ:

1. Introduction
2. Spiritual Preparation
3. The stories and lessons from Daniel 1-6
4. God loves us no matter what. He wants our love in relationship
5. Hearing God, Listening to his voice
6. God's Grace covers everything
7. Love your neighbour as yourself
8. Is sin a problem for you?
9. In Christ - your identity
10. The Dark Night of the Soul

WALK in Christ to serve God and others, minister, share the gospel and live in community:

11. The eternal continuum
12. Eyes on Jesus, not the path
13. Everything as unto the Lord
14. In word and deed
15. My life? God's life? My money? God's money?

STAND in Christ against the enemy:

16. Abide in Christ—in hard times
17. Jesus overcomes fear
18. Faith in God
19. Hope - Part 2

Action:

Additional Actions:

- f. Work out when and how much time you will give to this experience of Jesus. What works for you? What fits your personality? How do you make it work with your other commitments and Jesus's current call on your life?***
- g. Make sure you have done all the actions in the chapter, have bought a journal and have you worked out who will help you as you follow this workbook.***

The next chapter is a spiritual preparation. We want Jesus to minister to you strongly at every step, so we need to approach this with the right heart attitude.

2. Spiritual Preparation

Aim: The aim of this chapter is to get ready to receive what Jesus has for us.

Bible passages: Luke 3:1-22, John 1:19-34. Read these Bible passages to prepare for this chapter and before you read the chapter.

This chapter will take you 2 days. It has these parts:

1. Sit in Christ to be established
2. But first we need spiritual preparation

SIT in Christ to be established: our foundation

This workbook responds to the way Jesus called the first disciples to be disciples and to be with him. Being with him was for them the place of training. It was where their heart's belief took root. Where they learnt in practical ways the values of the Kingdom.

They spent time with him before he sent them out on their first mission. Then they spent time with him, reviewing what happened and learning from it. They spent more time with him, maturing beyond that. And then, after his death and resurrection, they spent time first sitting with him to re-learn what they had missed. And then sitting with the Holy Spirit to establish a new foundation for a radically changed understanding of who Jesus is and how we follow him.

From this foundation, relying on the Holy Spirit, they then changed the world.

But first we need spiritual preparation

God sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus. Isaiah the prophet had prophesied this would be the case so that Israel would sit up and take notice.

Why was any preparation needed for the Son of God? Surely Jesus had all authority?

When we read the passage, we realise that the preparation was for the people. To prepare their hearts.

“Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”

It started with repentance. John preached a message of repentance and baptised anyone who came. And so it is with us.

God wants our hearts to be ready to receive from Jesus. To be ready to receive, we need to be thirsty. We need to be willing and even desperate for Jesus to change our lives. Wanting him to bring new life into the deepest part of our souls. To answer all those questions that cause us to cry out when we are desperate.

This workbook is all about changing the way we walk with Jesus to do it his way. To receive that message, we need to prepare the way, just like John did.

We need to repent and ask God to fill us. How desperate are you to know Jesus more fully?

Action:

- a. Meditate on the passages below, then come to God in repentance and prayer.*

Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. (Psalms 51:9-12)

We all have things in our lives that we need to confess. We do things the way we want. We are proud. We sin. We have pressed on in our own strength rather than leaning on Jesus. We need to repent to make way for Jesus.

Jesus, the Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (Colossians 1:15-20)

To receive all he has for us, we need to have hearts that are open and ready and wanting to receive. We need to be thirsty. Like a ploughed field waiting for the grain and the water. Jesus, the Son of God, can provide all that we need. He has it all. We have nothing. What do you want from Jesus?

On the final and climactic day of the Feast, Jesus took his stand. He cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. (John 7:37)

- *Pour out your heart's desire to him.*
- *What are the questions you need answers to?*

Write what you want from Jesus in your journal as a record of your request.

Spend the day thinking about this journey. Grow your awareness of your need and recognise all that Jesus is. Add to what you have written in your journal after the day of thinking. Grow your expectation of what God can do in you and through you.

Keep asking and be ready to receive.

3. The stories and lessons from Daniel

Aim: The aim of this chapter is to give you a foundation to start from, in growing closer to Jesus by learning about discipleship from Daniel.

Bible passages: Daniel chapters 1-6, 9:1-23. We will read these chapters one by one as part of the Action instruction further down the chapter.

This chapter should take you at least 14 days and another 7 at a later time.

This chapter comprises these parts:

1. Daniel was a superb role model for us
2. Action: Read Daniel Ch 1-6
3. Action Part 2: Review Daniel's guidelines for being a disciple
4. Daniel's Guidelines for being a Disciple
5. Daniel's top priority was loving God
6. A comment about believing and faith

Daniel was a superb role model for us

Everyone loves a good story and stories are often the best way to learn things. So, reading Daniel's story is a good starting point. I have returned to Daniel and his stories throughout my life. Daniel is my Old Testament hero and reading his story is inspirational.

Being a disciple of Christ is a most soul satisfying experience. Later, we will look at the Gospels to understand how God calls us as disciples of Jesus. But Daniel was a great disciple of God. We can learn much from him. We will learn some foundational attitudes and practices from him that are not described in the Gospels. And they are all here in 6 chapters that are easy to read.

Also, as we look at Daniel, we will learn how we can apply scripture to our lives. We need to have learnt this so that when we get to the Gospels and Ephesians; we have prepared ourselves for the big step up in allowing the Holy Spirit to become our teacher. **Daniel will also teach us to realise how great God is and will help us lift our expectations of what God will do in our lives.**

Imagine God saying to you that "you are greatly loved". What would that be like? God said that about Daniel.

Daniel is significant because he was a prisoner in Babylon. So, he was working in enemy territory. Daniel, just like us, lived and worked in a domain where people did not accept God. Daniel succeeded in this environment and earned many promotions, eventually becoming the second in command of the entire nation. God loved him and blessed him and used him to build his kingdom. So, he has plenty to teach us.

One of the main things he teaches us is that God is everywhere, so even when we are in enemy territory, we should know that it is truly God's territory and we are God's children. God is available wherever we are.

Daniel was a prisoner, so had limited freedom. He had to do what he was told or risk death. Yet, despite being under authority, Daniel lived his life under God's authority. His success despite being a prisoner is an outstanding model for us as we have constraints imposed on us. He teaches us how to cope with persecution and political control.

Daniel was also a man of devotion. He spent time with God every day and he listened to God. He was not called to be a prophet to Israel in the traditional meaning of that, but, yet in the book of Daniel, mostly in the back half, you will find Daniel's dreams, visions, prayers, and answers from God.

These later chapters are his journal recording what he heard from God. They contain more specific prophecies about the timing of Jesus' first arrival on earth than anywhere else in the Bible. (Isaiah has more details about the events around Jesus). You will find insights into how heaven works that don't appear anywhere else. Given his deep devotion to God that we see in chapters 1-6, God trusted Daniel with the prophetic messages and insights that we see in chapters 7-12. We won't look at his visions and prophecies. They are very complicated and that would need a different type of book.

But, as a disciple of Jesus, we want a lifestyle that Jesus will love. We want Jesus to use us and bless us just as he did Daniel. His prayers revealed God's plans, his insights from God influenced kings and leaders and witnessed to the power of God. His prayers caused heaven to act to change the course of history. And we want to do the same.

In the first 6 chapters of Daniel, you will find many principles of living for Christ that Daniel followed. This reflects his disciple's school and what he learnt as he trusted in God. They tell you how to live as a disciple in enemy territory, relying on God's strength and power. So read these 6 chapters and come back to them when you need to learn another principle. Most of the principles are obvious in the stories. Some principles you have to work out by thinking about why Daniel did something. What would you do in his situation and what did he do?

Action:

Take 7 sessions (maybe that is 7 days or stretch it out longer) to work through the 6 chapters, plus chapter 9.

Journaling our spiritual journey and especially what God places in our minds is a widely recommended spiritual discipline. It is good to get into the habit. Disciples have been doing it for centuries. We will talk about the uses of the journal as we get to them. Daniel kept a journal and recorded in it what he heard from God. That is how we have the written record in chapters 7-12. He also corresponded with other prophets like Ezekiel about what was going on.

Read one chapter of Daniel each day and then stop to write in your journal anything in that chapter that teaches you about being a disciple. This is the pattern you should follow:

- a. First, read the chapter as a story, so that you have the context.**
- b. Then read it again, verse by verse, record any lessons that you can learn from Daniel about how he follows God.**
- c. Imagine you are in Daniel's place and walk through the story. How can you learn from this Bible passage? Write any new thoughts that stand out.**
- d. Write questions you have.**
- e. Pray about the story and again ask God to show you anything you should see. Write anything new in your journal.**
- f. Reflect on the story as you go about your day and record any new thoughts from God.**

- a. For example, in Chapter 1, read the chapter and take in the story.
- b. Then read verse by verse slowly. As you read, record in your journal any practises or habits that Daniel has that help him as a disciple of God.
- c. Then pause and imagine it was you in Daniel's place. In Chapter 1, he was just 15. Imagine what it would have been like to be taken from home and moved to a strange country that speaks different languages at age 15. And knowing that any wrong step can cause you to be executed. But also knowing that you are a child of God and wherever you went, you are a servant of God, regardless of what Nebuchadnezzar thought.
- d. Write in your journal questions that you have in your mind as you read the story. What emotions would you have had? What would you be asking God for?
- e. Pause and pray about the story. Thank God for the story. Ask God to put in your mind further understanding about Daniel and how God helped him. Write in your journal anything that God pops into your mind.
- f. Finally, keep thinking about the story as you go about your daily duties. Be ready for God to add understanding later in the day. You may see something that triggers a thought. In the evening, add any further thoughts to your journal.

Then do the remaining chapters, taking a day to do each chapter. Take longer if you want to. This is not a race. What you are doing for each chapter is just as above for Daniel, chapter 1:

In Chapter 2, Daniel would have been around 18.

In Chapter 3, they would all have been in their 20s. Imagine you were one of the three.

Chapter 4 covers Daniel from probably in his 40s to his 50s.

In Chapter 5, Daniel would have been in his 70s.

In Chapter 6, he was over 80.

Then do the same for Chapter 9:1-23. Chapters 7-12 overlap with Chapters 1-6 time-wise. So, Daniel would have been over 80 in Chapter 9. It would have been written at the same time as Chapter 6. For Chapter 9, you can stop at verse 23 if you like. The verses after that are God's prophetic revelation to Daniel. Read it if you like. It tells us about the coming of Jesus and his death.

When you have done all the above, you can move to the next section.

Action Part 2:

Just take one guideline from below each day or session. Stop after the 7th. Review your life as a disciple against the principles. Do this slowly and deeply, using the questions below. The idea of only doing one a day is so that we give the Holy Spirit time to touch our hearts and our minds as we reflect. We can sit and look at scripture and pray and think and not get everything we should. If we are aware of the presence of God as we go about our jobs, you will sometimes find the Holy Spirit adding further insight as you walk through your day.

Here are the questions you should ask for each guideline as you come to it:

- g. Is this something that you already do? That is great! Think back to what triggered you to live this way and thank God for those events that fashioned your heart habits. Thank God for the people who touched you. If you have a deep, deep sense of God working in your life, you can always write a prayer of praise to God in your journal.***

- h. Or do you need to change? Ask Jesus to help you with that change. Record what you think in your journal.*
- i. We want these things to become natural in your life so that you do them without having to keep track. As we do this disciple journey, we want to change to be more like Jesus. It needs to be natural and just a part of our nature. These are not rules to remember, they are habits to gain.*
- j. Pray about any change you want in your nature or thinking and ask God to make that change in your heart for you, so that it is a part of your life. Record it in your journal.*
- k. If you are uncertain, dig into the Bible. Look at the Bible references and read them. Talk to others in your community.*

Daniel's Guidelines for being a Disciple

I have listed below the guidelines that I have found in Daniel. You may have already found all of them as you read the chapters. Maybe you have found more than I have?

For each guideline I have listed where in Daniel you can see it shown and also some New Testament passages that support that thinking. I have also added a few notes below each of the guidelines. The Action section asks you to meditate on each one, taking one each day. Use g. to k. above to guide you on each one.

1. **Walk closely with God, conversing and praying and reading scripture privately each day. This is one foundation of a relationship with God.** (Daniel 2:17, Daniel 6:10, Daniel 9: 2-6, Matt 14:23, Matt 6:6, Luke 6:12, John 8:47, John 14:16-18, John 16:7-15)

Prayer is one basis of our relationship with Jesus. The first and most important is love.

We use prayer to worship Jesus and give thanks to him. We pray to confess our failings and to ask for help from the Holy Spirit.

We can also listen to God in prayer, we can feel God in prayer, we can see God in prayer and we can know God in prayer. If you already do these things, then carry them on, but if you don't, then just try it. Pause and let God speak to your heart. We will come back to teach about this in a later chapter.

As we spend time with Jesus in prayer and conversation, our love for him will grow. He will take the fear and shame out of our hearts and replace it with his love.

When we have many problems or difficulties or have needs that come from deep in our hearts, we will dedicate more time to prayer than usual. If need be, we will also fast from food so that we can give that time to God. It is a signal to God that we are desperate for his help.

Daniel 9:2-6 talks about just such an occasion when Daniel was expecting to see God do something, and it hadn't happened. The passage talks about him fasting and wearing sackcloth and ashes. This was a way in which the Israelites signalled their repentance to God, expressed their deep desire to follow God, and publicly declared they wanted God's help.

Jesus explained God looks at what is going on in our hearts. In Matthew 6:6-7 he says we shouldn't put on a show for other people when we are fasting or repenting. So, the custom of wearing sackcloth and ashes has mostly stopped. But we should still have the spiritual attitude

when we come to God of repenting in our hearts. And we will sometimes fast as we set aside time for God to make special requests of God.

Pray about any special needs that you have. Reflect and thank God for your journey with him. Recognise your growth in Christ and give thanks. Especially give thanks for any breakthrough answers to prayer that you have seen in your life.

Do you have the discipline of talking to God each day, praying and reading his word? And then allowing Jesus to speak to you? If not, then try it out and see how it changes your life.

Some people easily fall into the discipline of a daily devotion time, as Daniel did. For some of us, it is very difficult and does not help our walk with Christ. As a disciple, I struggled with the daily discipline of a quiet time in the morning. My life was hectic and busy, and I had a long way to drive to get to work. My complete relationship with Jesus changed when I discovered I had the freedom to do it differently. I have more time at night than in the morning. I much prefer to spend 2 or 3 hours with Jesus than 30 minutes. I still talk to Jesus every day as I go about my day. I pray through the day. But my special times with Jesus are longer and less frequent.

What discipline will bring you closer to Jesus as you sit with him?

2. **Love God and centre your life values in him and not in other stuff.** (Daniel 1:8, Daniel 3: 16-18, John 15:9-17, Romans 8:28)

If we are followers of Jesus, that is a life commitment and for every aspect of our lives. Being a disciple of Jesus will be a life-changing experience. We will become more like him in every way!

One of the key character traits of Jesus is the love he has for every person. He loved us despite our sins and regardless of the religion we grew up in. His death and resurrection grants us salvation and forgiveness for our sins. He died for us, so that his love would call us to follow him.

As a disciple of Christ, our love for Jesus and our love for other people will increase as we get to know him. Jesus will change our hearts. This includes our love for our family, our friends, our colleagues, regardless of the faith that they practice. The love of Jesus gives us a new way of looking at other people and the world.

As you pray and worship and read scripture and serve Jesus, allow your love for him and for others to grow. Pray about the people in your life and your relationship with them.

We will spend much more time exploring this in another chapter.

3. **Understand the culture in which you live, but stay true to yourself and God. Know who you are and who you belong to. Keep yourself pure and holy.** (Daniel 1:8-20, Daniel 3:16-18, Daniel 6:3-5, Acts 10:9-29, Ephesians 1:4-610, Ephesians 1:3-14, 1 Cor 9:19-27, 1 Peter 1:10-15)

They took Daniel to Babylon with the intention that he lose his culture and adopt the Babylonian culture and the Chaldean knowledge set, which included writing, science, technology, mathematics and astrology, and also included divination and magic. They gave him a new name that honoured a Babylonian god. The study included some subjects that the

Mosaic law forbade. The intention was to brainwash the four lads. Daniel had the problem of how would he represent Jehovah when, as a captive, he had to go along with all the brainwashing.

Being pure and holy is about the state of our heart before God. God looks on the inside while people may look on the outside. So being pure and holy is never about following the rules. It is not about what we wear or what we eat or where we live. These things reflect the culture that we live in.

Being pure and holy is about where we stand with God. Daniel could have eaten the king's food and drunk the wine, even if the Jewish law forbade it. He was a captive. He could have eaten the food even if presented to idols. Acts 10:9-29 makes that clear.

In Daniel 1:8 in the original language, it says that Daniel made this decision to question the food because of what was in his heart. The verses don't say Daniel wanted to follow the Jewish dietary rules. I think this entire episode was God doing a miracle. God prompted Daniel in his heart to follow this path to establish trust and credibility with the people he had to work with.

Daniel would not have been willing to leave the final decision to the steward (V 13) if it had been about following the rules. This was a risky experiment, but God gave Daniel confidence that it would turn out for good. Clearly, Daniel knew he was a son of God and he could trust his life with God.

Staying true to yourself means you behave according to what is in your heart. What is in your heart is what you truly believe. Staying true to Jesus is allowing him to change your heart so that you follow him. Read Romans 7:4-6. The Holy Spirit is our guide, not the law or rules. This is one reason it is important to allow the Holy Spirit to guide us.

As you read Daniel's story, did the local culture change him? Did he change the local culture? Did he stay true to God?

This is the call on all of us, to represent Jesus, to reflect his values and character, to be an influence for him. To be true to Jesus.

As a disciple of Jesus, we will gradually walk into increased holiness with him. It is not an easy path, but it is a rewarding path. As we walk the path, we will become more like Jesus. Reflect on the road you have travelled with Jesus and give thanks for the blessings you have received. Pray about the issues or uncertainty that you may see in front of you.

This whole workbook will teach and guide you in this as you walk through it with others and Jesus.

4. **Fully take part in life to contribute positively. Do your job excellently, with diligence, hard work, and integrity. Maintain healthy relationships with all.** (Daniel 1:8-20, Daniel 6:3-5, 2 Thessalonians 3:10, Ephesians 4:25-32, Ephesians 6:5-9, Hebrews 6:11-12)

We live where God has placed us, and God wants us to have great relationships with the surrounding people. Our family, our neighbours, our places of work. Even if the people around have a different faith or live differently. God will use us wherever we are. He calls us

to live for him surrounded by these people and to contribute productively to the community. He calls us to maintain good relationships. Everyone respected Daniel.

Sometimes, he may call us to move and go somewhere else. Or circumstances may force a move. Then we have a different local community and we should make good relationships with those around us. And contribute well to that new community. But regardless of where we are, we should work hard to have good relationships. We should love and pray for our families, especially if they don't know Christ.

Pray about your life and how you contribute to and shine in your community. Ask God to bless the work of your hands and the people you work with.

5. **Trust God to place you where you will best be used, and to give you everything you need. Establish God's perspective on your situation.** (Daniel 1:8-9, Daniel 3:17-18, Daniel 6:3, Daniel 6:10, Matthew 6:25-34)

Wherever we are, God has a plan for us. Pray about it. Allow God to plant in your heart the things that you can do to represent God in your community.

Do you have a strong sense of a particular call from God to a specific ministry or place? Pray about it and look for God to open the doors you need opened for you to follow that call. What miracle would God need to do for you to follow that call?

Or ask God to make you content just where he has placed you. Pray for your witness.

6. **Walk closely with fellow believers. Share each other's burdens. Pray together, especially in hard times. Together, pray that God will provide.** (Daniel 2:17-23, Galatians 6:1-10)

As I explained in the Introduction chapter, as a disciple, we cannot do it on our own. We need other believers around us. And we need Jesus to encourage and help us. It may be a small community. In the introduction chapter, I talked about the roles we need to see within our faith community. Daniel had his 3 friends. We don't know if he had others. But he must have written letters or had a few friends who travelled, otherwise people like Ezekiel would not have heard about him. Ezekiel was also living in exile (see Ezekiel 14:14, 14:20 and 28:3).

Who is your faith community? Are you walking closely with them? How do they help you follow Jesus? Pray for each person you have thought about and pray that you and they will help each other in the issues you face.

7. **Don't wait till you are qualified. Fly before you get your wings. Stand up and stand tall.** (Daniel 1:8, Daniel 2:16, Daniel 2:24, Daniel 3:16-18, Daniel 6:3, Isaiah 40:30-31, Ecclesiastes 12:1, 1 Timothy 4:12, Ephesians 6:10-18)

As a disciple of Jesus, you have Jesus with you all the time. You are called to stand tall as his child. You have his authority. This is not to encourage foolishness. But it encourages us to follow our hearts or what God is leading us into. It is not about doing things in my power or that I want. It is about doing things that Jesus calls us to and we do them in his power.

Many of the things that the Holy Spirit will call us to, we will do as individuals. This is an invitation to follow the Holy Spirit rather than being constrained by our culture. We can follow the call of Jesus as individuals when he calls us that way. At other times, the Holy Spirit

will call us as a group to something new. Within our culture, we may need to explain what is happening or ask for support. But if God places a challenge before us, we should respond.

We should not let our culture get in the way of what Jesus is calling us to. Daniel had every reason to keep his head down and stay out of trouble. Instead, he became a shining light for God.

Is Jesus calling you to do something that you need to stand tall about? Is there something you have been afraid of that you need to stop being afraid? Make sure that this is not something you are doing out of guilt, but is something Jesus wants you to do. Is this something just for you or is it something for your group? What do you need to do it with enthusiasm and genuine conviction? If you feel uncertain, ask Jesus to set it up for you. To make those divine appointments. Or to cause the conversation to give you an opportunity. Or for the situation to be ideal to do what he wants you to do.

Stand tall and follow the Spirit of Jesus as he leads you into this, and trust in the Holy Spirit to meet your needs. Trust in the Holy Spirit and do not be afraid.

You can stop here. I suggest you pick up the rest later. There will be gaps where the practical experience takes longer than the chapter. You can fill up that gap with 1 or more of the guidelines. Otherwise, I suggest picking up the rest at the end of chapter 7, where there could be a sizeable gap. But don't forget to come back and do them all. So jump down a few pages to "Daniel's top priority was loving God".

8. **Invite God into the opportunities and problems of your workplace / environment, listen to God, seek God's guidance. Expect God to respond miraculously. Boldly trust that God's answer is complete and right. Trust it fully, have faith in God.** (Daniel 1:8-9, Daniel 2:17-23, Daniel 3:16-18, Daniel 3:28, Daniel 6:10, 2 Chronicles 7:14, John 15:7, Matthew 21:21)

This is a bit like yesterday's, but the focus is different. Jesus is with us in everything we do. Work, family, and ministry are all important to Jesus. If you have a problem at work, then pray about it. Expect God to intervene and ask him for a solution. Keep praying about it. The same if we have a problem with our family.

Throughout Daniel, we see God miraculously at work. The miracles that we see in our lives may not be as notable, but they are still real.

Now on these issues, we are dealing with people. God always gives every person freedom and freewill. He will never force a person to accept Jesus or obey his standards. But we can still pray for it. If the person is open to Jesus and as he touches them, we will see a change in their hearts. I have found that as I pray to God about work or family problems, God intervenes and I see people changing their minds and their behaviour.

Do you have some problems you want to pray about? How will you develop the habit of always going to God first about your problems rather than last, when it has become desperate? Thank God for whatever he does. Accept whatever he does, even if it looks like he has done nothing. We don't know what is going on in the hearts of other people, but God does.

But remember that Jesus extends the choice to every person. They can accept him or reject him. And pray accordingly. Hand over our problems to Jesus and expect his intervention.

9. **Give God glory for what he does. Let your life point to God. His answers may be bigger or different from what you asked for.** (Daniel 2:19-23, Daniel 2:26-30, Daniel 2:47, Daniel 3:16-18, Daniel 3:28, Daniel 4:1-3, Daniel 4:34-37, Daniel 6:26-27, Daniel 9:24-27, 1 Peter 2:9, Romans 15:18-20)

Live so that your life points to God. If God does things around you, make sure you give God credit for these. This is not about preaching. This is about living so that God is clearly on display. You can see in Daniel that several times Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges God is the greatest and all powerful. He acknowledges it in his head, but not in his heart. His behaviour doesn't change. He is still proud and does not bow down to worship God. But you can see that Daniel and his friends clearly pointed out what God had done rather than taking the credit for themselves.

If you are the only Jesus follower in your family, how can you give God credit for what he does without upsetting your family? How can you give God praise that will always receive a positive reaction? How do you let your life point to Jesus?

10. **When God (or circumstances) calls you to deliver a hard message, do it humbly, but with courage.** (Daniel 2:30, Daniel 4:19 & 27, Matthew 21:12-17, 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, Philippians 2:3-4)

Jesus was very humble; he calls us to live with a humble spirit. But when he had something important to say, he did not shy away from it.

Daniel was very careful when dealing with the proud Nebuchadnezzar. But then he was always humble. He approached everyone in humility. But with the king, he was especially careful. Do you reflect Jesus in this way? Have you had to deliver a hard message to someone? How did you do it? Pray for grace in your life, that when you are in difficult situations that need the right words, Jesus will give you the right words.

All the Old Testament prophets came to Israel, clearly calling out tough messages from God. They stood their ground to represent God within a Jewish setting. Here, Daniel had to be a bit more careful.

Jesus dealt cleverly and with confidence in deflecting the attacks from the religious leaders of the day. He outsmarted their every attempt to trip him up. He plainly declared God's priorities.

He also dealt with the temple merchants in voice and action as they were cheating the poor and made a profit from travellers and foreigners. The religious leaders of the day had allowed the temple to become a market and a market that was robbing the poor. They would have immediately recognised the words that Jesus spoke from Jeremiah 7:1-11, and understood the sin against God that they had profited from.

Pray for increased humility in your life, in all your relationships, and in how you talk to all other people.

Pray for strength and confidence when you have to confront something difficult for God.

11. **Remember, you are living in enemy territory. Be smart and careful. Maintain good relationships. Make friends with key people. Pray for and get close to your enemies until they become your friends.** (Daniel 1:8 – 20, Dan 2:14-15, Daniel 4:8-9, Matt 5:43-44, Rom 12:17-19, 1 Peter 2:12, Matthew 5:43-48, Matt 16:6, Matt 23:3-12)

Again, this principle reflects that God asks us to maintain good relationships. But we also need to be smart and not allow others to manipulate or trick us into doing the wrong things. We need to be careful.

Daniel could see that the Chief Officer would never agree to his request. He could not risk the king's anger. So he quickly dropped the request for special arrangements. He also did not want to put the Chief Officer at risk. He wanted a good relationship with him. So he took the request up with the lowly steward and proposed it as an experiment. When we face such situations, God gives us insight and guidance.

Many times, I have done the right thing without understanding it by following what I felt God was saying to me.

We will spend more time on this later.

Spend some time thinking about the difficult situations that you face. Ask God for his wisdom to help you for each of them. Expect that God will help you in each. Look at the promise in Luke 21:15.

12. Promote & sponsor others rather than yourself. Be humble. (Daniel 2:49 & 4:27, Philippians 2:1-8, Romans 12:10, John 13:34)

Again, this is about being humble. Jesus was humble all the time. But it didn't stop from being frank and direct when he needed to be. He also put others first. He compassionately cared for many people who in the day's culture would be treated with disdain.

The follower of Jesus is all about allowing Jesus to be on the throne of our lives. This requires humility.

We should also show humility by putting others ahead of ourselves in our thinking and in our lives. That way, we reflect the love of Jesus to others.

Spend some time reviewing how you live. Do you put yourself first? If needed, confess this sin to Jesus and ask him to change you.

Who around you needs your encouragement to help them grow or shine?

13. Be willing to sacrifice or die for God, to be with God is gain. (Daniel 3:16-18, Daniel 6:10-13, Philippians 2:1-8, Romans 14:7-9, Philippians 1:21-23)

Daniel faced the risk of death along with everyone else who served the King. Life was risky in those days. Life can be risky in some parts of India still today.

The Bible teaches that as we learn to walk with Jesus here on earth; we start to step into the life we will have in eternity. Walking with the Holy Spirit as my companion along the Jesus way is a great experience. Whether I walk with him on earth or eternity, I am happy. He is my hope and my joy and my peace.

We will talk more about this later, but take some time to reflect on your journey with Jesus. Recognise the sacrifices that you have made. Give thanks for the ultimate sacrifice that Jesus made. Ask for strength and guidance to face those difficult, life-threatening situations when you come to them.

Pray about your attitude to danger and ask Jesus for the Holy Spirit to be with you when you are in danger, but in a way that you can feel or even see. The Bible talks about the Holy Spirit being present within us, but also over us and around us.

14. **Look beyond yourself to your community and nation. Recognise the issues and with fellow believers, pray about what you see. Confess your sins, your father's sins, your church's sins, your leader's sins, your nation's sins. Prevail on God to intervene. This is spiritual warfare.** (Daniel 9:3-19, 1 Timothy 1:1-2, 2 Chronicles 7:14, Romans 13:1)

OK, the verses don't list all those things that we should confess, but the principle is there. Here is Daniel. As upright a servant of God as we could imagine. Yet he has a burden for the sins of his people.

Do you have a sense of burden for your family, your community, your nation?

As we come to God to pray for the things that are important, we need to come with clean hands, having confessed our sins. We need to come with a pure heart. Wanting the best for our family and our community and our nation.

Take some time to pray for the things that weigh heavy on your heart.

15. **God has the times in his hand. He will achieve his ultimate plan in Christ. Put your faith in him. Don't worry about the things that you don't need to know or understand.** (Daniel Ch1- Ch12, Daniel 12:8-9, Matthew 6:25-34)

Daniel teaches us through the many visions and dreams and prophecies that God is still in control, even if it doesn't look that way. In the story that we have looked at, we see how God allowed Judah to be invaded by the Babylonian empire because they were not faithful to God.

Then through Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar realises he was not the great, all-powerful king that he thought he was. Four times we see him declare that the God of Israel is the real God (Daniel 2:47, Daniel 3:28-29, Daniel 4:2-3, Daniel 4:34-37). Yet, he didn't live that way. At a point in time, his head acknowledged that God was almighty, but he did not take the lesson into his heart and live in submission to God.

This happened despite the experience of becoming mad for 7 years. How could anyone forget that? You would think that would be a life-changing experience.

His son Belshazzar also didn't learn the lesson. In Daniel 5:30-31, we see God allows the Persian empire to take over the Babylonian empire and Darius ruled Babylon.

Daniel encourages us to put our trust in God and look beyond the big man of the day or the big problem of the day. God's plan will work out. Just as the dream in Daniel 2 predicted, a Greek empire displaced the Persian empire and that by a Roman empire. And the spiritual empire of God, represented by the rock that was carved out of the mountain without human hand, displaced the Roman empire.

Whatever bad is going on in this world, caused because God gives humanity freedom of will, God will ultimately be victorious.

Has there been a time when you turned your back on God, just as Nebuchadnezzar did? What did you learn from those episodes? How do you make sure it doesn't happen again? Do you need to live differently to reflect your understanding that your times are in God's hands? Are

you completely confident in Jesus and your relationship with him? Do you know Jesus is with you all the time?

Are there things that you worry about that you don't need to worry about? Pray and hand them over to Jesus. Trust in Jesus for the things that you cannot control.

Daniel's top priority was loving God

All these guidelines add up to being wise in God. As we seek to live as disciples of Jesus, the Holy Spirit guides and empowers us. The Holy Spirit brings wisdom into our lives and other things we will talk about later.

Daniel spoke God's revelation of truth. The human response was that he was a man of great wisdom. But Daniel repeatedly pointed out that all his wisdom was direct from God and not from him. This does not require us to be the smartest person (even though Daniel was clearly smart, given his government administration achievements). Walking closely with God reveals his wisdom. The key ingredients are love from a pure heart (God and others), an active conscience / listening to God, and a sincere faith. These are all heart beliefs and practices, not smarts. And these are exactly the heart experiences that bring us to come into God's presence so that we can hear His voice, receive his wisdom, and his anointing, to live our lives for Him.

But being wise was not what Daniel considered most important.

Daniel knew the key to being a disciple. He tells us in Daniel 9:4, I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: "Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments". Loving God was his priority.

Three times, the angel of the Lord responded by revealing how God viewed Daniel:

At the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly loved. Therefore consider the word and understand the vision. Daniel 9:23

And he said to me, "O Daniel, man greatly loved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for now I have been sent to you." And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling. Daniel 10:11

And he said, "O man greatly loved, fear not, peace be with you; be strong and of good courage." Daniel 10:19

Can you imagine anything better? A message from God that he loves you greatly. We have a later chapter on growing our love for Jesus and another one where Jesus will tell us how much he loves us.

A comment about Believing and Faith

When we first became believers, we believed in Jesus and his sacrifice, repented, and placed our trust in him. For many of us, we can remember the occasion and can even remember how we felt. The Holy Spirit touched us so that our belief in our conversion was deep within us. We knew and believed because we experienced a touch of the Holy Spirit.

I want to talk to you about head-belief and heart-belief. We live our lives out of our heart-beliefs. We live out of what we feel and know in our guts. We translate what we have experienced into our heart

beliefs, and then those beliefs guide our lives. We rarely live out of our head-belief. It just does not happen. When we come to the point of doing something that flows from just our head, we will feel uncomfortable and we often will not follow through. Even when we know it is the right way.

As a disciple, when we read the Bible, we often read it with our heads. We can accept intellectually what we are reading and believe it in our heads, but we will not act on it, because it is not our heart belief.

Already in the introduction you may have slid over sentences and read them and accepted them in your head, but not accepted them in your heart. Listening to God. A relationship with God. Walking with God. If these are not your current experience of God, then you may have quickly passed on. Maybe you believe being a believer is only about being saved and baptised. Or only about serving God. How you act will reflect what you believe in your heart.

Clearly, Daniel was a disciple who had a deep faith in God. It seems his heart belief had no limits. But if we read between the lines, we can see he had moments when he wasn't sure. So he went to God to establish exactly what he should have in his heart.

Daniel clearly had a strong head knowledge of God. He had studied well and his training had helped him well. But, this journey is about growing our heart belief in God, which we put in place by experiencing God. To do this, we have to try things out. As we experience God and depend on God, our heart belief grows. This happens as the Holy Spirit brings us into new ways of living. We will make mistakes, but that is OK. God understands we will make mistakes.

Note: This description in the following paragraphs relating to belief vs faith works in English. It may not work in another language.

The New Testament was written in Greek. In Greek, there is only one word for faith or belief: "pis'-tis". In English, they sometimes translated it as belief and sometimes as faith. For us, when we use the word faith, we normally mean something that we put our trust in. Something we act on. It has a deeper meaning than belief.

I can believe that Jesus is the son of God, but it is only as I put my faith in him, I become a child of God.

The translators of the New Testament use the word belief or faith according to how they read the passage. We can believe in the Holy Spirit without having the faith that he will talk to us when we need to hear him and that he will walk beside us.

This entire journey is about growing our faith in God so that we will live in action from our heart's belief.

As I grew up, I deeply believed in God with my head, and some of that belief translated into my heart. But there were things that the Bible talks about that I did not do. That was sometimes because no one else did them. And sometimes because no one talked about them. And sometimes because I did not have a heart belief that was strong enough for me to depend on God. I hesitated to share my faith with the people I worked with, because in my heart I had a fear of man. While my head believed that God could do miracles, my heart did not believe it, because I didn't see them around me. My heart told me I could trust the Bible because I had experienced new life in Christ. My heart did not tell me I could trust the Holy Spirit, because no one taught much about the Holy Spirit.

The Bible calls this being double minded. James talks about it in this passage.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do. (James 1:2-8)

The passage says we should be thankful for tough experiences because they grow our heart belief or faith and cause us to mature. The sign of this is that love grows. Our love for Jesus and our love for others. The passage assumes we talk to God about all the events of our lives and that we will ask God to sort out whatever is lacking.

Daniel certainly had plenty of difficult situations and confronting life events. He used them to grow his faith in God by trusting in God all the way. Through his experiences with God, he equipped himself for the next even tougher test.

This workbook is about a deep faith that changes the way we live. It calls us to an intimacy in our relationship with Jesus. A deepness that goes so deep that you know nothing will ever take it away from you. It is about love and grace. It is about time with God on your own. Without that deep time, just you and God's time, you will not change. It is also about time with others to help each other and serve each other and encourage each other.

It is about loving and believing Jesus in the depths of our hearts, the place where our spirit meets with the God who lives in our hearts.

To follow this path, you will need to have a thirst for God that only he can satisfy.

You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. (Psalms 16:11)

Action:

I. Pause for a while, be quiet before the Lord.

- ***Breathe in and then breathe out slowly.***
- ***Check out your feelings. Do you want to be a Daniel?***
- ***Can you feel the Lord calling you forward to do it?***
- ***Talk to the Lord about how you feel as you continue the journey.***
- ***Ask him to be with you every step of the way. Ask him to build your heart's belief.***

Stop here for today and pickup again tomorrow. During the day think about Daniel and you and what God may want to do in your life. What do you want?

4. God loves us no matter what. He wants our love in relationship

Aim: The aim of this chapter is to grow a deep love for Jesus. This is the first step in an intimate relationship with him.

Bible Readings: Deuteronomy 6:1-12 & 7:6-9, Mark 12:28-34, John 14:1-31, 1 John 4:1-21. Read these passages slowly and thoughtfully before you read the chapter. Let Jesus speak to you from them. Take 1 or 2 days.

Other Bible passages used: Psalms 139, Luke 15:11-32, Matthew 6:19-34, Luke 22-23, John Chapters 17-19.

It should take you at least 13 days to do this chapter. This chapter has these parts:

1. My Story
2. How do you obey a command to love God?
3. Loving Jesus is a heart response
4. Do I love Jesus?
5. How do I grow my love for Jesus?
6. Action:

The Sheema

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.” Deuteronomy 6:4-6

My story

I remember the day I became a Christian. I was only young, maybe 12. Walking home, I felt I was walking on air, feeling purified and loved and with a love for God in my heart. I felt that again a few years later. But over the years, that sense of God and his love dissipated. I was continually told as a young believer I needed to read the bible and study the bible and be good and go to church and..... a long list of rules I had to do. Where was that feeling of joy I had?

Given that my dad was a Theological College lecturer, we would often have doctrinal discussions over our meals. Back in those days, there was a tremendous emphasis on correct doctrine and being sure of exactly what we believed. There was a large focus on the detail of what we believed. We assumed love for God and each other flowed automatically from our beliefs and our state as children of God. Many of the beliefs created the rules we followed. But in fact, the stronger people held to particular beliefs or rules, the less loving they became. We were told we shouldn't trust our emotions; they were unreliable.

If we read the Bible carefully, it is exactly the opposite. Christ lives in our hearts, and he calls us to follow our hearts far more often than to follow our minds. The only times he talks about how we use our minds is when he is quoting Deuteronomy 6:5. Everywhere else in the Gospels, he talks about our hearts.

For me, the wake-up moment came with the charismatic renewal movement of the 1970s and 1980s. God clearly had given us emotions for good reason. The nature of worship changed from hymns about God to prayers and songs sung to God himself. These songs harnessed our emotions in prayer. Our whole being was involved, not just our brains.

And exploring the work of the Holy Spirit opened multiple extra dimensions of relationship with Jesus and working with Jesus. How come no one had ever talked about this before? We were too busy

with our belief system. We argued about doctrine and read the Bible more like a textbook. This had sidelined our God given emotions, so God could not use them.

We were also too busy being faithful servants to give God what he most wanted. Our love.

Imagine my surprise when I read the Bible with a different orientation. I found emotion everywhere. God uses our emotion. He made us in his image as emotional beings. If you are concerned about this, then stop and pray and ask God to sanctify your emotions.

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. (1John 3:1)

And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. (Romans 5:5)

And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. (1John 4:16)

We love because he first loved us. (1John 4:19)

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. (John 15:9)

Action:

a. Read the verses above slowly. Think about God the Father, and Jesus the Son. From creation to now, their message has been that they love us. That they love you and me.

- **Spend some time meditating on the love of God. Feel the love of God wrap around you.**
- **Say thank you to Jesus.**
- **Ask God to grow his love in you. And to sanctify your emotions, so that they reflect him.**

Think about God's love as you do your normal work today. You can stop here for the day and pick up the next segment tomorrow.

God created a wake-up moment for the Children of Israel when they were about to take possession of the promised land and live in it. God prompted Moses to give them some commands. We find these in Deuteronomy 6 and includes "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might".

That is an enormous demand. When you read the surrounding verses, you can see God was serious about this. He really wanted them to love him. And it was certainly clear to Israel.

The Hebrew word used for love includes loving both with our hearts and our minds. The heart love was an emotional love for God, responding to his love for Israel. And the mind response was a conscious mind commitment, a decision to trust God and follow him.

They call this passage starting with V3, that starts with "Hear O Israel" the Shema (Hebrew for "Hear"). Every day, every Jewish person will recite the Shema.

Shema also means listen or pay attention or attend to. Our next topic will be on listening.

In Hebrew, there is no separate word for "obey". The presumption in Hebrew is that if you listen, you will then hear, and then you will do. Hearing implies obeying. Shema means both listen and obey. If you don't obey, you haven't listened properly.

So, to obey is to love God. With all my heart. And all my soul. And all my might.

This may start with belief. But clearly involves our emotions. Our hearts. The Bible is full of the reality of emotion from cover to cover. God pours out his love for us. Jesus died for us. Again and again, we are told that Jesus was filled with compassion for a person. And he is looking for our response to him. And he is looking at our hearts for that response. What is a suitable response to someone who died for us?

What is in my heart for Jesus?

Action:

b. Pause and reflect.

- *How much do you love Father God?*
- *How would you describe your love for Jesus? Is it close? Is it intimate? Is it distant? Is it deep? Is it negative? Does Jesus move you to show mercy? Record your response in your journal.*
- *Think about your emotional love for God and Jesus as you do your work today. How are you aware that you love God? How do you see other people loving God or not loving God? Stop here for the day. Think about your love for God during the day.*

How do you obey a command to love God?

You and I cannot command someone to love us. Love just does not work that way.

The problem was that for many of the Jews, the way to love God was to follow the list of instructions. Following rules is always easier than maintaining a relationship. Recite the verses every day, strap these verses to their arms, strap them in leather pouches around their heads, put the signs up on the doorposts, etc. That was a sort of obeying. But not what God was looking for. All the time they missed what was in V6: keep these in your heart.

Traditional Jewish culture did not think abstractly. They showed their devotion to Jahweh through their behaviour. So it was quite natural for them to focus on the rules and miss the spiritual or the heart aspects of what God was saying. God was very patient with them in taking them down the path of understanding in Spirit and in truth. We see in King David and the prophets, people who understood God the way he wanted them to relate to him. But generation after generation of Israel failed to understand and walked in error and rejected God.

God was looking for a deep and lasting heart response to who he is.

And many people today do something similar. They think that if they go to church, read their bible and pray, they show they love God. Or they commit themselves and many hours to ministry to serve God. But Jesus is looking for what is in our hearts, not our external behaviour. He is not looking for servants; he is looking for deep lovers.

We saw Daniel had just such a deep love for God. How did he grow that love?

Daniel knew the history of his people. He knew God had first shown his love to his forefathers and that he had treated them according to his love. He knew God had rescued his people from Egypt because he loved them. And that God had renewed that declaration generation after generation. Right down to Daniel. Daniel knew God loved him and he responded to that love.

The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments. (Deuteronomy 7:7-9)

Again and again, God told Israel that they were his treasured possession. And he tells us the same today.

When we turn to the New Testament, Jesus makes his own declaration of love for the people.

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. (John 3:16)

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. (John 15:9)

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. (John 15:12-13)

And Jesus looks for our response. He references the Deuteronomy verses and repeats them as ongoing guidance to us. He declares how important it is by calling it the first and most important commandment. Each of the first three Gospels make this clear (Matthew 22:37-40, Mark 12:30, Luke 10:27-28).

Then, in John's Gospel, Jesus personalises it to himself as the son of God. In John 14:15, Jesus says, "If you love me, keep my commandments".

If you don't read the entire chapter, or you don't read it in the original language, then all you hear is a command or a rule. If we focus on keeping the commandments, we end up doing the same thing that Israel did with the Shema. We focus on the commands, not the loving. We will come back to this passage later.

People have studied the Gospels to discover that Jesus made 49 commands. Repent, follow me, let your light shine, honour God's law, rejoice, do not lust, keep your word, go the second mile, turn your cheek, love your enemies, be perfect, judge not, ask, seek, knock...etc.. they are all there. But focusing on doing these things is not the path to loving God. If we focus on these, they become rules.

Believers who have this rule mentality have gone even further. They have listed 1,050 commands that are in the New Testament and set about obeying them. Israel couldn't keep 10 Commandments. They failed repeatedly. How can we keep 1,050 rules? We are the same. The Jesus path is not a road of rules. It is a road of love and a heart response to Jesus.

Following all the rules does not qualify us to get to heaven, become God's children or to give God our love. It doesn't matter how good we are, we will never get a tick from God. Our best will always fall short of his standards. We are human and we sin and fail.

We qualify for God's love simply by being human; he loves us all. We enter a relationship with God by saying "Yes" to God and by accepting his love. It is the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross that qualifies us to respond. As we say "Yes" to Jesus, we become God's sons and daughters. It is all based on the sacrifice of Jesus, who bore our sin, and our response of "Yes".

God reduces all the rules down to love God with all your heart and all your mind and all your strength and love your neighbour as yourself.

As one author² put it, “Jesus died, and therefore all the bad we do can never lose God’s love, yet all the good we do can never gain God’s love.” The cross and God’s offer of forgiveness and salvation stand for ever drawing us to God. They qualify us, they reflect God’s love, they draw us forward into this love relationship.

It took me quite a while to understand the depth of the love that Jesus has for me, and I still do not fully understand it. We will never fully understand the depth of love that Jesus has for us.

And how do we respond to that love? My experience was tough. God had to go to some length before I responded properly to his love. But that is what he is looking for. Our response to his love. And he is looking for a deep response from the depth of our heart and being.

Something deep enough, and genuine enough that it responds to the love he has shown by Jesus dying for us.

Something deep enough, and genuine enough that it will change every part of our lives.

It is important for us to understand the nature of this relationship. As humans, we are oriented to think about obedience, not love. That is the way society works. We follow rules. Not rely on love. And particularly in a country like India where authority looms large. Right through the Bible, it says God looks in our hearts for our response. We have the same problem in Australia, where many churches are rule oriented.

We need to put aside any sense of our goodness, obedience, or responsibility as the basis of our relationship with God. Our relationship is only based on Jesus’ death and resurrection, God’s grace, his love for us and our choice to love God.

The truth that God brings us is that he made us as emotional beings. God made us for relationship. Relationship with each other and relationship with God.

This is important for disciples of Jesus to learn. Much of our normal discussion is about how we will serve God. We naturally look to do the things that we know Jesus wants us to do. But our foundation as disciples should be our relationship with Jesus. Not a sense of duty or obligation.

What Jesus wants is our love. He gave his life because he loves us, and he wants us to respond with our love. As we love, he will gradually draw us into who he wants us to be.

If we are obedient to God’s commands but don’t love him, we will inevitably fail or fall into sin just as Israel did.

As I mentioned above, Hebrew culture did not think abstractly about love or worship, it was only about how they behaved and what they did for everyone to see. So wearing the passage on their heads or hands was their response to the command. And all the time, God was asking for a change in their hearts.

As we followed Daniel, we can see that he understood that. But do we understand it?

Our culture places a tremendous emphasis on how we behave in public. What we wear. What we do. How we pray. How we sing. But Jesus wants to see what is in our hearts. In the deepest place of our

² Tim Keller

being, when we are all alone. When only Jesus can hear our words or our thoughts, how do we show our love for Jesus?

How do I grow my love for Jesus?

We choose who we love. Jesus says we have the freedom to choose him or not to choose him. It is our freewill. We can choose to respond, to love him. We can choose how deeply we love him.

We could ignore him completely. We could treat him like a policeman, or a judge, or someone constantly watching and criticising us. Or treat him like a distant God of the universe. If you have these images of God locked away already in your head, maybe even planted by other believers, then you need to correct that image. This is not what God is like.

You may already have a deep and satisfying love for Jesus. If your love of Jesus is the foundation of your life and is deep and true, then that is great. But I have found that no matter how old you are, loving Jesus and actively growing our love is an agenda that never goes away. Don't despair. Love grows. We just need to keep watering it, nourish it, give it a chance; and it will grow.

"How do I do that?". The answer is slowly and deeply.

If you struggle with loving Jesus, look in the Bible to get a correct perspective. There are many marvellous stories in the Bible that show us the love of God and invite us to respond.

Jesus told three stories in Luke 15. The lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son. These stories together tell us that Jesus will find you and love you no matter how lost you are. That his love for you is radical and sacrificial.

Action:

- c. ***Read Luke 15:1-32. There are 3 parables here. We are going to look at the last one, but all of them are worth reading. They touch us in different ways.***

Maybe the first parable is about people who just lose their way in life, and Jesus the shepherd finds them. Regardless of how far away you have wandered. Even if the most painful thorn bush caught you. Jesus, the shepherd, will find you and restore you. Maybe that is your story?

The story of the lost coin places God in the story as a woman and people as the coins. The woman values them very much; they are precious. We don't know why. Maybe because they were her dowry (in Jewish culture, the groom paid a dowry for the wife). Maybe because they were coins from a necklace or a hair ornament. The one coin seemed to have great importance because it was a part of the 10. This parable talks to me about the preciousness of each person and our relationships. It speaks of a mother's concern for every aspect of her family and household. Maybe you thought you were not valuable or important? This parable tells you that God sees every person as valuable. There is a celebration in heaven when Jesus finds you.

Read Luke 15:11-32. Jesus told the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15 to explain what the love of God was like. The parable should be called the Parable of the Loving Father. The father represents God in the story. Working slowly through the parable is a great way to grow our love of God. Read the comments and questions just below to help you as you go through the action step.

I would come back to this story multiple times. You can stretch it out over 4 days. Each time you go through it, imagine you are a different person and see what God shows you. I have comments below to help you and we will look at it in sections. Take a day for each section.

- 1. The Father.*
- 2. Then the older brother.*
- 3. Then the son.*
- 4. Then the Father again.*

As you read the story, look for something new that you haven't noticed before or listen to God to let him tell you something about the story that you haven't yet picked up on. Use the notes below to help you. Record your thoughts in your journal.

This story speaks to a variety of loves that God shows us.

Unconditional love, sacrificial love, first love (the love of initiating love), perfect love (love that is so strong and has such an impact on us it removes fear from our lives). Spend some time reading and re-reading the parable.

As you read the story, position the story in a traditional Indian village with all the cultural connotations that come with that. As you read the parable, what thoughts go through your mind?

- 1. Do you think the father is weak and stupid? Imagine the loss of face he would have had. Imagine the disruption to his life. What his wife would have said to him. What the village elders would think. But the father understands his son. He desperately wants the younger son to truly love him and this wild unreasonable demand of his share of the estate reflects someone who doesn't even care whether his father lives or dies. Who would do such a thing? How can this be a picture of God and us?*

But it also reflects that the son wants to live life to the full. He is not happy with his current life. He wants more.

The Father recognises that and chooses a path that may fail. But it may solicit a genuine love. He loves his son sacrificially. He wants his son to love him in return more than anything else. He will pay any price to gain the love of his son.

How much pain, rejection, embarrassment, loss of face, loss of wealth would you be willing to bear to show your love?

- 2. Do you feel sorry for the older brother? You need to think about love vs obligation. Responding to rules or obligations is not love. Love comes from deep within us. The older brother felt obligated to follow the rules. He did not love his father. Even though the brother doesn't get much attention, still give it a whole day. It is important that we reflect on what we do out of obligation and what we do for love. We all do things out of obligation, that is not the problem. But God is looking for our love. Most relationships work much better when their foundation is love and not obligation. As we apply that thinking to ourselves, God may well prompt us to do something about our other relationships and our relationship with him.*

- 3. Put yourself in the place of the younger son. Live with him in the path of rejecting his father, setting off, spending, sinning, losing it all, desperation, and coming home. How do you feel?*

Can you see the father as he daily scans the horizon? Waiting. Waiting. Longing. Waiting.

Can you see him when he recognises you, his son in the distance? Running to greet you? Not even dressed properly. Where is his self-respect? It doesn't matter, here is my son!

See yourself as the celebrated returning son. The gifts and signs of honour. How did you deserve them?

4. *Again, think of yourself as the father. Can you feel the love for your returned son? The pride in his humility to return and seek forgiveness. His sense of oneness in knowing that his son will be beside him from here on. They can work the farm together. There will always be trust. There will always be celebration. There will always be love. Can you see your own story in any part of the story? Now, how do you feel about the father? Can you see God the Father in the story?*

At the end of the 4 days, stop to tell Jesus how much you love him. I find it helpful to write a prayer or a letter to God that expresses my love for him. Putting deep thoughts down on paper is worship, but also grows our love for Jesus.

Action:

Then, for a different day:

- d. *Read Luke 22 to 23 on day 1, and John 17 to 19 on day 2. Use the notes below to help you.*

- *Before you start, think about your love for Jesus. What stops your love for Jesus?*
- *When does your love grow less? Why?*
- *Talk to God about it and look for his answers that will keep your love for Jesus constant and growing despite whatever circumstances you are walking through. This is a lifelong journey. Write your thoughts down.*

These two passages take me back to my foundation in Christ. His sacrifice and my response. It encourages my thankfulness to Jesus and my response of love. Read one of the two passages each day and then respond to the points below in sequence. Take 6 days for this meditation.

1. *It was the darkest day in all of history when they put the Son of God to death. But it was also the greatest celebration of love. The day Jesus chose to die out of love for you and me.*

The day when God loaded the guilt and punishment of my sin, your sin, and the sin of all generations past and future onto the sinless, pure, and holy Son of God. The sacrifice of blood given for our sins.

We can't even begin to understand what that means. God made Jesus guilty for us. God punished Jesus for us. How does that work? What does it mean for Jesus to bear the burden of all our sins?

No, I can't understand what it means at all.

2. *But I can understand that it was a day when people yelled at Jesus, the Son of God. They also beat him, spat upon him, pummelled him, and whipped him. They beat his face until it was out of shape. They tore his back to shreds and made his head bleed with a crown of thorns. Nails pierced his feet and hands. His body hanging on the cross. A day when they crucified and killed the Son of God.*
3. *He died for you and me. It didn't matter who accused him, or who passed judgement, or who struck the nails. He died for you and me. And God had always planned that he would die. You and I put him on the cross.*
4. *As Jesus prepared himself for his sacrifice, He knew exactly what the plan was, and he knew the cost. He embraced it for the joy in the love of his Father and love for every person in every generation.*

Prophets from Moses through to Zechariah had foretold his death over centuries. David and Isaiah foretold the specific detail of this a thousand years before it happened. The prophets had included the specific details of the story: sinless, riding on a donkey, being rejected and beaten, having his hands and feet pierced, his body damaged, his clothes divided and lots cast, being silent before his accusers, being killed in the company of thieves, and being buried with the rich.

Jesus kept telling his disciples that he had come to die, that this was the plan, and that he would rise again three days later.

- 5. Yet as Jesus contemplated His death, as he understood the pain, he looked for another way. Jesus knew what the terrible cost of separation from the Father would be like. He knew that bearing the sins of the world, the wrath of God, would be something that even he was not ready for. He knew the plan, but he wasn't sure that he could do it.***

So he went to the garden to pray in preparation. Luke tells us being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. And he records Jesus' prayer: "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; but not as I will, as you will." Is there another way?

The Father, in response, sent an angel to encourage him, to build him up, to strengthen him for the depths of agony. His resolve strengthened the second time he prayed: "Father, not my will, but yours be done."

- 6. Jesus, who only did what the Father told him, who only did what the Father showed Him, was suddenly all alone. No longer aware of his Father, of his sonship. And in that moment, his Father loaded onto him the punishment for the sins of a world. My sins, your sins.***

And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, saying, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

He died in order to enable our relationship with God. He died so that we could receive forgiveness. He died so we could be God's children forever. It is the greatest love story ever told.

Our response to love Jesus changes us forever.

In dying, he says to us: Follow me and I will give you my Spirit to be with you all the time. I will place love and joy at the centre of your character. But you are going to be in trouble at times, just like I was. You're going to love the sinners, and the discarded. You're going to want to do what I did. Follow me and you will live in the freedom I have won for you. Follow me and you will live in the power of my resurrection. Follow me and I will be with you even unto the ends of the world. Follow me and your cup will run over with grace and goodness, mercy and joy and you will dwell in the House of the Lord forever.

As I see the disciples failing after his crucifixion, Jesus still loves them. He still declares his love for them.

As we fail him, even repeatedly, he still loves us.

Jesus, the Son of God, comes to earth as a human. Just so that we can have our sin problem rectified. Just because God loves us so much that he wants us to be reconciled with him. He wants to give his

love. He wants to receive our love. He wants a relationship. What kind of God is this? He gives his son to die so that we will have a reason to love him. He gives his love so that we can respond.

What an amazing God!

What is blocking my love for God? The further I go as a disciple, the more important the cross becomes to me. As we grow in Christ, we increasingly understand how fundamental the sacrifice of Jesus is to our salvation and our walk with Christ. My understanding of God and how he loves us has changed, as this understanding has grown in me.

Action:

e. Pause, reflect on this. What is your response? Is there anything that prevents your response?

Take some time to tell Jesus about your love for him.

God wants us to be in a place of close relationship with him. A place where love is strong. Where fear does not exist. In a place where peace, rest, and hope are dominant. Where God purifies us for our walk with Jesus. We need to resist whatever takes us away from that place. And encourage whatever takes us to that place.

Our love for God is the foundation of all these things. Love always comes first. Before service, before ministry. This is the heart of being a disciple of Jesus.

As we read the gospel story, love is foundational. It is the major truth about God, and all our other truths about God or faith need to fit under this truth. God's love is always front and centre. He calls us to respond by building a kingdom of love. Love should be the secret ingredient in every ministry.

"The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing." (Zephaniah 3:17)

Action:

f. Before you proceed, decide whether loving God is going to be a priority in your life.

Take some time to be still... to still your soul and to let Jesus speak to you about his love for you and your loving him. Stop. Breathe deeply. Meditate on Jesus.

- Who is he? My Saviour? My friend? My deep divine love? My God?***
- How will I respond?***
- Is loving God the foundation of my life?***

If you are unsure, take some time to work it out. Read the passages, talk to Jesus and plumb the depths of your heart for the genuine answers.

Don't be afraid to come back to answer the question, "Is loving Jesus my priority?"

Spend the day celebrating Jesus' love for you and growing your love for him as you think about him and what he means to you.

Do this regularly. Even come back after several years to ask it again. It should always remain front and centre. Never let it cool.

Loving Jesus is a heart response

If you read the whole of John 14, Jesus starts in verse 1 by declaring, “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.” Our beliefs are important as well as our emotions and here Jesus is declaring that we should believe in him as God. Some translations express it as a command.

For the believers with the 49 commands of Jesus, this one is not on their list. Because they have a rule mindset, they are looking for rules to control behaviour. Not what is happening on our inside where Jesus looks.

The original language presents it vaguely. It is not clear if it is a command or encouragement. But if we look at the setting, we know the answer. Jesus is in the upper room with the disciples. Again, he has told them he is leaving them. He has said one will betray him. And that Peter will deny him. Their world is crashing down around them. Jesus wants to comfort them. “Don’t let your hearts be troubled.” And then the invitation. Trust the Father, trust me. At the deepest level. Have faith in me. Build your lives on me. Erase the fear and trust in my love. And that I have a plan. And that you have a place in it. And that as you trust me, the fear will be gone. As you love me, fear will go. We will know we belong and that in eternity that will never change.

Jesus still makes that offer to us today. It is not a command; it is an invitation.

Action:

g. Pause for some minutes and consider that for yourself. At the deepest level of your being, are you able and willing and wanting to trust Jesus?

As you express love for Jesus and your complete trust in him, can you feel all fear being removed?

Stay in this place longer if you need to till your heart is still and filled by Jesus, and you experience the overwhelming assurance that regardless of all else, you can trust King Jesus. Write what you are feeling in your journal. Then keep reading, don’t stop here today.

The other key verse in the chapter is verse 11. “Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.”

Again, he is asking us to believe in him. To put our trust in him. To live our lives founded on him.

The rest of the chapter is promises. These are the promises of what will happen if we believe. They follow the format: If—(something occurs), then -- (this promise will happen). If you love me, that will cause you to keep my commandments.

This is a promise, not a rule.

And to look at it properly with the following verses so that we see the full promise:

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him,

for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” (John 14:15-18 ESV)

If you love me, I will come, and my Spirit will live in you. Jesus is saying I want your love and your relationship. He wants us to be deep lovers. And in his absence, his Spirit will take his place.

If you believe in me and love me, that will cause you to keep my teachings, because I will give you the Holy Spirit to guide you and help you.

Reading this verse in this way is consistent with the way it was written in the original language (Greek). It is consistent with the rest of John 14 and it is consistent with the rest of the New Testament.

For example, 1 John 4:12-19 tells us that God’s love planted in us, completes us, it enables us to be the people he has called us to be, to fulfill our destiny. That his love enables us to respond to his Holy Spirit, to grow in loving him and in loving each other.

Romans 5:5 says: “For we know how dearly God loves us, because He has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with His love.” This is at the end of a passage that deals with encountering pain and suffering!

Loving God is where the heart of ministry comes from, and Jesus first calls us to love him. As the Apostle John said, if we love God, keeping his commandments will be easy (1 John 5:3). And as Jesus said, the loving comes first and the obedience naturally follows, not because he commands it, but because he loves us and we love him.

Why on earth would the God of all creation want those he has created to love him? The idea is strange until we look at it like a father and his children. What father does not want the love of his children? Every father or mother loves their children and wants nothing more than to have that love returned, responded to, given back, and at a deep significant level.

This is true of God as well. While he is the God of creation, he says repeatedly that we are his children. He wants a relationship with us and a response of love. And then, as we read scripture, we see that God’s nature is one of love. He is love. As we read the 1 John passage, this aspect of his nature comes out strongly.

It comes out especially strongly as we look at Jesus, his coming to earth, his mission and his death on the cross. Followed by his resurrection, overcoming death and evil. That the son of God should come to earth is strange beyond belief. No, not just the Son of God, but also the creator of the world. The person who spoke us and our world into existence, comes down to live with us, as one of us, just to give us another shot at sorting out our relationship with him. It makes no sense.

Why? Why would he do it?

And the answer comes loud and strong: Because he already loved us. And he wants us to love him.

We need to capture that love in our hearts and respond to it. We need to apply it individually to ourselves. We need to contemplate and roll it around in our heads and our hearts till not a shadow of doubt remains.

As we read the story, it becomes very clear how large the sacrifice was. To bear the sins of the entire world. To personalize it. He died for me, for my sins. This is the love of Father God for me. This is the love of Jesus for me. This is the love of the Holy Spirit for me.

As we meditate on that, we can come to only one conclusion: that God the Father loves us at a depth that we cannot fully understand. But it is real and we need to grasp that realisation and communicate it in thanks to the deepest recesses of our beings. God is love and we need to know that.

As you read the whole of John 14, it is also clear that Jesus wants a relationship with us that is ongoing and active. We will live together. He welcomes us. He wants to continue the relationship he has with his disciples. He has lived with them day in and day out. They know each other at the deepest levels. He expects us to ask for things. The Holy Spirit will be with us constantly. Unlike orphans, we will never experience abandonment. He wants to father us. He wants to live in us.

Action:

h. Read John 15:1-17

John 15 marks a distinct shift in the relationship between Jesus and the disciples. Previously, they were his disciples. Now they have become his friends. Unlike the disciples, the gift of the Holy Spirit is not a future promise. The Holy Spirit is available now to us.

Before you proceed, pause. Are you willing to have a relationship with the Jesus through the Holy Spirit?

Relationships are a two-way affair. It takes commitment, but the rewards are amazing.

Specifically, pray and ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you, to be your counsellor, to be your guide, to be your companion and your source of power. And to grow your love of Jesus and others. If need be, ask someone else to pray this over you.

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

Do I love Jesus?

It doesn't take long to give yourself the test of "Do I love Jesus?".

Now don't get guilty from the result. Also, don't overreact to whatever conclusion you draw. This is just a quick test and you should not use the test to guide your path to love. The path to love is not by turning our backs on our loved ones. The path to loving Jesus is by engaging with him.

But it is appropriate that we examine ourselves so that we know ourselves better. In Matthew 6:21 Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." We need to understand the things we love more than Jesus, so that we can deal with them and talk to him about them. You probably can only deal with these one at a time. The Holy Spirit will help you as you work through each. And the aim is to grow our love of Jesus so that it overtakes our other loves.

So don't get upset if there are things you love more than Jesus. Over time, this will change. As you walk with the Holy Spirit, you will change.

Action:

- i. ***Read Matthew 6:19-34. If we put Jesus on one side and all the stuff that we love on the other, one by one, we will know in our hearts how deep our love goes. Against my family, my job, money, status, power, my favourite pastime, my favourite relaxation, sex, addictions, etc. I can be truthful to myself about how deep my love of Jesus goes.***

- ***Take a bit of time and test yourself. Just work down the list and recognise which trip you up.***
- ***Mark them in your journal to come back to and talk to Jesus about them.***
- ***What slows your loving of God? Are there things you just treasure more than God? Write them down.***

In the coming days or weeks, select the things you have recorded and discuss them individually with Jesus. Ask Jesus to change you. Ask Jesus to grow his love in you so that your love for him will outdistance these other treasures. This may be a slow, long path you may need to come back to repeatedly. Hold on to the promise in V33 that, as you put Christ first, he will answer your need. This is the same process that Paul described in Romans 12:2 that slowly transforms us. The same word used to describe the transfiguration of Jesus. That was some transformation! God will make the same gigantic transformation in us.

We need to realise that our fears and failures can also prevent us from loving Jesus fully. So, I suggest you work through these as well.

Action:

- j. ***If you feel distant from God under some circumstances, that is a good time to do the second half of the “Do I love Jesus?” test based on Matthew 6:25-34. When we are close to God, when love is high, we also enter his peace and his rest. Fear goes away. We recognise the security we have in God’s love. So, this time ask yourself, “What looms larger than God and his peace in my life?” “What has taken God’s place?” “When do I feel fear and all alone?”***

It might be fear, or stress, or physical sickness. These all can destroy love. Maybe you think you are self-sufficient; you don’t need God. Maybe you fear what God may ask you to do? Or stepping away from the structure of clear rules to the uncertainty of walking with Jesus? Perhaps you are too busy. Or any of a thousand other things. Life can cause our love to grow cold.

We need to take these issues to God in prayer. Talk them through and talk to him about them. The path of a disciple needs to go through and overcome these spaces.

If you struggle to hear God, then come back to this question after you do the next chapter. Mark it in your journal to come back to. Stop here for the day.

This process will help us know ourselves better. Who we are and what we love flows from our inner being. As our lives change, our loves will change. This is a journey. Pray about your issues or addictions if you feel you need to. Jesus will certainly help you change. There is more about how, later.

Our love of God, which is what we are assessing, grows or weakens naturally depending on what we do and how we relate to him. So don’t treat the symptom of the problem. As we spend time with

Jesus and as we grow in Jesus, our love for him will naturally grow. The test above is simply taking the temperature on that at a point in time.

And we also need to realise that Jesus wants us to love others and loving Jesus enables that love. There will be more on that later, too.

So loving God is a process. It is my response to the work of the Holy Spirit in my life. As we spend time in a relationship with Jesus, our love will grow. It needs to be real and genuine. You cannot artificially create or mandate it. As you draw closer to Jesus, you will love him more. Over time, your love for Jesus will grow and, as it grows, you will find your priorities change. Some things you used to love may no longer control your thinking.

Jesus clearly wants us living and taking part in the world. We don't want to be like the monks of old who completely withdrew from the world so that they could spend more time praying. We have to work to earn a living. And as followers of Jesus, we should be involved in our community and ministry.

But the place where our love will grow, where deep calls to deep, is one on one with Jesus. Where we can tell him exactly what we think and feel. Pour out our love or our anger. Our fear or our hope. Our shame or our peace. And grow our love for Jesus. We will come back to this in the next few chapters.

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Eph 3:17-19)

Action:

Aim: The aim of this chapter was to grow a deep love for Jesus. This is the first ingredient in an intimate relationship with Jesus.

In this chapter, we talked about aspects of loving Jesus. As we love Jesus, our love for God will also grow. We have more to add in later chapters.

Action:

- k. Has your love for Jesus strengthened as you did this chapter? Is it embedded in your spirit so that it is there to stay? What do you need to do to maintain your love for Jesus? Mark it in your journal.***

Here is an additional action to help to strengthen Jesus' love in your heart.

Action for the next day:

- l. The Bible describes David as a man after God's own heart. Despite all his failings! It was his heart that God looked at. We see David expressing his emotions in many of his psalms. I often read psalms in the New Living Bible. It helps me be closer to David's emotions. Have a look at Psalm 139.***

Take two days to work through the psalm. Read it again each day. If you can, find a place where you can be by yourself, so no one will disturb you. Be still. Invite Jesus into your space. Ask him to show you whatever he wants and tell him you want to be real. Be open to God being present with you in new ways. Relax and be expectant. Know that he wants to bless you.

Day 1. What does the psalm tell me about God's love for me?

- *Pause at the end of each verse and question it. What does the verse tell me about God's love?*
- *Do I see it in my life?*
- *Talk to God about it. Test it. Search the depth of it.*
- *How does this change your experience of God? Write your comments in your journal so that you can remind yourself.*

Day 2. What does it tell me about me loving God?

- *Again, pause at the end of each verse. What am I learning about me?*
- *How do I respond? Does deep call to deep?*
- *What else does it tell me that will help my relationship with God?*
- *Talk to God or experience God in new ways as you respond.*
- *What one thing from the psalm do you want God to give you? Ask for it and listen. Just rest in his presence. Let him direct your actions. Later record your experience and thoughts in your journal.*

The aim of the action sections is to make sure that what we have taught in the chapter becomes second nature for us. That it is a part of our lives without having to think about it.

God's love for us and our love for him is the foundation of our lives. As we walk with Jesus, love will grow. But we can help that by remembering and holding it in front of ourselves.

If you are constantly aware of God's love, then you are ready to press on to the next chapter.

If you struggle with feeling loved or responding to his love, then think about other ways that you may grow your love. Talk to your friends. But you should still carry on to the next chapter. The next chapter will also help you grow your love for Jesus.

Loving God in the Dark

It is sometimes hard to love God when everything around us is difficult. If we face persecution or if everything just seems to go wrong. God can feel a long way away.

The early part of Psalm 55 expresses just those feelings.

Listen to my prayer, O God, do not ignore my plea; hear me and answer me. My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught because of what my enemy is saying, because of the threats of the wicked; for they bring down suffering on me and assail me in their anger. My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death have fallen on me. Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me. (Psalms 55:1-5)

One way I encourage myself is to take a psalm or a scripture passage and re-write it as though Jesus was speaking it to me. In the first person, spoken by him. Sometimes he speaks in a whisper and sometimes he calls in a loud voice.

As I listen to the Holy Spirit and write, I am sometimes reminded of other scriptures, and I will incorporate them into what I write, always in the first person from Jesus. I will sometimes see in it an answer to a question I have been struggling with. This method allows the Holy Spirit to guide my thoughts and to deal with the issues that have brought me to him as my counsellor. I am not trying to

re-write the Bible; I am just allowing Jesus another way of speaking to me. This speaks to my spirit and calls me forward. It helps love to grow.

We all know Psalm 23 and how it has encouraged us in many situations. Here is my whispered from Jesus version from my journal. It responds to the feelings I had at one time that were like Psalm 55:1-5, which you should read first.

My child, why are you worried?
I am your shepherd,
I see your needs and I will care for you.
I have everything you need.
I will guide you to green pastures and ensure that you are fed.
I will take you beside the quiet waters,
that your thirst will be quenched, and your spirit restored.
Stay a while beside the quiet waters and I will make your spirit strong.

I care for the whole of you,
your body, your mind, your heart, and spirit.
There is not one aspect of your life that I am not concerned about.
I will guide you on the path that is right for you.
Even when death or doubt surrounds you.
When experiencing weakness or feeling lost,
I will find you and I will lead you.
Let me take your worries. Come here, rest while I carry you.

Give me your full adoration
that I may extend my grace to you.
Your love for me and your attention to my voice,
provides the channel through which I can meet your needs.

Give me your love,
that I might double it and re-double it.
For in my love, you will find peace and joy.
In loving me, your love for others will grow.

Enter each day knowing that I am in it.
That I live in you, you walk in my spirit.
Wherever you go, you will find me.
I am before you and I come behind you.
I overflow around you.
My goodness and my love are with you,
and are yours every day of your life.
I will sustain you for your whole life.
Till at last you reach that day that I eagerly wait for,
When you will dwell with me for eternity.

5. Hearing Jesus, Listening to his voice

Aim: The aim of this chapter is to grow closer to Jesus by having an intimate relationship with him, where he leads us, every step, every day. To “hear” Jesus through the Holy Spirit every day.

Bible passages: John 10:1-30, John 7:37-39, Habakkuk 2:1-2, 1 Corinthians 2:6-16. Read these passages slowly and thoughtfully before you read the chapter. Let Jesus speak to you from them. Take 1 or 2 days.

Other Bible passages used: John Chapters 14, 16- 17.

This chapter should take you at least 10 days. It has these parts:

1. A relationship with Jesus through the Holy Spirit
2. Now it is time to stop and to listen to Jesus
3. God has spoken this way to his people through the ages
4. We can hear God for different reasons in different places
5. If you struggle with hearing
6. Action:

A relationship with Jesus through the Holy Spirit

Prayer was always front and centre in the spiritual life of our family. In India, the mission my dad worked for had a little slogan: “prayer is the work”. Before outreach at a mela, or church planting, or any other ministry, there was prayer. Prayer was the basis for all big decisions. Even as a child, I knew that prayer was the ingredient that changed our reality. It was in response to prayer that God intervened and blessed us or others. The family lived by faith with no income, depending on the money given by believers in Australia. We prayed about our needs and God answered our prayers year after year.

Clearly, prayer is fundamental to being a disciple of Christ. We see this reflected in what Jesus taught the disciples in the Gospels, and we see it in Acts in the early church, and all the way through the New Testament. We saw how important prayer was to Daniel. Prayer is foundational.

But I heard little about hearing God as I was growing up. By this I mean listening as in a conversation and then talking. Together with love, the basis of a two-way relationship.

I prayed, but no one taught me how to listen. I knew that as I followed Christ he would lead me, but largely, this was through the Bible or through a sense of peace or sense of direction as I prayed.

I did not know how much of Jesus I was missing out on.

Listening to Jesus is all about relationship

Listening is all about relationship with Jesus. Loving him, listening to him, talking to him, allowing him to direct my life. Listening and talking to the Holy Spirit makes all of life much easier.

Yet, many believers that I meet do not know how to listen to Jesus.

Jesus says that we must be childlike to encounter the Kingdom of God (Matt 18:3 and Matt 11:25).

Coming to Jesus and talking and listening to him is something that even a child can do. Many children hear the voice of God regularly.

As you come to Jesus, it may help you to imagine you are with him. Walking in the garden. Or seated with him. Or in your favourite place. Imagine that he looks at you and smiles and you should

welcome him. Or it may help if you imagine yourself as a child coming to Jesus, the source of love and truth.

Don't make it any more complicated. It is a two-way expression of love.

Some people discover that they have heard God for much of their lives. It was just natural. They may have started as a child. For others who hear, they didn't realise that it was the Holy Spirit giving them suggestions and pointing things out until they looked in scripture and realised it was the Holy Spirit. And then they discovered, to their surprise, that many believers don't hear Jesus.

Others I know have heard God well before they became believers. They started reading the Bible regularly, and after a few months, started hearing God, as they read, and also during the day as they did their work. Some even started reading the Old Testament, and this happened. Then, when they got to John's gospel, all became clear. They had been hearing God for months or even years before they realised it was the Holy Spirit.

It was not like that for me. I struggled to learn to hear the Holy Spirit, despite having been a believer for some time. My head was too full of strong opinions, doctrine, science, and logic. Jesus had to work hard to help me find the real Jesus and then for me to hear him.

It was not until God led me on a path that forced me to stop and slow down and to set aside specific time for him, where I was ready to meditate and be quiet before almighty God, that I grew in this space. I was already seeing miracles of healing every week as I pastored. And seeing souls come to Christ. And casting out evil spirits. But I needed to take time aside from my busy life and busy mind so that I could hear the gentlest whisper of my Saviour.

In John 5:19, Jesus says, "the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does, the Son also does". Then later in the same chapter, Jesus talks about hearing the Father and the Father speaking to him. Jesus lived closely with the Father every step of the way. And as his disciples, he calls us to do the same with him.

Jesus, in the passage you read in John 10, was talking to normal people when he said, "My sheep know my voice, and I know them. They follow me, and I give them eternal life, so that they will never be lost." Now that is a promise that is worth paying attention to.

We hear and see Jesus because that is how we do relationship. Many disciples live this way.

Daniel lived this way. Later, we will talk about some other Bible characters who lived this way.

You will remember the story of Samuel in the Old Testament. God called him in the night time. He thought it was Eli, the judge and priest, who was training Samuel. Eli eventually realised it must be God. So he told Samuel that the next time he should answer God and tell God he was ready to listen.

Recognising the voice of Jesus is not always that easy. It depends how open and still our hearts and minds are.

Jesus is looking for a relationship with each of us. This means we are friends, that we talk. That we have intimacy with each other. That we will talk about the deep and significant things that are going on in our hearts. Listening and talking to Jesus is how we grow this relationship. We will also grow the relationship by loving Jesus. And by worshiping and obeying Jesus. Eventually, it will be the deepest relationship we have.

This has been the experience of disciples down through the ages from the early church to now.

Listening is God's plan for every disciple

John 10:27 says that every one of God's sheep, hear his voice and follow him. This is how we know we are his sheep. This is how we follow him. Every day! You can hear Jesus through scripture, but hearing him directly is what he promised us. And this adds a tremendous depth, clarity, and joy to our relationship.

Jesus made an explicit statement about this in John 8:47. "Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God." Let this verse encourage you and give it a go. He also promised that he would be our guide throughout our lives. John 14:16-18 says:

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever, the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)"

The whole of scripture gives evidence that our relationship with Christ is real, intimate, and interactive. We love, talk, listen, feel, cry and laugh with each other. We still worship God and stand in awe of him, but also come as his children to his arms. Scripture calls out that no one and nothing stands between us and God.

Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun. Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; (Psalms 37:5-7)

Action:

- a. Start by Reading John 10:1-30 again and then meditate on it. Let the pictures roll around in your mind. Do you have new thoughts as you read it the second time?**

What is your reaction to the strong verses in this passage? John 10:4 Do you know the voice of Jesus? John 10:14-15 Do you recognise the good shepherd? John 10:25-27 Do you recognise Jesus is your Saviour? Your Messiah?

Do you believe Jesus wants you to hear his voice guiding you to green pasture?

What in the John 10 passage is outside your experience? Ask Jesus to fill it. And having asked, you need to check by trying it out. We will do exactly that later in the chapter. Jesus is faithful and he will speak to you. The Bible records many people as hearing the voice of Jesus. You want that to be your experience.

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. (Hebrews 1:1-2)

Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.

God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth." (John 4:23-24)

Pause for the day here.

There are many ways of hearing, including seeing and feeling

However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived"-- the things God has prepared for those who love him- (1Corinthians 2:9)

Now I am a wordy person. So, writing and words are a natural place for me. So, I hear Jesus speaking to me as I listen and write or as I read Scripture. Jesus will probably speak to you in the way that is most natural for you to hear.

Some people hear Jesus in their ears like normal conversation. For me, I never hear Jesus like that. I hear the gentlest whisper in my mind. I would call it the ears of my heart. It only takes shape as I write it down or speak it out. Having written it down, I know it is from Jesus when it is clearly not what I would say and it complies with the essence of Jesus as recorded in Scripture. But as I write and as I speak, I will have a sense of the Holy Spirit being with me.

The Bible refers to the eyes of your heart. Jesus in John's gospel promised that out of our innermost being would flow rivers of living water. John explained this was the revelation of the Holy Spirit. Jesus has promised that to all of us. New life will flow into us and through us as we listen to him and the Holy Spirit and give them space in our hearts and lives. Jesus says in John 4:22-24 that worshipping him in the Spirit is how the true worshipper comes to him and this is what God the Father wants. The verses say this is how we must worship him to be true to him.

Some people will see pictures and know the interpretation. Jesus saw in his heart's eyes the pictures that Father God used to guide him. Some people worship as they create a drawing.

Or music may lead you to God. It may be to still your heart and prepare your spirit. Or, some people find God places words in their mouth as they sing made up songs. The prophet Elisha worked this way. As he listened to the music, he felt compelled to worship and then to listen to God in the Spirit (2 Kings 3:15).

Others will hear Jesus as they walk in creation. Jesus speaks to them through what they see with their eyes. Some people will hear Jesus through pictures as they pray and listen. Some will feel God's presence and have a sense of what they should do. Other will have dreams or visions. Each night as they go to bed, they will ask God to reveal himself through their dreams.

Listening can also be in response to reading the Bible. As you read the Bible devotionally, reflect on what you have read, write in your journal your thoughts and then pause and ask Jesus and about your thoughts and the passage and then record them all in your journal.

My experience is that Jesus normally makes himself known to us in the way we will find the easiest. But you need to seek him and you will find him. You need to ask and he will give. You need to love and he will respond.

Sometimes he will speak to you through your thoughts as you do something else and it will be only later that you realise that idea or that thought was from Jesus because it set you on the right path. Some people just have an inner conviction about what Jesus is saying to them.

God always answers, one way or another, even when people don't recognise his presence. "In a dream, for instance, a vision at night, when men and women are deep in sleep, fast asleep in their beds-- God opens their ears and impresses them with warnings (Job 33:14-16 MSG)

Now it is time to stop and to listen to Jesus

The Bible records God speaking to people in a variety of ways. The Holy Spirit continues to do that.

To start, you may need to use your imagination a bit. I normally start by asking a specific question and then I listen. The answer reveals God's revelation. But if I am struggling, I will imagine that I am walking with Jesus in a garden or in my favourite place and I come and sit with Jesus and start listening to him. Or you may start with a prepared reflection. You should prepare yourself for how works best for you.

You should not start with a list of prayer requests, that is just speaking and kills the conversation. Listen rather than talk. Leave praying for your needs until later or another time.

Find a quiet place

Find a quiet place where you can prepare to listen to Jesus with no disruptions. Then stop your mind, and breathe deeply. Then prepare for Jesus in how best brings you into his presence.

Quiet yourself before Jesus. Worship him and pray that he will sanctify your mind and your imagination and your heart and your emotions. Ask for doubt to be removed and for courage in your heart. Ask Jesus to speak to you as you wait, listening and looking.

Action:

b. Start by reading John 10:11-17 again and in quietness, try to hear Jesus speak to you. Be ready to write it down.

- 1) Start by just being quiet before Jesus.**
- 2) Ask the question "Lord, do you love me? Write what you hear or see or feel.**
- 3) And "Lord, what do you think of me?" Write what you hear or see or feel**
- 4) Thank Jesus for coming to you and speaking to you.**
- 5) Then consciously go through it and ask "Was that Jesus or was that me?" Did my thoughts come through, or did I hear Jesus? Did I hear words of life and love?**

Talk to the Holy Spirit about your experience and record it in your journal.

What if you didn't hear, see, or feel anything?

Then try again, but this time empty your mind and ask God to plant a picture in your mind. What is the picture? Try to interpret it and understand what it means.

What if this didn't help?

Then try again, maybe in a different place or at a different time. Maybe in a different way. Persevere. Do you ever feel close to God? What prompts that? Recreate that situation for yourself. And try again.

What if still nothing happens for you? Find someone who you trust who hears God and ask them to sit with you. To listen with you or see with you and to help you walk this path.

You know Jesus loves you. You have read it in scripture. But hearing it directly from Jesus is quite different. For most of us, our first experience of hearing the Holy Spirit leaves us crying. We do not understand how much Jesus loves us. As we hear him speaking, we slowly understand the depth of his love for us individually. Hearing and feeling this depth of love Jesus has for us changes us.

This place of intimacy and love with Jesus is a special place. We know we are unclean, yet in his presence, all is purity and light. We know we can talk about anything. In this place of love, even the hard discussions about failure or sin fill me with love.

This is what 1 John chapter 1 is all about! I now understand it. I have heard; I have seen; I have touched. This is the word of life. Life in Jesus.

What he tells me and I have written are ideas and thoughts which I did not have when I started. I recognise the words contain different ways of acting that I would not have thought up without Jesus. This is Jesus breathing hope and life into me.

As you hear the words you write for yourself, they should encourage your faith. You will feel the glow of the Holy Spirit and a confirmation in your heart, which will grow your humility and love for Jesus. If you don't understand what you hear, then ask Jesus some probing questions, ask for a deeper understanding.

If you hear words in your ears, that will make it even easier for you. If you see pictures or images record them in your journal. You may immediately know what they mean. Or you may need help to understand them. If you find you are struggling, try again in a different place. You know yourself and you will know when and where Jesus has set aside for you to talk to him. Or ask your help group.

"Be still, and know that I am God! I will be honoured by every nation. I will be honoured throughout the world." (Psalms 46:10 NLT)

Show me your ways, LORD, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Saviour, and my hope is in you all day long. (Psalms 25:4-5)

But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. (John 10:2-4)

Stop here for the day.

Action:

- c. Then, as you have time and feel called to it, again sit down and ask him questions that are troubling you. Ask him about direction. Ask him about any sin you struggle with. Listen to his answers. Write them down. Jesus loves talking to us. Give him time to do that. Ask him some probing questions if you don't understand. Write what you hear down. Record the pictures you see.***

Stop here for the day.

How do I know it is from Jesus?

Whatever you hear from Jesus should be consistent with what you read in the Bible. Check out what you hear against the Bible. It should always be consistent with the detail and the themes we see in the Bible as reflected in the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles.

The Bible calls us to live our lives in a community characterised by good relationships, unity, love for each other, compassion, serving each other, deferring to each other and trusting each other. The Bible calls us to preach the Gospel, to minister to people, to love God, to love the entire world as he does. What we hear from Jesus will not conflict with what is in the Bible spoken by Jesus or the Apostles.

Whatever you hear from Jesus will reflect his character. Just as in the Bible, we see him offering people new life and new ways rather than accusing them, so Jesus will speak to us.

What he tells me is never what I know I want. When I see my desires written, I know I've been listening to myself. If I see self criticism, again I know it is me. When we are dealing with failures or sin in our lives, Jesus speaks from an entirely different perspective. His love for us shines through. He knows he has died for our sin and he knows he has the answers of life and death. His words bring answers and comfort and reassurance and ways of leaning on him.

If I see evil stuff written or bad stuff about other people, I know it has come from the devil. The devil is the accuser, so anything that accuses you or other people is probably from the devil. Words from the devil create pride or put others down or increase fear, doubt, and confusion. If you hear angry words, it may be from the devil or from you.

If it is not from the devil and it is not from me, then it must be from Jesus. This is God breathing hope and life into me. I recognise the words or thoughts as having the life of God in them with purity and love.

You should find what you hear from God, sort of bubbling gently into your mind, spontaneously, from your spirit, as prompted by the Holy Spirit. Your own human thoughts will be more logical, with connected thoughts following logically.

As we sit in quietness before Almighty God, as we invite the Holy Spirit to work in our lives, we, too, will hear and will see. We may start with difficulty and make mistakes. But God will bless us and his Spirit will guide us.

However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived"-- the things God has prepared for those who love him-- these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. (1Corinthians 2:9-10)

God has spoken this way to his people through the ages

Is it really OK to use our imagination?

You may feel hesitant about using your imagination to get in touch with God. It may feel wrong or you may have been told that you can't trust your emotions. For others, you may be hesitant because our imaginations can also take us to dark places of fear or dark places of lust and sin.

When we first became believers, Christ placed his Spirit to live within in us. His Spirit is aligned with Jesus and with God. So whatever we hear from the Spirit is from God. We are only using our imagination to help us learn how to listen. To start the conversation. Once you are listening regularly, you don't need your imagination to start you off, just as do the sheep, you will hear and recognise the voice of Jesus.

Before you start, ask God to sanctify your imagination so that you will respond to the Holy Spirit.

For most of us, when we first came to Christ, to repent and to choose Christ, the Spirit was touching our hearts. We responded to the Holy Spirit. For some of us we may have no distinct starting point, but we reached a point of awareness of the ongoing presence of God in our lives.

This is a continuation of exactly the same. Having come to Christ, the Holy Spirit does not walk away from us, but stays and takes up residence and does all the things that Christ promised he would. He speaks, he leads, he counsels, he guides, he is our advocate; he brings healing. The Holy Spirit is the provider of these necessary things. We hear spiritually through the Holy Spirit. We see spiritually through the Holy Spirit. We feel God's presence through the Holy Spirit.

The problem is that many disciples don't stop to listen or look with the ears and eyes of their hearts. So we need to ask and then learn. Disciples have been doing this in every age down through the centuries.

Apart from listening, our imagination is a part of how Jesus calls us to do great things for him. To preach in the marketplace, to pray for miracles, to grow a strategy for growing the Kingdom, or a new mission endeavour. All these things Jesus places in our hearts using our imagination. If the dreams come from us and selfish desires, they will fail. As we imagine with Jesus, we see the Kingdom extended. We need courage to chase after these dreams. Fear and doubt can kill the dreams that Jesus plants in our hearts.

James talks about doubt in this way.

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. (James 1:5-7)

So as you approach listening to God, pause and ask for courage from Jesus and for all doubts to be taken away. Hebrews 11 and other scriptures teach us that God responds to our faith and is pleased with our faith, so as we come to hear, we should come expectantly and in faith.

This is exactly what Jesus did

Mark 1 tells us that when Jesus first began his ministry, preached and performed miracles, the next morning, early he went off to an isolated place to pray and listen to the Father. He had suddenly become famous and everyone wanted his attention. He needed to get away to be refreshed and to align his thinking to God the Father.

In John 5:19, it says, Jesus gave them this answer: "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he **sees** his Father doing, because whatever the Father does, the Son also does." So Jesus, in his mind's eye, is seeing pictures of what the Father is leading him to do.

In John 12:49-50, Jesus says, "For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So **whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.**" Here he is hearing words from Father God that lead him to say what he says.

As Jesus taught the people, he used parables. A parable is a story. As Jesus told the story, he was expecting the hearers to use their imagination to add colour and understanding to the story to create

pictures that provided spiritual insight. As our minds imagine, we give the Holy Spirit the opportunity to colour and direct our thoughts in the way he influences us. In his stories, Jesus was asking, “What if?” to allow God to change hearts.

As we listen, Jesus continues to ask us “What if?”.

Jesus promised we would do the same things he did and more

Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. (John 14:12-14)

Jesus promised that disciples in the new covenant would live in power and authority, led by his Spirit. We should expect that as disciples of Jesus, we will live and behave differently because of his presence in our lives. Responding to the Holy Spirit enables us to obey the great commission. John 4:23-24 calls worshipping Jesus in the Spirit true worship.

And what King David and others did

David, in writing the Psalms, did exactly the same thing.

I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. I keep my eyes always on the LORD. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay. (Psalms 16:7-10)

In David’s imagination, in his heart’s eye, he first places the Lord consciously at his right hand, so that he can always see him. It is a part of how he listens to God. He sees the Lord and then hears the Lord. He had an image of God in his mind that stood for the Lord and that helped him to hear and see and be aligned with God.

How much easier it is for us. As we look in the New Testament. We have many, many images of Christ that draw us close to him so that we can worship and see or hear him. Jesus with the crown of thorns. The empty cross. Jesus in the garden. Jesus walking with the disciples. Jesus healing the deaf or blind. Jesus at the door knocking. Jesus as the Shepherd.

If we look at Psalm 23, we can see that David wrote the psalm with pictures given to him by the Lord. He reminds David of what he used to be; a shepherd. He then shows him how he is a shepherd to David. That he looks after David and he lacks nothing. And the message then carries on with pictures, green pastures, paths through the mountains, dark valleys, a rod, a staff, a table with food, oil poured on his head. And as David responds to these images, he sees in his mind; he writes and the Spirit of God fills in the words that talk about fear and safety, and love and eternity.

That may be the same process you and I can use to listen to Jesus, if we mostly see pictures.

Or look at Psalm 7. David starts the way I often do. With a question for God or a problem. “Lord, save me, I am being pursued; they want to tear me apart; I have no one to rescue me.” And as he prays and listens, he hears the Lord reminding him that his shield is the God Most High, who is strong and powerful. David relaxes and puts his faith in God and then ends with thanks and praise to the Lord.

If we look at Psalm 22, the pictures David is seeing and the words he is hearing prophetically point to Jesus and his death on the cross. The psalm starts with the words that Christ will say “My God, my God, Why have you forsaken me?”, and includes imagery of what Christ will suffer and his rejection

by Israel when all they were waiting for and wanting was the Messiah. God used David's imagination throughout the Psalms.

In the Old Testament, Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses, King David, King Solomon, Daniel and all the prophets hear God. Daniel, Isaiah, and Jeremiah have large passages of what they heard from God. And the list gets too big after that. Even unbelievers have heard the voice of God, the heathen prophet Balaam (Numbers 22:7-13) and the Assyrian Field Commander, was told by Yahweh to invade Israel (2 Kings 18:25).

Acts 2:17 promises this for men and women.

In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. (Acts 2:17-18)

Throughout Acts, we are told that the Holy Spirit spoke to Stephen, Phillip, Peter, Paul and many others, including the ordinary believers. Specific instructions. Guidance. What to do next. How to avoid problems. What to say. Where to go. This is the model that we follow.

In the 1 Corinthians 2 passage we read at the beginning of this chapter, Paul records that listening to the Spirit of God was exactly how he wrote the Epistles. And down through the ages, countless believers have maintained this practice to the benefit of all around them.

For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. (1Corinthians 2:11-13)

The LORD is my shepherd; I have all that I need. He lets me rest in green meadows; He leads me beside peaceful streams. He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honour to His name. (Psalms 23:1-3 NLT)

The early church put a lot of emphasis on coaching new believers leading up to baptism. Mentors guided them to understand the Christian faith, its practices, and the implications of commitment. Hearing Jesus through the Holy Spirit was one of those practices. Every believer learnt how to hear God before baptism. History records that the practice was widespread in the early church. The practice continued for over 300 years but gradually disappeared because of big egos, misuse, conflict and as the organised church became an institution with leaders having authority.

Human conflict and rules displaced the promises of the New Testament that every believer would hear and be led by the Spirit of Jesus. But throughout history, some Christians have maintained this practice and followed the Spirit of Jesus.

"This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. (Jeremiah 31:33)

We should also remember that the early church still lived in the era when faith was passed on orally. Many people couldn't read or write. God's solution to build his kingdom needed to work within this

oral tradition. The oral tradition also benefits because it is conducted like a conversation. There is room to probe and question and understand what Jesus is saying as he speaks to us.

The same is true even today with societies where many do not learn to read and write. God's plan of salvation and the promise of the presence of the Holy Spirit does not depend on having an education and having a Bible in your own language. Our loving God promised Jesus for all in the world not just the educated.

"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). (Matthew 1:23)

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever-- the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. (John 14:16-17)

And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)

As I have preached amongst the poorest in India, where many have no education, I have seen many respond to the call to come to Christ, despite a culture that insists we maintain the beliefs and practices of our grandparents. This is the ministry and witness of the Holy Spirit.

He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. (Eph 2:17-18)

Action:

- d. Set aside some time to listen to the Holy Spirit. Ask him to talk to you about your strengths and weaknesses. Ask him what you need to do to grow stronger in the Lord. Write his answers and meditate on them and work out how to apply what you have heard.**

Stop here for the day.

We can hear God for different reasons in different places

Prayer should be a two way conversation. We should leave space for God to talk to us. You can't hear Jesus when you are talking. Stop talking to listen.

What we talk about, how much time we spend listening, and how much time we spend speaking will depend on the context of what we are doing. The setting we created above is a devotional setting, just us and Jesus. Scripture clearly calls us to set aside time to do that.

But you can hear the Holy Spirit anywhere and everywhere, just doing the normal things of life. You just need to be ready to hear. Just as with a trusted friend, when and how often we talk with the Holy Spirit will depend on what is going on around us. And just as with our friend, we will have different conversations on different days, for different lengths, for different purposes.

Here are some places we can stop to hear God:

- To listen deeply for ourselves, to grow and become more like Christ.
- To listen for someone else when we have been asked to pray for someone or we minister to someone.

- When we come together in prayer with other believers to listen to God to find out what he would like us to pray about or how we should pray on an issue.
- When we are preparing to preach or are reading our Bibles, to hear to help us direct our thoughts and our understanding.
- When we are praying for direction or to make decisions or if we face difficult circumstances.
- Just as we go about our normal day doing our normal duties.
- And anywhere else where we need God's help or God wants us to minister.

But to grow, we need to hear Jesus deeply in the quiet place for ourselves

Jesus regularly went off to some quiet place to spend deep significant time with his father. There, he talked and listened to Father God. If Jesus needed it, we need it 100 times more.

Deep listening calls us into relationship, refreshment, accountability, encouragement, coaching, and love from and to Jesus. Our love of Jesus and our appreciation of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives always grows as we sit with him. This is the place where we grow in Christ.

We need to make sure that we listen deeply. This is the place of maturing in God. We may not do this every day, but we should do it regularly.

To listen to Jesus deeply:

- 1) You should follow a pattern that works for you. For deep listening, look for a place where no one will disturb you.
- 2) Start by quieting your soul, be in a place of rest and get rid of the pre-occupations, consciously step into the Lord's presence. Use quiet, or music or scripture or whatever helps you to come into the presence of Jesus. I find it easiest just to sit in silence and grow my awareness of the presence of Jesus as I sit.

Some people will walk as they talk to the Holy Spirit. Others want to keep their hands busy. They may do some sort of work or may care for a garden or work a field. Some younger people listen and hear God as they run or swim or exercise. We are all different and we need to find the right way and right place that allows the deep work of the Holy Spirit to grow in our lives.

Meditation is a long practised discipline of Christians down through the ages. There are many ways of meditating that bring us close to the Holy Spirit.

- 3) Fix the ears and the eyes of your heart on Jesus, expecting to hear something uplifting and providing spiritual guidance. Greet him, welcome him, consciously be in his presence.
- 4) Either start by asking Jesus a question, or if you struggle with that, use the eyes of your heart to position yourself with Jesus. You are walking with him, or sitting with him. In the garden with him. This is a space of relationship. Sit with him and then listen or ask a question. Or you see a picture.
- 5) As thoughts come into your heart or mind, write them down. This is us connecting to the flow of the Holy Spirit. The ideas or words or thoughts should come as a flow to us from the Holy Spirit.
- 6) Write the entire conversation that you have with Jesus. This is the discipline that we have seen with Daniel and David and the prophets. Probe and ask questions to ensure you understand.
- 7) After you have finished, check that it is consistent with scripture.
- 8) After you have finished, if it is important, check it out with your prayer partner or advisor. If it is very important or radical or for other people, check it out with maybe 2 other people. If it is just a word for you and it clearly is from God and consistent with the essence of Jesus, then you know it is from God, you don't need further checking.
- 9) Then do what the Holy Spirit has suggested to you.

In this place of quiet, the Holy Spirit knows everything about us. We stand as our real selves before God. All pride is gone. Our inner lives are on display. But, there is no judgement in this. The Spirit

encourages us. The reality of our lives becomes visible in the quiet place. This is the place where the Holy Spirit counsels us. This is the place where we repent and change. This is the place of growth. It is also the place of intimacy where the Holy Spirit will tell you about yourself. Where he will share God's love. In this space love always grows.

While we can hear the Holy Spirit anywhere, hearing deeply and journaling what we hear enables us to be disciplined and more accurate. It enables our spiritual advisors to review it, and it ensures that we don't change the message from God as we think about it. Our memories are not great and warp what we remember unless we have it written. This is the same discipline that the prophets used.

As with the prophets, some of us may hear and see God through dreams that have deep spiritual significance. In these cases, the dreams prompt a discussion with Jesus, which can take us to that same place where deep calls to deep and the ideas that Jesus plants can take shape and become our discipline and guidance. Or maybe change our direction to address a failing or an opportunity.

We need to go to this quiet place with God to deal with the deepest issues in our lives. The questions that seem to have no answer. The problems that keep us awake at night. This is the place of comfort and counsel. The place where God breathes new life into our walk with him.

Let all that I am wait quietly before God, for my hope is in Him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress where I will not be shaken. My victory and honour come from God alone. He is my refuge, a rock where no enemy can reach me. O my people, trust in Him at all times. Pour out your heart to Him, for God is our refuge. (Psalms 62:5-8 NLT)

Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, will not normally give you words to tell other people or to tell them what to do unless they have asked you to pray for them. Jesus gives everyone the freedom to choose him or to choose another way. He will never impose himself on us. We are free to choose. He offers the same to other people. And he can speak to other people or prompt them through their conscience. It is not our job to tell them Jesus told me you should do this or that. He can tell them directly himself.

Remember that God can speak this way to anyone. For important matters, we should ask others to review what we've heard or to share what they've heard. The Spirit of God will work in all those who are listening to ensure unity in understanding and action. You should lean on each other for anything that is important. You should be humble and teachable.

Praying for other people

As we observed a little earlier in John 5, Jesus clearly checked in with Father God as he walked down the street. Listening and looking spiritually to discern what he may do or say to the people he met. He had a constant connection to Father God.

If I am asked to pray for someone, that makes it a different situation, and I will immediately listen to Jesus for that person. They may have asked for a specific prayer, something is troubling them, or they want healing, or a blessing. I will stop before I pray for them, just to give me time to hear. I say hear, but in this situation, Jesus may give me a picture or a word.

We probably never hear Jesus 100% accurately. We are human and make mistakes. So I will gently share the word or picture with the person and ask them if it means anything to them. Often it does.

For them, it increases their faith in Jesus and so I will then pray along the lines asked or along the lines reflected by the picture.

If I hear nothing when I pause, I will then pray. The Bible promises that when we open our mouths to speak, the Holy Spirit will give us the words (Luke 12:12, John 15:7, Colossians 3:16). Sometimes when I do not know what I am going to pray, the Holy Spirit will give me things that I should ask for, for the person I am praying for. He equips us for his ministry. It requires faith to speak before we know what we are going to say.

But in ministering to other people, we always need to remember that none of us hears Jesus 100% accurately. So we need to be gracious and humble. If we suggest something and the person disagrees, then we just let it pass. God knows what is going on and he will answer the prayer according to the way he sees the person's heart. We don't need to know everything. God knows what he is doing.

I do not agree with the people who say loudly, "Thus saith the Lord....", because they make it sound like they are God and always right. Even the most experienced people gifted as prophets recognise that they sometimes have got it wrong.

I was working with an Indian prophet who was widely endorsed in America, Europe as well as India. I asked him how accurate he thought he was. He said he would like to think he was always right, but he suspected he was exactly right around 50% of the time. He made the distinction of being word for word correct and generally correct. While he liked to think he was always right, he remained humble and knew he sometimes made mistakes. He still looked for confirmation from others when it was important.

Jesus understands our human weaknesses, but, yet, he calls us to step aside and listen. Deep calls to deep. And we, in his power, build his kingdom one small change at a time together with other believers. We lean on each other and on anything important look for the witness of several people hearing God in the same way.

The same is true as we pray for our community. If we feel Jesus is telling us something for our community, write it down and humbly give it to the leaders and let them assess how the word applies. Always look at any word you receive as for yourself first.

[Listening as we go about our normal day doing whatever.](#)

My prayer partner hears Jesus much better than I do (that is why he is a great prayer partner). He hears the Holy Spirit speaking directly into his ears as he goes about his daily activities. He is always ready to hear Jesus. I often need to sit and prayerfully focus my attention on Jesus before I hear him in my mind.

Just yesterday he was telling me he wanted to visit one of his friends who we have been praying about. This man is not a Christian and is in the middle of marriage problems. The friend runs a motor car business, and he planned to visit him at work. As my prayer partner left his home, his wife asked him to pick up an extra item, which was out of his way. He was feeling cranky about it, but, as he got into the car and headed toward his friend's work, he heard Jesus say to him physically in his ears "I want you to do the pickup first". So, he changed direction and did that.

Having picked up the extra item as he came closer to his friends' work, there was a lot of traffic, and it frustrated him. But Jesus said to him, "slow down, I am arranging this." As he pulled into the parking area of his friend's business, the friend's wife came out to head home.

Now he also ministers to the wife, he gets on well with both and both are happy for him to pray and talk with them, but he rarely sees the wife on her own. So, in the car park, he could have a one on one, private conversation with her and pray with her, in a public setting, before he went into the business to find his friend while she went home encouraged.

Listening to Jesus can help us in the little day-to-day things and in the deep things of Jesus.

I will regularly chat to God about the issues that face me as I work. And pause and wait for Jesus to lead me.

Shout for joy to God, all the earth! Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious. Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies cringe before you. All the earth bows down to you; they sing praise to you, they sing the praises of your name." Come and see what God has done, his awesome deeds for mankind! (Psalms 66:1-5)

If you struggle with hearing

Take your time with this chapter. We need to embed our listening to the Holy Spirit as an important part of the life of a disciple. It makes everything else easier. The practice is foundational and needs to be something that you are comfortable doing and you experience Jesus in the ways described. If you struggle, then get help from someone who practices these things. You should not move past Chapter 6 until you can hear Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

If you struggle with listening, and it just doesn't happen, what do you do?

Each of the following sections provides some ideas. Here are some passages to encourage you to claim the promise.

I will give you hidden treasures, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the LORD, the God of Israel, who summons you by name. (Isaiah 45:3).

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Ephesians 3:16-21)

Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me. (Revelation 3:19-20)

Know the love of God more deeply

The Ephesians 3 passage above declares God's treasures and his desire to summon us by name rest on three foundation points. God's grace and provision. God's love for us and our love response. And our response of faith to live our lives founded on these.

It was certainly my experience that while I had only a strong head belief; I did not know the depth of relationship or hear God's voice as I do now. I intentionally placed the chapter on loving God before the chapter on hearing God. For me, hearing Jesus is part of a deep relationship of love with Jesus.

Yet I know others who have heard Jesus long before they stepped into that deep relationship of love for Jesus. Arguably, for them, it was exactly the opposite. Hearing Jesus led them to love.

We are all different, and the Holy Spirit deals with us according to our personalities.

But if you struggle, one option is to reconsider your love for God and your relationship with God by reviewing Chapter 4.

Dreams and Visions

Maybe you are hearing from God in dreams and visions but not recognising what is happening. It is very easy to have dreams and just shrug them off. Or have dreams and forget them by the time morning comes.

We all have dreams, but some of us never remember them. Dreams are a normal part of life. They are part of our brain doing housekeeping to keep our brain healthy. However, some dreams may hold spiritual significance, serving as God's way of speaking to us.

If you are having dreams, and you suspect you should pay more attention, then get the help of someone who hears God regularly in this way. With them, pray over your dreams to reveal what God wants to say to you. Learn how to interpret dreams. Apply the dreams to your life just as we would with any other form of hearing God.

I have met a few people who felt unable to hear God, but when coached by the right person found God was speaking to them through their dreams most nights. As they understood, they released new life into their walk with God.

I also know some people who resisted hearing God and were hesitant about the work of the Holy Spirit. God spoke to them through dreams to reveal his plan and action.

Just as in listening, it is important to record the pictures or dreams we have that could be from God. That way we keep the record accurate and we can get the help of more experienced disciples.

Are you right with God?

As with many things with God, if we are not right with God, we miss out.

Spend some time reviewing your walk with God to make sure that you are walking faithfully with him. Sin can disrupt our relationship with God.

The next chapter also has some helps on our relationship with God and those things we need to get right.

Walking by faith rather than by sight

**Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.
(Hebrews 11:1)**

For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed--a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." (Romans 1:17)

God loved the people of this world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who has faith in him will have eternal life and never really die. (John 3:16)

For we live by faith, not by sight. (2Corinthians 5:7)

We also build our relationship with Jesus on faith. In my experience, the Holy Spirit often plants faith, and it is then up to us to allow our faith to grow. Scripture shows faith as fundamental to conversion, righteousness, holiness, freedom, and experiencing God's love. Clearly, fellowship with God is similarly based in faith.

It requires some level of faith in God for us to hear God and listen to his voice.

Have you exercised faith in listening?

If you hear the Holy Spirit and not at other times, it may be simply that you are asking a question that God will not answer so that you can proceed with faith. Sometimes Jesus simply says to me, "Alan, that is not for you to know." While at other times, I have just heard nothing.

Jesus sometimes just calls us to walk by faith. We may want God to give us a clear answer to a question. But God may want us to press on in faith rather than having the certainty of sight. Scripture also encourages us to grow our faith.

[Check out your heart's beliefs](#)

"Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." Galatians 5:25

If you are struggling to hear God, it may be because in your heart you are not sure that it is what Jesus calls us to do. Maybe someone has placed this doubt in your heart.

Jesus clearly tells us in John's gospel that the Holy Spirit is his gift to all believers and that we need to rely on the Holy Spirit in every aspect of our faith. What Jesus said still stands. You will find many references to the Holy Spirit from Acts forward in the New Testament. It is like a flavour that is sprinkled through everything. With one or two sections that major on him.

There are some believers who do not believe that we can hear Jesus, because that is not their experience. Across the world, parts of the church do not practice listening to Jesus. But the Bible is very clear on it. And if you live in a community of people who listen, you will see a unique community. A community that is led by Jesus.

Every Christian denomination believes in the Holy Spirit and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. But some churches just don't practice what they believe.

If you know people who say this is rubbish, don't argue with them, just do it. Even the Pastors who don't believe you can listen to Jesus will say that they are "called" into the ministry. Being called means they are listening.

If you ask them what they mean by that, they will say that they felt Jesus led them into ministry, or that Jesus gave them a heart burden for their ministry. This became their call. I would respond, that is just another way of hearing Jesus, with our emotions. That then raises whether we will listen to Jesus frequently or only when there are big decisions to be made.

For the people who believe that disciples can't hear God, the other reason may be that they think the miracle gifts of the Spirit (healing and prophecy) are not for this age, that they ceased in the Apostolic age. That they ceased because God gave us the Bible instead. I don't agree.

But regardless, listening to God is not a miracle gift. It is something that God gives every disciple and every believer. It is not on any list of the gifts of the Spirit. It is a part of being a child of God. But you have to choose to listen and then ask and then obey. People have practiced it through the centuries.

So while some believers do not practice it, there is no good reason. There are parts of the church that are cautious about anything to do with the Holy Spirit. This can happen when there is a focus on head knowledge of God. People react by becoming cautious of everything to do with the Holy Spirit.

Pray about it and allow Jesus to change your heart. Talk to your mentor about it. Why would we want to ignore something that Jesus placed such a large emphasis on?

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. (John 10:27)

Action: Write your own first person version of Psalm 23

- e. If you still struggle, look at psalm 23 and do what I suggested. Set aside some time with the psalm in front of you. Read it through once and then start your own version with Jesus speaking to you in the first person. "Your name, I am your shepherd.... Keep writing the verses until in your mind you start to write something that reflects new thoughts, not in the psalm. Just keep that going till you stop.*

Now review your work and work out if that was you writing or if you were hearing the Holy Spirit prompting you.

Review the chapter

If you are still struggling and you haven't heard the Holy Spirit, then review the chapter to see if there is something you have missed. Read the Bible passages again. As you read, stop if you find something that helps you and do it for a few days.

If you find something that is not your experience, that may mean you struggle to believe it, or you don't know it to be true for you, then pick that up and ask Jesus about it. Ask the Holy Spirit to make it your experience so that you can believe.

Is God speaking to you in other ways than hearing? Pause in quietness and prayer. Erase all thoughts from your mind and then ask Jesus to give you a picture to help you. What is the image that comes to mind? Analyse it to see what God is saying.

Or maybe you should check your feelings or emotions as you come to God. Do you have a sense of peace or of joy? Of excitement or energy? Take these God given emotions and apply them to your situation.

Find someone who hears God well and get them to help you

Find a person who hears Jesus well and ask them to help you. Become their student for a little while. I have found over many years that women often hear Jesus better than the men. Typically, women have more compassion, love more deeply, and hear more clearly. So don't be afraid to ask a godly woman for some pointers. If you are a man, do this more formally as a talk with others there as well.

For some time, I was the pastor for all the missionaries in a missionary organisation. I would pastor missionary families when they had problems and needed help. One of my key jobs was to help a couple or a person find out what their call from Jesus was. The practice of the mission was that they would not tell people what type of ministry or what country they should go to. We expected Jesus would make it clear to them and that together we would honour the call that Jesus gave them.

As I talked to a couple individually and together, we looked for both husband and wife to hear their call from God separately as confirmation of each other. I noted that regularly, the wife would hear Jesus and his call on their lives long before the husband.

I have also seen in churches that far more women hear Jesus clearly than do men.

I have often found that people with less formal education or who are artistic hear Jesus more naturally and instinctively than those with a better education. Individuals like myself who are very logical or structured or very scientifically oriented often struggle with listening to Jesus. God understands our differences and is patient and adjusts how he speaks to us.

To hear faithfully, it is important that we can read the Bible and are able to check what we hear against the teachings of Jesus. I found when working with ECI churches in India that people who are not literate can hear God, but they don't always know what is from God and what is from them, because they can't check it against the Bible. Listening to God requires a pure heart that is founded on the words of Christ.

So look widely for the right person. Find someone who clearly loves Jesus and hears well.

Ask your prayer partner or help group

If you are doing this as a group, then share your experience with each other. Help each other. Even as you pray together, change the way you pray to allow people to hear and see what the Holy Spirit is doing in your group.

So you may pray together and someone might say, "God showed me a picture of..." or "I think the Holy Spirit is saying this to me." Someone else might interpret the picture. Or may have something else to share.

This is how we pray when we are on mission with a team. We pray about what story we should emphasise, or whose testimony will be best today, as well as praying for what we are going to do. Jesus will use anyone to pass us a message. It allows Jesus to build and use the team the way he knows best.

In the group or with your prayer partner, work out together with the Holy Spirit what needs to happen.

Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. (Romans 8:5)

Action:

Aim: The aim of this chapter was to grow closer to Jesus by having an intimate relationship with him, where he leads us, every step, every day. To hear Jesus through the Holy Spirit every day.

Action:

- f. Over a few days, read John 14, 15, 16, and 17. Do it slowly and think about what you read. This reflects the heart of Jesus for each of us. It is what Jesus taught the disciples just before his death, so he thought it was important. Just read it slowly and talk to Jesus about the ideas you read, one at a time. Don't read judgement into the words, read hope and connectedness and life. Don't use it to judge yourself. Use it to draw close to Jesus.**
- **What promises can you find to apply to your life? (John 14:1, 6, 12, 13, 14, 15-16, 26; John 15:3-4, 9-12, 14-17; John 16:13; John 17:20, 23-24.)**
 - **Are they real in your life? If not, mark them down as a point of prayer. If so, thank Jesus for what he has enabled.**
 - **If you find something that is not your experience, that may mean you struggle to believe it, or you don't know it to be true for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to make it your experience so that you can believe. Talk about it with your group.**

Hearing the Holy Spirit is the second foundational element that we have added as disciples for Jesus. We need to hear Jesus to be all he wants us to be. Hearing makes everything easier and helps us work toward God's plan rather than our plan. It also means we can receive the Holy Spirit's comfort and counsel. We all need that.

If you struggle with hearing, you can still move on to the next chapter, but you will struggle with Chapter 7. Keep practising and working on it while you do chapter 6.

6. God's Grace covers everything

Aim: The aim of this chapter is to understand the grace that God offers us through Jesus and the boundaries of that grace. And take another step towards relationship and purification.

Bible passages: Ephesians 3:1-21, Ephesians 1:3-23, Romans 8:1-17. Read these passages slowly and thoughtfully before you read the chapter. Let God speak to you from them. Take 1 or 2 days.

Other Bible passages used: Psalm 51, Romans 8: 12-30, Ephesians 2:1-10, James 4:5-10.

This chapter should take you at least 14 days or 14 sessions.

I have several reasons for putting this chapter next. We need to understand and believe in God's grace before we will trust our lives to intentionally living under his grace. The next chapter calls us to do exactly that. The chapter after that deals with the problem of sin in the disciple's life. If sin is the problem, grace is the answer. And grace is the answer in multiple dimensions. So, I want to deal with the solution before we get to the problem.

But in the process of doing that, it may raise questions in your mind about sin. I want to understand grace first, so please hold your questions about sin till chapter 8.

This chapter has these parts:

1. God's grace is favour to us, a gift
2. An incorrect view of God
3. A Biblical understanding of God, a God of love and grace
4. Our belief about ourselves can get in the way
5. The lifestyle we choose affects grace in our lives
6. Active holiness - receiving God's grace
7. Action:

John the apostle introduces Jesus as the Word becoming flesh. The power of God that spoke creation into existence became a human person named Jesus. Right at the start of the gospel, he clearly claims Jesus to be the son of God and that his arrival changes the way God and man relate to each other. God is starting a new age, a new covenant. The old is gone. The new covenant is a covenant based on Jesus, his sacrifice, the gift of the Holy Spirit and the gift of God's grace.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (John 1:16-17)

Jesus, full of grace and truth. Wherever he goes, wherever he is, grace is there in fullness. And he gives grace in new ways, grace upon grace.

After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. All the believers were one in heart and mind. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all....(Acts 4:31-33)

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life. (Revelation 22:17)

As I mentioned in Chapter 3, I was very aware of God's grace when I became a believer. I knew it both in my head and in my heart. My early years as a believer then became more about following rules. I did what I was told I should do. I read the Bible; I went to church. It was much later in life when new people and new ideas helped me to step away from the comfortable patterns I had grown up in. It was then that I understood the amazing depth and nature of God's grace.

We see God's grace all around us. In creation, in the world that so creatively provides us a home. In the way that we are so wonderfully made. We marvel at the way the entire world and universe work together. God is truly a God of grace.

And we see the same wonderful design in the spiritual world. God is the all sufficient provider.

We have already experienced God's grace when we came to him for salvation. We have also experienced God's grace through his love for us. And again, we have experienced grace as we listened to God in the last chapter. As we listened to him and moved into a more vital relationship.

We see God's grace in the gift and sacrifice of Jesus. We see his grace in the resurrection and the giving of the Holy Spirit. We see God's grace as the Holy Spirit purifies and refines us. The touch of God on our hearts and lives, bringing us to tears of thankfulness and love. Or as we worship and sense his presence. As we see God changing lives or healing lives. We live with and worship an amazing God. Truly, he turns the world upside down.

Or is that the right way up?

We live founded in his grace and the more we experience his grace, the more we know his love, his joy, his hope. We experience the freedom we have in Christ. We see the Kingdom built. Life will never be the same.

This chapter slowly builds up a more specific picture of grace. Please push all the way to the end of the chapter to know the grace that God wants for us, the grace that enables our relationship with God.

God's grace is favour to us, a gift

God's grace expresses God's favour to us. Grace is the empowering presence of God that moves in power to build the Kingdom of God through us. It is a gift from God, delivered through the Holy Spirit.

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

By entering through faith into what God has always wanted to do for us--set us right with him, make us fit for him--we have it all together with God because of our Master Jesus. And that's not all: We throw open our doors to God and discover at the same moment that he has already thrown open his door to us. We find ourselves standing where we always hoped we might stand--out in the wide open spaces of God's grace and glory, standing tall and shouting our praise. (Romans 5:1-2MSG)

God's law was given so that all people could see how sinful they were. But as people sinned more and more, God's wonderful grace became more abundant. So just as sin ruled over all people and brought them to death, now God's wonderful grace rules instead, giving us right standing with God and resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 5:20-21 NLT)

While the New Testament often just says Jesus was full of grace, it also lists events and times where grace exactly meets a need in very specific ways.

1. Grace to forgive sins and receive salvation, to become children of God (Ephesians 1:7-8)

Jesus' sacrifice, death on the cross and resurrection are the foundation. He extends his grace wherever he pleases. Salvation is the most obvious and first way, enabled by Jesus on the cross, dying for our redemption. That is the grace that provides salvation and is the starting point of the Gospel being real in our lives.

But we have to come in repentance and sorrow and wanting to turn our lives around to live another way. Our repentance is more than saying sorry. It is a deep commitment within our souls to change direction completely. We also come in faith, which God plants in our hearts. He also plants his Spirit in our hearts. While it is a gift, we can block grace flowing. It is our choice. God gives us the freedom to choose or reject him.

2. Grace given to forgive our sins after we become children of God (Ephesians 2:4-6, 1 John 2:12, Romans 8:1)

Jesus' sacrifice is sufficient for all sin, even the sin we have not yet committed. Once we are his children, he declares us perfect and clean. Scripture acknowledges we may still sin and have an ongoing struggle in our lives. But Jesus declares us sin-free in his eyes. His death and resurrection is sufficient.

Stop! Read that paragraph again. Then stop and understand what it says. Can you believe it?

Hebrews 10:14 tells us that by one sacrifice, Jesus has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. There are several other verses that confirm this.

Again, we can block this if we turn our backs on God or try to live based on our own strength or deliberately decide to sin against God.

3. Grace given to overcome temptations or addictions (Romans 6:15-16)

Jesus calls us to live a holy life and provides grace through the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome sin of all sorts and to take away the power of temptation. His grace is strong enough to deal with sin.

But we need to come in humility. Pride and self-righteousness will block grace.

4. Power for living (Galatians 5:16)

Grace empowers us to have faith in God, to hear God, to grow in maturity, to allow the Fruit of the Spirit to grow in our lives.

But we need to come in humility and walk as Christ leads. Walking to our agenda, walking in the flesh or self-righteously, will block grace.

5. Power in time of need, miracles, signs and wonders (Hebrews 2:4, Romans 15:18-19)

Grace can heal, change people or change circumstances or the natural world. Grace can provide wisdom or answer questions. God's grace is behind the Gifts of the Spirit.

But again, we should come in humility, with nothing in our hands, powerless.

6. Power for a God given commission (1 John 2:27, Ephesians 2:10)

Grace enables people to perform a role called by God. Pastor, evangelist, or just helping. Doing something the Holy Spirit has prompted us to do. God always provides sufficient for the task if we let him.

However, a lack of humility, pride, and ego can block it.

7. And more (John 16:13-15)

There are many other ways that the Bible says the Holy Spirit will deliver grace into our lives. Many other ways that Jesus' followers have experienced his grace down through the centuries. You will have heard stories of God's grace from people around you. For all, we need to be humble, recognising that without God, we cannot do anything.

God's grace extends to us as believers to cover the whole of our lives and everything we do as his children. Legalistic thinking prevents believers from understanding the fullness of grace that is available to us as believers.

That God would give gifts to us may seem strange. Normally we probably think of sacrificing to gods. We give to appease. Or for protection or to gain favour. And here we are talking about grace as a gift from God.

It starts with the forgiveness of sins and salvation. Then he says he wants to be our friend and have a relationship. And he will help us in life! This is nothing like the gods we grew up worshiping.

To be a true disciple, we need to understand and apply God's grace to everything we do. We need to have faith that God will be with us and will empower whatever work he calls us to, while also taking us down the path that leads to holiness and maturity. But he doesn't promise it will be easy, just that he will always be with us. As disciples, Jesus is asking us for our lives.

This is the Gospel of Christ and is what Jesus is talking about in Luke 9:23-27 when he says that we should take up our cross and follow him. Again and again, writers in the New Testament talk about the gospel of grace. In Hebrews, the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of grace, showing his part in the spread of God's grace. Grace calls us forward so that we fully grow more like Jesus.

In the previous 4 chapters, you have already started that journey. This chapter will equip you further. But to follow the pathway of grace requires some changes in thinking and outlook.

Grace is not just a word. It is a person. While Jesus is the foundation for this grace, the Holy Spirit is the means of grace in our lives. The call of grace calls us to align ourselves with the Holy Spirit. To pause with him, listen, feel what he feels, and act to bring his love to a lost world.

Grace, visible and experienced in the disciple's life, is the difference between living in God's power rather than living in my power.

And the unfortunate secret of grace is that while God's grace can cover everything, that will not be the case for everyone. Many believers will miss out. Because they do not engage with the Spirit of grace and choose instead to live their life their way.

There are three types of barriers to experiencing God's grace. These are general headings. Under them are specific things that the Bible talks about:

- **Our understanding about God and who he is.**
- **Our thinking about ourselves.**
- **The lifestyle we choose to live.**

We don't realise how big these barriers are till God reveals the reality to us. We struggle to see ourselves truly as God sees us. And we struggle to see God truly as he has revealed himself. Our beliefs about ourselves and God can get in the way of God's grace. Our incorrect views also influence our choices as to the way we live as a disciple. A lifestyle of **active holiness** will attract grace. A lifestyle of sin will limit grace. I will explain "active holiness" later in the chapter.

If we choose **active holiness**, God will bless you with grace upon grace.

In this chapter, we have a section on each of these topics and some surrounding issues.

Action:

a. Read Ephesians 1:3-14. This is a statement about us and the privileges that we have as the children of God.

- *Does the passage encourage you? Can you identify with it? Or is it painting a picture of Jesus' followers that is nothing like your experience as a disciple?*
- *Write your thoughts down in your journal. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you about your reaction to the passage.*
- *Read slowly down the list and tick each item that you know in the reality of your experience to be true. Note in your journal any you don't tick. These are not a problem. Just recognise that you have yet to step into these. Pray about each.*
- *Have you experienced God's grace? V6 talks about God's grace freely given to us. We have all received God's grace through our conversion experience. Have you experienced God's grace in ministry or after conversion? Do you want to experience more of God's grace? Talk to God about it. Thank him for the grace you have received. Ask for more.*
- *Keep thinking about God's grace to you during the day.*

Stop here for the day and leave the next Action suggestion for tomorrow.

We need to make sure that our thinking about God does not reflect any wrong thinking that comes from our experience. Or that our own thinking does not put God in a box. That would make God in our image. Scripture says we are made in God's image. We all have our own experiences and so our thinking about God is often not uniform. And sometimes not aligned to scripture.

Action:

b. Who is God to you? What is your sense of God and how do you think about him in the privacy of your mind and heart? Take some time and your journal. Pray about it and then just record your thoughts about God. Pause and bring to mind your image of God. Who is God to you?

We all have our private perspective about God and his attributes and unless we surface those thoughts and write them down, we can't deal with them. We want to compare our private thoughts against what is in the Bible. Then change our thinking and heart belief. Our presumptions about God may have come from our family, our teachers, local culture, some other religion, or even a church.

Keep thinking about this question during the day. Try to remember where your understanding of God has come from. As you do this, the Holy Spirit will help bring things to mind and expand your understanding.

An incorrect view of God

Our view of what God is like may have come from many places. From another religion, from the surrounding culture, from people we hear preaching, from personal experience, from our reactions when we hear about what is going on in the world, or even from the way we read the Bible. My view could come from our behaviour and habits and the lifestyle we choose. Or maybe my view of God or Jesus comes from other people. I just follow the crowd. Maybe I just ignore God. He is irrelevant.

A Mr Fix it God?

Our view of God could come from our habits. We might just live life the way we want to and only go to God when things go wrong or we need something. That treats God like he is there only to fix our problems. So, we have decided what we want God to be like by the way we treat him. That is making God in our image. We have made him to fit in with us. The Bible teaches us that God made us in his image.

The God who just doesn't care? The absent God?

But when we look at all the problems in the world, or look in the Old Testament at the nasty things that happened, it is easy to get a confused view of God. Why does he let all the bad things happen?

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they allowed evil to enter the world. And evil came in to corrupt people, society and the natural world.

God has given us freedom, and people in all generations have misused that freedom by choosing evil. And the evil spreads and affects all around us. Powerful people aspire to more power and choose to fight or kill to get what they want. The rich hoard wealth. The strong own the weak. The people with authority misuse that power. That is the outcome of people having freedom unless they choose God.

There are people who, even though they have chosen God, still live as though he is absent and doesn't care.

The God of me?

God has given us the freedom to choose good or evil. Some people may choose to live aligned to the devil. But, for most of us, the choice is between God and me.

If I choose to control my life and do it my way, then I am my own god.

The God of good works?

If you believe that doing good things is the way we get to heaven or the way to gain God's favour, then you are believing in a false god.

That would be a god of good works. Yes, they are good works, but our good works, not God's good works. That is not how God wants us to relate with him. And that certainly is not how he will grow grace in our lives. God wants us to come to him with empty hands to the God of love, who wants to make us pure and holy.

Ephesians 2: 8-10 tells us how we come to Christ. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.”

The God of rules, the recorder of sin?

Some people will see God as we see him in the Old Testament as a God who has exacting requirements as expressed in the 10 Commandments and all the many laws of the Old Testament without understanding the ways in which God showed grace to the Israelites. Or they look at all the commands in the New Testament and emphasise the rules or sins they want to put up front. I talked about this in chapter 4.

The Israelites also had a wrong view of God from their religious leaders. They created more and more rules and regulations about how people should live and each generation added some more on top of what the previous generation said. All the rules were in something called the Talmud and each generation added more exacting requirements. The religious leaders wanted to control the behaviour of everyone. So Israel also didn't understand the true nature of God.

And the church today can also do that.

The church sometimes gives an incorrect view of God by the things preachers focus on and give most attention to. Back in chapter 4, I talked about having a rules orientation and how that gets in the way of understanding God's love. It also gets in the way of our understanding God's grace.

I have noticed in my many trips to India, and in the chat sites and interactions I have from the other side of the world, that many Indian believers seem to be pre-occupied with sin. Sin looms very large and believers talk to each other about how they can't beat their sins. Preachers keep preaching on sin, but I hear little about grace.

If the preacher at church spends most of their time talking about sin and tells us exactly how we should behave then the hidden message is that God is a god of rules.

The rules hide God the Father who said I will love you regardless of anything you have done.

The rules completely obliterate Jesus, who said my sacrifice can make you clean.

The rules completely hide Jesus, who says, in my power, you can overcome sin.

And Jesus said: “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36).

And the apostle Paul wrote, “Christ has set us free! This means we are really free. Now hold on to your freedom and don't ever become slaves of the Law again.” (Galatians 5:1 CEV).

Romans 8:2 carries this forward into our lives. “The Holy Spirit will give you life that comes from Christ Jesus and will set you free from sin and death (CEV).”

Pastors in both our countries have reflected this culture of law into the church. I regularly hear people talking about all the rules or expectations that believers should obey. There seems to be a strong sense of obligation about behaviour. Some of that comes from wanting believers to live visibly differently than other faiths.

But those who communicate that focus to new believers cause them to not see God, the God of grace. The God who loves them sacrificially, and with compassion, showing them perfect love. The God who looks in their hearts rather than at their behaviour. And who wants their love in a relationship, regardless of their failures. The God who recognises that people make mistakes and forgives them. The focus on sin and rules completely takes all that away.

But you, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness. (Psalms 86:15)

Action:

- c. *Read Ephesians 1:15-23. This is a prayer. It is a prayer for believers that we will have a correct view of God. Use the passage to pray for yourself and your companions.*

Action for the next day:

- d. *Read Ephesians 3:1-13. This is a statement about God and his grace. Take a note of verse 8, where it talks about God's boundless riches. His riches are love, grace, and truth. These are there to be given away. This passage is specifically talking about grace. Boundless means unlimited, larger than we can understand or measure, inexhaustible, never ending. God has more grace to release than we can comprehend.*

Meditate on this passage and intentionally expand your expectations of what Jesus can and will do. Have you put limits on God's grace in your mind or heart? Examine yourself and ask God to change your heart, to grow your belief.

A Biblical understanding of God, a God of Love and Grace

This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit--fruit that will last--and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other. (John 15:8-17)

The Old Testament shows us a just God, who is concerned for the widows, the poor and the downtrodden. We also see him as a forgiving God, given Israel's repeated failings, which he constantly forgave. But eventually, when his patience ran out, he deserted Israel for a period and let the surrounding enemies occupy the land. So, we may see him as a God with many attributes, some of which seem to conflict with each other. Such as patience and punishment, love and judgement.

According to Isaiah 28: 1-13, God has adjusted the way he has revealed himself and his actions to match humanity's understanding and spiritual progress. Over time, man's understanding of God and his ways has slowly progressed. Then in Jesus we have the perfect revelation of who God is (John 1:1-14; Heb 1:1-4; 1 John 1:1-3).

As we look in the New Testament, we see God primarily as a God of love and compassion as expressed in Jesus, who came to earth for us. He lived and ministered and then made the extreme sacrifice by giving his life that we might have redemption, forgiveness and salvation.

But it is the one God who led Israel out of Egypt and led the nation right through the Old Testament and who also gave us Jesus in the New Testament. And the Bible teaches he does not change. The Bible also says that we cannot fully understand God. His ways are beyond our understanding (Isaiah 55:8-9, Romans 11:33-34). So we need to grow our trust in him, regardless of anything else.

Hebrews 11:6 says that “without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” So if we want to live receiving God’s grace, the encouragement is to seek God earnestly.

If we stand back and look at the Bible in its entirety, we see God made man in his own image as an act of love. The joy of relationship experienced within the trinity was the basis for God creating us. He created us for relationship with him and with each other.

The storyline of the Bible is simply “I made you, I loved you, I lost you, I want you back”. We see this story end to end and repeated within the panorama of centuries. And in the detail of each individual story.

We see the God of love and grace revealed in Jesus. The way he walked the earth. The way he gave himself for our sins. His death and resurrection.

We see the God of love revealed in Acts and through the New Testament, through the witness of his people.

We see the God of love and grace around us. As we step closer into his kingdom. As he reveals himself in new ways. Showing love and compassion as we minister in his name.

We see the story repeated in the last chapters of the Bible, where God reveals his ultimate plan. “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Rev 21: 3-4).

And the last verse in the Bible again calls us forward. “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen.” (Rev 22:21).

We need to know that God is a God of love and that he is pure and holy and that he is always good. While he has attributes that seem in conflict, he holds the tensions of these with love and grace. We need to know that God wants a relationship with each of us. Including you and me. That he has allowed us to know him and his nature. And he is always good. And he has gifts for us, his grace, which is present in our lives through the Holy Spirit as we submit our lives to him and put him on the throne of our lives.

We need to hold a correct image of God in our hearts and our minds. He is good, and full of love, grace, and truth. As we have come to Christ, as we become his children, his Spirit within us convinces us we can trust the Bible and that Jesus really was the Son of God and was full of grace and truth.

Action:

- e. **Meditate on the verses below. Are your private thoughts about God consistent with them? Do you have a clear picture of God the Father, Jesus the eternal Son and the Holy Spirit?**

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:16-17).

God.... has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for our sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. (Hebrews 1:2-3)

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (Gal 5:16-18) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-26)

If you feel you need more detail on who God is, you could look at the following links.

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/god-video/>

<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/who-is-god>

Our belief about ourselves can get in the way

Action:

- f. **Before you read this section, can you go back and read your journal? Look at your responses to the action question a. at the very start of this chapter. Refresh your mind about how you responded personally to Ephesians 1:3-13. What did you write about how that passage made you feel? Challenged? Encouraged? That's not me?**

How we see ourselves before God sets our expectations and our hearts' belief and can limit the flow of his grace in our lives. For now, I am just raising some sets of alternatives. In a later chapter, we will deal with more.

I had two goes at writing this bit. As I prayed about it, I believe the Holy Spirit prompted me to write it again and then again.

The pictures are true and biblical. But they differ from each other. And none are the full picture.

Slaves or royalty?

Our culture teaches us we always need to be subservient to the bosses in our lives. Many religions teach god is remote and we are like slaves. We serve the gods. We sacrifice to the gods. We pray they will not harm us. We pray they will bring us a good life.

Jesus invites us to live with him, in his home (John 14:2-4). John the apostle says that we are the children of God (John 1:12). Paul the apostle says the same:

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. (Romans 8:14)

In that same chapter, he calls us heirs of Christ. And says we have been adopted. Several passages say Jesus is our brother. That we are members of the family of God.

But you are God's chosen and special people. You are a group of royal priests and a holy nation. God has brought you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Now you must tell all the wonderful things that he has done. (1Peter 2:9)

Jesus invites us to live in his authority. We will talk about this later.

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. (Colossians 2:9-10)

Clearly, Jesus wants us working with him, together with him, to build the Kingdom of God. The Bible says we are no longer slaves.

Are you a slave or a member of the royal family?

If you see yourself as a slave, you limit the flow of grace. But... that is not the complete picture.

Self serving or humble?

In the gospels, we see many examples of people who want the most for the least. The rich young ruler effectively asked Jesus what is the minimum I need to do to have eternal life (Matthew 19:16). He was proud of what he had already done. God is looking for people who recognise that they are unworthy and need him and come to him in humility.

Peter the apostle in the same chapter effectively said, "I have given up everything for you, what will be my reward?" That ends up almost being the same question.

Jesus said to the rich young ruler, sell all you have and give to the poor and come and follow me. And the man could not face that because he was very rich.

Peter had given up home and work and had followed Jesus, so had done exactly what Jesus had asked of the rich young ruler. Jesus assured him that there was a place in heaven for him, but then told him that the first will be last and the last first. Peter wanted to be treated as first because of what he had done for Jesus. Jesus wants people who need him and come with nothing in their hands, always and throughout their lives confessing their need for a Saviour with all humility.

In this modern age, we are absorbed with self. It is our nature to want to be self-sufficient. We want to be proud of who we are and what we have done. But that is not the pathway to grace.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. (1Peter 5:6-7)

Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble." (James 4:5-6)

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses,

in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2Corinthians 12:9-10)

Jesus calls us to carry our cross and follow him. To follow him in humility.

Ephesians 2:8 told us it is by grace I am saved. It is completely a gift from God. Nothing we have done qualifies us for salvation.

And as grace continues in the disciple's life after conversion, the same is true again. It is a gift from God. No part of it comes from us other than the decision to be a disciple. Only God, through his grace, can lift us up. For that to happen, we accept that in Christ, spiritually; we have nothing. Our righteousness is like filthy rags to God.

As we read the many references to grace in the New Testament, there is a consistent message; pride gets in the way of God's grace, humility attracts God's grace.

Friend or servant? Or self-sufficient?

Earlier we looked at the passage in John 15. Here God went out of his way to make sure that the disciples knew they were friends and not servants. He says the same to us.

Do we believe we are self sufficient? Or do we believe we cannot live without God?

Have a read what Paul says about himself in Philippians 3:7-14. Paul has been listing his religious credentials, the things he has done to comply with God's expectations, and then he admits they count for nothing.

But Christ has shown me that what I once thought was valuable is worthless. Nothing is as wonderful as knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have given up everything else and count it all as garbage. All I want is Christ and to know that I belong to him. I could not make myself acceptable to God by obeying the Law of Moses. God accepted me simply because of my faith in Christ. All I want is to know Christ and the power that raised him to life. I want to suffer and die as he did, so that somehow I also may be raised to life. I have not yet reached my goal, and I am not perfect. But Christ has taken hold of me. So I keep on running and struggling to take hold of the prize. My friends, I don't feel that I have already arrived. But I forget what is behind, and I struggle for what is ahead. I run toward the goal, so that I can win the prize of being called to heaven. This is the prize that God offers because of what Christ Jesus has done. (Philippians 3:7-14 CEV)

God's grace is a gift, and we cannot receive that gift when we think we can do it on our own.

I am a true disciple of Christ only as I walk in his power and his grace. It is only as we come humbly, with nothing, that Jesus can fill us with new life. This is the cross that Christ calls us to carry. We need to empty ourselves of self and take ourselves off the throne and put Christ there. I am a slave of Christ, while also being a prince of the realm.

Jesus promised grace and kingdom impact as he called the disciples. Follow me and I will It is all about Jesus and what he will do in our lives. All we have to do is drop our stuff and follow.

And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." (Matthew 4:19 ESV)

Action:

g. Read Ephesians 3:14-21. This is a prayer for people like you and me. Read it through and contemplate it. And then pray that prayer for yourself or yourselves.

- **Hold the prayer in your hearts and think about it over the next day or so. Does it resonate with you? Do you want God to answer the prayer?**
- **The passage asks God to allow the Holy Spirit, through his power, to do “immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine” and to do that in our lives. This is the invitation to hand our problems, needs, and sin over to the Holy Spirit. Is that how you live? Do you want to live that way?**

‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’ (Acts 17:28)

The Life style we choose affects grace in our lives

The scriptures tell us that there are two ways to live. We can live according to our old nature or we can live in the Spirit.

The old nature pays attention to what I want, my worldly ambitions, worldly thinking, chasing money, or experiences or power. This is the path of pride and self-sufficiency. Many people come to Christ and confess his name, but then turn around and live the way they always have, but as a child of God. This is the choice that will limit God’s grace in their lives.

To allow grace to work in our lives and to purify us and eradicate the power of sin, we need to be responding to the Holy Spirit. We need to give the Holy Spirit free rein in our lives in a fully open and honest way. We need to listen to the hard bits and the good bits. God cannot deal with sin in our lives unless we allow the Holy Spirit to change us.

The scriptures in this space say that we need to be humble and we need to acknowledge our weakness and inability to do it on our own and very deliberately handover to God. We looked at some of them yesterday. For God’s grace to flow, we need to choose him and his path in our hearts.

We need to put aside any sense of the fatalism that is common in our culture. The Ephesians passages are clear that God has called us and has a plan for us. But again, Jesus gives us freedom at every level to choose him or to choose another way.

The same is true when we are doing ministry of some sort. For grace to be seen in the power of God in ministry, in conversions, or in healings, we need to want the Holy Spirit to work in our lives. If we want to start a new endeavour, we need to do it because Jesus has led us, not because we want to do it.

In every situation, the key question is “Why are we doing it?” Because I want to do it or because God wants me to do it?

From the outside, no one else knows why. We will look the same to other people, whether we are preaching because I want or because God wants me to. But God knows. And God will respond to our obedience.

For grace to flow in our lives, we need to have God sitting on the throne in our lives. Intentionally, we need to remove ourselves from the throne and hand over to God. That means inviting the Holy Spirit

to lead us. As we listen to the Spirit, God will be present. He will not leave us alone. We need to believe that God will be with us and change us through his Spirit.

God will take care of whatever is holding us back, whether it's sin, addiction, stress, worry, or lack of confidence, as long as we allow him to. We can hand these over to God through his Spirit. He will change our attitudes, our desires, even our body's responses as we align to him. He will sanctify us as we submit ourselves to him.

Another quote from Tim Keller a pastor in New York: "Only grace brings spiritual transformation. Apart from the Spirit of God, we are helpless to effect lasting change in our fallen world."

And some quotes from the Bible:

And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." (Matthew 4:19)

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. (2Corinthians 9:8)

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

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:15-16)

Action:

h. Have a look at Romans 8:1-11. Note verse 1.

- ***Do you feel guilty or guilt free?***
- ***As you read the passage, does it resonate in your head and your heart? If you don't feel accepted and guilt free by God, then spend some time talking to the Holy Spirit about that. Ask him why? Ask him to change the way you feel in your gut.***
- ***Is there anything else in the passage that you need to clarify with the Holy Spirit in a way that is specific to you?***

Active Holiness - Receiving God's Grace

Holy is an adjective that is normally applied only to God. He possesses moral purity and maintains a complete separation from sin. When we talk about holiness for people, we again emphasise that we are choosing a path of being set apart from sin and desiring to live in imitation of Jesus. We cannot do that on our own. We can never do it in our own power. It is the work of grace in our lives as we submit to Christ.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

But growing in Christ is a process that unfolds. We call this sanctification. We gradually live a life of increasing holiness. Paul the apostle talks about salvation this way. Sometimes he uses the past tense, sometimes the current and sometimes the future tense. For him, salvation is a part of the ongoing life of the disciple. We slowly discern extra levels of salvation and will eventually experience the ultimate redemption as we enter heaven. This is the path of holiness.

How do believers grow in grace? It would be nice if we automatically matured, but God calls us to pursue growth in grace actively. Jesus, for example, tells his disciples to, “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Matt. 6:33). Paul says to the Philippians, “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to **will** and to **work** for his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12–13 ESV). Active engagement is required of us.

We do this both as we “Sit in Christ”, and as we minister for Jesus in whatever way he is calling us. That is part of the next phase “Walk in Christ”. Our pursuit of holiness is two pronged. We sit with Jesus privately at the same time as we live for Jesus publicly. We cannot grow in holiness before Jesus without serving Jesus. As we do, we grow. Part is about our will before God. The other is about acting out of our will. The verse says that as we do this, God will respond by working in our lives.

We are slowly building up a more complete picture of the disciple and active holiness. We will complete it in a later chapter. But at this stage, the following verses summarise our understanding.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20)

For we know how dearly God loves us, because He has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with His love. (Romans 5:5)

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. (John 10:27)

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. (James 4:10)

But he says to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. (2Corinthians 12:9)

I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:13)

All combine to define active holiness. Jesus is not calling us to a holy isolation when he says “Follow me”. He is calling us to do what he did. To live a life that ministers, reflecting our private holiness. Listening to the Holy Spirit to guide us. In humility, knowing that in our own strength we can do nothing, but that in Christ, we can do whatever he calls us to. And looming over every aspect of life is God’s love and our response of love.

But the path to God’s grace, the path to sanctification, can be a constant conflict of desires until, at last, we accept that what we most desire is to live for God and to become Christlike. And even then, we may falter along the way. Laziness may get in the way. Temptation may suddenly rear its head. Worldly ambition may come calling. People may get in the way. It very much depends on our relationship with God and how real it is for us. This is indeed daily taking up our cross to follow Christ.

But Jesus also promised that as we follow his Spirit, that the burden is light and he will give us rest for our souls.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:29-30)

God can grow grace in your life in a variety of ways. There is no constraint on how he can grow grace in your life. But it will require you to be active in submitting to God.

In Acts 2:42-44 we have a record of how the early believers allowed God to grow their grace. They had 3,000 new converts. Pentecost was a remarkable outpouring of God’s grace. But they did not stop there.

God changed the frightened, scared disciples hiding in the upper room we find in John 20, over 50 days, to become the bold warriors for God that we see at Pentecost. That was a ministry of his grace brought about by the Holy Spirit.

Action:

- i. That is what the Holy Spirit can do with us. Think about it. How would you like to see God working in your town or Village? Write it in your journal and pray about it. If you feel that God has given you that vision, pray for it to happen.*

Action for the next day:

- j. Read Romans 8:12-17. Does the passage encourage you and call you forward? As you listen to the Holy Spirit, ask him how you can step into all the passage promises?*

We want to give time for your sense of grace in your life to take hold. For you to have plenty of time to hear the Holy Spirit leading you to be more Christlike. So we have several days of Action suggestions.

Action for the following day:

- k. I have mentioned John 14:15 several times. It is time to look at the whole passage, John 14:15-31. I mentioned in the chapter on love; Jesus made a series of promises that are conditional on our actions, starting with loving God.*

- *Read the whole passage noting in your journal the promises about the way the Holy Spirit will support you. Also, note the adjectives that Jesus uses to describe the Holy Spirit.*
- *From the list which have you experienced? Thank God for that. Which do you want to experience? Ask God for that.*

Meditate on these things for the rest of the day before you come back to the next action.

But when the Friend comes, the Spirit of the Truth, he will take you by the hand and guide you into all the truth there is. He won’t draw attention to himself, but will make sense out of what is about to happen and, indeed, out of all that I have done and said. He will honour me; he will take from me and deliver it to you. Everything the Father has is also mine. That is why I’ve said, ‘He takes from me and delivers to you.’ (John 16:13-15 MSG)

Action for the next day:

- l. Read Romans 8:18-39. Almost all the things we have talked about are somewhere in this passage.*

As you read it, consciously put a tick, a question mark, or a cross against each phrase and each verse.

- ***Mark a tick for what you have experienced. Thank God for the experience of him.***
- ***Mark a cross for what you struggle with or have not experienced? Ask God about that. Listen to what he tells you.***
- ***Mark a question mark against what you don't understand. Ask the Holy Spirit about your question marks. Ask your peer group as well.***

And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you. (Rom 8:11)

Action:

Aim: The aim of this chapter was to understand the grace that God offers us through Jesus and the boundaries of that grace. And take another step towards holiness.

Additional action question:

m. Go back and have a look at your journal.

- ***Have you been hearing from God well? Are you hearing more clearly or more regularly now than when you started? If so, praise God for that and thank him. If not, maybe you should review the chapter or talk to someone. Talking to a prayer partner is the ideal way of walking this path as they encourage you.***
- ***Pray about any difficulties you are having and ask God to deal with them. Be expectant and keep trying.***
- ***Have you done anything that God told you to do? Celebrate your experience of walking with the Holy Spirit.***

An understanding of grace is important for us so that we have a right relationship with God. And so that we touch the world to build the Kingdom of God. It also enables us to have a good relationship with others, which is what is in the next chapter. We need to make sure that we embed the teaching on grace in our hearts' belief and not just in our head belief.

Assess yourself on this. And move to the next chapter when you are confident that you live based on God's grace.

How are you going with listening to God? I asked you to do that in a few action questions. In the next chapter you will need to hear God to direct your actions towards other people. If you are hearing but not very confident, that doesn't matter. You will improve. If you are not hearing Jesus at all, you need to get some help from a coach before you press on.

Are you struggling with sin in your life? Do chapter 8, then come back to chapter 7.

7. Loving Your Neighbour as Yourself

Aim: The aim of this chapter is to learn to love others, like Jesus loves. To do this, we will need to rely on God's grace and so will get to apply some of what we learnt in the last chapter.

Bible Readings: Matthew 25: 31-46, Mark 9:33-37, I John 3:1-24. Read these passages slowly and thoughtfully before you read the chapter. Let God speak to you from them. Take 1 or 2 days.

Other Bible Readings used in this chapter: Matthew 5:1-48, Luke 10:25-42, John 13:31-35, Luke 15:11-32, Luke 13:34-35, 1 Corinthians 13, Luke 23, 1 John 4:7-21, Philippians 2:1-18, Galatians 5:16-26.

This chapter will take you over 18 days and may need a lot more time after that for the practices to become second nature.

This chapter has these parts.

1. Loving others is fun, but sometimes hard and God's standard is high
2. What does real love look like?
3. It is what is in our hearts that matters
4. But what is in our hearts needs to bubble out to everyone we meet
5. What about costly love?
6. A side comment about Matthew 5:17-19 and the law
7. Jesus on loving others
8. Let's get practical about loving others
9. Action

Loving others is fun, but sometimes hard and God's standard is high

Up to now, we have looked at doing those things that will take us closer to the heart of God. This step calls us to love others. Our neighbour, our workmate, the person we meet in the marketplace, our friends, our family. In fact, it still takes us closer to the heart of God, but we are looking outwards to do it.

There is genuine joy in loving others. The fun of spending time with them. Getting to know them and carrying on a relationship. Meeting new people and sharing life with them. God made us for relationship. So doing friendship is what God wants us to do.

God calls us to make friends. He wants us to share our lives with friends. This is what Jesus did and takes us closer to being like Jesus.

But he also calls us to love the addict sitting in the gutter, the sinner, the person who bullies us at work, the person who cheats us. This is hard stuff. But also takes us closer to being like Jesus.

To love others properly, we first need to understand how Jesus loves. An incorrect view of God and his love positions us badly in loving others. The grace chapter began that understanding, but there is always more.

A lawyer came to Jesus and asked him what the greatest command was. And Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. **And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.**" (Matthew 22:37-40)

The lawyer didn't ask for the two greatest commands, but Jesus obviously didn't want to give him the first command on its own. He wanted the second tightly connected to it. As we come to look at loving

our neighbour as ourselves, we discover that these two commands are far more tightly bound to each other than we would have thought.

The more we love God, the easier it is to love others. The more we love others, the more we love God.

On another occasion, a lawyer asked Jesus what he had to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus asked him what the law said, and the lawyer gave Jesus this summary. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, **and your neighbour as yourself.**” (Luke 10:27). Jesus endorsed this summary and said that if he lived by this command, the lawyer would gain eternal life. Again, the two commands tightly joined.

Loving others as you love yourself is indeed a high standard. Some of us have a very healthy love for ourselves. Even if we are very humble or hate ourselves (which we shouldn’t), the message of this command is very clear. God is looking for a high standard. For an expression of love that is sacrificial and full of compassion, always wanting the best for the others in our lives.

Note that in Luke 10:26 Jesus asks the man how he reads the law. The man just repeated the scripture, he didn’t indicate how he reads it. But Jesus clearly expects that each of us will work out how we read the law. In our situation, in our context, in our social setting and our circumstances how do we interpret what scripture says. How are we going to apply it?

Then, in John 13, as Jesus prepared his disciples for his departure, he gave them a standalone instruction. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, **you also are to love one another.** By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35). By implication of the following chapters, this instruction includes all believers down through history. Our love for our fellow believers needs to be real and visible! And is essential for our witness to a lost world!

The implication is that the way we love will be sufficiently different from those around us, that society will sit up and take note. That people will want to know why? And will recognise that it is because we are believers. This is a statement about culture. If you recall my comments about culture in Chapter 1, this command calls us to have a culture of love for others that is sufficiently strong, visible and different, that it will stick out and be prominent in the local culture. That is a calling that is very hard to step up to.

Action:

- a. *Take a moment and settle yourself. Close your eyes, take a breath and invite Holy Spirit to be present.*

Philippians 2:3-4 says: Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of the others.

- *Pause before God. Allow the Holy Spirit to examine you and speak to you about yourself. How much time and energy do you focus on yourself? How much time into loving or concern for others?*
- *What is your normal response when you meet a new person? Do you think is this person useful to me? Or will I have fun with this person? Or can I share God’s love with this person?*

Or how can I serve this person? Write your thoughts in your journal. Ask Holy Spirit to align you to the heart of God.

As you go about your day, think further about it.

What does real love look like?

While God made us for relationship and friendship and love, he also wants us to have sanctified relationships that witness to what Jesus has done in our lives. Our lives are a witness to Jesus and who he is. As we have fun with our friends, we wear a sign for Jesus. Is that a scary thought? What does our friendship or love need to look like?

Here is how the Apostle Paul characterises what the true love we show others looks like:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. (1Corinthians 13:4-8)

Action:

b. Take the time to work through the list in 1Corr 13:4-8, one item at a time.

- ***Which of these come easy to you and which is a struggle? Which do you regularly fail at?***
- ***Take the ones that need action and pray about them, asking for God's grace to change your nature and the way you behave.***
- ***Pick just one item from the list and make it a daily prayer point. Stop trying to change on your own. Keep praying over the next days or weeks till you see God changing your nature with you just praying about it.***
- ***When God has answered your prayer, pick another item and start again.***

As you recognise Jesus slowly changing you, celebrate and thank him. Fill your heart with joy that you are becoming more like Christ. What we are seeing as God changes us is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives to extend grace to us for a particular result. We will expect to see increased expressions of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. I define this in a later chapter, so the comment is here only for those who are familiar with the term.

It is what is in our hearts that matters

As Jesus has said, man may look on the outside, but God looks at our hearts. It is what is in our hearts that God wants to change. If our heart changes, our actions will follow. If we force behaviour to look like we are obeying God, but our heart has not really changed, then that counts to God as zero. Only you and God know what is really in your heart.

But as your heart changes, others will notice the difference. You will be a better friend. You will love more deeply.

And the experience of countless believers before you is that God's love does not fail. As we step into the imitation of Christ, as we become Christ to our neighbours, as God works through us for good, he will change us at the same time. God's love never fails.

We need help to grow our love. We need the Holy Spirit and God's grace to get us there.

That is why the “Grace” chapter comes before the “Love Others” chapter. God, through his grace, will do this work in our hearts as we allow him. We can’t do it without him.

The loyal disciple of Christ will find that their capacity for love of others is always increasing and will find that as we love God more, we will also love others more.

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

In addition, as we come before God, in prayer, for our relationships with those around us, with a love that is compassionate, first, and sacrificial, we release God's grace. Our actions release God's grace to operate miraculously in the lives of those around us.

That is our calling.

But what is in our heart needs to bubble out to everyone we meet

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:13-16)

We will come back later to look a little more deeply into how Jesus talks about our love for others. Most of the people we meet will be casual contacts. As we go shopping, as we travel to work, as we do the things that are a part of life.

And then we make friends with these people we meet. At school, college, church, watching cricket. Anywhere we go. Jesus is simply asking that we let our light shine.

The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ). (John 1:41)

I love this one verse story that shows how spontaneous Andrew was. The first thing he did when he met Jesus was to think of his brother, Simon. He wanted Simon to experience exactly what he had experienced. At that stage, it was simply meeting Jesus. He didn't know that his spontaneous action was going to change both their lives radically. The disciple Phillip was the same sort of person.

This is not about preaching or converting people. This is simply shining the light of Jesus. Allowing people to meet your friend Jesus or see the difference that Jesus makes in your life.

It could be just a smile. It could be a question, “Are you alright?”. It could be a touch. Or even a thank you.

Maybe not being angry in a difficult situation. As God matures us, we get less stressed. The problems of life on earth move into perspective. We carry God's joy and peace rather than worldly stress. We respond to the needs and opportunities we see around us.

Or being the first to offer help when someone has run into problems.

Jesus also asks us to love our neighbour. Even if they belong to another faith. A Hindu or a Muslim. God loves them. We need to love God and we need to love others, too.

And as acquaintances become friends, the opportunities to share your friend Jesus increase dramatically. Pray for a problem. Stand by a friend. Ask Jesus to intervene. The opportunities go all the way from showing compassion to telling them about your life in Christ.

If you are excited about your faith, you will naturally share what is going on in your heart.

If you look at how Jesus ministered in the Gospels, he mostly interacted with people. While he sometimes taught the crowds, it is the stories of individual people we remember. He reached out in love and compassion. We have an incredible friend in Jesus who we can share with our friends. Jesus is interested in every aspect of their lives and we can offer to pray for the big issues in their lives.

We need to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit who guides us, whether we are just a friend or when we might offer to pray for them or when we might witness for Christ. We don't want to cause people to be frightened off, nor do we want to hide Jesus.

If you get the chance to witness about Jesus and the time is right, the Holy Spirit will give you the right words to use to touch that person's heart. (Luke 12:11-12)

Action:

c. Pause and set aside some time with the Holy Spirit.

- **Ask him to help you review your life with people you meet and your friends. How can you be God's light? Are you good at it? Can you be better? How? What needs to change?**
- **Don't feel guilty about your failures, just ask the Holy Spirit to help you next time.**
- **Pray about the people you know. Ask the Holy Spirit to point out anyone that you should try to get closer to. Pray about that person or those people.**

Remember that just as Jesus and you have an honest relationship. You should keep your relationship with friends natural and honest. They may not last forever, but you don't drop them just because they won't come to church with you. If the Holy Spirit has pointed them out to you, you may be the friend they need at some stage in the future.

What about costly Love & Mercy?

My growth in this area has been slow and hard and has been more in jumps than any gradual process. My roots had to be shaken to make me aware of what I was like and to recognise the changes God wanted to make in my life.

My first trip to India after not living there for 35 years was truly a humbling experience. It started with a school centenary reunion. I had ex class mates telling me what I was like as a nasty teenager. Acting white, male and privileged. That was eye opening and very hard to take. Then, as I travelled back to the places where we used to live in North India, there were needs all around me. And as I prayed for people and ministered to people, my perception was that nothing happened. Where was God?

This was especially worrying as I had seen God work miraculously in conversions and healings and dealing with evil spirits over many years when working with Australians and Pacific Islanders. Why was this any different?

Before my next trip to India some 5 years later, I had to learn that I was asking the wrong question again. The right question was: "Where was my compassion and my love for these people?" The people were spiritually lost, or poor, or sick. Where was my love? It is easy when you visit

somewhere to not show love. You won't be around tomorrow. Does it matter? But we can choose to show God's love. What if God was calling me to minister in India?

In India, we have the poor and the sick constantly around us. In vast numbers. It is easy to get hardened. We know we can't help everyone. We know we can't stop all the time. But we can ask Jesus to show us who he wants to bless.

"Lord, soften my heart."

"Holy Spirit, guide my heart, my steps and my actions."

I had to learn to love all over again. I had to have that ache in my heart for their wellbeing and to see Jesus blessing them. I had to learn to feel their pain and to stand with them before Almighty God, asking to be delivered.

On my next 15 or more trips to India, I saw God work in power. Hundreds of people chose Christ. Seeing people choose Christ is the ultimate uplifting gift. God's grace is truly on display. And as well, God blessed the people I ministered to. I hugged and touched the untouchables while Jesus gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and healing to the sick. Jesus freed the demon-possessed. I saw Jesus give more miracles than I could count. We truly are sons and daughters of an amazing God. God's grace is on display every time we minister.

If we go back to what Jesus had to say, he spoke in parables. He tells us the stories of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son. We have already looked at the Prodigal Son. Plus the ultimate story in Luke 23, Jesus dying for all of us.

These stories tell us that true love is **Sacrificial Love**. It sacrifices of ourselves and what we want in order to serve others. It looks for the best interest of the other person.

It is also a caring love, always looking at how we can build up other people. It is **Compassionate Love**. Our hearts feel the pain of others and we want to stand with them. We want to see God have mercy on them and their situation.

I would also call it **first love or initiating love**. Rather than responding to an expression of love given to us, it will extend love when no response is on offer. A willingness to love even if we expect no response. 1 John 4:19 tells us we love because God first loved us. God offers this to us. The prodigal son was loved, when there was no reason for him to be offered love.

Invariably when we talk about love in the New Testament, we also see it imply that it is a **deep** love. It carries with it a sense of commitment and depth and soul commitment.

And finally, regardless of the actual word used in the Greek, true love is very intentional and is a purposed love that expresses itself in **action**.

The word doesn't mean all these things in Greek, but looking at its use in the New Testament, we can see the above associations with the word. The full meaning comes out in the stories of Jesus and people and in the parables he told and in the way he talked about relationships.

So, God's standard of love is high, and Jesus showed the way he loved in action in how he treated individuals. He looked at their situation with compassion in his heart. And then responded with action to bring God's grace into reality. Grace is radical. God's love is also radical.

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. (1John 4:18)

Take these following action suggestions on separate days.

But first read **Luke 10:25-42**. Jesus told this story to answer the question “Who is my neighbour?”. The question was asked because the legal expert wanted more clarity about when the law applied. Luke says he was trying to justify himself. He was probably expecting an answer that gave a rule about some people being excluded and outside of the law. Jesus answered the question with a story that not only showed who our neighbour is, but also showed how we are to love our neighbour.

Our attitudes to our neighbours sometimes grow out of the way we have been treated in the past. I also want to use the story to clean the slate of instances when we have been on the receiving end of bad treatment or when we ourselves have been a bad neighbour.

Action:

d. Luke 10:25-42. Put yourself in the story. Do this one character at a time. Start with the man attacked and robbed in V30. Have you experienced something like that?

- *Can you imagine you are that man and how you would have felt?*
- *Spend some time thinking about it. Put your thoughts in your journal.*
- *Pause and pray about whatever comes up for you.*
- *Do you need God to erase a bad memory? Or to take hate away for the people who hurt you? Or to free you from the remorse and history of that event that you can't let go of?*
- *Write the prayer point down.*
- *Keep praying for God's grace in your life, till you feel fully free.*

Action for the next day:

e. Now position yourself as the person who walks by, the priest in V31 or the Levite in V32. The New Testament positions every believer as a priest. We all have direct access to God.

- *Touching the blood would have made them ritually unclean.*
- *But, the Old Testament had very strict guidelines for the help that a Jew should give to a foreigner in need.*
- *Have you ever done that? Stepped away from someone in need?*
- *Maybe it was too horrific to look at.*
- *Maybe you felt helpless?*
- *Often we would instinctively assist someone in need, like this person who was robbed and beaten.*
- *Would you turn your back and go on?*
- *What about for that type of person you are most uncomfortable about?*
- *Would you pray about it and ask the Holy Spirit for guidance?*
- *Again, write your thoughts down in your journal and spend some time in prayer and allow the Holy Spirit to refresh your memory.*
- *What do you need to pray about?*

Action for the next day:

f. Verse 33 is the Good Samaritan. The Jews despised the Samaritans. They would have nothing to do with them. In India, this might be a Dalit.

- *Can you identify with him? What would you do if it was you who came to the man robbed?*
- *Would you do what he did?*
- *Including covering his costs till he was better?*

- *Would you do something else?*
- *Put your thoughts down in your journal.*
- *Is what you would do very different from what you would have done 5 or 10 years ago?*
- *Write that down as well.*
- *Pray about what you have learnt. Pray for a need or thank God for the changes you have already seen in your life.*

Jesus on Loving Others

Read Matthew 5:1-48 before you read the following sections.

A side comment about Matthew 5:17-19 and the law

This has nothing to do with this chapter, but as you read Matthew 5, you may have wondered about verses 17-19 where Jesus appears to make some strong comments about the law and it still being relevant. In several places, I have already said we need to get rid of a law mentality. So in quick summary, this is what these verses are about:

1. Jesus starts by mentioning the law and the prophets. This, in the day's language, was talking about what today we would call the Old Testament. So he starts by saying the Old Testament still stands and that he is the fulfilment of the Old Testament. He is not talking about the 10 commandments or any other commandments. He is not talking about the law. He is talking about the inspired word of God.
2. The Old Testament points to Jesus as the Messiah right through it. We view the whole of the Bible as pointing to the Father and Jesus and reflects God's plan. Jesus is the fulfilment of the Old Testament. Note that it is Jesus who fulfills the OT. He doesn't suggest that we fulfill it by our actions.
3. In the remaining part of Matthew 5, he then redefines some of the Old Testament commands to show how deficient they are. He does this 6 times, each starting with "You have heard it said...". He made it clear that he is changing the requirements for the new covenant. The standards are higher.
4. As we observed when reading Daniel, the Old Testament points to Jesus and beyond Jesus to the second coming. So, until everything is accomplished, the record and prophecies of the Old Testament stand.
5. This is not about commandment keeping. Elsewhere in the Gospels, Jesus makes it clear that life under the new covenant is very different. To read this as implying, we have to keep the old laws suggests we have to comply with all 613 commands in the Old Testament, including the ceremonial laws. This conflicts with what the New Testament writers say. Jesus nowhere suggests this, and he is very clear that he ushers in a new age, a new covenant, and that his death and resurrection changes everything.

Jesus often spoke about loving others

Jesus often spoke about loving others. He had a knack for telling stories that hit areas of our pride. Or areas where the culture of the day did not reflect his heart. Areas where we may have given ourselves permission to not step up to his standards. If you want illustrations of how we should love others, just look at how Jesus treated others. The compassion around the many miracles. And he included it in 8 or 9 of the parables he told.

Even loving all within the community of our own church can be difficult, but clearly, to be a disciple of Christ, we need to love way beyond this. John 13:34-35 nominates all other believers. The believers in other churches! You know? Those churches that do it differently than we do. That have some strange beliefs?

We now have 7 situations that Jesus spoke into that are all a part of this topic of loving others. Take one a day for the next 7 days. They get harder each day, so take more than a day if you need to. Remember, we are looking to change our heart attitudes until they become our natural reaction to

every situation. So take as long as you need for your heart to change and your habits to align to your changed heart.

Loving God depends on Loving Others

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell. “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:21-24)

Here, Jesus undermines the Jewish law, in two ways. The first is to extend the law way beyond its intention. By equating murder and anger, Jesus is saying sin is sin, deal with it. But it is the second part that is of most interest here. Jesus considers reconciliation with people as important as reconciliation with God. The law does not teach this, and we rarely think about sin in this way. Jesus says that reconciliation with God cannot happen until I have reconciled with you. Jesus is elevating the importance of our relationships, because they reflect what is going on in our hearts.

The Jewish altar was in Jerusalem. So, if you lived in Jerusalem, you might spend one hour leaving the gift to go home and reconcile. But if you lived further away, it could take three days.

If you read the passage carefully, it includes both the situation where you have something against someone else and where the other person has something against you.

Our relationships with other people are fundamental to our relationship with God. The more we love God, the more that love will overflow to others. The more we love others and see God in their lives, the more we will love God and thank him. Loving God and loving others connect with each other.

God’s love depends on us forgiving others

For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. (Mat 6:14-15)

Here, Jesus changes the topic to forgiving other people. Now, that is a hard thing to do. We get so tied up in our anger when someone does us wrong. And Jesus says we need to love them and forgive them. He makes the point extra strong by saying that if we don’t forgive people who have done us wrong, God the Father will not forgive us our sins!

Our relationship with Jesus and the Holy Spirit depends on our state of forgiveness. We know that sin will disrupt that relationship unless we deal with it. Here, we need to forgive as readily as God forgives us.

That is a change in nature that will be hard to attain. Remember, our goal is for Jesus in us to become second nature. This one will take a bit of effort. Again, the Holy Spirit will work in us to achieve this. Hand the problem over to God, pray about it and work with him to see your life change dramatically.

And notice where these verses appear, straight after the Lord’s prayer. The Lord’s prayer is all about changing the way we live on earth. The prayer invites Jesus to bring heaven to earth in practical ways. We use it regularly for corporate prayer. Each time we say “And forgive us our debts, as we also have

forgiven our debtors.” We immediately recognise the connection between how we behave and how God treats us.

Jesus again and again stressed the need for us to forgive those who had wronged us. The story of the prodigal son in Luke 15 is also the story of a father forgiving his son. What a father!

Jesus also used several parables directly on this topic. In Matthew 18:23-35, he tells of the unforgiving servant. In Luke he has some more.

It is important we feel forgiven and know that we have been forgiven in order to start from a clean sheet again. To begin again, we need a clear starting point.

As Jesus ministered healing to people, he regularly told them that their sins were forgiven. He encouraged them to walk a new path after their healing experience.

Even more convincing is how Jesus forgave those who sinned against him. For Jesus, forgiveness was not automatic, but it was intentional, a conscious choice, presumably based on what he saw in the person's heart. After being crucified, Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them” (Luke 23:34). He has shown us the way.

As I have worked with pastors and lay workers over many years, I have observed that forgiving those people who have wronged us, seems to be one of the very difficult spiritual battles that many followers of Christ have. We need to have victory in this area to be effective disciples.

Clearly, Jesus wants us to learn this important trait. As disciples, as followers, we need to forgive as we go.

Action:

g. Read Mathew 18:23-35 and Ephesians 4:31-32. Bring to God any situations where you are struggling with anything done against you or you are struggling to forgive someone else. Ask the Holy Spirit what you should do? Recognise that you need to forgive these people. Recognise that while you have not forgiven, you cannot fully receive God's love and are unable to minister God's love.

Pause and pray about it. Ask the Holy Spirit to do the miracle of grace in your life, to enable you to forgive. Keep this prayer running while you have any sense of anger still in your heart. Ask the Holy Spirit if you need to do anything? Did you contribute to the situation? Is there a degree of righteous anger about it and you need to write a letter to help get it off your chest? Don't mail the letter, hang on to it and pray about whether you send it.

As you move forward, ask Jesus to enable you to forgive immediately anything that is done against you. To not hang on to anger or a sense of injury. To be ready to forgive always.

Love is greater than the Law

Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shrivelled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shrivelled hand, “Stand up in front of everyone.” Then Jesus asked them, “Which is

lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they remained silent. He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus. (Mark 3:1-6)

In Exodus 35:2 it says, “For six days, work is to be done, but the seventh day shall be your holy day, a day of sabbath rest to the LORD. Whoever does any work on it is to be put to death.” Clearly, pretty serious stuff. And Jesus had broken that law according to the Pharisees. So needed to be put to death.

Jesus could have offered to heal him the next day. The man had not even asked to be healed, but maybe he was hoping to be healed. We don’t know. But Jesus went out of his way, seeing the man, to make a point, in front of everyone. This was teaching in action, and Jesus wanted everyone to pay attention. Jesus was about to do something good and loving. He wanted to teach the people how far from God they had moved with their legalism. He wanted to show them the heart of Father God. Being aligned with God and loving people is more important than the religious law.

Action:

h. What is your top priority? Showing love and compassion or obeying the rules? What do you learn from Jesus?

- ***Write your answer in your journal.***
- ***Pray about it and talk it over with the Holy Spirit.***

The lesson for us is simply that hurting people and needy people often need a response then and there, not tomorrow. This is a matter of priorities. Our response to love should be an immediate response. Our brand of love shines through the clutter of life somehow. We find a way for whatever we feel God is presenting to us. We live in the freedom that Christ gives us. And God may suggest we move on because there is something more important ahead. We should respond to the Holy Spirit, but our default character trait, should be compassion.

People matter more than the Law

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. (Matthew 5:38-42)

This is an impossible ask, and very difficult to understand. Why should we turn the other cheek? Especially to bad people who are not obeying the law?

Not only is ‘an eye for an eye’ a direct law (Exodus 21:24), it is an entirely natural, commonsense way of doing justice. It is the basis of most countries’ legal systems. Crimes should attract punishments which are appropriate and proportionate to the severity of the crime. In our modern times, the courts still apply this principle by applying an appropriate sentence of a fine or imprisonment.

Did Jesus intend for courts to stop punishing offenders? I don’t think so. But Jesus could affirm the Jewish law and undermine both the actual law and the natural intuition behind it.

In this episode, Jesus was clearly saying the fact that someone has been bad or nasty to you does not excuse you from treating them well. Regardless of how someone treats us, Jesus calls us to treat them with love, kindness, and goodness. Jesus loves them regardless and we should look to do that too.

Action:

- i. How does that sit with you? Can you do what Jesus says? As we commit our paths to God, the Holy Spirit will guide us and give us the power to live the Jesus way. We may fail. God still loves us and will give us another chance. He will walk beside us, regardless.*

God loves everyone (Widows, Women, Dalits, Tribals, Sudras, Vaishya, Kshatriyas, and Brahmins) and we should too

Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly." Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." "Yes it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment. (Matthew 15:21-28)

We need a bit of background to understand this story. Deuteronomy 20:17 describes the Canaanites as a people who were an abomination to God. They performed child sacrifice, ritual prostitution, incest and bestiality as a part of their worship of their gods. God commanded Israel to destroy this nation completely as they occupied the promised land, in order to prevent the contamination of Israel by their culture, teaching, and religion.

Israel didn't do that. This woman's existence was a reminder of the failure of the Jews to obey God's command. All Jews would have nothing to do with any Canaanite. They wouldn't enter a Canaanite village. They wouldn't speak to a Canaanite, they wouldn't touch a Canaanite, they treated the Canaanites as sub-human. In other ages they used the Canaanites as slaves.

It is surprising to everyone around that Jesus even speaks with her. But not a surprise that he refuses her request. And he does that twice. But then something amazing happens. He submits to her argument. In Mark's version of the story, Jesus says, "Because of your answer, your daughter is healed". This is the only occasion in the gospels that someone argues with Jesus and he concedes. And it is the most unlikely person imaginable, a Canaanite woman.

This story goes way beyond what any sensible God-fearing Jew would have thought was remotely moral, natural, or legal.

The parallels to the Indian caste system are very close. The treatment of wives and women is also similar. For those of us who have grown up in India, this is something Jesus wants us to learn. He wants to re-make us to love and respect like he does. God has made every person in His image. Jesus died to save every person.

In the way we love others, Jesus calls us to be radical. He wants our radical love to be on display. Jesus breached all the social conventions of the day. He engaged in conversation with the woman. He

gave her the respect of treating her as an individual and then through a statement that the Jews would subscribe to, gave her the opportunity to state her case, to challenge the Jewish norm.

Sin does not get in the way of his love. And in the gospel record, you can see that Jesus talks to the normal people and those who were outcaste in their culture. Prostitutes, tax collectors (traitors to the Jewish community, they worked for Rome, the oppressor), publicans, sinners (e.g. adultery), the poor, the sick (cripples, lepers, blind,...) or those regarded as ritually unclean. He honoured children. He also spent time with the Pharisees and the Sadducees, who were religious lawyers or teachers, often they were the oppressors.

We need to pray for, love, and care for the people that society ignores or treats badly.

Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:43-45)

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:26-28)

God loves everyone and we should, too.

Action:

- j. All too often, our culture has taught us not to love particular groups of people. Our culture also encourages us to look at our society as a hierarchy. We treat the people at the top with respect and we treat the people at the bottom as unimportant. We cannot love someone unless we respect them. Jesus makes no such distinction. He died for everyone. He loves everyone; despite their sin. We are to do the same.*

Pause before God and allow the Holy Spirit to search you and to examine your attitudes. Thank God for the changes he has already made in your life. If you need more changes, ask for them as well.

Loving the poor and the oppressed

Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow. (Isaiah 1:17)

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” (Luke 4:18-19)

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ (Matthew 25:34-36)

Right through the Old Testament, we have constant reminders that God is very concerned about how we treat the poor, the widow, and the oppressed. There are over 2,000 verses on this topic in the Bible. That alone tells us that God thinks it is important. We need to be very clear that how we treat the poor and oppressed is a high priority expectation that Christ has of his disciples. Like all aspects of holiness and becoming more like Christ, our path towards this will take time.

In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus talks about this higher standard. Have a look at the passage. The passage says that the sheep (the children of God) will have distinguished themselves by ministering to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the unclothed, the sick, and the prisoner. It is just assumed that the elect of God will have done these things. That they are marks of our behaviour. That compassion dominates our culture. God elevates the poor and oppressed to make them very important people.

The Bible, in one place or another, lists many people as those who we are told to care for. The poor, the oppressed, the widow, the orphan, the fatherless, the weak, the resident foreigner, the refugee, the robbed, the prisoner, the mute, the destitute, the needy, the afflicted, the stranger, the neighbour, and we could go on.

The Bible also asks us to do many things to show compassion and to protect them. Support, deal fairly with, care for, do good; seek justice, correct oppression; show kindness, show mercy, do not oppress, feed, give water, provide clothes, provide accommodation, speak up for, be righteous, defend, deliver from the hand of the oppressor, do no wrong, maintain their rights, be generous, pay honestly, and the list goes on.

One of the key elements in loving these people is that to love them, we have to go out of our way. This is not just about our personal relations with people around us. This requires a whole lot more.

We have just struggled through a few years of the COVID pandemic. There was a plague in Rome and the whole Roman Empire in 165-189, 130 years after the time of Christ. People were dying across the whole Roman Empire, rich and poor. The government of the day and the rulers did nothing. Rich people tried to leave the cities. The poor struggled. There were food shortages as the empire struggled to carry on.

Fear gripped everyone, and their focus became self-preservation. Except the early church in Rome. This band of early Christians did incredible things. They cared for the sick, buried the dead, fed the poor, despite the risk to themselves. They regarded this as their holy calling from God.

And so came the reputation of the church as caring and loving. They witnessed for Christ by showing compassion in action. And so started the tradition in Christian communities of caring for the sick, the poor and the orphans. Still today, Christians run hospitals, orphanages, schools, refuges, and meet the needs of the poor and oppressed.

Beyond our personal relationships, we are called to hold soft hearts for those in need, and to show love to them, self-sacrificing, compassionate, in action. Restoring life to the needy brings them justice. This is our calling.

Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream! Amos 5:24

Action:

- k. *Pause before God and allow the Holy Spirit to search you and to examine your attitudes. Thank God for the changes he has already made in your life. If you need more changes, ask for them as well.*

Jesus says love your enemies

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:43-48)

Love your enemies? Is Jesus mad? No one loves their enemies. That was certainly the way in the ancient world. The Jews of the day would teach that we should love our neighbour (another Jew) and hate our enemies (a non-Jew or anyone who had hurt you in any way). The people outside of your group were treated as worthless. Their lives did not matter.

While Christianity has radically changed the world’s thinking and now most people recognise every human has value and rights. But still today, most cultures and most religions allow you to treat people outside of the religion or culture in most despicable ways. It is culturally accepted.

But that is not Jesus’ way. He calls us to love our enemies. And then he showed it.

As he hung on the cross, surrounded by those killing him, his prayer to Father God was, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.”

For Pastors, this is how your church can change your village. Just by extending love. And the passage gives us the hint of how we start that; by praying for those who persecute us.

Loving our enemies was Jesus’s plan on how to change the world. As we love our enemies, we change and our enemies’ change. We become reconciled to each other and hopefully also to God. This is part of overcoming evil with good. This is the light driving out darkness.

Again, we can’t do it by ourselves. We need the Holy Spirit to help us. But as we lean on Jesus, as we invite him into each relationship or each situation, he will change the world. Relationship by relationship. Person by person. Situation by situation. This is Jesus building the Kingdom of God.

But it starts with me.

Action:

- l. *Read Mathew 5:43-48, 1 John 3:11-24 and Romans 15:1-7.*

- *Bring to God any situations that you face.*
- *Write them in your journal.*
- *Seek what the Holy Spirit would have you do. Look to him for ideas and innovation in how to show the love of God to the people around you or to your enemies.*

- ***Start by simply praying for them regularly and then slowly see what the Holy Spirit does in your life and the life of the others.***

The Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 that Jesus not only has reconciled us to God, but “has given us the ministry of reconciliation.” By restoring our right relationship to God, Jesus made it possible for us to live in the right relationship with others. As we share Christ’s love through the Gospel and others respond, they too will be reconciled to Christ. Repairing what is broken requires action.

Let’s get practical about loving others

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

The difficulty for us in loving others is our weaknesses. That is exactly where God will come through and do the miracle of grace in our hearts and our minds that enables us to follow him in this most difficult of paths.

The practical solution is always to ask God to intervene. And no, the prayer is not “Change these people Lord to make them likeable.” The prayer is “Lord, change me.” We also want God to make each of the people we pray for, whole. Whole in Christ and whole in their nature and whole in their circumstance.

Your prayer should always look for the best for that person. You now serve that person in prayer.

For people we struggle with, it will take time and effort and prayer. It does not come easy at the start and we need to work at it. It is a spiritual journey all its own. Eventually, it will be much easier.

Love and compassion walk hand in hand. As a child of God, I need to have compassion for the people of the world. As we minister, God looks in our hearts and he responds. He looks in the hearts of the people we minister to and responds. Love and compassion and our hope in Christ are the absolute foundations of how we grow the Kingdom with Jesus.

I look at it as a process. Start with the people close to you. Don’t start with the world. Start with one person - you. When God has changed your heart, pick up a person who you live with. Or a person you work with. Do one or two at a time. God will direct you to the people you struggle with or the people he wants you to make friends with.

I have found that God deals miraculously as we bring people or our relationships before him, asking for his intervention.

Action:

m. Stop! Pause! Clear your mind, open your heart. Does God love you?

- ***Did you ask him in Chapter 5?***
- ***Think about it and then give God a response.***
- ***Tell him in words what his love means to you. Write them in your journal.***
- ***Speak it out loud to make sure you really know.***
- ***Speak it out loud to someone you love.***

- *As you go through your day, be on the lookout for the person God wants you to tell about his love for you.*

Action for the next day:

- n. Leave this for the next day. If you have someone who you find difficult to love, then the path of activating God's grace is to pray about it.*
- *Make a commitment to pray about that person every day.*
 - *Write their name down in your journal.*
 - *Notice what is going on in their lives.*
 - *Pray about the issues they face.*
 - *Pray for solutions to those issues.*
 - *Pray that God will bless them.*
 - *Continue praying for them until you have a healed relationship.*

Action for the next day:

- o. As God places people on your heart, take on the discipline of praying for God to heal your relationship and for them to hear the call of the Holy Spirit.*

Action:

Aim: The aim of this chapter was to learn to love others, like Jesus loves. To do this, we will need to rely on God's grace and so will get to apply some of what we learnt in the last chapter.

Additional action question:

- p. Go back to your journal and review your responses to the above questions.*
- *Talk them through with the Holy Spirit.*
 - *What real action do you need to take to live out any new understanding?*
 - *Write it in your journal.*
 - *This is the action that will take your changed understanding into a lived experience.*
 - *We want to take whatever changed understanding we have into a lived experience so that it is a natural part of our lives. That way, we don't have to remember it, it is just a part of who we are in Christ.*

Do you now naturally ask the Holy Spirit about any difficult relationship you have? And about new people that you meet? Has God answered your prayers for people as you prayed for them? Has the Holy Spirit shown you alternative paths in your relationships with other people? Are you able to share Jesus' love with other people? Have you changed your thinking at all?

Seeing our prayers work out in the lives of people will take much longer than the time in doing this chapter.

We won't wait till God has answered all our prayers. But you should wait till the actions of loving others and reaching out to them in grace is second nature. That will take a while.

While you are waiting for your practice to catch up you can do guidelines 8 to 15 from the Daniel chapter. We left them to be done here.

Allow the Holy Spirit to call you forward. Either to persevere in "listening to his voice", or in "reaching out in love to others".

When you are ready, press on to the next chapter.

8. Is sin a problem?

Aim: The aim of this chapter is to know that Jesus has dealt with sin. To better know how God looks at sin and where it fits into the life of grace.

Bible Readings: Romans 5:12-21, Romans 6:15-23, Romans 8:1-39, 1 Peter 1:13-25, Ephesians 2:4-10, Galatians 5:1-26. Read these passages slowly and thoughtfully before you read the chapter. Let God speak to you from them. Take 4 or 5 days.

Other Bible Readings used in this chapter: Romans 3:21-25, Romans chapters 6, 7 and 8, John 3:16-18, John 4:5-30, John 8:1-11, Col 2:13-14, 1Jn 1:7-10, 1Jn 2:12-13, Heb 12:1-2, Heb 3:12-14, Matthew 12:31-32.

This chapter will take you at least 12 days or sessions.

This chapter has these parts.

1. Some comments on sin
2. What about sin after conversion?
3. Holiness unto the Lord
4. Grace is radical, as is God
5. Repentance and power from on high
6. The unpardonable sin
7. Sins of addiction
8. Action:

In the previous three chapters, we have mentioned sin several times. We have also made some powerful statements about grace and sin:

- As we come to Christ, his death, his resurrection, our salvation eradicates all our past sin and deals with any future sin we may commit.
- The Holy Spirit and God's grace enable us to overcome sin in our lives.
- Sin is not a problem for Jesus. He has dealt with it. His death and resurrection is the supreme solution. We should never reduce what Christ achieved on the cross.
- As a disciple of Jesus, we are called to be holy. To imitate Christ and live a pure life. A life without sin.

We define sin as living contrary to God's standards. We have already discussed several of Jesus' standards in the earlier chapters. God gives us free will. We can choose how we live. We have also discussed how God looks on our hearts. We can sin in our hearts, regardless of how we behave, simply by choosing to go contrary to what God is leading us to. God looks at our inner motives. We can even sin by doing nothing when the Godly path is to do something.

We talked about grace and the way Jesus' death paid the penalty for our sins. Does that mean we can sin all we like? Not at all. That is not living a holy life or imitating Jesus. That is not living as guided by the Holy Spirit in our lives. Galatians 5 makes this very clear.

Sin is a big issue for people who have a legalistic outlook. They find it hard to recognise the grace of Jesus Christ.

This chapter is all about resolving these conflicts and differences and to establish a biblical understanding of sin.

I am hesitant to give an entire chapter to sin. We are far better off considering Jesus, looking forward to all he offers us in life.

But as I minister in India, I have recognised that sin looms large to almost everyone and we need to talk about it.

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

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. (Colossians 3:1-2)

Come near to God and he will come near to you. (James 4:8)

Some comments on sin

Here is the new agreement that I, the LORD, will make with the people of Israel: "I will write my laws on their hearts and minds. I will be their God, and they will be my people. "No longer will they have to teach one another to obey me. I, the LORD, promise that all of them will obey me, ordinary people and rulers alike. I will forgive their sins and forget the evil things they have done." (Jeremiah 31:33-34)

Now we see how God does make us acceptable to him. The Law and the Prophets tell how we become acceptable, and it isn't by obeying the Law of Moses. God treats everyone alike. He accepts people only because they have faith in Jesus Christ. All of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. But God treats us much better than we deserve, and because of Christ Jesus, he freely accepts us and sets us free from our sins. God sent Christ to be our sacrifice. Christ offered his life's blood, so that by faith in him we could come to God. And God did this to show that in the past he was right to be patient and forgive sinners. This also shows that God is right when he accepts people who have faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:21-25 CEV)

The Bible teaches that we have all sinned and fallen short of God's standards. But Jesus has addressed that problem through his death and resurrection, provided we come to him in faith and genuine repentance, a complete change in direction.

First, we should note that in this passage, as in the rest of the New Testament, sin is sin. There are no big sins or minor sins. We will deal with the exception later.

The law of the land will identify big sins like murder and minor sins like lying and will punish these in different ways. That is the job of government to manage. And if we break the laws of the land, then we too should get punished according to those rules.

The Old Testament laws were for the Jewish nation both their civil laws and their spiritual laws. It is appropriate for our civil laws to treat lying differently than murder, that is consistent with Bible teaching. It is very difficult to separate the OT laws into spiritual and civil. That split makes little sense in Jewish culture. But it remains the case that they covered the laws about God and worshipping him, as well as the rules around how society operated.

The consequence of our different sins may be quite different if we are trying to make good the damage we have done. Different sins will have very different consequences. Some of our sins will hurt other people. Some will hurt only me. Some sin may hurt thousands of people, some just one person. It is good for us to make good the damage we have caused from our behaviour or sins. But all sin falls short of God's standard. Even Jesus made a comment about the punishment appropriate to someone who abuses children.

But God comes ready to forgive our sin, big or small. Even in the Old Testament, God each year forgave the sins of the people and the nation as the High Priest sacrificed for them.

As a point of interest, these attributes that we are to hold in our hearts of repentance, being sorry and coming to Jesus in humility, were also required of the High Priest as he went into the Holy of Holies once each year. God expected him to carry the pain, sorrow and compassion for the sin of Israel as he approached the mercy seat to get redemption for the nation.

And the passage makes the comment that the Old Testament (The Law and the Prophets) repeatedly called out that God would forgive them and he wanted a change in their heart attitude. This again shows a God of grace, not legalism. So the verses above stress that it wasn't the 10 Commandments or all the rules of Moses that reflected God or set the standard.

God's grace operates above and beyond the law. It overruled the law.

Don't let the long lists of rules and punishment in the Old Testament set your attitudes. They were not the complete picture. Don't let our culture set our attitude. Don't let our desire for law and order in society set our attitude. Our faith is in Jesus. He paid the price for us and we live in his grace.

As followers of Jesus, and regarding our spiritual lives, our understanding of sin is from Jesus, not the government. Not legalism. Not the law of Moses.

There are many instances in the New Testament where Jesus forgave people their sins. At no stage did he question them what sins they had committed. Sometimes it was clear, in other cases, Jesus may have known, but he conveyed the message that as people expressed faith in him, he forgave their sins, regardless of what they were.

John 3:16-18 says exactly that. Jesus came into the world to save us from damnation. And he will save and forgive whoever believes in him. Jesus died on the cross for all sin and any sin. There is no distinction.

There is only one place where Jesus put a limit on this and we will deal with that separately.

As a child of the King, you need to know that God forgives every sin. No sin is too large. You can see in the Gospel record that Jesus, in meeting and talking to the woman from Samaria (John 4:5-30) did not let her history of sin get in the way. He did not preach to her about sin; he offered her new life in Christ. This she accepted and then started her own gospel mission in her village.

Again, we see this in how Jesus dealt with the woman caught in adultery. (John 8:1-11) The people accused only the woman reflecting their sinful culture (where was the man?). Jesus did not focus on her sin. He did not condemn her, but showed her compassion and invited her to live a new way.

Jesus talked about the sin of the stiff-necked religious leaders. Who were proud and haughty and imposed their rules on everyone else, calling them God's rules, while they lived sinful lives themselves. (Matthew 23:1-39, Mark 12:35-40, Luke 11:37-54, Luke 20:45-47).

Everything Jesus does brings our attention to look forward to a better way of living. He wants our focus to be on life, lived with him. He wants us to enter his joy and peace and preach him only.

All sin separates us from God, till we become a child of God and then his sacrifice covers that sin. Of course, there needs to be genuine repentance and remorse and humility. This is the gospel of Christ that leads to salvation.

When we conduct gospel meetings and we appeal for people to make a commitment to Christ, we do not ask what sins they have committed. Christ accepts anyone who is touched and responds.

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. (Col 2:13-14)

Some Christians or churches treat sex sins as especially bad, but that is not God's view. God loves every person in the world and will welcome any person who repents. Jesus spent time with the prostitutes and the tax collectors who robbed people. He still welcomes everyone to come to him.

It is hypocritical for churches to distinguish different sins and treat people differently according to how they classify the sins. God calls us to treat everyone well. This thinking was very clear in the last chapter.

Some churches treat something like being gay or having mental illness as a sin and so want to exclude such people from their community. God loves everyone and his Spirit calls whoever will listen.

Defining sins by the church that somehow enforce a separation from God is inconsistent with Jesus and his teaching.

What about sin after conversion?

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us. (1John 1:7-10)

I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. (1John 2:12-13)

Here the Apostle John is writing to the believers. He recognises that for everyone of us, we will sin despite our conversion. But our place in Christ remains. He has already paid the price.

Yes, we need to confess our sins. Yes, we need to repent.

And yes, we can overcome sin through the Holy Spirit. We need to stop trying in our strength and handover to the Holy Spirit. And in the power of the Holy Spirit, we will overcome the evil one.

Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is all sufficient to meet the price of every sin. And his gift of the Holy Spirit is all we need to progress into holiness.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:1-2)

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. (2Corinthians 4:18)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with

perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Action:

a. *Pause before God and allow the Holy Spirit to search you and to examine your attitudes to sin.*

- *Do you need to change your thinking about sin?***
- *Have you allowed sin to trip you up when you should lean on the Holy Spirit?***
- *Do you have past sins that trouble you and you can't forget?***
- *Ask the Holy Spirit about them. Do you need to do something? Do you need to ask the Holy Spirit to put them behind you? Have you been judgemental about sin in the lives of others?***

Holiness unto the Lord

We should always seek to live holy lives. 1 Peter 1:13-25 calls all people of faith to live a life of holiness. Literally, holy living means that the disciple lives a life that is set apart, reserved to give glory to God. It is a life of joy, and peace and praise to Jesus.

As we preach and as we pastor, we should always point to Jesus and call people forward to live in the fullness of everything that God promises us.

I have noticed that in some parts of India, Jesus' followers are pre-occupied with sin. This is especially true of pastors and what they preach about. We need to make sure that as disciples living in an evil society; we do not allow the common sins of the society to find their place in our lives. But as his followers, Christ has forgiven us. As children of God, his grace should set us free from the habits of sin. His grace gives us victory. We need to be pre-occupied with God's grace and the work of the Holy Spirit that gives us the ability to overcome all sin in our lives. We need to embrace the fullness of life that Jesus offers us.

As disciples, we should oppose sin and evil. In ourselves, in our churches, and in our communities. But we should do this without being judgemental. The Bible reminds us of this. We should never reject the person. Holiness is simply a standard we live by. Our focus is on Jesus and his power for life.

We should stand up for justice, love, and compassion. We need to be very careful in the public arena. We need to oppose evil, but with the same grace that Jesus showed. He was clear in his public criticism of society leaders who were unworthy. He was clear in speaking against national sins. He was even angry at the people desecrating the house of God. But when faced with an individual who had sinned or even lived in sin, he was full of compassion. He invited them to step into new life.

How then do I act? How do I adopt holiness and reject sin? The secret is to live consciously in the Kingdom of God by following the Holy Spirit. We will talk more about this in the next chapter.

Grace is radical, as is God

Many churches teach little about grace. That is because it is too risky and gets in the way of law and order.

Grace is radical. Grace is certainly risky. Most pastors would not feel comfortable preaching to believers who have received Christ, that Christ on the cross has already forgiven and covered all their future sins. They would be concerned that some people would take it as an invitation to sin. That they would end up with broken marriages throughout the church.

But that teaching is the reality. We need to take a high view of what Jesus accomplished on the cross and not diminish it. We need to be confident of our place before Christ. He is not accusing us; he knows he died so that we will be clean. We need to focus on the solution, not the problem.

Of course, that is conditional on us accepting that sacrifice, repenting, and desiring to live with Christ in our hearts and lives. Grace calls us forward to live sanctified lives in Christ. Grace calls us forward to holiness in Christ.

As we preach or talk, we need to be careful that what we say does not undermine or devalue the sacrifice that Jesus made. His death and resurrection are the most important events in history. Jesus promised us the Holy Spirit to keep us on his pathway.

The cross of Christ is radical. Jesus, the one and only son of Almighty God, came to earth and died for our sins. And rose again to show victory over sin, death and the evil one. This is incredible! We should never lessen what the sacrifice of Christ has achieved. It brought freedom to everyone who accepts him. It gave access to the Holy Spirit for everyone who accepts him. This is radical. This is world changing!

Grace is costly. It required the son of God to come to earth and die. Grace always calls us forward to sanctification, to allow God to change us into his image. To allow the sacrifice to have a real impact in our individual lives, in our churches and in our communities.

But our culture gets in the way. We need to be counter-cultural.

We need to allow God's grace to flow freely. To murderers, to rich people, to nasty people, to women, to poor people, to Dalits, to widows, to uneducated people, to everyone that our culture tells us we should ignore or push down. We should allow the love of God to flow freely to these people.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:1-2)

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:4-10)

These verses tell us how God regards his children. No condemnation. Set free. Seated with him in heavenly places. Even while we live on earth and are not sin free. Saved by the cross of Christ to do good works in his power.

God is radical in the big things and radical in the little things.

Action:

- b. Think about the cross of Christ. Think about the salvation that you have received from Christ. And the freedom you have received. Talk to the Holy Spirit about all that Jesus' sacrifice means to you. Write this down in your journal.**

Action for the next day:

- c. Read Ephesians 2:4-10 just above.**
- Pause before God and allow the Holy Spirit to search you and to examine your attitudes towards other people. Do you need to change the way you think about or treat other people? Add to your journal.**
 - Think about specific groups of people. Do you extend the freedom and honour that God gives them or do you treat them in a way that Jesus would not treat them? Write down your thoughts.**

Repentance and power from on high

Repentance refers to a clear point when Jesus provides a person with a new understanding that he does not accept their behaviour. Sorrow and regret often accompany repentance. Repentance leads to choosing a new way. A new way that draws us closer to Jesus and we have a desire to walk with him (Heb 6:1; Acts 20:21). Repentance brings with it new understanding, and a change in perspective or belief to lean on God and not ourselves.

Godly repentance always brings with it a sense of hope and expectation, a renewal, a new beginning. These displace our sorrow and guilt. Paul refers to this when he says "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death (2Corinthians 7:10).

As a disciple of Christ, if everything is going wrong, if Christ seems a long way away, or you feel Jesus is disciplining you, then it is likely that unrepented sin is the cause. Spend some time praying about it and examine your life with the help of the Holy Spirit. If you do not know what the sin is, then talk to the Holy Spirit about it and ask him to shine a light on your life.

Repentance is incomplete till we hand over to the Holy Spirit

After repenting, we need to ensure that we do not repeat the sin in our lives. That we move from a state of sinning to a state of not-sinching. As before, we do this by bringing the power of God to act in our lives. We talk it through with Jesus and ask the Holy Spirit to change our inclinations and to both give us the power over sin, but also to take away any desire to sin. We ask God to change us from the inside out.

As our heart changes, our feet will follow our heart.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1John 1:9)

He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. (Psalms 103:10-12)

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin-- because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. (Romans 6:5-7)

Have a read of Romans chapters 6, and 7 if you want more guidance.

Elsewhere in the New Testament, there are lists of many sins. But we know that pride is one that leads us into many other sins. You will already know what sins you struggle with. But recognising when and what prompts our sin is a very useful thing to do. That is the situation where we need the power of the Holy Spirit around us.

Action:

d. Spend some time with the Holy Spirit.

- ***In your journal, list the sins that you struggle with and, beside them, list the situations where those temptations are greatest.***
- ***Talk to the Holy Spirit about both lists. Ask for power over the sin. To take away your desire.***
- ***And for those situations where temptation is strongest that the Holy Spirit will be with you in power.***
- ***Ask the Holy Spirit, are these places you should avoid?***
- ***Ask the Holy Spirit for guidance and understanding of why you sin and what you should do about it.***

God's standard of holiness is far beyond our understanding. We may well be sinning, but have become so used to it we no longer hear the Spirit cautioning us. If you are living in constant failure, or sickness, or frustration, seek God's help about what happens at the deepest level of your life.

The sin of the modern age, across both the western and eastern church, is that we have made God into a god of our own image. We make God to be what we want him to be rather than what he actually is. It takes time and scrutiny to discern those things that we believe about God that are just a reflection of what we want him to be like. This also is a sin.

See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end. (Hebrews 3:12-14)

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Restore

to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. (Psalms 51:1-3,12)

We know Christ has paid the price and that his death covers even our future sin. We also know that the true disciple is called to be true to Christ in everything and to live a sanctified life. Through the power of the Holy Spirit. Not by trying harder. But by prayer and dependence on the Holy Spirit.

In this context, true repentance is always a joyful experience. It lifts our whole spirit and aligns us to God in a way that brings joy and hope and encourages us forward with Christ.

Action:

- e. Read Romans 8, the entire chapter. Read it slowly and as you read it, check your living experience against what is in the chapter. Tick it off one verse at a time. When you have finished, find a quiet space and turn your attention away from the scripture to the Holy Spirit.***

As you see or hear the Holy Spirit, ask him to minister to you. Just accept whatever he says to you. He may encourage you, he may build you up, he may point out some truth. He loves you and desires for you to experience all that God offers as he speaks to you.

Ask him if you are unsure, and gain benefit by him telling you of Christ's love for you. Regardless of how we go, every day is a new day and offers new opportunities to walk with God. Every day, the basis of life, is that God loves you and has provided a way for you to be reconciled to Christ and declared holy. This is your foundation.

The unpardonable sin

There is one sin, called the unpardonable sin, that scripture treats differently and says that God will not forgive it. This is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Matthew 12:22-32, Luke 12:10, and Mark 3:29 describe this sin. The word used in the Greek has a broader meaning and covers a range of situations that belittle or denigrate the Holy Spirit. In Matthew, they use it to attribute the work of the Holy Spirit to the Devil. It is difficult to determine the extent to which the intent of the verse applies and precisely how the word is used in this instance. But it means we should be careful.

Mostly, this will be a very clear situation where, for whatever reason, we knowingly and deliberately either go against the Holy Spirit or lie about what God has done or said through the Holy Spirit.

The verses in Matthew distinguish between speaking out against Jesus and speaking out against the Holy Spirit. Apart from anything else, they mark the importance that God places on the work and witness of the Holy Spirit in our lives and ministry.

These verses may also be the basis for the commentary in Hebrews 6:4-8. This relates to those people who, having known Christ and experienced the Holy Spirit, have then turned their backs on God and lived a life of their own choosing, a life that denies the experience that they have had of God's grace through the Holy Spirit.

Any interpretation of these verses calls us to be careful. As Paul says "Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. (Philippians 2:12-13).

Sins of addiction

The other group of sins that need a comment are the sins of addiction. Alcohol, sex, drugs, pornography, lust, gambling, anger, wife beating, selfishness, conceit (pride, self-importance) and other habitual behaviours that express as sin. While grace covers all sin, the New Testament is clear in its teaching that this is not an excuse to encourage sin or an acceptance of addictions or habitual sin.

Choosing to sin shows that God is not on the throne and that sin is in control. This is not in any way leading to holiness or sanctification. The entire chapter of Romans 6 deals with this issue.

Addiction and habitual sin should not have any place in the life of a child of God. If you have a genuine desire to live a sanctified life but have addictive or habitual sin, it is likely that you will need help to overcome this problem. Addictions change the chemical composition of your body, making it more difficult to break the habits.

I have seen believers cured instantly of their addictions, simply by praying and asking the Holy Spirit to deal with the addiction. I have seen new believers cured of addictions simply because they came to Christ.

And there are those who make it over time with the help of fellow believers or counsellors. God looks at our hearts and our ultimate benefit to determine what the Holy Spirit will do.

Often sins of addiction reflect a heart that is not committed to holiness and change.

I have also seen believers who have never got beyond the addiction. They fail because their commitment to the process was inadequate. Privately, in their hearts, they loved the sin or habit. Or were unwilling to allow God to heal their hurts and damage. They were not willing to hand over control to God. Self was truly still on the throne.

There is no shame in needing help. As disciples, we live our lives depending on each other. Love and community support are fundamental believer principles. This makes the Body of Christ strong and vital. It reflects the heart of God.

But often sins of addiction need help from several people and accountability to those friends as well. And may need to be helped by treatment.

But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble." Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. (James 4:6-10)

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. (1Peter 5:10)

If you struggle with sins of addiction, then you need to talk to someone to receive prayer ministry or treatment. Talk to your coach or senior pastor. You need to deal with it. But you need help to deal with it. And maybe help from outside your community.

Action:

Aim: The aim of this chapter was to understand sin better and how God looks at sin and where it fits into the life of grace.

Additional action question:

- f. Go back to your journal and review your responses to questions a, b and c above.*
- *Talk them through with the Holy Spirit. Are there any changes in your understanding or beliefs from those questions?*
 - *If so, what real action do you need to take to live out of that new understanding?*
 - *This is the action that will take your changed understanding into a lived experience.*
 - *Do you need to spend time with a particular person or group of people? Or do you need to experience the life of others? Do you need to apologise? Do you need to experience an aspect of life that is new to you?*

If sin is still a struggle for you, apply the teaching of James 4:5-10. Read the passage slowly.

The passage suggests a 5 step process:

1. Submit to God
2. Resist the Devil
3. Cleanse your heart you sinners, purify double mindedness, lament and mourn
4. Draw near to God, be humble
5. And he will exalt you

If you are still struggling talk to your peer group, or reach out to a coach and get help.

If you are hearing the Holy Spirit clearly as you spend time with him or as you live, then press on to the next chapter.

9. In Christ

Aim: The aim of this chapter is to introduce you to the most important truth of the gospel that you may never have heard of. And take it into your daily lived experience.

Bible Readings: Ephesians 1:1-21, Ephesians 2:1-22. Read these passages slowly and thoughtfully before you read the chapter. Let God speak to you from them. Take 1 or 2 days.

Other Bible Readings used in this chapter: Galatians 5:15-25, Acts 2:1-18, Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16, John 1:33, Acts 2:37-38. 1 Corinthians 13.

This chapter will take at least 16 days or sessions, but will probably take longer.

This chapter has these parts.

1. The most incredible promise
2. Your identity – a chosen child of God
3. The Holy Spirit in our lives
4. The Fruit of the Spirit
5. Dealing with sin in our lives
6. Being filled by the Holy Spirit
7. The Gifts of the Spirit
8. What are the promises we should be able to live from?
9. As we live in Christ, he will deal with our past
10. As we live in Christ, he will deal with our culture
11. As we live in Christ, he will deal with our present and our future
12. Holiness in Christ
13. Action:

The most incredible promise

“This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” (Jeremiah 31:33-34)

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17:20-23)

In Christ

All the chapters thus far have been leading up to this one. This chapter is life changing if we apply it to our lives. This is the chapter you need to take slowly and carefully and work through it prayerfully, talking to Jesus.

There are 31 verses in the Gospels where Jesus says **“follow me”**. There are another 20 verses that use “follow” in the New Testament outside of the Gospels. The word follow in the Gospels implies

come with me, learn from me, live with me, be my student, be my disciple. As Jesus called the disciples and subsequently calls us, he is offering, not commanding. It is an invitation to life. And wrapped up in it is the promise that Christ will lead us in this adventure of life. We just need to follow – closely, listening and talking.

In the New Testament, the term “**in Christ**” occurs 86 times. In Ephesians 1 and 2, which you have just read, it occurs 9 times. There are another 15 verses in the New Testament that use the term “**with Christ**”.

The total of these is 152 verses. It must be important. The way we live “with” Christ or “in” Christ is of fundamental importance. This is the life of the disciple that Jesus envisioned. This is a central theme to the writing of the Apostle Paul.

All these verses talk about being with Jesus or his Spirit as we live in this world. The emphasis is on **Jesus** and learning from him and being with him. There is an implied promise in the words used (follow, with and in), that he will be with you and me, every step of the way. Jesus confirms the promise in John’s Gospel.

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. (John 14:16-18)

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.” (John 16:13-15)

Jesus through the Holy Spirit, will guide you, he will comfort you, he will teach you, he will meet your needs, he will lead you beside the still waters, he will refresh your soul, he will guide you on the right paths, he will protect you from evil, he will make sure that goodness and love will be with you all the days of your life, and eventually, you will dwell with him, in his house, forever. (Psalm 23)

And then, as Jesus prays for the disciples in John 17, and for us, we have the verses we read at the beginning of this chapter. Pay attention to the bold phrases.

I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as **you are in me and I am in you**. May **they also be in us** so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that **they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me**—so that they may be **brought to complete unity**.

Stop. Take a breath and read that passage again slowly. Let the words sink in.

Stop and think about what Jesus has just said.

Jesus in us just as the Father is in Jesus!!!

And then Jesus defines it as complete unity. **Jesus in me and you!**

That is a level of intimacy that goes way beyond anything we have talked about thus far. This is more than a relationship. This is being joined to Christ.

The Bible teachers call this “Union with Christ”.

Several of them would suggest that “Union with Christ is the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation. It underlies every aspect of redemption.”³ Another said, “it might be the most important aspect of the Christian life you’ve never heard of.”⁴ And he goes on to say it is a “treasure that has been buried for far too long.”

Every part of the church acknowledges that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is a key result of salvation. Yet few talk about it. And only a few teach how to live that way.

Releasing the Holy Spirit into our lives is something that happens when we first came to Christ in our conversion experience. It is automatic as we repent and give our hearts to Christ. This happens for every new convert. The Holy Spirit empowers our lives.

But God calls us on to go deeper. To walk the path of sanctification and progressively experience more and more of him through the Holy Spirit.

That is an opportunity too great to pass up. To have a relationship with Christ that is way deeper than any normal human relationship. To have the Holy Spirit living in me in a way that is vital to my life.

My counsellor within. My guide within. The person who knows all about me, without explanation, and still loves me!

**Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?
(1Corinthians 3:16)**

As children of God, we discard the culture of going to the temple or a building to worship. God is with us all the time. We can worship him in our hearts. We can talk to him in our hearts. We can hear him in our hearts. Instead of us having to go to the temple to find God, he has come to us. And in a way that creates the closest of relationships. (We still go to church to be part of a faith community).

This verse in the original Greek is also saying that we are collectively God’s temple. The “you” is a plural you. There is only one temple. The Spirit’s presence in our lives is a unifying and collective experience. As we together respond to his agenda, we live in unity.

The Ephesians chapter 2 passage you read commented on this further and if we go to Ephesians 4 we get a fuller explanation.

Can I suggest you stop again for a minute and think about it? Are you willing to live this? It will require dedication. It will require submission. Again, it is taking up our cross. It will be a journey. It will require that we take self off the throne of our lives and firmly put Christ in charge. But the rewards will be amazing.

For most of you, when you read the words, your head will respond and the Holy Spirit will touch your heart to respond as well. You will want whatever Jesus offers us.

But there is no promise it will be easy.

³ John Murray

⁴ Kevin DeYoung

Action:

- a. Have a talk to Jesus and talk about it right now. Grab your journal and write what you hear from the Holy Spirit.**
- **Ask him about any doubts or questions you have.**
 - **Write it all down in your journal. And continue to think about it.**
 - **Pause and be silent. Let the Holy Spirit surround you and encourage you.**
 - **Just sit for a while in the presence of God and enjoy his company.**

Your identity – a chosen child of God

The Ephesians 1 reading makes many startling statements about us as we go through the conversion experience and as we carry on to live in Christ. This first chapter of Ephesians is a hymn of praise to God the Father, the Blessed one and to Jesus Christ his son, for the grace that he has shown us. It responds to the love, hope and joy we have as we live in him. And calls us to praise God with the author.

There is no promise of wealth or long life or an easy life, but there is a promise that everything that Christ won on the cross is potentially available to us. That every spiritual blessing is available to us.

The passage continues that God chose us before the creation of the world, and He chose us to be holy and blameless.

Action:

- b. Pause and think on each part of that.**

- **Chosen by God for eternity. Chosen by God, from eternity. From the beginning of time, God already knew us. And he chose us to live in him.**
- **Chosen by God to be holy. To be declared blameless. To be made clean by accepting Christ. Holy by choosing to live in Christ. Despite our many failings. And all our previous sins. Despite our current weaknesses and failings. Holy to the Lord!**
- **Chosen by God to be a recipient of his love. This speaks to the Father's love for each of us. The same love that called Jesus to make the ultimate sacrifice. The love we talked about earlier. Sacrificial love. First Love. Perfect love. Intentional, practical love in action. A love that we can only fully receive if we choose Christ and then as we choose to live in Christ.**

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

That little word “in”, is very easy to just flick past. But look out for it as you read scripture. It opens up a new life in Christ that we have not contemplated previously. It defines a relationship with Christ that can go as deep as we can manage.

Chosen and named by God as his sons and daughters. In the original language, it says chosen to be adopted as his child. This is the case whether we are male or female. His heirs. To inherit what Jesus has achieved. To carry his authority. Living with him, in his house, working the family business, with the rest of his family.

While God chose us, we responded to the call of the Spirit in our hearts. We have the freedom to accept the call or to deny the call.

Deep in our hearts, we want to be loved and we want to be accepted. We want to be known and valued. Our soul calls out for intimacy. Father God may be the father you never had. This relationship is the foundation for deep soul satisfaction. As we interact with the Father and we know his love and live in his will, no matter how simple or complicated our calling, we find our identity. We live in a holy place of love, faith, joy, hope, rest, and peace.

Around us may be difficulty or conflict or opposition or evil, but resting with the Father, within his embrace, is the place where we know we belong. Finally, we find complete satisfaction in our identity in Christ. Our earthly ambitions fade away. We know we are secure, whether in living or in dying. And the reality of eternal life with the Father, and the Son, establishes a different perspective that brings joy, peace and hope into our lives.

This is the ministry and grace we receive through the Holy Spirit.

Action:

- c. ***Pause for a few minutes and step aside to be with God. Allow the Holy Spirit to lead you. Does this sense of call on your life resonate with you?***
- ***Do you feel it and do you want to respond?***
 - ***If you don't identify with it, stop and talk to God about it. What blocks the way?***
 - ***This is the time to be real with the Holy Spirit and deal with the reality of your life. Maybe you need to take some time out to work through some issues.***
 - ***Respond as the Holy Spirit leads you.***

The Holy Spirit in our Lives

Bible Readings: **Galatians 5:16-26**. Read this passage before you read this section.

From the passage you have just read, Galatians 5:25 says, “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.” If you look at the passage for context, this clearly is about living in all aspects of our lives. We came to life through the Spirit at conversion and Paul here says we should walk our daily lives, living in the Spirit.

As we live as a disciple, we experience an increasing filling of the Holy Spirit as we hand over more of our lives to God. As we do this, we increasingly experience sanctification. The more we hand over

to God, the more God can use us. So just as a glass can have a splash of water in it, or be a quarter full, or half full or fully full, we can hand part or all our lives over to God as a commitment to live under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit calls us forward. Christ and his sacrifice call us forward. But God always gives us the freedom to choose. We can hand over as much of our lives as we want to.

Up to now, the chapters have guided us on a path of progressively surrendering more and more of our lives to Christ.

We started by loving God. Then we started listening to God. As we developed our relationship with Christ, we gave God more room to work in our lives. Then we looked at grace and sin and took the effort to rely on the Holy Spirit to help us stop sinning. Then we focussed on loving other people more. Every step took more of ourselves off the throne of our lives and placed Christ there.

As we spend more time with the Holy Spirit and hand over more control to him, he points us increasingly to Christ, and he changes us and our thinking. Bit by bit, we become more like Christ.

Action:

- d. Galatians 5:16-26 is a challenging passage on our commitment to God. If our lives of love are to stand out, we don't want our other behaviour to destroy that witness. Talk to the Holy Spirit about questions you have.***

Have a look at the verses 22-23. Take each item on its own. These are the marks of the changes that the Holy Spirit can do in your life.

- ***Check yourself against the list. Some of these attributes may be a normal part of your character. Some you may struggle with. Mark the ones you struggle with in your journal.***
- ***Pick one thing that you struggle with and pray about it over the next weeks. Ask God, in his grace, to change you. Stop trying to change on your own. Just pray about it, nothing else.***
- ***Come back and look again in a month's time and see if you feel God has worked in your life.***
- ***Pick another from the list and repeat this process.***

The Fruit of the Spirit

As we progressively submit our lives to the Holy Spirit, our nature and behaviour changes. Galatians 5:22 calls this the fruit of the Spirit. To keep the words as simple as possible, I will use the CEV version:

God's Spirit makes us loving, happy, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled. There is no law against behaving in any of these ways. And because we belong to Christ Jesus, we have killed our selfish feelings and desires. God's Spirit has given us life, and so we should follow the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-25 CEV)

This happens automatically as we hand over to God. These markers are the fingerprint that God leaves on our nature as we allow him, as we walk with him and as we minister with him. They are the results God gives us as we live in Him. You should know these changes, you and your family should have noticed the changes.

Action:

e. ***Stop for a minute. Just pause and be quiet before the Holy Spirit for a minute.***

- ***Then ask him which of these are more visible in your life?***
- ***And after another pause, “Which of these do I still need to learn and apply?”***
- ***Write what you hear in your journal. I know that you could answer the question for yourself. You know what you are like and your strengths and weaknesses. But asking the Holy Spirit will bring enlightenment to you and will give you more than just an answer. God will use the Holy Spirit to show you the way.***

None of these marks are absolute. You will never say I am completely patient or joyful. We experience these in degrees and for the whole of our lives, Jesus will gradually take us deeper into him. Others can see what has changed, but there is always more that we can change. We can always more fully show Jesus in our lives.

So, as you sit with the Holy Spirit each day, one question can be, “How am I growing in Christ?”. And as you listen, the Holy Spirit will celebrate with you the wins and the successes, and bring to your mind the times you failed or the times you could have done better. There may be times when we have completely failed, we were impatient or unloving. Holy Spirit will show us what we did and will encourage us to grow into Christ and to trust him more completely.

And while this is happening, all the time, the Holy Spirit will confirm how much Jesus loves and values us.

1 Corinthians 13 tells us that love is the most important of these attributes, so keep it first.

2 Peter 1:5-8 has another list that starts with faith as the foundation of these and builds up to love the greatest.

Do your best to improve your faith. You can do this by adding goodness, understanding, self-control, patience, devotion to God, concern for others, and love. If you keep growing in this way, it will show that what you know about our Lord Jesus Christ has made your lives useful and meaningful. (2Peter 1:5-8 CEV)

Other parts of scripture will encourage us to walk humbly. And to live sexually pure, which is called chastity.

Romans 12:1 gives us the challenge of holy living: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is true worship.”

Ephesians 4:13 calls us forward towards fullness in Christ.

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Ephians 4:11-16)

And Matthew 5:6 provides the promise: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”

This is the life of walking in the Spirit. Walking in Christ.

Dealing with sin in our lives

I am not really that keen to return to the topic of sin, especially when we are talking about being joined to Christ, in Christ. But the discussion will help you know yourself better. Plus, we need to recognise that we are human and we will sometimes fail. God knows that and has provided for that. He still loves us. He will still use us. He never gives up on us. Looking at sin helps us to be specific when we talk to God and ask for his help.

The fruit of the Spirit are also called graces. For each of these attributes, there is the opposite. These can represent sin in our lives.

Grace name	Opposite
Love	Hate
Joy	Sadness, depression
Peace	Discord, conflict
Patience	Impatience
Kindness, Compassion, Mercy	Cruelty, judgement
Goodness	Evil
Generosity	Greed, selfishness
Gentleness	Harshness
Faithfulness, Hope	Having no faith, fear
Humility, Modesty	Pride, arrogance
Self-control	Anger, lying
Chastity	Sexual immorality

In the believer’s life, the opposites often represent sin and a part of our lives that we have not yet handed over to God. If you are aware of this behaviour in your life, you need to talk to God about it. As you sit with Holy Spirit, he will point out these things to you.

As you engage with the Holy Spirit about these, as before, repent and be sorry for your behaviour. Then ask God to take that over and bring the opposite grace into your life. As before, this is not about trying harder. We cannot change this on our own. We need God and his power. So, hand it over to God and ask him to change you.

As we engage with the Holy Spirit he may well show us things we have done in the past that were not aligned with his love. We may have hurt our spouse or our children or family or friends. Where the Holy Spirit reminds us of past sins and errors we have made, we need to deal with them. Maybe we did not carry God’s love, or we did not do what we should have done, or we did something wrong. As the Holy Spirit points these out to us, in responding and seeking forgiveness from the people we have hurt, God will heal our sins and restore our relationships. We may also need to confess to people we hurt. But if they are unaware of your actions and they didn’t feel any hurt, it is generally wise not to confess our past sins to them.

As a disciple of Christ, there are some areas of our lives that we need to be very careful about. Over the years, I have noticed that these are particular areas of failure for disciples. As God blesses our

ministry and our responsibilities increase, these become even more of a temptation. So for leaders or pastors, they are still areas of temptation. As you sit before God, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any weaknesses that you have in each of these areas. Bear them in mind for yourself and for your brothers and sisters.

Fear of man / Our desire for the approval of others

Depending on our personality, one or other of these may be an issue for us. As a child of God, our primary concern is our relationship with God and our witness as his child. But when real people confront us, who are there right in front of us, sometimes we lose our boldness or confidence and instead let other people drive our behaviour rather than God.

This may be an example where a head belief has not yet become a heart belief. So, we act out of our head belief. Maybe we feel inadequate, unworthy, or insignificant. Or we may feel we will lose credibility or friendship and act out of that fear that is in our heart.

As we work this through with Holy Spirit, we will change to become more like Christ.

Alternatively, we may be so keen to see our ministry grow we adjust the message to gain the approval of others or unbelievers. We are more interested in success than being true to Jesus, so we preach an easy gospel or use our outgoing personality to be more on display than is Jesus.

As we work this through with the Holy Spirit, we will change to become more like Christ.

Forgiving Others

We talked about this one back in Chapter 7. Jesus forgives us, and we need to learn to forgive others. I am surprised how often this comes up. Most of us have experienced significant wrongs in our lives. Often in a way that is life changing. The impact on our lives has been clear and unquestioned.

Jesus has forgiven us and given us the capacity to forgive others. We just need to do it. The reaction to being wronged is anger. Hanging on to the incident is a lack of self-control. And eventually the anger grows to hate.

Jesus calls us to forgive those who have wronged us and to love our enemies. If you have been hanging on to some anger about a long ago incident that has had a major impact on your life, you need to deal with it with the Holy Spirit. You need it to be behind you and for you to be anger free.

Our desire for wealth and depending on wealth rather than God

For those of us who have wealth, it is very easy to depend on money rather than on God. We may even use our wealth to achieve what we think God wants and think of it as being sacrificial. But depending on money is not depending on God. God will bless us as we lean on him.

For those of us who have no money, earning money becomes a powerful motivation. Because we are poor, we are very aware of what we do not have. The opportunity to make money is very real and influences our thinking. All the time, our mind is wondering whether any new opportunity will bring more money to be available for our ministry or ourselves.

God wants us to live depending on him. He will guide us. He will also provide. This is often an area of difficulty and growth. Sometimes we don't have enough because we didn't listen to God and went off on our own idea of ministry. Be relaxed about it and listen to God.

Putting ourselves first – our ego

For some of us, with personalities that are more driven and bolder, we always want to be visible and noticed. We want to be out the front, or in charge. Our personality pressures us to be noticed and admired. Our ego controls our actions rather than being humble, as Christ is humble. Or we may have a heart belief that unless we behave pushier, we will be ignored or not listened to.

As we work this through with Holy Spirit, we will change to become more like Christ.

Over-confidence that we are always right – Judging

Because we know Christ and know the way to Christ, we understand this as truth. Other people don't know this truth or value this truth. Because we have the Bible as a reference point, we can be confident about spiritual matters based on the Bible. We grow accustomed to knowing God's way and we are confident about God, even if other people disagree.

I have noticed that some disciples take their confidence in Christ into many other areas, about which they know little. They assume they are always right and they stop listening. This is a lack of humility and is another way that we may put our ego first instead of God. Inevitably, this leads us into being judgemental and making judgements about people or issues that do not reflect the reality or what the Bible says. It leads to a habit of being critical of everyone else.

Scripture calls us to be humble, to put others ahead of ourselves, to work for the good of others and to leave room for God's grace to work. We are also told not to judge others, but leave that to God. Condemnation and judgement in our speech and our actions completely obliterate the love of God that we should share. Criticism and judging is the destroyer of trust, relationships and love, while God calls us to build and restore relationships and love. It takes experience and compassion to come alongside a fellow believer to show them a better way without damaging our relationship.

As we work this through with Holy Spirit, we will change to become more like Christ.

Sexual temptation

The Bible again and again calls us to sexual purity. The hallmark of the disciple is that they have victory in this space. In many cultures around the world, sexual impurity surrounds us and India is no different. Because the culture regards women and children as subservient, they are the ones who end up mostly being abused.

Whether it is from our thoughts or our actions, we need to confess our failures, repent and ask Holy Spirit to change us, our minds and our behaviour. This needs to be a genuine work of Christ inside us.

As we work this through with Holy Spirit, we will change to become more like Christ.

Action:

- f. Do a quick review of this last section. Which of these anti-graces do you think you struggle with? Are any of the temptation areas an issue for you? Pray to God. Thank him for the miracle of grace that you see in your life and, if need be, ask him to go further in any areas you have listed in your journal. Keep praying till you see victory.*

Being Filled by the Holy Spirit

Read Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:7-13, Luke 3:16, John 1:33, Acts 2:1-39 before you read this section

The Bible passages I have listed above talk about being baptised in the Holy Spirit. This is an experience of being immersed in the Holy Spirit.

Jesus began his ministry by going to John the Baptist to be baptised (Mark 1:7-13). John, as a prophet, was calling for repentance but prophesying that after him would come someone who would baptise with the Holy Spirit. After John had baptised Jesus, as Jesus walked out of the water, he experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a radical experience. As he looked up, he saw the spiritual reality of heaven being torn open, ushering in an era of the Holy Spirit. And the Spirit descended on him like a dove and then everyone heard the voice of the Father saying, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." And at once, the Spirit sent Jesus to the desert.

His being baptised in the Holy Spirit enabled Jesus to be aware of and interact in a supernatural dimension. He could see the spiritual realm. And hear in the spiritual realm. Also to be led by the Holy Spirit. And then to converse with and withstand the devil, another supernatural being. Then later, as Jesus moved into ministry, he says that he hears the Father, that he is one with the Father and that he sees the Father and only does what he sees him doing. Jesus acknowledges the Holy Spirit as an essential force in his ministry. The source of miracles and healing and dealing with demons.

All these flow from the Holy Spirit.

I tend not to talk about being baptised in the Holy Spirit. It is an excellent picture. Immersed in God, surrounded by God. But different parts of the Bible use the word baptism in various ways and also apply it to normal water baptism. The Apostle Paul seems to use it one way and the Apostle Luke another. So, I prefer to talk about the filling of the Holy Spirit. You can be full to the point of overflowing, so again, we get a nice mental image.

There is an overflow of the Holy Spirit from what is inside us to those around us as we experience the Holy Spirit in a new way. And then minister in the Holy Spirit. This is what we see in the early church, as recorded in Acts.

When we talk about baptism, we have a mental image of something that happens once. When we talk about being filled, it is something that can happen again and again. The Holy Spirit comes to us in different ways at different times. I am sometimes aware of his presence with me in power. At other times, I sense he is with me as a counsellor or friend, working through whatever I face. Chatting as we walk along.

So, I prefer to talk about being filled with the Holy Spirit. This is also consistent with Scripture, where often when something happens through a person, but in the power of God, the Bible uses the terminology "they were filled with the Holy Spirit."

Often before people can minister in power through the Holy Spirit, they have an experience of God coming upon them in power. It is a sacred moment where the Holy Spirit makes his presence felt in a way that gives us certainty that he is with us. There is no argument. It is visible. We may fall to the ground. We may feel warm. Maybe we hear God in a special way. He sometimes touches our hearts, we feel Jesus' compassion. We may cry. We may laugh. We recognise that the Holy Spirit has touched us, and is in us in a more powerful way than we have experienced before.

Some people talk about this as baptism in the Holy Spirit. Again, I will use the term filled with the Holy Spirit.

How did that happen for me?

I was at a service where the preacher was preaching on exactly this topic. I felt the Holy Spirit challenging me to want this as a reflection of my love for God. So, I went out the front, along with others, and the preacher laid hands on me and nothing happened.

But God had planted in me a thirst for him I needed to fill. Over the next weeks and months, as I prayed and sought God, and aligned my spirit with his, my awareness of the Holy Spirit gradually changed, until it became for me a radical experience of God. So, for me it took many months, but my life with Christ has never been the same again.

For others, it may be a quick and a radical experience with all the emotion, similar to conversion. You may experience God in new and dramatic ways and instantly experience some gifts of the Holy Spirit.

We are all different, and the Spirit of Christ meets us individually. He will come to us in response to our desire and request. How he comes to us may reflect us and our nature. Or may reflect how God wants us to experience him, for our growth in him. But we need to want to align ourselves to God and take progressive steps that take us deeper into Christ and reflect a desire for the work of the Holy Spirit to flourish in our ministry.

The Bible consistently says the Spirit should fill us. And we should live by or in the Spirit. Or we should be baptised in the Spirit.

When we are filled in the Holy Spirit, our spiritual capacity to hear, feel, and see the Holy Spirit increases. And just as he did for Jesus, the Father will say to us, this is my child who I love and I am pleased with you. And all before we have even started ministry, just as for Jesus.

If we look carefully through the Gospels and the New Testament, we see it says that the Holy Spirit will help us live our lives:

- I receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit through the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16, John 1:33, Acts 2:38)
- The Holy Spirit enables rivers of living water to flow through me (John 7:38-39)
- The Holy Spirit will be our guide, our advisor (John 14:16)
- The Holy Spirit will be our constant companion (John 14:17)
- The Holy Spirit will guide us to know the truth in every situation (John 14:17)
- The Holy Spirit will be like our family (John 14:18)
- Christ abides in me via the Holy Spirit (1 John 3:24)
- The Holy Spirit guides my prayers (Ephesians 6:18)
- The Holy Spirit makes me mature in Christ (Hebrews 6:1-4)
- I worship by the Spirit of God (Philippians 3:3)

- I am thirsty to hear from the Holy Spirit (Revelation 21:17)
- I receive wisdom and revelation from the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:10-14, Ephesians 1:17, Acts 13:2)
- I receive life from the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:6-13)
- I receive power from the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:4, Rom 15:19, 1 Thessalonians 1:5)
- I receive the thoughts of God through the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:10-12, Romans 8:5)
- I am led by the Spirit of God, (Romans 8:14, Acts 8:29, Acts 11:12, Galatians 5:8, Romans 8:6)
- I am made a child of God by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:14-16)

As we hand over more and more of our lives to Christ, the Holy Spirit will increase in our lives. The Holy Spirit will gradually fill us. This is the process of sanctification.

How great a provision Jesus has made for us through the Holy Spirit. How can we ignore it. The Holy Spirit and all he does should be front and centre in our lives.

Every disciple should follow this path. Every pastor should follow this path. But it depends on our willingness. To be filled, we need to follow, and be with and live IN Christ.

Action:

g. Again, pause and take a breath. Stop and listen to Holy Spirit. Open your heart to God. Tell him what is on your heart and listen to his response.

If you are ready to be filled by the Holy Spirit, just simply pray for that to happen. Or ask another pastor to lay hands on you and pray for it to happen. Maybe at a pastor's conference or a meeting. As God prompts you, follow his leading.

If you are struggling and you want prayer, seek a trusted Senior Pastor and ask them to pray with you.

The Gifts of the Spirit

Read Romans 12:1-21, 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, 1 Peter 4:8-11 before you read this section.

Those involved in ministry use the Gifts of the Spirit. So, this topic is rightly part of the next workbook. But as we SIT with Jesus and the Holy Spirit, we should consider the gifts and their place in our lives in Christ. So, I have made some brief comments below.

What are the gifts?

The New Testament frequently talks about being filled with the Holy Spirit. Even before he was born, the Spirit filled John the Baptist. As Mary told Elizabeth she was pregnant, the Spirit filled Elizabeth. The Spirit filled Zachariah while he was prophesying. At Pentecost, the Spirit filled all of them. Then, as Peter stood and preached, the Spirit filled him. The Spirit filled the disciples several times. The Spirit filled Paul the Apostle several times.

Sometimes that statement implies that the Holy Spirit empowered that person in what they were doing. The comment is made because the Holy Spirit's presence was evident or observable in some way. It does not always say how this was discerned. Sometimes the Spirit filling a person was associated with an event. A prophecy. Healing. Preaching. Conversion. Bringing someone back to life. Cancelling the venom of a snake bite. Casting out an evil spirit.

These unusual God enabled occurrences are called the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. They are miracles of grace. They reflect an act of God to fulfill his purposes in or through individuals. Mostly to bless others or to provide signs that point people to God. Sometimes they work miraculously to change the natural world to comply with what God wants, through the Holy Spirit.

However, God also gives some gifts to individuals to empower their ministry.

The gifts are God's to give. We should ask for the gifts, but it is God who will decide if, when, what, and why they are given.

The New Testament lists some 21 gifts. The Romans 12 passage included perceiving, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, ruling, and mercy. The 1 Corinthians 12 passage listed wisdom, messages of spiritual knowledge, faith, healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in different tongues, and interpretation of tongues. No doubt, there are many, many, more. The Biblical record shows that God has moved in grace and power to meet the need of many situations beyond those listed above. And that he continues to do that today.

The passage we started with in this chapter talked about every spiritual blessing. Any list of gifts that we make does not constrain God. Nor is he constrained by our understanding of what a particular gift is or when he will use it. The gift is God's to give. We should bless his holy name in thanks for any gift that is given. His gifts to us are always good. I know from my personal experience that he will give gifts that are not on the list.

The gifts vary significantly and the New Testament reflects that there are lesser gifts and more important gifts. The New Testament identifies tongues as the least significant gift and prophecy as the most significant gift, encouraging us to seek the more important gifts. Some gifts emerge from our natural abilities or our nature, such as serving or helps or administration or giving, and God grows them and uses them for the Kingdom. Other gifts are entirely at God's disposal and he gives them as he wishes.

The teaching in the New Testament is that the gifts are expressions of God's grace, given to establish the Kingdom of God, for the common good, to minister to individuals, and to enable the church to function where every person plays a part. Each person contributing through God's grace. We are also told that the gifts shouldn't distract us, love reigns supreme, faith enables the work of the Holy Spirit and hope calls us forward.

Now eagerly desire the greater gifts. And yet I will show you the most excellent way but do not have love, I gain nothing. (1Corinthians 12:31 and 13:3)

How do I receive the Gifts?

God gives these gifts in his wisdom. He gives the gifts in response to many things, our prayers, an act of repentance, someone coming to God in humility, a need expressed as a request to God, a desire by God to provide a sign of his power and presence, his desire to bless a person or a community, his response to the faith of a person or of a whole community. We see these reasons and more mentioned in the New Testament.

Some gifts have close connections to the growth of grace in our lives, such as compassion and faith with the gift of healing. Love and the gift of encouragement. Compassion and the gift of mercy. Humility and the gift of wisdom.

Some gifts reflect a deep work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of individuals and the call that God places on their lives to serve God in specific ministry roles. Examples are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.

Scripture teaches every believer has a gift to contribute to the Kingdom and that we can have more than one gift. As his children, we can ask God to give us particular gifts. But we should accept whatever happens. We should use the gifts that are given to us. We should look for every opportunity to bless people and to establish a witness to God and his love.

The presence of the more important gifts generally reflects increasing sanctification in our lives. As we hand over more control to God, he will use us in new and powerful ways. As the fruit of the Spirit grows, we also see the gifts flourish. A life that is Spirit filled is more likely to see the gifts of the Spirit on display.

But it is also the case that God gives the gifts as he will. He may give a gift to a new believer for a specific purpose. Or God may want to use a specific grace that has grown strongly in the life of a believer, even though in other areas of their lives they have not given all to Christ.

Some people see a particular gift as being given to them personally for ministry in that space. My experience is that God gives the gifts to meet a need or a situation and that God will give any gift through anyone who makes themselves available by stepping forward in faith to meet that situation.

We will come back to the gifts within a context of ministry in Part 2 of this book.

The Gifts and faith and flow

To receive and to exercise the gifts of the Spirit requires faith in God. At that moment, when we step out to pray for healing or speak a word, we need to have faith that God can use us in this way. Having faith in God is a hallmark of the Gifts of the Spirit.

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)

I always talk about them as God's gifts and it is God who blesses, heals, raises, gives sight or whatever. It is not me. The gift is not mine; it is God's.

But I recognise that as I stand before Almighty God, my position is also critical. John 7:38 says that as I trust the Holy Spirit, or have faith in the Holy Spirit, rivers of living water will flow from me. I need to be right with God and living a sanctified life to minister.

Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified. (John 7:38-39)

Now, God can bless regardless. Or he can bless even when my faith is low. But to minister, I should expect that I need to live a sanctified life so that I can be the means of the flow of God's blessing.

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. (Philippians 2:1-4)

The passage above also calls us, as we stand in Christ, to minister in love and compassion and in humility. Wanting the best for whoever is in front of us and ministering just as Jesus did.

What if I prayed and nothing happened?

As with grace, there are many reasons God's gifts may not flow, but this is not the right place for that discussion. I will deal with it in Part 2 of this workbook.

As I read the stories of the saints over the ages and as I watch the ministry that I have seen, I have learnt to just thank God when he blesses us. We see revivals at some times and not at others. Sometimes we witness healings, and other times we do not. We see people praying for years before they see God answering their prayer. And sometimes God acts when we have just made a simple prayer request.

But as we seek to use the gifts that God provides, he asks us to walk in faith and expectation. Every time we pray for healing, we should expect that God will heal, and accept it, if he doesn't. Every time we preach to people for conversion, we see the Holy Spirit stirring some hearts and they respond, while others do not respond.

We need to actively seek the gifts that God has for us and actively seek to be the means or flow of God's blessing. God gives the gifts in response to a need. We should expect this to happen as we minister.

If God does nothing when we pray, it does not mean our faith is inadequate. Maybe the person we are praying for has privately rejected God. Maybe God has other plans. God looks at the hearts of all involved. We should simply accept what God is or is not doing.

In the next workbook, we will talk about spiritual authority. Spiritual authority does not align to authority as seen in our culture. So maybe nothing has happened because we are praying against how God works. Or not understanding how the powers of evil work.

If we want to minister in the Gifts, we need to make sure our lives are being lived in Christ. That we are listening to the Holy Spirit and that we ask him if what we expected doesn't happen.

We should recognise and be thankful to God for all the gifts. The Body of Christ needs the variety of gifts. They are a part of how the church works. The community equally needs lesser gifts along with greater gifts. Our focus should not be on the gifts, but on the giver.

Just as we read in Acts, we should expect that God will be visible in each of our lives through his miraculous presence and his gifts on display, welcomed and celebrated, under the umbrella of Christ's love.

Action:

- h. Again, pause and take a breath. Stop and listen to Holy Spirit. Open your heart to him. Do you need to change your thinking about the gifts of the Holy Spirit?. What does God want to say to you about these gifts?***

What are the promises that we should be able to live from?

Jesus said I only do what I see the Father doing. We know how present God the Father was with Jesus. And the promise is that Jesus is in us in exactly the same way. Just stop for a minute, pause and think about it.

Jesus, the creator of this world and the God who died to show his love and win us, will be with and in us, every step of the way! That is incredible. Imagine what it would be like if you could hear and feel God every day, 24/7, at every step. Is that worth chasing after?

That is a long way from how most believers live.

There are only 2 verses in the New Testament that talk about us living “FOR” Christ. And both these verses relate to being in chains or jail, or persecuted for Christ. Nowhere does it say we live for Christ or work for Christ or witness for Christ. The New Testament teaches we live, work and witness with Christ and in Christ.

So, as we grow, we grow in Christ. As we see the fruit of the Spirit, they come in Christ. As we see the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit, we receive them in Christ. God is a vital part of these and so, as we ask for more, Christ leads us. We should respond to Christ’s plan and his leading. We should submit our minds and our hearts to his leading. In Christ is the heart of the loyal disciple of Christ.

Yet in almost every church today, you will hear the challenge of what you ought to do for Christ. Come out the front for Christ, live for Christ, work for Christ, give for Christ, witness for Christ, die for Christ. The emphasis is on what **you** have to do. And the language does not reflect that God will be with you every step of the way. The path of obligation is a long way from what Jesus wants for us. While we might use this language, we need to be careful that we actually live in Christ and minister in Christ.

The last thing we want to do as disciples of Christ is head off anywhere to any endeavour without Christ being with us. And to do that, we have to live in him. He is our guide. He will lead the way.

In this discussion, we want to focus clearly on Jesus and what he has said to us about the way we should live. These are the words of invitation.

Spread through the Epistles, Paul frequently talks about sin and living in an evil society. So, he uses terms like being a slave of Christ rather than a slave of sin. So, we see the terms slave, servant, soldier, spread through the Epistles. As disciples, we live for Christ and we do specific actions for Christ when we feel he has asked us to do them. So, the “for Christ” terminology is a part of our journey, but it needs to be within the context of a life lived “in Christ”, side by side.

Do you get the significance of this? Never alone. There is always the counsellor. Loving, encouraging, bringing hope, guiding, leading, resting, restoring, remaking your life as you grow in Christ. You do not have to do the work. It is Jesus who does the work. He truly lives in us. The Holy Spirit guides us in the way to live.

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)

Is this your experience? Is this your desire? Do you want to live it? It will change your perspective on ministry. It is life giving because Jesus pours his presence and power into our lives every step of the way.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here! (2Corinthians 5:17)

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

Action:

- i. ***Now that you have that perspective firmly planted in your mind, read Ephesians chapter 1 again.***

After he declares fifteen verses of glorious truths related to who we are in Christ, Paul recognises our need for God's Spirit to open the eyes of our hearts and to give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we will believe. Allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you from the passage.

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. (Ephesians 1:17-23)

Holy, faithful, grace, peace, every spiritual blessing, chosen, blameless, adopted, children, redeemed, forgiven, wise, chosen, marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.

This is the promise.

Action for next day:

- j. ***Again, pause, stop, and step into the presence of the Holy Spirit. Have a talk to him about these things in your life. Are they real? If not, what needs to happen? Ask the Holy Spirit?***

As we live in Christ, he will deal with our past

Our behaviour flows from what we believe in our hearts rather than what is in our minds. Thus, despite Scripture, there may be a gap between what we believe in our heads from Scripture and how we actually behave. These gaps arise because we behave according to our heart's beliefs. And sometimes we believe in our hearts incorrectly.

If someone has significantly wronged you, it is only natural that you will feel hurt and angry. There may even be a degree of righteous anger in that because the person hurting us has been dishonest or unloving. But if we hold on to that anger, then that becomes sin. While we know God has died for all sin and loves the individual, we cannot feel that way because we internally believe in our hearts that the person needs to be punished, and we cling to the anger because we want the person punished.

Our heart has given us an incorrect belief, and we have responded to it by hanging on to the anger.

Our heart beliefs are based on the things that we have experienced in life. The good and the bad. The true and the untrue.

Let me give you another example. If we have prayed and God answered our prayer to heal someone, our heart belief will be that God can heal and will heal. But if we have prayed, and he didn't answer our prayer, our heart belief may be that he doesn't hear or answer our prayers. And so our behaviour, our actions, may be driven by an incorrect heart belief.

While God both hears and answers our prayers, his response may have nothing to do with us and everything to do with the person we are praying for. Unless God tells us, we don't know.

As we go through life with all the complexity of our relationships, we pick up heart beliefs, that are not true or holy. And so we miss out on the best that Christ offers. We may live in fear. Or may have trouble loving. Or we may not experience his rest, or his presence, despite the promises in scripture.

We have many bad events in our lives, from when we were a child through to our adult lives. Some of the bad events may be natural events, such as a parent or a child dying. They may be unanswered prayers where we had set our hearts on something that never happened. They may be from experiences where we felt no one cared. Or someone hated us. These all may have left a mark on our lives and led to an incorrect heart belief.

The Bible tells us that life will be hard and that the world is full of injustice. Jesus told us that this would be the case in John 16:33, "In this world you will have trouble."

He also said in the same verse, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

For every instance where our heart belief is wrong, the Holy Spirit can change that heart belief as we allow him to minister in our lives. The Holy Spirit will challenge our heart beliefs just as God challenged Adam and Eve in Genesis. We can hear the questions that come from the Holy Spirit to challenge us. "Who told you that you were naked?" "Why are you angry?" Why is your face downcast? And again in the Gospels, Jesus asks "Why are you afraid?" "Why do you doubt?" "Where is your faith?"

So, if you see a gap between the promise of God and the way you behave, look closely at yourself with the Holy Spirit to understand where that heart belief that causes this gap came from. And the Holy Spirit will also show you the steps you need to make to rectify it.

The promise of the Holy Spirit as counsellor and guide includes the promise that he can deal with all these heart beliefs that are wrong. As we expose our lives to the Holy Spirit and listen to him, he will guide us to all truth, and help us align our feelings and behaviour to that truth.

We need to pay attention to our feelings, as they reflect our heart's beliefs. This is a part of what Ephesians 1 calls the eyes of our heart.

As we sit before the Holy Spirit and listen carefully, we know God knows the truth of our lives and despite whatever is wrong, we also know that he still loves us and has the solution. This is not a place of shame, but a place of being re-made into Christ's image.

With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith. (2Thessalonians 1:11)

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. (2Timothy 1:6-7)

You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. (John 15:3)

Action:

k. You may like to set aside a fair bit of time to talk to the Holy Spirit. Pause. Be quiet for a while. Think about the big issues in your life that have left their mark. You may still be angry about something from years back. Maybe you have a character trait that has been there for years. Trust? Love? Fear? Stress? Anger? Hate? Anxiety?

- **Take the time to list the events or the issues that are present in your life that you still have to deal with.**
- **Talk to the Holy Spirit about these one at a time. Ask him to heal the past and change you and your nature. What has to happen? Talk with the Holy Spirit to really deal with the issue.**

Spread them out across several days or weeks if need be. Leave space between them for the changes God will make to become real in your life. Let the Holy Spirit call you to the next one. But don't stop till you are done. The Holy Spirit will tell you when.

As we live in Christ, he will deal with our culture in us

We also may have picked up aspects of our culture that limit what God can do in our lives. We talked in Chapter 1 about culture and here, at the end, we come back to it. The culture we live in inevitably leaves a mark on us. If it is not a part of who we are in Christ, we need to leave it behind. We need the help of the Holy Spirit to change us. We need to be brave to step away from the sinful aspects of our culture.

But Jesus says that as we do this, he will bless us and that our visible difference will speak for the Gospel of Christ. Our willingness to step away from our culture will be one aspect of our witness to the surrounding people. And as we do this, we will shine like lights and proclaim the gospel in action. We may have a selfish ambition that we cannot control. Or we may focus on money. Or we have picked up attitudes toward women that reflect our culture and not Christ. Maybe there are memories of Hinduism that still drag us down. Maybe there are wrong ideas that we have picked up from the church. Maybe it is an acceptance of the fatalism that invades our culture, which plants the expectation that God is powerless.

Honesty

India has a reputation as being one of the least honest cultures in the world. The expectation of lying is often a part of the culture, and all parties understand the cultural expectations on how we speak to elders or bosses. But sometimes the lying is deliberate dishonesty.

In John 1:14 Jesus is spoken of as full of grace and truth.

The Word became a human being and lived here with us. We saw his true glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father. From him all the kindness and all the truth of God have come down to us. (John 1:14 CEV)

We have been talking throughout this journey about our walk with the Holy Spirit. Jesus, in talking about the Holy Spirit, calls him the Spirit of truth.

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. (John 16:13)

These uses of the word truth speak to the truth of the Gospel of Christ.

But we are also called to be honest.

All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one. (Matthew 5:37)

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. (Colossians 3:9-10)

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. (Ephesians 4:29)

Jesus, when criticising the Pharisees, said:

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (John 8:44)

How can the body of Christ, the believers, truly represent Jesus who is full of grace and truth, or the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, unless we speak truthfully? Yet, as I have ministered in India over many years, again and again I have found believers who have adopted the practices of our culture. This has made my heart ache and filled my spirit with sorrow as I have experienced it. The challenge to this can only come from the Holy Spirit. But that will only come as we give him the space and chance to challenge us.

Treatment of wives

Ephesians 5:1 to 6:9 talks about relationships in the family home. In Chapter 7 we talked about Jesus' guidance on how we love others. Clearly, God calls us to maintain good relationships with the people we interact with, including wives.

Our culture treats women as second-class citizens and sometimes as property. Sometimes this has led to a culture of wife beating. Jesus calls people of faith to have sanctified relationships between husband and wife. Just as in any other relationship, Jesus has strong words to say about love.

The Ephesians 5 passage says that both husbands and wives should submit to each other. In fact, Ephesians 5:21 says that all believers should submit to each other. This is a general comment that requires us to put others ahead of ourselves. It is a statement about humility. It is a statement about building others up.

The entire chapter is about us imitating Christ and the unity we share as we live aligned to the Holy Spirit under the headship of Christ, walking in the way of love, just as Christ did.

and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Ephesians 5:2)

The passage is about Christ. The individual statements are examples of how we imitate, follow, or live in Christ.

The word “submit” is the translation of the Greek word “hypotassō” expressed in this verse in the passive voice, which changes its meaning. This is a word about relationship and not about authority. It is about humility, building each other and serving each other in love. Verse 21 picks up this exact sense.

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Eph 5:21) Then there are specific examples for wives and then husbands. Here is the one for husbands.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. (Ephesians 5:25-28)

The guidance that we should love our wives, just as Christ loves the church, is a very high standard. Christ died for the church. Christ showed compassionate, sacrificial, first, perfect and active love for the church, and that is the standard for loving our wives. The verse uses the word love 5 times. It is all about love.

The same is true for wives loving husbands. We are all accountable to God for ourselves. We all honour God as we imitate God in being humble and putting others ahead of ourselves and walking the way of love.

Serving

This chapter has tried to build you up by recognising that the Spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, lives in us. We, therefore, can live enabled by the love, faith, power and authority that Jesus lived by. I have told you that you are members of the royal household, sons and daughters of the King. All of that is true and all of that enables us to live a life unlike anything we previously would have thought possible.

But Christ also calls us to walk in humility. To serve with humility. To defer to others and put them ahead of ourselves.

Our culture admires the leaders who stand tall. Our culture bends to the people in top positions and treats lowly people badly. They do what they are told. Our culture does not encourage us to be a servant of all. The culture at the time of Christ was exactly the same. The poor served the rich and powerful.

At the same time, we recognise that serving roles provide the poor with employment and the opportunity for a better life. So we are happy to being served by people who are employed to serve us. But still within the culture we can get very used to be served and can adopt an attitude of expectation and treating the servers as second-class citizens.

Being a disciple of Christ is very different. Have a look at these passages.

Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:43-45)

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbour as yourself.” (Galatians 5:13-14)

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. (1Peter 4:10)

As we have said many times, God looks at our hearts and what is happening there. Jesus is looking for us to have a serving heart and to treat everyone as people formed in the image of God. The Bible goes further, to say that one thing that directly flows from Christ in us, is our attitude to other people.

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. (Philippians 2:1-4)

Palestine in the time of Christ was much like the India I grew up in. There were few paved roads. The dirt roads were dusty. People wore sandals on their feet. As they walked during the day, their feet and ankles would get dusty and dirty. The custom of the day was that when they entered a house to visit or for a meal, a servant or a child would grab a basin, water and a towel and would wash the feet of the visitors.

We have the story in John 13:1-20, where Jesus, at the Passover meal, did exactly the same. No one had offered to wash their feet. The disciples may have looked at each other, wondering what had happened to the servant who washed feet. Something had gone wrong. No servant was going to appear. What would happen?

Some may have been quite happy to ignore the problem. They were rough fisherman. Others may have looked around to see who was going to volunteer to serve?

In your mind’s eye, you can see the picture. Jesus got up. He took off his outer clothing. He wrapped a towel around his waist, took the water and the basin, and started washing the disciples’ feet.

The Son of God became the servant. Jesus, aware of all that was about to happen with the crucifixion. So aware that he planned to pray for strength. Took the place of the servant to serve every disciple, including Judas.

He calls us to do the same.

Still today in India we take our shoes off, even in the city, before we enter a home. As you enter a house to minister and leave your shoes at the door, remember Jesus. You, too, have come to serve.

Regardless of your role or the place, hidden away in your heart, ready to appear when needed, is the heart of a servant. It is Jesus’ heart in you.

What other cultural challenges affect you and your practice of life in Christ?

Action:

- I. ***You may like to pause. Spend some time in reflection. What cultural practices cannot be associated with living in Christ? Think about your life in Christ. Spend some time with the Holy Spirit and allow him to speak into your life. Deal with whatever he shows you. Maybe there are many things that you need to take slowly and carefully over several weeks. Make a commitment to the Holy Spirit to do this. Talk to your fellow believers about what is on your list.***

As we live in Christ, he will deal with our present and our future

I have now touched on many specific ways of experiencing the Holy Spirit in our lives as we live in Christ to change our present reality:

- Recognising our true identity in Christ.
- Sanctification as we grow in Christ.
- The fruit of the Spirit growing in us as we live in Christ.
- Dealing with sin in our lives.
- Being filled by the Holy Spirit.
- Using the Gifts of the Spirit in ministry and outreach.
- Recognising the promises in scripture that we can live from.
- Dealing with the marks left on us from our past.
- Dealing with the marks left on us by our culture.

These all help us as we minister in the name of Jesus. These are the source of maturity, discernment, direction and power in our lives as we live in Christ.

But there is even more! As we live in Christ, the Holy Spirit will minister to us as a person, making us complete and whole as a person within ourselves. This is a ministry direct to our whole being from the Holy Spirit.

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. (1Thesalonians 5:23-24)

This passage talks about the wholeness or integration of our spirit, soul and body. The word whole comes from the Greek word “holos” which means entire and complete. The Holy Spirit makes us complete as a person, in whatever dimension that means. For each of us, that may mean different things.

As the Holy Spirit brings love into our being, we change. You will remember when we talked about love, we mentioned perfect love drives out fear. The Holy Spirit will take fear away as he pours God’s love like an oil of healing into us.

Or maybe you have a troubled heart and you need peace. The Holy Spirit will bring peace and his presence into our being so that we can live all the time from a place of peace.

Or do you need hope? Do you need a sense of purpose and have a strong sense of the reality of the hope that Jesus is to us for all of eternity? The Holy Spirit will do that, too. In Christ is the place where regardless of what the world throws at us, regardless of what the devil throws at us, we live in

peace, in hope, in rest, in love. Even in the middle of the most distressing situations. I can still know God's love and peace in my heart and bring hope into every situation. Our counsellor within. Our strength within. Our wholeness of spirit, soul and body.

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

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. (1John 4:18)

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, (Ephesians 2:14)

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7)

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you. (2Thesalonians 3:16)

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:27)

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, (Ephesians 1:18)

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)

The Holy Spirit will minister in us with the power that flows from our resurrected Lord. Our night will change into his glorious day. In truth, we will experience a transformation and renewal. As we live in Christ, we will change and prepare ourselves, becoming ready to meet our Lord. Ready to overcome the darkness. We will become God's light.

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. (John 15:11)

And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 13:52)

Action:

m. Again, pause, stop, and step into the presence of the Holy Spirit. Have a talk to him about these things in your life. Are they real? If not, what needs to happen? Ask the Holy Spirit?

- To what degree are you whole in spirit, soul and body?***
- What behaviour changes are you attempting to make in your life? Are you trying to change from the outside in, or from the inside out?***
- Are you asking God to make a transformation in your spirit, by the power of his Spirit?***

Holiness in Christ

When I first started listening and talking to God, much of our conversation was exactly in this place of dealing with the past issues in my life and cultural issues that affected me.

The image that God gave me of this process was from Malachi of the refiner and his fire refining us to pure gold or silver. If you head into the silver workers around India and watch them refine their silver. They will heat and melt the silver to make it responsive to the purifying process. As they heat it, the impurities float to the top and the silver worker removes it by skimming it from the top. And as he does this, the silver becomes increasingly like a mirror in which he can see his reflection. This is the image that Malachi gives us and is the picture of what the Holy Spirit does in our lives. Taking what is valuable and making it even more valuable. Allowing the character of Christ to be seen in our lives ever more clearly.

Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience. For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (Hebrews 4:11-13)

"This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." (Hebrews 10:16)

When we align our hearts with God, we will experience feelings of peace, joy, hope, rest, soul satisfaction, trust, faith, and, above all, love.

This is the life of being in Christ. In him is life. In him is love.

Action:

- n. You may like to pause. Be quiet for a while. Think about your life in Christ. Think what life would be like without Christ. Without the Holy Spirit. Worship him and give him thanks in whatever way you want to.*

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit, you may abound in hope. (Romans 15:13)

This benediction is appropriate because it speaks to the foundations that we have talked about. The love of Father God. The grace that Jesus enables. And the companionship of the Holy Spirit.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Corinthians 13:14)

Action:

Aim: The aim of this chapter was to introduce you to the most important truth of the gospel that you may never have heard of. And take it into your daily lived experience.

As you finish this chapter, do you have a sense of celebrating Jesus and the Holy Spirit and your life in Christ? Congratulations, you have finished. You should continue to walk in the Spirit as you walk with Christ in serving others, living, and doing ministry.

Action:

- o. Maybe you would like to reflect and write some notes down about your story and be prepared to share that with other people?***

As I thought about writing this book, I recognised that I too started my walk as a disciple without understanding and knowing the Holy Spirit. I had no idea what God had planned for me to walk into. I realised how much my story was similar to other believers who had never been told. So I used bits of my story to help tell about the incomparable riches of God's grace. And I know there is even more that I have not yet walked into.

We should always be ready to tell our story or bits of our story to encourage others.

What part of your story would encourage other believers? What part of your story would encourage un-believers to place their faith in Jesus?

My prayer partner regularly shares his dramatic conversion experience with non-believers. They always show interest and feel touched by God as he shares it.

Have a think about it. Pray about it. And if the Holy Spirit leads you, write something down so that when you have the opportunity, you know what you would say and how you would say it. Just make sure it points to God rather than to you.

What if I haven't really got anywhere during this entire period?

Put some heart attitudes in here?

Do you feel cheated because you have not experienced the things I have talked about? You need to get help and lean on a compassionate coach who loves God and who walks in the Spirit. Find one and get them to pray for you and walk with you. Learning from a book is not for everyone. It can be hard. Talk to your friends. Lean on them too. You need to press on to find your answers and to know the freedom of living in the Spirit. The natural way that we pass on our faith or learn about our faith is person to person. That may be all you need.

Ask Jesus to meet your need, where you are. To show you who you can lean on and to bless you as you search for Christ and seek to understand all he has for you.

There is one more chapter, but it is optional. It is about what to do when you just can't hear God. When he feels very distant and you feel all alone. But it also says find a compassionate coach.

There is also a chapter that has my prayer for you.

10. The Dark Night of the Soul

Aim: The aim of this chapter is to talk about times when God seems to have forgotten you and work out what to do about it.

Where was God? He seemed to have deserted me. I couldn't hear his voice. Nor could I sense his presence. I felt all alone. His grace seemed to have left my life. I prayed for the sick and nothing happened. Where was God?

One month became 3 months. And the months loomed large in front of me. And still he was not there.

Maybe there was unaddressed sin in my life? There are many passages in the Bible that talk about God leaving us because our sin has got too much for him. The prophets talk again and again about that. Ezekial, Isaiah, Jeremiah. He eventually organised for Israel to be conquered by Babylon and Persia because of their sin. He simply had to step away to see if they would come to their senses.

I scrutinised my life. But nothing seemed to be a problem.

Maybe God was allowing the devil to test me? I read Job. He certainly was in a black place and very depressed. He had lost everything. But was still talking to God.

But that didn't seem to be the case for me. Everything in my life was still OK. My family was OK. My church was OK. My job was OK. My finances were OK. I was still operating as a leader in the church. People in the church approved of my ministry. But in my mind, it was devoid of the power of God. I didn't feel God's presence.

For almost 3 years, I felt lost and deserted. No voice of the Holy Spirit within. Where was my God?

Have you ever felt like that? Has it gone on month after month?

Yes? Then this chapter is to encourage you. This is the sitting with God that you need at special times in your life.

No? You can skip this chapter. Unless you want to be prepared. It is not like the other chapters in its structure.

Bible Readings: Psalm 13, Exodus 3:1-10, Romans 8:18-39, Psalm 71. Read these passages slowly and thoughtfully before you read the chapter. Let Jesus speak to you from them. Try to read them all in the one day.

Other Bible Readings used in this chapter: Isaiah 32, Matthew 26:36-46, and 27:45-54, Psalms 22, 23, 24.

This chapter has a different structure. It will take a day or two to cover the content. But then, there are practical suggestions that you can apply over several months.

This chapter has these parts.

1. My Story
2. My Plan of Action
3. So what was it all about for me?
4. The Desert, the Wilderness
5. The Dark Night of the Soul

6. The important bit
7. Action:

My Story

I had been working in Canberra. Actually, I ended up with two jobs. In my 30s with a young family. Life was busy.

I was completing a large 6 year government project. For all my time there, I had been doing a small amount of volunteer work for a mission. I was on their board and did bits and pieces. Then, as we got towards the end of the project, I increased my time with the mission, working as pastor to the missionary staff. The mission work was exciting. God was working throughout the Pacific Islands and in Australia. Almost every week, we saw miraculous answers to prayer. Converts from the hippy NSW North Coast were joining to attend our training college. We saw God's grace in action almost everywhere we went.

It was thrilling to work with a team of people all giving 100% to God. All united in a common ministry. We had about 20 families living on campus. The majority were staff. The rest were missionaries waiting to go to a mission field. One of my jobs was to meet and pray with them about the call of God on their lives. Which field was God calling them to? That was a great experience.

We had many visitors. Every week, we had islanders and ex-hippies released from spiritual bondage. That was exciting.

But after 3 years, it was changing. Large egos were disrupting the unity. And I felt God leading us to leave. We stayed just long enough to complete the government project and then we headed back to my home city of Sydney.

The transition back to Sydney seemed to be orchestrated by God. The doors kept opening. My old employer immediately offered me a job. We found a house to come back to. Our old church, where people knew and loved us, was nearby. We quickly settled in.

And that was when I seemed to lose God. It felt like everything went dark and there was no light. I could no longer hear the Holy Spirit. Where was my Lord?

I couldn't work it out. I just did not know what was going on.

As I talked around to my church friends, people just did not understand my problem.

They had no expectation that God would speak to them, so did not understand what I was missing. That is just normal, they said. What is your problem? Read the Bible. But my heart was in pain. I thought I had lost my connection to my Lord.

I eventually worked out a strategy in my head. My heart was just struggling with the loss.

My Plan of Action

So I decided if I could not hear or feel God, I would chase after him. Somewhere out there in the dark was God.

So I would learn to love him in the dark.

I had read the story of Sadhu Sunder Sing. His story was called “How I found Christ”. He later changed it to “How I found Christ and Christ found me”. It was the story of a Hindu sadhu in the dark of India, searching for God.

So I decided I would learn to love God in the dark. And learn to trust him in the dark. And learn to grow my faith for him in the dark. In my mind, I was chasing after God. But now as I reflect, I am sure that through this period, the Holy Spirit was leading me, without me realising it.

These were the specific actions that I took. I spent time 2 evenings a week doing these things over the 3 years.

1. I wrote love letters to God.
2. I lost myself in the Psalms. I entered David’s pain and tried to connect to his praise and excitement.
3. I took familiar hymns and re-wrote them as prayers to God, focusing on the truths and discarding what I felt was froth.
4. I took psalms or scripture passages and re-wrote them to be in the first person, God to me.
5. I read devotional books written by people who did the same, mostly by a lady called Frances J Roberts.
6. I read books written by people who loved God and knew the Holy Spirit, mostly a pastor called A. W. Tozer, but there were others.
7. I stopped reading theological books. I needed a reality, not a set of beliefs.

As I did this, I realised I was looking for heart connections to God. My faith had always been very strong in my head. But now I needed my heart to become strong.

And after 3 years, the miracle happened. God started showing up again. I could hear his voice, feel his presence, and move under his guidance.

Given that no one around me understood what I was going through, I was mostly quiet about it.

But over the years, I slowly started putting what had happened to me into context and slowly recognised the hand of God guiding me each step of the way. As we look back, we can often see the hand of God that we could not see when we are in the middle of chaos.

While I felt I was in the dark, that was not the reality. John’s gospel repeatedly talks about Jesus as the light. Then in John 9:5 Jesus says “I am the light of the world”. If you are really in the dark, just a single match spreads a significant amount of light. God’s light was still all around me. But my inability to see that reflected my pre-occupation with my situation.

People having depression must feel a lot worse. But again, can often see some part of God’s light.

Over the years I heard a few people talking about the “Dark Night of the Soul”. As they talked, I recognised myself in what they were saying.

So what was it all about for me?

Now I believe that the period of darkness was God ordained and not Satan ordained. God needed me to grow in several areas, and this was his way to get me to focus and act. To stop and deal with a problem.

1. **God needed me to learn to love deeply. To love God deeply. To love from my heart, not my head. And learn how to love other people.**

This was by far the most significant outcome from this dark period. We need to love God deeply. We need to respond to the type of love he has for us.

Being busy comes at a significant cost. Relationships suffer. The important gives way to the urgent. I had neglected some of the most important things in life. Including my relationship with God. I needed to learn again.

How do you teach someone to love deeply? Does withdrawing love help? Maybe. You see perfect love in Jesus. You read and watch other people who love deeply.

I certainly changed, but the learning did not stop at the end of the three years. I still learn more about love as I journey with Jesus.

2. I needed to enter the place where deep calls to deep

Being busy comes at the cost of that relationship, which is most important. The relationship with Christ within. The tabernacle, the holy of holies, where deep calls to deep. Unity with Christ.

3. God needed me to learn to rest and to rest in him.

For 6 years, I had been working long, long, hours. The project had been incredibly demanding, but we had achieved outstanding success. God was in me as I worked. He equipped me with the skills I needed for an unusual design and the disciplines needed for a 200 person year project.

My 2nd job was also very demanding but more so from a spiritual perspective. God grew my understanding and my faith.

But God wants us to rest in him. He doesn't demand busyness. He wants our souls to be at rest in him, regardless of how busy life is.

4. I needed to learn to trust God and work to his agenda and have faith that he will pull it all together. I needed to learn that God himself is my leader and I can depend on him.

A mission organisation is an ideal workplace. Everyone is on board. They have all committed their futures to missionary service. By comparison, church is hard. Volunteers are unreliable and are part-timers. Their priorities will almost always have to put work ahead of ministry.

In the mission, I had learnt to depend on a strong team of leaders. I could follow their lead. At church, we did not have that.

I had also seen leaders fail. Jesus needed me to know that he would not fail me and regardless of those around, he would lead me, support me and guide me. That people in the future would fail and I needed to survive that in his power.

That means that God is even more important. I needed to learn to depend on the Holy Spirit for myself, rather than for ministry.

How does chasing God in the dark deliver the above things?

That is a good question.

Maybe it was sitting in God for 3 years? Maybe it was discerning the presence of God? As we traverse the wilderness, God works a miracle of grace in our hearts. We grow under his direct influence.

I don't know how it happened. I can't reproduce it. I had to experience it with God.

I certainly came out of the experience, a stronger disciple.

The Desert, the Wilderness

In our culture, people often see the desert as a bad place to be. It is dry, waterless, and the place of death. The word wilderness has that same connotation. People don't live there, it is devoid of life.

As disciples, we sometimes talk about a desert time when God was absent.

Yet God calls us to the desert. For him, the desert is a place of newness or restoration, of testing, of renewal and sanctification. It is in the desert where God communicates new plans and where major spiritual campaigns are born. It is a good place. A place we should welcome. It is a place where God speaks.

When God delivered the children of Israel from slavery out of Egypt, he led them through the Red Sea and into the desert. As they travelled, he revealed himself and his nature to them. He guided their path with the cloud and the pillar of fire. He met their physical needs with manna, water, and quails. And then, despite their complaining, at Mount Sinai, he established a covenant with them. He renewed the promise he made to Abraham and instructed them on the detail of the covenant. This included the 10 Commandments, which they broke even before Moses had completed transcribing the rest of the law from God at Mount Sinai.

God established his presence in the camp. The tabernacle was always there, reminding the Israelites of who he was and what he had done.

Despite this, again and again they failed him and again and again God forgave them or dealt justly with their sins.

When they failed to trust him to enter the promised land, he led them back into the desert. For 40 years they travelled till that generation had died. During this time, God gave them a second version of the law. Moses explained it all again and presented this second set of laws. Much of it was a repeat. But some of it was new, including the passage we looked at in Chapter 3, where God makes clear what he really wanted was their love.

And God then again led them into the promised land and with a new generation of Israelites with new leaders, they occupied the promised land.

The time in the desert gave the Israelites clarity about who God was and established his presence with them. The time in the desert established and documented their history with God going back to Abraham. It gave them their feast days. It established the religious laws and their social laws. It set their culture. It set apart the priests to serve and means of obtaining God's forgiveness. It established the practices of thanking God and the practices of making good their sins.

Truly, they knew who they were and what God was calling them to be, and to do, from those years in the desert.

The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness. For forty days, he fasted as he prepared and strengthened himself. It was his place of preparation for his mission. In this time of preparation, the Spirit would have led him. Father God would have talked to him. It was only on the cross that Jesus called, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" In the desert, God would have been there.

At the end of the forty days, Jesus had fully prepared himself to face Satan and his temptation. He knew who he was and what his mission was. He knew how he would fulfill the Father's plan for reconciliation and the new covenant.

Satan started with the temptation of food, to tempt Jesus to give in to his hunger. To serve himself rather than others.

Satan, even in the way he tempted Jesus, tried to sow seeds of doubt. "If you are the Son of God,". However, Jesus was aware of his identity. But can you trust God? Asked Satan, test him. But Jesus was confident in his Father.

But I have an easier plan offered Satan. And I can make you popular. But Jesus knew who he was and why he was there. His time in the desert had set his head and his heart. He knew who he was and what he was about to do.

God met with Elijah in the desert. John the Baptist lived in the desert. David hid in the desert. He wrote psalms in the desert.

God tested Abraham and led him to go somewhere 3 days journey with his son Isaac, away from home to a mountain. It was desolate and unpopulated. And there he struggled with God's commission and trusting God. Then at the last moment, having shown his trust in God, an angel changed the command and God blessed Abraham. It was a struggle of trust.

Isaiah eagerly expects the promise of the righteous King, who will transform the desert.

See, a king will reign in righteousness and rulers will rule with justice. Each one will be like a shelter from the wind and a refuge from the storm, like streams of water in the desert and the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land. (Isaiah 32:1-2)

till the Spirit is poured on us from on high, and the desert becomes a fertile field, and the fertile field seems like a forest. The LORD's justice will dwell in the desert, his righteousness live in the fertile field. (Isaiah 32:15-16)

The desert is a place of encounter with God. Distractions of life are no longer there and we are free to hear and respond. The Bible treats the desert as a place where God can speak to his people.

What happens within our hearts in the desert is a response to the Holy Spirit.

He counsels and we respond. Even when we don't clearly understand what the process is.

Whether it is a physical desert or a spiritual desert, Jesus will use it for good. In the desert, he will prepare the way and give us the resources we need for the next part of our journey.

The Dark Night of the Soul

More recently I found out the origin of the phrase the "Dark Night of the Soul". It was first used by a priest called St John of the Cross in 1577. He used it to describe his experience of God while in prison. His books are hard to read.

Buddhist, spiritualist, and new age authors have since picked up the term to describe a period of spiritual desolation. But that is not what this term really means.

For St John of the Cross, this was a period of preparation and being equipped, specifically for union with Christ. The things we talked about in the chapter on “in Christ”. While we go through the place of desolation, the entire experience is uplifting and brings us closer to Jesus.

He wrote two books. In the “Ascent of Mount Carmel”, he outlines how we are to prepare ourselves for union with Christ. Then in “The Dark Night of the Soul”, he outlines how God prepares us for union with Christ. Accepting that God has his own plan for preparing us that differs from our plan is life changing on its own.

The books have a poetic style, which makes them very difficult to follow. But the books are clearly looking to bring hope and comfort to the believer going through hard times when God seems absent.

He uses the word dark because, compared to God’s light, all we can see or experience or understand is relatively dark. We live in the dark, only because God is so brilliantly light. But we are also in the dark in our physical isolation and the absence of God.

He describes the characteristics of darkness with some similar comments to mine above about the desert. It is painful, but necessary. It is the place of contemplation.

He refers to scripture, but his thinking is largely based on his personal experience. He does not justify his experience from scripture.

I am not recommending the book, as it is far too difficult to follow. It reflects a different age, where self-harm and punishment was a spiritual discipline. It also assumes that mystic isolation is the path to God.

The important bit

What is important for the disciple who feels isolated from God is to recognise that many others have been there before us. God uses these times for good. The encouragement is to stay faithful and persevere. Focus on God and be open to learn from whatever is placed before you. If you cannot hear the Holy Spirit, then find solace and encouragement in the written word of God and in prayer.

Lean on your friends and find encouragement in the Bible. Work through Romans 8. And Romans 1-10.

Many of David’s psalms reflect an experience of desolation and separation from God. Jeremiah, the “weeping prophet” certainly reflects some of this feeling. Lamentations is a book written from exactly this place. And I have made some suggestions below.

The time of isolation will end and the Holy Spirit will come to you in a new way. You will unite with Christ.

But when the perfect comes (1 Corinthians 13:10, Colossians 3:14, 1 John 4:16-21)

Lord, how do I even describe it? Your perfect Love.

In the middle of bright sunshine, in the brightness of summer midday, there is something even brighter.

In the beauty of a morning dawn, there is something yet more beautiful.

In the glow and warmth of the summer sunset, there is someone who is yet warmer and whose presence presses in yet closer.

In all the smells that follow summer storm, there is a smell that is stronger and sweeter, that stays with me through the darkest night.

A life purposed. A life set aside. A life offered. A life given. A Father's love sacrificed.

Your love made visible, in human form. Nailed to a cross.

Your plan made visible, in human form, nailed to a cross.

Your plan of love.

How do I experience it?

How do I live within it?

I rest in your presence, in your love.

AA

Action:

This action section is different because we have just touched on the edges of a very complicated topic.

You may have seen that little poem called "Footsteps in the sand". It often comes with a picture of a double track of footprints through the sand that becomes a single track. And the poem asks God, "When I had my biggest need, why did you leave me?" And the response in the poem is "that was when I carried you".

Action: Spread these out over many days or weeks, or months

- a. Make sure that there is no sin in your life. There are scripture passages that say God can withdraw his presence because of sin. This would likely be significant deliberate walking away from God. Make sure it is not depression. Depression affects every aspect of your life. I would think it is a whole lot worse. It needs to be treated. The dark night of the soul is specific to our relationship with God.**
- b. Don't give up. Press on with whatever is in front of you. Embrace the experience and live in it. Don't waste your time feeling sorry for yourself. Use it constructively. See Hebrews 12:3-11.**
- c. Spend plenty of time with God. In prayer and reading the Bible. Even if it doesn't seem the same. Press on. Keep asking the Holy Spirit what you would normally ask, even if you don't hear a response. Express your pain, show your anger, tell God exactly how you feel and what you think. Be real. But also, try to know that God loves you and that he sings over you. Remember that Christ died for you, to set you free. Know that the Spirit is present around and above you. Trust that God knows what he is doing.**
- d. Read Matthew 26:36-46, and 27:45-54. Jesus has been here before you. Call out to Abba Father and pour your heart out to him.**
- e. Read Psalm 22. And think about it. Pause for a day. Read Psalm 23. Think about it. Pause for a day. Read Psalm 24. Think about it. Pray to God for whatever is on your heart.**
- f. As you read the Bible, test the passages to see if there is an application in your life.**
- g. Do the things that will grow your love of God, whatever that is. We are always better off if our love for God increases. What you do will depend on your nature and skills. Write, draw, paint, walk, sing, listen, gaze, look, inspect, compose, touch, exercise, contemplate, visit, sit in an empty church, sit in a packed church, sit beside a river, walk to a mountain place, withdraw to a desert place. Work as a labourer for a year or two. Create a garden. Grow a vegetable patch. Work in the**

fields. Some monasteries have rooms you can stay in. There are Christian ashrams. In India, some of the big cities have contemplative places.

- h. In the natural, just sense how you feel emotionally. There are bible passages that respond to many of our emotions. Just put your emotion into a "Bible passage on ..." search on your phone.*
- i. In times like this, it is natural to withdraw. To be on your own. But look for another way. Who can be your support, your stand in counsellor? Look to spend deep, useful time with someone you trust. Make sure that they know what you are expecting. Give them permission to speak, to cry, to challenge, to struggle, to love with you.*
- j. Commit each day to the Lord in whatever you are doing. Ask that in the events of the day, you will see and hear and feel something that draws you closer to God.*

11. My prayer for you

Well, that is the end of SIT in Jesus. Did it help you? Where are you now?

Earlier I gave you a list of verses that summarised what we had learnt up to that point.

Here is the list extended to add verses that summarise the whole of SIT in Christ and active holiness.

- Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20)
- For we know how dearly God loves us, because He has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with His love. (Romans 5:5)
- “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself.” (Luke 10:27).
- My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. (John 10:27)
- Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. (James 4:10)
- But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. - 2 Corinthians 12:9-10
- Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of the others. (Philippians 2:3-4)
- There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)
- Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:1-2)
- So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:18)
- I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:13)
- “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one-- I in them and you in me--so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” (John 17:20-23)
- God’s Spirit makes us loving, happy, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled. There is no law against behaving in any of these ways. And because we belong to Christ

Jesus, we have killed our selfish feelings and desires. God's Spirit has given us life, and so we should follow the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-25 CEV)

I pray this workbook has helped you to be closer to Jesus. To walk with him each day in the joy of his presence. To know his love at a deep level and be able to share that love with others.

The words in the workbook are not important. Just focus on living with the Spirit. He will lead you to all that you need. He will lead you to all truth. He will facilitate you to live in Christ.

I pray you will have a life filled with joy, faith, hope, and love, and that you will enjoy God's presence and find rest in him every day. As you press on to walk daily in the Spirit, may you find encouragement in what God has prepared for you to do. AMEN.

END of SIT, start of WALK.

Having sat with Jesus, you should now be ready to walk with Jesus. This means living every day in community, loving Jesus and others and ministering to people in the powerful name of Jesus. You have already been doing this all along the way. You have already studied the foundation for walk and as you did it you have been walking in Christ.

We walk with Jesus to serve him and others. I haven't written the workbook for walk at this stage. It picks up some additional topics that haven't been covered in this book.

If you follow Jesus through Matthew you notice that Jesus regularly goes away to a place of solitude and quietness. It starts in Matthew with Jesus going into the desert. He faced the temptations from the devil and equipped himself for mission.

Clearly between Matthew 7 and 8 he had again gone up the mountain for another heavy prayer session.

There is a pattern that emerges, and I like to name it against the physical locations that Jesus seems to follow.

On the mountain top (or in the desert, or in the garden, or in the quiet place) we meet with Jesus, just as Jesus talked with the Father. This is the place of preparation and equipping by God. We talk about mountain top experiences. These are experiences of God that refresh us, they build us up and they equip us for ministry. The domain that I have called SIT in Christ to be established. Ephesians 1-3 defines it.

As Jesus comes down from the mountain, he meets people and there he does ministry. He talks to people. He has meals with people. He preaches, he teaches, he heals, he explains, he trains the disciples; he spreads the Gospel. This is the domain that I have called WALK in Christ. (Ephesians 4:1 - 6:9)

But we will get to the valleys where the Devil attacks. Jesus had many attackers—this is the domain of STAND in Christ. These are the places of warfare. We cast out evil spirits. People try to kill or attack us. People oppose us. There is persecution. But we stand firm in Christ.

Jesus had much opposition. The Pharisees and religious leaders wanted to kill him. This is the place of spiritual warfare. Here we must STAND firm against the enemy who is evil and cunning. (Ephesians 6:10-20)

As disciples, we will constantly cycle through these domains just as Jesus did. If Jesus needed to go away to be refreshed in the quiet place, then we need to do that 100 times more. Jesus is with us, through his spirit in each domain. But what we ask of him will be different in each domain.

As a disciple, you will spend time in each place. Being a disciple means time alone with Jesus, time ministering in Jesus, and time in warfare in Jesus.

You will cycle around these phases.

If you need refreshment, don't battle on, but go back to Jesus and the quiet place to be refreshed.

Know yourself and intentionally move between these domains. The mountain top, the foothills and the valleys.

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me." (John 10:14)

The End of Part 1