



2021 Bible Study Series

# An Anchor for the Soul

By Rev Jackie Stoneman

# Foreword

What a year 2020 has been. Who would have dreamed at the beginning of the year that something would happen that would impact the whole world in the way that Covid-19 has done.

As I write these studies in September 2020, we still do not have a vaccine, there is no overseas travel and interstate travel is limited. People are still not able to meet again 'normally' at church and there is much distress about access to elderly people in nursing homes and the loss of jobs and financial hardships that so many are going through. Suicide rates are significantly up, and the level of anxiety is great. On the world stage there is enormous uncertainty about what will happen with the virus. Many countries are experiencing a second wave, nations are in chaos and conflict simmers just below the surface.

Of course, one of the big questions that many people are asking is 'what will happen next?' I guess by the time you are reading this you will know part of that answer, but I suspect that the anxiety, fear, struggle and uncertainties have not gone away.

I'm reminded of Jesus' words in Matthew 24:4-14 as he sought to prepare His disciples for the immediate future (the destruction of Jerusalem) and the long-term future (the second coming of Jesus).

*<sup>4</sup>Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. <sup>5</sup>For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many. <sup>6</sup>You will hear of wars and rumours of wars but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. <sup>7</sup>Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and*





*earthquakes in various places. <sup>8</sup>All these are the beginning of birth pains.*

*<sup>9</sup>"Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. <sup>10</sup>At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, <sup>11</sup>and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. <sup>12</sup>Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, <sup>13</sup>but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. <sup>14</sup>And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (N.I.V)*

This is not a comforting picture is it? We know that throughout history, since the time that Jesus spoke these words, these things have been happening. In our own day we can see how clearly these words are being fulfilled around the world. There is unprecedented persecution of Christians, a chaotic world, a loveless, selfish world and all sorts of false teaching leading people astray.

How are we to cope in this chaotic world? How are we to bring up our children, build relationships, cope emotionally, physically, mentally and spiritually and deal with the next crisis?

The writer to the Hebrew Christians was writing to a group of Christians who were struggling to cope in their world. We are not sure who the writer was, but we know that the ultimate writer was God. Here is what Hebrews 6:19-20a says:

*We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf.*

In these four studies we are going to look at four different ways that Jesus is the anchor for our soul. Each study stands by itself, but if you do all four then you will have a greater understanding of how Jesus enables us to not only survive but thrive in a scary world.

# Study 1: An Anchor for our soul in troubled times.

When we think about troubled times, we can think about a number of situations that we find ourselves in.

**For example:**

- Someone else has done something that has impacted us greatly. We are caught up in the impact of their actions e.g. a family member has committed a crime, a family break up and we can no longer see our grandchildren, a careless driver that caused an accident and we are now permanently disabled, a friend who spoke untruths about us to others and now our reputation is ruined.
- We are living in a world that is suffering from the consequences of people's selfishness in general e.g. people don't care to look after the world's resources and now we are all suffering, people acted selfishly in the pandemic and now we are facing the impact of the virus spreading further, leaders of nations want power and engage in aggression that impacts millions of people. We see 'evil' at work in the actions of people.
- We live in a broken world where 'nature' seems in chaos e.g. we are impacted by bush fires, floods, drought, cyclones, pandemics.
- We are impacted by unexpected illness in our own lives or those close to us e.g. disease, mental illness, stress.

Whatever our situation we can feel powerless to really do anything to change our circumstances. There can be a very real feeling that this has not been our fault and we feel what is happening to us is unfair.

Perhaps we even feel that God is powerless. He doesn't seem to be answering our prayers to change the situations. Our soul – the real us, can become shaky. We need an anchor for our soul in troubled times.

Let's look at a man in the Old Testament who would have understood these experiences because of the circumstances in his life. He wrote the book Lamentations. Many scholars believe that Jeremiah the prophet was the author of this book, but we can't be 100% sure. We do know that God was the ultimate author.

## **The situation the writer of Lamentation faced:**

The situation that the book of Lamentations deals with is the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. God, through prophets like Jeremiah, had predicted this catastrophic event. God was bringing this devastating event about because His people would not listen to him or live as His people. Now of course there were many individual people, like Jeremiah, who were faithful to God, and they got caught up in the disaster of what had happened. Their suffering was immense. In fact, for Jeremiah, He was used by God to warn the people and to plead with them to turn back to God. He spoke against the false prophets who were saying everything was OK. But he was ridiculed and persecuted and totally rejected. His suffering seemed totally unfair. The people themselves couldn't believe what had happened to them. Where was God in all of this destruction? Was He still their God? Was there any hope? Would the nation turn back to following God?

## QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION

Read Lamentations chapter 2. (Note this chapter is an acrostic poem. Each verse begins with the successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet)

### Lamentations 2

- 1 *How the Lord has covered Daughter Zion  
with the cloud of his anger!  
He has hurled down the splendour of Israel  
from heaven to earth;  
he has not remembered his footstool  
in the day of his anger.*
- 2 *Without pity the Lord has swallowed up  
all the dwellings of Jacob;  
in his wrath he has torn down  
the strongholds of Daughter Judah.  
He has brought her kingdom and its princes  
down to the ground in dishonor.*
- 3 *In fierce anger he has cut off  
every horn of Israel.  
He has withdrawn his right hand  
at the approach of the enemy.  
He has burned in Jacob like a flaming fire  
that consumes everything around it.*
- 4 *Like an enemy he has strung his bow;  
his right hand is ready.  
Like a foe he has slain  
all who were pleasing to the eye;  
he has poured out his wrath like fire  
on the tent of Daughter Zion.*
- 5 *The Lord is like an enemy;  
he has swallowed up Israel.  
He has swallowed up all her palaces  
and destroyed her strongholds.  
He has multiplied mourning and lamentation  
for Daughter Judah.*
- 6 *He has laid waste his dwelling like a garden;  
he has destroyed his place of meeting.  
The Lord has made Zion forget  
her appointed festivals and her Sabbaths;  
in his fierce anger he has spurned  
both king and priest.*

- 7 The Lord has rejected his altar  
and abandoned his sanctuary.  
He has given the walls of her palaces  
into the hands of the enemy;  
they have raised a shout in the house of the Lord  
as on the day of an appointed festival.
- 8 The Lord determined to tear down  
the wall around Daughter Zion.  
He stretched out a measuring line  
and did not withhold his hand from destroying.  
He made ramparts and walls lament;  
together they wasted away.
- 9 Her gates have sunk into the ground;  
their bars he has broken and destroyed.  
Her king and her princes are exiled among the nations,  
the law is no more,  
and her prophets no longer find  
visions from the Lord.
- 10 The elders of Daughter Zion  
sit on the ground in silence;  
they have sprinkled dust on their heads  
and put on sackcloth.  
The young women of Jerusalem  
have bowed their heads to the ground.
- 11 My eyes fail from weeping,  
I am in torment within;  
my heart is poured out on the ground  
because my people are destroyed,  
because children and infants faint  
in the streets of the city.
- 12 They say to their mothers,  
"Where is bread and wine?"  
as they faint like the wounded  
in the streets of the city,  
as their lives ebb away  
in their mothers' arms.
- 13 What can I say for you?  
With what can I compare you,  
Daughter Jerusalem?  
To what can I liken you,  
that I may comfort you,  
Virgin Daughter Zion?

*Your wound is as deep as the sea.  
Who can heal you?*

*14 The visions of your prophets  
were false and worthless;  
they did not expose your sin  
to ward off your captivity.  
The prophecies they gave you  
were false and misleading.*

*15 All who pass your way  
clap their hands at you;  
they scoff and shake their heads  
at Daughter Jerusalem:  
"Is this the city that was called  
the perfection of beauty,  
the joy of the whole earth?"*

*16 All your enemies open their mouths  
wide against you;  
they scoff and gnash their teeth  
and say, "We have swallowed her up.  
This is the day we have waited for;  
we have lived to see it."*

*17 The Lord has done what he planned;  
he has fulfilled his word,  
which he decreed long ago.  
He has overthrown you without pity,  
he has let the enemy gloat over you,  
he has exalted the horn of your foes.*

*18 The hearts of the people  
cry out to the Lord.  
You walls of Daughter Zion,  
let your tears flow like a river  
day and night;  
give yourself no relief,  
your eyes no rest.*

*19 Arise, cry out in the night,  
as the watches of the night begin;  
pour out your heart like water  
in the presence of the Lord.  
Lift up your hands to him  
for the lives of your children,  
who faint from hunger  
at every street corner.*

20 *"Look, Lord, and consider:  
Whom have you ever treated like this?  
Should women eat their offspring,  
the children they have cared for?  
Should priest and prophet be killed  
in the sanctuary of the Lord?*

21 *"Young and old lie together  
in the dust of the streets;  
my young men and young women  
have fallen by the sword.  
You have slain them in the day of your anger;  
you have slaughtered them without pity.*

22 *"As you summon to a feast day,  
so you summoned against me terrors  
on every side.  
In the day of the Lord's anger  
no one escaped or survived;  
those I cared for and reared  
my enemy has destroyed." (N.I.V)*

► 1. What has happened to these people?

► 2. What would it mean to them to have lost their identity as a nation, their temple, to discover that the prophets they had listened to (not Jeremiah) turned out to be false prophets, that they were so desperately hungry and worst of all that God seemed to have abandoned them? Think about some of the emotions that they would have been feeling. Think about what they might have been saying to themselves as they went through this disaster.

- 3. Read Lamentations 3:1-20. This is the writer who is speaking. Remember he has been caught up in the consequences of his people not listening to God. His world is totally broken.

**Lamentations 3 (This chapter is also an acrostic poem)**

- 1 *I am the man who has seen affliction  
by the rod of the Lord's wrath.*
- 2 *He has driven me away and made me walk  
in darkness rather than light;*
- 3 *indeed, he has turned his hand against me  
again and again, all day long.*
  
- 4 *He has made my skin and my flesh grow old  
and has broken my bones.*
- 5 *He has besieged me and surrounded me  
with bitterness and hardship.*
- 6 *He has made me dwell in darkness  
like those long dead.*
  
- 7 *He has walled me in so I cannot escape;  
he has weighed me down with chains.*
- 8 *Even when I call out or cry for help,  
he shuts out my prayer.*
- 9 *He has barred my way with blocks of stone;  
he has made my paths crooked.*
  
- 10 *Like a bear lying in wait,  
like a lion in hiding,*
- 11 *he dragged me from the path and mangled me  
and left me without help.*
- 12 *He drew his bow  
and made me the target for his arrows.*
  
- 13 *He pierced my heart  
with arrows from his quiver.*
- 14 *I became the laughingstock of all my people;  
they mock me in song all day long.*
- 15 *He has filled me with bitter herbs  
and given me gall to drink.*
  
- 16 *He has broken my teeth with gravel;  
he has trampled me in the dust.*
- 17 *I have been deprived of peace;  
I have forgotten what prosperity is.*
- 18 *So I say, "My splendor is gone  
and all that I had hoped from the Lord."*

*19 I remember my affliction and my wandering,  
the bitterness and the gall.  
20 I well remember them,  
and my soul is downcast within me.(N.I.V.)*

- What is he experiencing emotionally as he lives through this time?
- How would you respond to his emotions? What would you want to say to him?

► 4. Let's see how this person deals with the devastation in his life. Read Lamentations 3:21-26.

#### **Lamentations 3:21-26**

*21 Yet this I call to mind  
and therefore I have hope:*

*22 Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed,  
for his compassions never fail.*

*23 They are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.*

*24 I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion;  
therefore I will wait for him."*

*25 The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him,  
to the one who seeks him;*

*26 it is good to wait quietly  
for the salvation of the Lord. (N.I.V)*

Where is God in all of this for him?

Did you notice that the writer does two things?

Firstly, he expresses his anguish to God in absolute honesty. It's encouraging isn't it that God organised these expressions of distress called laments to be in the Bible. He wants us to express the depth of our pain to Him.

Secondly, the writer deliberately reminds himself of the character of God. He 'talks to himself' about God's character and makes a deliberate decision to wait for God to act because he knows that God will act in His good time. His feelings and knowledge work together. The character of the Lord is an anchor for His soul in the midst of chaos. He may not understand God's plan or timing, but He is sure of God's character.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Do you feel that you can be absolutely honest with God when you are in distress? If not what might be stopping you?
- How do you 'talk to yourself' about God to steady yourself? Is there anything that you notice about your 'self-talk'?
- When you are with a Christian friend who is distressed, do you allow them to express their distress or do you try to stop them doing that? Do you come in too soon with something positive from God's word and they don't feel heard? How can you develop your 'listening skills' to be more like God's? To connect with feelings and knowledge?

## ► GOING FURTHER

We have a great advantage over the writer of Lamentations. We sit at the other side of the cross and resurrection. We have the whole of the scriptures. We have so many more examples of God's faithfulness to ground ourselves in. Let's return to our theme verse:

*We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. (Hebrews 6:19-20a)*

The writer of Lamentations would have been so familiar with the layout of the temple. This was one of the causes of great distress at the time – the temple had been destroyed. In the inner section of the temple there was a curtain that separated the rest of the temple from the 'Holy of Holies'. This especially represented God's presence with His people. The high priest was the only person who could enter the Holy of Holies and that was only once a year on the Day of Atonement. This was the day the High priest offered a sacrifice for the sins of the nation.

Our verse in Hebrews reminds us that Jesus is our high priest. He has dealt with our sins. He not only offered the sacrifice for sins – he was the sacrifice for sins. If we have put our trust in Jesus, then sin has been dealt with. We are secure in our relationship with God. It is here that we see God's compassion and faithfulness. God's character was clearly demonstrated in Jesus' death and resurrection. God has fulfilled His promises. God loved us so much that Jesus died for us. Jesus has made us right with God. This is so important to understand if we are to have an anchor for our soul. Remember Jesus said the world would be chaotic before He returns. Is your soul anchored in God's love for you? Don't look at the circumstances of life for an anchor. Cling to the cross of Jesus.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How would you describe your soul anchor at the moment?
- What is one truth that you know about God that can be an anchor for your soul?
- Have you been looking to the circumstances of your life to see if God loves you?

- How can you shift to seeing the Jesus death and resurrection as central to your security?

## ► AN EXAMPLE OF HAVING YOUR SOUL ANCHORED IN JESUS.

The author, Horatio G. Spafford (1828-1888), was a Presbyterian layman from Chicago. He had established a very successful legal practice as a young businessman and was also a devout Christian. Among his close friends were several evangelists including the famous Dwight L. Moody, also from Chicago.

In 1871, Horatio and his wife's young son died of pneumonia. In the same year Spafford's fortune evaporated in the wake of the great Chicago fire. Having invested heavily in real estate along Lake Michigan's shoreline, he lost everything overnight.

In 1873, he planned a European trip for his wife and four daughters. In November of that year, due to unexpected last-minute business developments, he had to remain in Chicago, but sent his wife and four daughters on ahead as scheduled on the S.S. Ville du Havre. He expected to follow in a few days.

About four days into the crossing of the Atlantic, the Ville du Harve collided with a powerful, iron-hulled Scottish ship, the Loch Earn. Suddenly, all of those on board were in grave danger. Anna hurriedly brought her four children to the deck. She knelt there with Annie, Margaret Lee, Bessie and Tanetta and prayed that God would spare them if that could be His will, or to make them willing to endure whatever awaited them. Within approximately 12 minutes, the Ville du Harve slipped beneath the dark waters of the Atlantic, carrying with it 226 of the passengers including the four Spafford children.

A sailor, rowing a small boat over the spot where the ship went down, spotted a woman floating on a piece of the wreckage. It was Anna, still alive. He pulled her into the boat and they were picked up by another large vessel which, nine days later, landed them in Cardiff, Wales. From there she wired her husband a message which began, "Saved alone, what shall I do?" Mr. Spafford later framed the telegram and placed it in his office.

Another of the ship's survivors, Pastor Weiss, later recalled Anna saying, "God gave me four daughters. Now they have been taken from me. Someday I will understand why."

Spafford left immediately to join his wife. This hymn is said to have been penned as he approached the area of the ocean thought to be where the ship carrying his daughters had sunk.

Horatio and Anna's faith in God never faltered. He later wrote to Anna's half-sister, "*On Thursday last, we passed over the spot where she went down, in mid-ocean, the waters three miles deep. But I do not think of our dear ones there. They are safe..... dear lambs*".

*Naturally Anna was utterly devastated, but she testified that in her grief and despair, she had been conscious of a soft voice speaking to her, "You were saved for a purpose!" She remembered something a friend had once said, "It's easy to be grateful and good when you have so much but take care that you are not a fair-weather friend to God."*

Following the sinking of the Ville du Havre, Anna gave birth to three children, Horatio Goertner, (1877), Bertha Hedges (March 24, 1878) and Grace (January 18, 1881). On February 11, 1880, Horatio died of scarlet fever at age three.

After the birth of daughter Grace in 1881, Spafford and his wife moved to Jerusalem out of a deep interest in the Holy Land. There they established the American Colony, a Christian utopian society engaged in philanthropic activities among Jews, Muslims and Christians.

### **It is well with my soul**

1. *When peace, like a river,  
attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot,  
Thou hast taught me to say,  
It is well, it is well with my soul*

### **Chorus**

*It is well (it is well)  
with my soul (with my soul)  
It is well, it is well with my soul*

2. *Though Satan should buffet,  
though trials should come,  
Let this blessed assurance control,  
That Christ has regarded  
my helpless estate,  
And hath shed His own blood for my soul*
3. *My sin, oh the bliss  
of this glorious thought!  
My sin, not in part but the whole,  
Is nailed to the cross,  
and I bear it no more,  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!*
4. *And Lord haste the day  
when the faith shall be sight,  
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;  
The trump shall resound,  
and the Lord shall descend,  
Even so, it is well with my soul  
(Public Domain)*

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What is your reaction to the story and the Hymn 'It is well with my soul'? (Think about the examples of both husband and wife)
- What 'anchor for your soul' are you taking away from today's study that will help you live faithfully in today's distressing world?



## Study 2: An Anchor in times of failure

In life, failure can be a devastating experience. It can really shake us. It may be that we have experienced failure in a relationship, or in a task we undertook, perhaps we failed an exam or have had a major moral or financial failure.

For some people it may be a specific sin that they are so ashamed of. Perhaps it has had great consequences and we simply can never forgive ourselves or believe that God has forgiven us.

For other people there is a constant sense of never measuring up, always feeling insecure in ourselves.

In both these situations we may know in our heads that Jesus has forgiven us and accepted us, but that knowledge hasn't permeated into the core of our being. As a result, instead of being free to be other-people centred and God centred, we are constantly focusing on how we don't measure up. We need an anchor for our soul.

Not all failure is wrong. Thomas Edison's teachers said he was "too stupid to learn anything." He was fired from his first two jobs for being "non-productive." As an inventor, Edison made 1,000 unsuccessful attempts at inventing the light bulb. However he saw his failure in a positive way. He now knew thousands of things that didn't work. But the sort of failure we are going to look at today is not like failing at inventing something.

God knows that if we are to have a solid anchor for our soul, we must face the ultimate failure that every human being has. That is the failure to be God's person and to live God's way. The Bible calls it sin and its consequences are catastrophic. Today we are going to look at three people who had to come to terms with the sin issue in their lives before their lives could be transformed.

## ► 1. David

David was the great King of Israel whom God described as a 'man after my own heart' (1 Samuel 13:14). He had been given incredible promises by God that included a Kingship through his descendants that would never end (2 Samuel 7). David had been passionate about following God and been faithful to God even through the terrible years of Saul trying to kill him. He waited for God's timing to be the King of Israel instead of fighting Saul for it.

However, when he was the King he came to a defining moment of failure. It is recorded in 2 Samuel 11. David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then organised for her husband Uriah to be killed in a battle.

In 2 Samuel 12, Nathan the prophet addressed David's sin through a story. David initially seemed to have no ability to own his sin. He didn't see the connection with Nathan's story until Nathan said, 'You are the man.' David finally owned his sin and acknowledged that He had sinned 'against the Lord'. Now of course he had also sinned against Bathsheba and her husband Uriah, but fundamentally he had sinned against God. We have some Psalms that David wrote about his repentance that are very helpful for us to look at.

### Psalm 51

*For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.*

- 1 Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your unfailing love;  
according to your great compassion  
blot out my transgressions.
- 2 Wash away all my iniquity  
and cleanse me from my sin.
- 3 For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is always before me.
- 4 Against you, you only, have I sinned  
and done what is evil in your sight;  
so you are right in your verdict  
and justified when you judge.
- 5 Surely I was sinful at birth,  
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
- 6 Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;  
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.
- 7 Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;  
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
- 8 Let me hear joy and gladness;  
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
- 9 Hide your face from my sins  
and blot out all my iniquity.
- 10 Create in me a pure heart, O God,  
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

- 11 Do not cast me from your presence  
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
- 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation  
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.
- 13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways,  
so that sinners will turn back to you.
- 14 Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,  
you who are God my Saviour,  
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.
- 15 Open my lips, Lord,  
and my mouth will declare your praise.
- 16 You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;  
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.
- 17 My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart  
you, God, will not despise.
- 18 May it please you to prosper Zion,  
to build up the walls of Jerusalem.
- 19 Then you will delight in the sacrifices of the righteous,  
in burnt offerings offered whole;  
then bulls will be offered on your altar. (N.I.V)

### QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. **Verses 1-6** — How did David see his wrong-doing in relation to God?
2. **Verses 7-17** — How did David ask God to deal with his sin?
3. **Verses 10,12,13, 15, 18** — As David experienced God's forgiveness how did he move from the inner turmoil to a renewed outward focus? What can we learn from this?

## Psalm 32

- 1 *Blessed is the one  
whose transgressions are forgiven,  
whose sins are covered.*
- 2 *Blessed is the one  
whose sin the Lord does not count against them  
and in whose spirit is no deceit.*
- 3 *When I kept silent,  
my bones wasted away  
through my groaning all day long.*
- 4 *For day and night  
your hand was heavy on me;  
my strength was sapped  
as in the heat of summer.*
- 5 *Then I acknowledged my sin to you  
and did not cover up my iniquity.  
I said, "I will confess  
my transgressions to the Lord."  
And you forgave  
the guilt of my sin.*
- 6 *Therefore let all the faithful pray to you  
while you may be found;  
surely the rising of the mighty waters  
will not reach them.*
- 7 *You are my hiding place;  
you will protect me from trouble  
and surround me with songs of deliverance.*
- 8 *I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;  
I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.*
- 9 *Do not be like the horse or the mule,  
which have no understanding  
but must be controlled by bit and bridle  
or they will not come to you.*
- 10 *Many are the woes of the wicked,  
but the Lord's unfailing love  
surrounds the one who trusts in him.*
- 11 *Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous;  
sing, all you who are upright in heart!*  
(N.I.V)

### QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

- **Verses 1-5** — What were the lessons that David learnt about dealing with sin?
- **Verses 6-11** — As David accepted God's forgiveness, he again turned his attention outward to encouraging others. What encouragement did he give?

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

- When you are dealing with sin in your life what do you notice about how it impacts you physically, emotionally, mentally, socially?
- How do you deal with sin and failure in your life? Do you minimize its seriousness, blame others, get caught in ongoing guilt and shame or something else?
- As people who now know that Jesus has paid the price for our sin, how do these passages encourage you to:
  - deal with sin in your life?
  - know that you are forgiven and live a life of thankfulness?
  - be non-judgemental in relating to others 'who sin'?
  - have an outward focus to be living for Jesus?

## ► 2. The Apostle Paul

We know that Paul (or Saul as he was originally known) was a very dedicated and devoted Jewish Pharisee. He actually sincerely believed that by persecuting and killing Christians he was serving God! As you read how Paul described himself think about what a shock it must have been to discover the truth about himself. He may have been sincere, but he was sincerely wrong. He was actually persecuting and killing the very people that God had saved!

In this first passage Paul was dealing with false teachers who were saying that people should come to Jesus and keep the Jewish law – especially the law of circumcision. In Paul's response to them we get an insight into how he saw himself as a 'religious person' before he became a Christian and how he then saw himself as a Christian.

### Philippians 3:3-14

*<sup>3</sup>For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh— <sup>4</sup>though I myself have reasons for such confidence.*

*If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup>circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup>as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.*

*<sup>7</sup>But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup>What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup>and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ — the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. <sup>10</sup>I want to know Christ — yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup>and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.*

*<sup>12</sup>Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. <sup>13</sup>Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (N.I.V)*

### QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

- What do we learn about Paul's background and how he was trying to have a relationship with God before he became a Christian?
- What changed for him when he became a Christian and was relying on what Jesus had done for him through Jesus' death and resurrection? How was Jesus impacting Paul's Christian life as He sought to serve Jesus?

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

- When you think about your sin and failures, how does this passage help you to 'rest' in what Jesus has done for you through His death and resurrection?
- How does this passage help you as you still live with sin and failure?

## 1 Timothy 1:12-17

*<sup>12</sup>I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service, <sup>13</sup>even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, <sup>14</sup>and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup>The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners — of whom I am the foremost. <sup>16</sup>But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience, making me an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life. <sup>17</sup>To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen. (N.I.V)*

### QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

- **Verses 13a and the end of 15** — How did Paul describe his identity before he became a Christian? (Paul was speaking from a Christian perspective looking back). How was this identity different from the identity he would have had as a Pharisee and Jewish person?
- **Verses 14-17** — What evidence do you see that Paul had been able to see himself in a different way since he acknowledged who he really was and had put his trust in Jesus?

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

When we really understand how God sees us in our sinful state and that there is nothing we can do to 'earn' a relationship with God, the Gospel message is the most astonishing news we could ever hear. It changes our identity. Paul wrote about this to the Corinthian Church when he said in 2 Corinthians 5:17 — 'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!'

To be able to really see what we have been like before God, is a painful experience, but if we really apply the Gospel message it leads us to be able to truly rejoice in our new identity. We can be confident in that new identity because God has brought it about, not us.

- How are you living life at the moment? Are you defined by your old identity – a sinner who is always failing? OR Are you acknowledging your old identity but you are defining yourself by your new identity – forgiven and made a new creation in Christ? What difference does it make to how you live your life? What difference does it make to your relationship with God?
- As you have looked at David and Paul today where would you put yourself in their stories? (for example do you look at your life and see very specific things like David did or do you identify more with Paul who was a very religious person?)
- Where is your soul anchored at the moment in terms of your failures and security? How can you keep on growing in having a more secure anchor for your soul?

### ► 3. John Newton (1725-1807)

John's mother was a Christian who taught him the Bible at an early age, but she died of Tuberculosis when he was 7. His father was not a good example to him. At 11 he began going on sea voyages with his father who was a merchant navy captain. He was a rebellious young man and eventually he was flogged. He said, "I sinned with a high hand, and I made it my study to tempt and seduce others."

He became involved in capturing natives from West Africa to be sold as slaves around the world.

He became the captain of the Greyhound, a Liverpool ship, in 1747, and on its homeward journey, the ship was overtaken by an enormous storm. He became very afraid during that storm and began to read the book 'The imitation of Christ' by Thomas a Kempis. God used that book to lead him to a genuine conversion.

He continued on as the captain of several slave ships hoping to restrain the worst excesses of the slave trade and be a witness to the crew.

In 1755, John left the sea and took up an office job and held Bible studies in his home. He was influenced by the Wesley's and George Whitefield. He became increasingly disgusted about the role he had played in the slave trade and became an Anglican minister. It is interesting that John's mother had prayed for him that one day he would become a minister. He became the minister at a church called Olney near Cambridge, England. He was a powerful preacher and he also introduced simple heartfelt hymns into the services. He worked with his friend William Cowper and in 1779 produced the Olney Hymnal of which Amazing Grace was part.

And in 1779 he became rector of St. Mary's, Woolnoth in London. His ministry included not only the London poor and the merchant class but also the wealthy and influential. William Wilberforce, a member of Parliament and a prime mover in the abolition of slavery, was strongly influenced by John Newton's life and preaching. Newton wrote "Thoughts on the African Slave Trade", based on his own experiences as a slave trader. This writing was very important in securing the British abolition of slavery.

Newton lived to be eighty-two years old and continued to preach and have an active ministry until beset by fading health in the last two or three years of his life. Even then, Newton never ceased to be amazed by God's grace and told his friends, "My memory is nearly gone; but I remember two things: That I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Saviour".

#### **Amazing Grace (written in 1779)**

*Amazing grace! How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me.  
I once was lost, but now am found,  
Was blind, but now I see.*

*'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,  
And grace my fears relieved.  
How precious did that grace appear  
The hour I first believed.*

*Through many dangers, toils and snares  
I have already come;  
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far  
And grace will lead me home.*

*The Lord has promised good to me  
His word my hope secures;  
He will my shield and portion be,  
As long as life endures.*

*Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,  
and mortal life shall cease,  
I shall possess within the veil,  
A life of joy and peace.*

*When we've been there ten thousand years  
Bright shining as the sun,  
We've no less days to sing God's praise  
Than when we've first begun.  
(Public Domain)*

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What is your reaction to the story and the hymn 'Amazing Grace'?
- What 'anchor for your soul' are you taking away from today's study that will help you live faithfully in dealing with failure?



## Study 3: An Anchor in dry times

*Jesus said in Matthew 24:12-13 'Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved'*

We live in a time when we are constantly bombarded with messages and information. We have instant coverage and graphic pictures of the disastrous situations right round the world. We are being exposed to the evil in the world in a way that we never have been before.

The pace of life for most people is increasing. Even retired people often say they never know how they had time to work or raise a family. As wonderful as technology is with its time saving promises, the effect is to enable us to cram more and more activities into our lives. That also has a very negative effect on relationships. Not only do we have the vast majority of people in our society exhausted and stressed, we have another group of vulnerable and often aged people who find that no-one has time for them and they experience great loneliness.

Even with the lockdowns during Covid-19, many people experienced a slower pace, but the stress of what was happening, the uncertainty of the future, the isolation or the being on top of one another in a family, financial concerns and health concerns took their tolls. Then there was the challenge of church and maintaining Christian fellowship. There were so many ongoing challenges.

Add to all of this the struggle that many Christians are going through with their spiritual lives. Some are struggling to pray or attend church (in whatever form that takes), some are disappointed that God doesn't seem to answer prayers or give them answers to ongoing problems. Others are struggling with God's people. They have been hurt by people, they 'get nothing out of church or Bible study', they are struggling with compassion fatigue – they can't cope with hearing about one more problem.

No wonder Jesus warns us that our love can grow cold and that we need to stand firm to the end. How can we do this? In this study we are going to explore some principles from the Bible that will encourage us to stay fresh and growing in our relationship with God.

The early church lived in daily expectation of the second coming of Jesus. Martin Luther said, 'I live as though Jesus Christ had been crucified yesterday, had risen this morning and was coming again tomorrow'.

## ► 1. The Psalms give us a road map for a rich relationship with God.

### Psalm 1

- 1 *Blessed is the one  
who does not walk in step with the wicked  
or stand in the way that sinners take  
or sit in the company of mockers,*
- 2 *but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,  
and who meditates on his law day and night.*
- 3 *That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,  
which yields its fruit in season  
and whose leaf does not wither -  
whatever they do prospers.*
- 4 *Not so the wicked!  
They are like chaff  
that the wind blows away.*
- 5 *Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.*
- 6 *For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.*

### QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

This Psalm is really the key to all the Psalms as it gives the foundation for a life that is committed to God's way.

- What is the contrast between the activities of the person who is living God's way and the wicked person? What is the outcome of those differences?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- How do you see the imagery of v3 working out in a person's life? How is it connected to v2?

- If following God's ways and staying connected to him means we prosper, then how come so many of the Bible characters (including Jesus) had challenging and difficult lives? What might prospering or flourishing mean for a Christian?

## Psalm 42

- 1 *As the deer pants for streams of water,  
so my soul pants for you, my God.*
- 2 *My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.  
When can I go and meet with God?*
- 3 *My tears have been my food  
day and night,  
while people say to me all day long,  
"Where is your God?"*
- 4 *These things I remember  
as I pour out my soul:  
how I used to go to the house of God  
under the protection of the Mighty One  
with shouts of joy and praise  
among the festive throng.*
- 5 *Why, my soul, are you downcast?  
Why so disturbed within me?  
Put your hope in God,  
for I will yet praise him,  
my Saviour and my God.*
- 6 *My soul is downcast within me;  
therefore I will remember you  
from the land of the Jordan,  
the heights of Hermon — from Mount Mizar.*
- 7 *Deep calls to deep  
in the roar of your waterfalls;  
all your waves and breakers  
have swept over me.*
- 8 *By day the Lord directs his love,  
at night his song is with me -  
a prayer to the God of my life.*
- 9 *I say to God my Rock,  
"Why have you forgotten me?  
Why must I go about mourning,  
oppressed by the enemy?"*
- 10 *My bones suffer mortal agony  
as my foes taunt me,*

*saying to me all day long,  
"Where is your God?"*  
11 *Why, my soul, are you downcast?  
Why so disturbed within me?  
Put your hope in God,  
for I will yet praise him,  
my Saviour and my God.*

#### QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

This Psalm is an example of David's honesty with God as He poured his heart out in distress but as he also clung to hope.

- What do you observe about David's honesty in this Psalm and what does that tell us about his relationship with God?
- How does David deal with His distress in terms of trusting God? How does he 'talk to himself' in his distress?
- In what ways can you identify with what David says in this Psalm?

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

- How might a commitment to grounding our daily lives in the scriptures, developing a very honest relationship with God and reminding ourselves to put our hope in God help us to stay close to Him and keep our love alive?
- What is one small action that you could put in place regularly in each of those three areas?

## ► 2. The scriptures call us to make some choices that will keep our love alive.

Here is one passage that encourages us to make some helpful choices.

### Philippians 4:1-20

*Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!*

*<sup>2</sup>I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. <sup>3</sup>Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.*

*<sup>4</sup>Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! <sup>5</sup>Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup>Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*<sup>8</sup>Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things. <sup>9</sup>Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me — put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*

*<sup>10</sup>I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. <sup>11</sup>I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup>I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation,*

*whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. <sup>13</sup>I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*

*<sup>14</sup>Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. <sup>15</sup>Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; <sup>16</sup>for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. <sup>17</sup>Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. <sup>18</sup>I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. <sup>19</sup>And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.*

*<sup>20</sup>To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (N.I.V)*

#### QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

- Paul encouraged the Philippians in some very significant areas. What can we learn from his encouragement of the Philippian church?
  - Verses 2-4 — Relationships
  - Verses 5-7 — Rejoicing in the Lord and handling anxious situations
  - Verses 8-8 — Choosing what we think about and learning from good models
  - Verses 10-13 — Learning contentment
  - Verses 14-20 — Giving and receiving ministry in the Body of Christ

#### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

- How might a commitment to following these examples help us to avoid 'growing cold' in our relationship with God?

### ► 3. God's love holds us

It is very important that we make choices to work on our relationship with God and our love for God. However, it is also true that God holds us and works in us. Let's look at one example of this in:

#### **Romans 8:31-39**

*<sup>31</sup>What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup>He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? <sup>33</sup>Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup>Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. <sup>35</sup>Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? <sup>36</sup>As it is written:*

*"For your sake we face death all day long;  
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."*

*<sup>37</sup>No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup>For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup>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. (N.I.V)*

#### **QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:**

- What encouragement does this passage give us that God is at work in our lives – even through the difficult times?
- How does this passage help us as we look back to the past to what Jesus has done, hope for the future when He will fulfil His promises and help in the present as he intercedes for us?

## AN EXAMPLE OF HAVING YOUR SOUL ANCHORED IN JESUS EVEN WHEN OVERWHELMED BY LIFE.

Martin Rinkart became a Lutheran minister when he was 31. He was called to minister at Eilenburg, Saxony in Germany at the beginning of the horrors of the Thirty Years' War. He spent the remaining 32 years of his life as a minister with the people who were devastated by that war.

The Thirty Years' War has been called the most devastating war in all history. Over 10 million people died during that war! The population of Germany went from 16 million to 6 million.

The walled city of Eilenburg became the refuge for political & military fugitives of that war but the result was overcrowding, epidemics & famine. Armies overran the city three times leaving behind death & destruction.

At the beginning of 1637, the year of the Great Pestilence, there were four ministers in Eilenburg — one abandoned his post to go to a healthier area & Martin Rinkart officiated at the funerals of the other two, leaving him as the only minister in the city.

The Rinkart home was a refuge for the victims, even though he was often hard-pressed to provide for his own family. During the height of the severe plague in 1637, he often conducted as many as 50 funerals a day. He performed almost 4,500 funerals in that year including that of his beloved wife.

By the end of the year, there were so many refugees dying that they had to be buried in trenches without services.

In the midst of this, Rinkart wrote many hymns including 'Now Thank We All Our God'.

- 1 *Now thank we all our God  
with heart and hands and voices,  
who wondrous things has done,  
in whom his world rejoices;  
who from our mothers' arms  
has blessed us on our way  
with countless gifts of love,  
and still is ours today.*
- 2 *O may this bounteous God  
through all our life be near us,  
with ever joyful hearts  
and blessed peace to cheer us,  
to keep us in his grace,  
and guide us when perplexed,  
and free us from all ills  
of this world in the next.*

3 *All praise and thanks to God  
the Father now be given,  
the Son and Spirit blest,  
who reign in highest heaven  
the one eternal God,  
whom heaven and earth adore;  
for thus it was, is now,  
and shall be evermore.*

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What is your reaction to the story and the hymn 'Now Thank we all our God'?
- What 'anchor for your soul' are you taking away from today's study that will help you live faithfully in dry times?



## Study 4: An Anchor in waiting times

As Christian people this world is not our ultimate home. Yet at the moment it is the only home we know. Remember Jesus' words that we looked at in the introduction to these studies in Matthew 24:4-14. Jesus warned us that while we wait for Him to return, we can expect:

- False teaching to become popular
- Lots of fighting amongst nations
- Natural disasters
- Persecution of Christians
- People being deceived
- An increase in wickedness
- People's love will grow cold.

It is a really depressing picture isn't it. Most of us would agree that we are certainly seeing all these things in our world today. But Jesus finishes this passage with these words:

*Matthew 24:13 but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*

He gives us the assurance that we will be saved as we stand firm. But he also describes the activity that His people are to be focused on during this waiting time. The Gospel is to be preached to the nations. Clinging to the gospel message is what anchors our soul in life and proclaiming the Gospel message is a central activity in life. In this study we are going to explore what that could mean for us. Now before you give up and think you have got to get your sandwich board out with 'Repent' written on it or think that you are going to become a person who really rubs others up the wrong way, let's explore the exciting possibilities.

## ► 1. God has given you a family and friends

The first place that we might explore is the human families that God has given to us. They may include spouse, parents, children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews, foster children and for some it may be the families that they have been invited into through friendship. Let's explore what the Bible has to say about our ministry to families.

### Deuteronomy 6:1-11

*<sup>4</sup>Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. <sup>5</sup>Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. <sup>6</sup>These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. <sup>7</sup>Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. <sup>8</sup>Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. <sup>9</sup>Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (N.I.V)*

What are the principles that this passage outlines concerning:

- Verses 4 & 5 — Your own relationship with God?
- Verse 6 — The place that our teaching and modelling is to come from?
- Verses 7-9 — How we are to teach? (Remember this is descriptive language so look for the principles rather than a literal interpretation.)

One of the greatest gifts that we can give our family (and all other relationships actually) is that they experience someone who is genuinely seeking to live for Jesus. For if that is the case then we will be growing in becoming more like Jesus – so we will be becoming more loving, patient, kind, generous, gentle, other people centered, willing to listen, people of integrity. We will be more able to apologise when we are wrong and demonstrate that we are willing to own our own faults. When others hurt us, we will be growing in maintaining healthy boundaries but also willing to forgive. All of this is part of our witness to people that comes from who we are as God's people.

#### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

- Do we realise that our ministry and prayers for our family and friends can help have a powerful impact? For those who already know Jesus they can be encouraged and built up. For those who don't know Jesus then God may well use us in bringing them to know the Lord? What reaction do you have to these possibilities?
- How can you grow in the impact you can have with your family? What are some areas that Jesus would want you to work on? (Think about examples of where you have had a good impact and where you have had a negative impact.)
- Are there one or two people in your family at the moment that you can really focus on? How can you show Jesus to them? Who is the biggest challenge?
- Are there any relationships that need special care within your family? What could you do differently that might have a different outcome?

## ► 2. God has given you a church family

### Ephesians 4:11-16

*<sup>11</sup>So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup>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.*

*<sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>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. (N.I.V)*

- **Verses 11-12** — What is the specific job of the 'people gifts' (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers)?
- **Verses 12b-13** — What is the aim of their ministry and the ministry of all the people?
- **Verse 14** — What will stop happening as we mature?
- **Verses 15-18** — What will the church be like as it grows to maturity?

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

If we really took this passage seriously our churches would be totally transformed. Notice that growth happens (both numerical growth of more people becoming Christians and being part of the Church and growth to maturity) **as each ligament does its work (v16).**

- What sort of ligament are you? How are you contributing to the health of the body of Christ – not only by what you **do** but also by **who you are as a mature person**? What is one area you could grow in?
- How are you going in allowing other ligaments to encourage you? Do you want people to speak the truth in love into your life? How can you encourage that?
- In what ways do you notice immaturity in your own life? How can others encourage you to grow in that area?

► 3. God has given us a world to be involved in.

**1 Peter 3:13-18**

*<sup>13</sup>Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? <sup>14</sup>But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened." <sup>15</sup>But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, <sup>16</sup>keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. <sup>17</sup>For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. <sup>18</sup>For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. (N.I.V)*

- How are we to handle situations where people give us a difficult time for being a Christian?
- What perspective does Jesus' death and resurrection give you as you think about suffering for your faith? Is it a place of encouragement for you? Elaborate on 'Yes' or 'no'.
- What's one way that you or a group from your church can reach out to someone who is negative about Christians?

## Matthew 28:18-20

*<sup>18</sup>Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>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, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (N.I.V)*

- Jesus, who is Lord of the world, told the disciples to make disciples of all nations. That involved teaching them what they had been taught. Therefore, all Christians are to be making disciples. What do you find is difficult about putting this passage into practice?
- What is the promise here that will give us the courage to keep going?
- What is the possible result of obeying this command? Do we have a vision of how much impact can be made by even helping one person to become a Christian and grow?

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

As we think about applying this passage can you be creative about really taking this passage seriously together. For example,

- How can you be prayerful in bringing people into the kingdom and supporting people 'on the front line' here and overseas?

- How can you use your resources – time and money and experience to make an impact in the world? e.g. look after someone's children so they can teach SRE or run a Bible study group, pay for someone in your church to be trained in reaching out to others, be an example of someone who will have a go and include others in your attempts to share your faith – like asking someone for a meal or afternoon tea.
- Do some brainstorming now about how you could be helpful in encouraging one another to reaching out.

Remember Jesus said in Matthew 24:14 *And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*

In the midst of all the troubles of this world we have a task to do. Jesus tells us to do this because He is passionate for lost people to be saved. Often in chaotic times people are very receptive to the hope that the Gospel brings.

- How does the fact that Jesus could return at any time mobilize you and your church to reach out to your community?
- What are the greatest challenges you face and how can you take one small step in moving forward?

## AN EXAMPLE OF BEING CREATIVE IN TAKING SERIOUSLY THE NEED TO BE FOCUSED ON REACHING OUT WHILE WE WAIT FOR JESUS TO RETURN.

The China Inland Mission, which James Hudson Taylor had launched in 1865, was exposed to a series of persecutions, including the evacuation of missionaries and the martyrdom of local Christians, which was ignited with the Boxer Uprising in 1900 and aggravated in the nine-year-long Civil War.

Nonetheless, the CIM, far from withdrawing from their evangelising enterprise, marched forward. We read that in 1829, "the Council of the China Inland Mission in China has been carefully surveying the whole field for which the Mission is responsible in China and its dependencies, and an appeal has been issued for two hundred new workers within two years."

In support of the appeal, Frank Houghton, editorial secretary of the CIM and prolific hymn writer, wrote "Facing a Task Unfinished," a hymn for the forward movement, to be sung at the CIM annual prayer conference scheduled in May, 1831. Printed in the January 1831 issue of CIM's magazine, "China's Millions", the hymn was distributed to Christians in England. Houghton reflects on the appeal and its fruition later in his book, "China Calling", stating, "Actually 203 missionaries were added by the end of 1831, in answer to the prayers of thousands in all the home countries who, at family prayers, at meal times, in public and in private, sang from their hearts the chorus:

*Lord, by the call of China's need,  
And by the love of Calvary,  
Choose and send forth, we humbly plead,  
Two hundred witnesses for Thee!"*

*(This information was written by Myung Hee Lee in "Reflections on Music, Worship, and Spiritual Formation")*

Here are the words to the Hymn Frank Houghton wrote. (These words were updated by Keith and Kristyn Gettys and used to renew a call for people to respond and go to share their faith.)

*Facing a task unfinished  
That drives us to our knees  
A need that, undiminished  
Rebukes our slothful ease  
We, who rejoice to know Thee  
Renew before Thy throne  
The solemn pledge we owe Thee  
To go and make Thee known*

*Where other lords beside Thee  
Hold their unhindered sway  
Where forces that defied Thee  
Defy Thee still today*

*With none to heed their crying  
For life, and love, and light  
Unnumbered souls are dying  
And pass into the night*

*We go to all the world  
With kingdom hope unfurled  
No other name has power to save  
But Jesus Christ The Lord*

*We bear the torch that flaming  
Fell from the hands of those  
Who gave their lives proclaiming  
That Jesus died and rose  
Ours is the same commission  
The same glad message ours  
Fired by the same ambition  
To Thee we yield our powers  
We go...*

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What is your reaction to the story and the Hymn "Facing A Task Unfinished"?
- What are you taking away from today's study that will be an anchor for your soul as you wait for Jesus to return?

## NOTES

## NOTES



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