

PRAYER IS SO MUCH MORE

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CHAPTER 1 Prayer is asking, seeking and knocking

Luke 11:9,10 says: "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks the door will be opened."

Prayer is asking. Prayer is seeking. Prayer is knocking.

Prayer is so much more than I ever thought. For so many years the theological traditions and people of my upbringing blinded me to what prayer could be.

No one ever told me that prayer can be long periods of complete silence. During which I become so aware of the almighty and glory of the God in whose presence I find myself, that I find myself at a loss for words...where words become superficial. No one ever told me that I can sing and dance with my eyes open in prayer...

But maybe the most important thing I learnt about prayer over the years is that, just as you think you understand prayer and all that it is, something new is revealed to you that changes everything. Something that renews the wonder of the presence of the living God...renews the wonder of talking to Him and Him to you..

It makes me ask continually: Teach me how to pray Lord.

Especially these days when I am now with so many of His children, also praying for 5 other people or 5 other families. Teach me how to pray.

2 Corinthians 5:7 says that to be a Christian is firstly to learn to believe without seeing first. This we learn especially there where we pray. There we learn to hit the winning stroke while we pray. To later, in the physical world of see and feel, witness the victory happen, the victory that originated in our prayers.

Wesley said that God does nothing on earth other than in answer to prayers. Someone else said: you can do so much more if you prayed...but you can do nothing more than to pray, if you haven't done so already.

Let me quote a couple of verses about prayer from the scripture:

Matthew 18:19 "Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven."

Luke 5:16 "But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed."

Luke 6:12 "One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God."

Luke 11:1 "One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When He was finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

Luke 11:2 “He said to them, “When you pray, say...Father, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come.”

Luke 18:1 “Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.”

John 16:24 “Until now you have not asked for anything in my name, Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.”

1 Thessalonians 5:17 “pray continually...”

But maybe there is someone among us asking: But why should we pray? God knows everything anyway.

Let’s answer this question in the following way:

Genesis 1:26-28 and Psalm 8:3-8 tells us that God appointed man as His manager here on earth. Not that God gave away His ownership of the earth with that, no, rather He delegated the responsibility to manage the earth to man.

Genesis 1:27 goes even further. It is written that man was intended to reflect the image of God. This could cause that we might look at man and for a moment even think that man is god, just to realize: No, he is just a man! Therefore 1 Corinthians 11:7 describes man as the image and glory of God that God is busy restoring, as part of His complete salvation and healing plan for each of His children (2 Corinthians 3:18).

The implications are immense because it means what happen on this earth depend to a great deal on man. Whether people experience heaven or hell here, will depend on whether we are filling the role God intended for us to fill.

Luke 4:6 and 7 tells us that man experiences hell on earth because man has given all his delegated authority and splendour over to satan and his powers. Therefore God had to send His Son to become man and to die to buy back His children, the children Adam sold out. And therefore all authority and power in heaven and on earth belong to Jesus who in turn has delegated it to His followers.

Ephesians 3:10 even says that we are God’s ambassadors whose task it is to proclaim to the invisible powers in the heavens that God reigns so they can also bow before His authority.

That’s why prayer is so important.

It is our task to pray like Jesus taught us to pray in Matthew 6: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed by Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread...”

God has already planned everything in detail and has already stored the perfect answers and exact supplies in heaven for us. But we need to ask, seek and knock. Yes, even sow in faith...even if it’s only a mustard-grain sized faith...to experience that nothing is impossible for God.

God chose to work through people. That's why there are so many examples in the scriptures of how God chose people who prayed to be the link for things to happen. Read for example 1 Kings 18:41-45 and James 5:17 and 18.

In Ezekiel 22:30 and 31 God calls out that He is looking for a man or a woman to come and stand in the gap...to come and stand before Him in His presence and intercede for people and their need.

Jesus Christ has already prepared the complete salvation for a lost humanity, but God chose to make people the messengers and the administrators of this complete redemption. Our prayers are often the keys that unlock the door to a life of abundance for people, a life also meant for them.

CHAPTER 2 To act in the name of Jesus

We call people who pray regularly and powerfully, intercessors. But strictly speaking every one who prays is an intercessor. Especially when we pray for others...like our children or partner or for someone's health or salvation. The concept of "intercession" means after all to act as a go-between; to plead for someone's sake; to represent someone else. It is for instance typically what a lawyer or advocate does every day when they appear in court on someone's behalf.

Intercession means to act on behalf of someone else, as delegate, with a certain authority and power. In this way the Bible speaks of Adam as the "image of God", which could be described as Adam being an "intercessor" for God on this earth. When people looked at him, for instance, they would see a good "representational image" of who God is.

It is also significant that God is called the Second Adam.

1 Timothy 2:5 and 1 John 2:1 speaks about the "intercessory" work that Jesus did for and on behalf of humanity with God.

Everything He came to do on earth, He came to do for and on behalf of the world: He took the punishment for our sins on Him and went to represent us (with our debt) with God. Therefore He had to carry the full punishment for the sins of the whole world and its people.

But, for us and on our behalf, He also achieved the complete victory over Satan and his powers. In order that we can, through faith in what He did, share in that complete victory.

In order that when we pray in the Name of Jesus, we are introduced by Jesus Himself to His father as those who come "In His Name" and with His authority.

The Bible even encourages us who believers with the promise that Jesus our Intercessor intercedes for each one of us with His Father 24 hours a day 7 days a week. Listen to how Hebrews 7:25 puts it: "Therefore He is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them."

This also means that Jesus literally stands between us and the enemy when He declares each and every accusation that the enemy brings against us about our pasts as "no longer applicable".

When the Bible then calls on us to pray for people and their issues it means that we can intercede for them in this same way.

Let me make this a little more practical:

To pray and intercede for people is to literally bring the wonderful gifts that Jesus achieved for and on our behalf to them, to put these in front of them and to present it to them. This includes gifts like reconciliation, redemption, the righteousness of Jesus, victory and complete healing. Go and have a look at texts like Matthew 14:17-19; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 in this regard.

Jesus was and is the Victor and we are the people appointed to go and proclaim this victory and even to go and enforce it in His Name.

Jesus is the Deliverer, and we are the people who receive the keys that can unlock any lock from Him to go and unlock these locks in His Name.

Jesus is the Head and we are the different members of His body here on earth.

In “Kingdom Enterprises” we are not in the production department, but in the distribution department.

Therefore God calls us His co-workers (2 Corinthians 6:1). Through our prayers and through our testimony we represent the living God amongst people. He who is able to break all strongholds. He who really cares and really loves.

Furthermore it is significant that the Hebrew word for prayer, the word “paga”, can also mean: “to meet”. This is exactly what happens when we pray:

We meet a living God

And we shouldn't be surprised if “along the way” we also meet the powers of darkness. Look at Ephesians 1:16-23 and 3:10.

What a thought! Every time I pray in the Name of Jesus, I literally walk in between the enemy with the authority and firepower of the complete victory in Jesus! No wonder the enemy's attacks are unsuccessful and they run for cover! And no wonder the enemy does anything in his power to dissuade us from praying!

It also shouldn't surprise us if during such meetings, healings start happening. (Acts 28:8 and 9). But also not if things sometimes get a bit “rough and wild” during such meetings! The Hebrew word “paga” after all also means, “to wage war” in certain contexts (Judges 8:21; 1 Samuel 22:17,18).

We should however not fear or get a fright, because in Matthew 27:51 and 45 Jesus said: Tetelestai. It is finished. All had been done that is necessary! Therefore we pray in Jesus' Name not out of a position of uncertainty or helplessness. What needed to be done to ensure the full victory Jesus did ages ago already.

We who pray should just start believing it and should start declaring this to all who live with greater authority and certainty. Especially in order that satan and his powers can hear it!

When the Bible calls us Jesus' witnesses, it is our privilege to tell this to all who need to hear it. It is our privilege to testify to the new life, the victory and the kingdom of God that came to earth. It is our privilege to tell of the day that God shook the world, shook it to such an extent that the universe trembled, even the invisible powers behind the scenes! To such an extent that 1 John 3:8 can say “...The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work”. Jesus broke satan's lawful hold on people. We just need to go and tell them that.

Then we will experience how it becomes the key that “unlocks” physical healing, or even redemption and deliverance from all sorts of demonic control in people's lives.

Matthew 16:19 says the keys that can make things happen have been given to us.

What a privilege! What an opportunity! What a responsibility!

CHAPTER 3 Carry one another's burdens and protect one another.

1. Prayer is to carry each other's burdens

Romans 12:15 – “Be happy with those who are happy, weep with those who weep.”

Galatians 6:2 – “Help to carry one another's burdens, and in this way you will obey the law of Christ.”

One of the most wonderful ways of carrying each other's burdens in the Body of Christ is to intercede for one another through prayer in the presence of God.

It is in reality as though we come to stand next to one another and say: Lean on me if you are suffering or are in too much pain to stand-alone. I am here for you. As long as I stand, so do you! When Colossians 3:13 tells us “Be tolerant with one another...” - the Greek uses the verb *anechomai* – then it is exactly what is meant here.

To carry one another's burdens means even more than just supporting one another. Romans 15:1 to 3 refers to this when the Greek verb *bastazo* is used. Unfortunately the New Afrikaans Translation translated it with “to put up with someone or tolerate him or her” while it actually means, “carry” in the sense of “carry away”. Therefore Paul refers to that which Jesus did for us. He “interceded” for us (Isaiah 53:6,12) and took our “burdens” upon Himself and in that literally “carried them away”. To carry one another's burdens literally means to take the “burdens” out of each other's hands and to take them to Jesus and to then leave them there for Him to handle further.

Someone put it in the following way: All of us have things in our lives that we just cannot handle alone. Therefore we need a “container” with a label; “for our Heavenly Father to handle” on it, where we can leave the things in our own lives and in the lives of other, with the certainty that it is now in “the right hands”.

To really minister life to one another in the ecclesia is the privilege and responsibility to minister in the Name of Jesus, which He has already done for us. We do not need to do that which Jesus has already done for one another. Our only roll is to represent Jesus to one another. He was and remains the Saviour who has already achieved the complete salvation for all people. He was and is the “ointment” that can achieve complete healing in the lives of people. (Jeremiah 8:22). Our task is to “rub” this ointment on to others where the pain is! He is the Fountain of living water (Jeremiah 2:13). We only hand it out and minister it to each other as God's new generation of ministers and priests (2 Corinthians 3:6). In Jesus' Name. Also when we pray for each other.

Someone put it in a striking way: The Lion of Judah roars through us as His loudspeakers.

In this way we help one another (Joshua 9 and 10). In this way that which Jesus has already achieved is implemented and practised in people's lives.

In Joshua 10:22 to 27 it is illustrated very beautifully when Joshua asks his soldiers to put their feet up on the necks of the slain kings in order that they can literally taste the recent victory.

Jesus broke Satan's power. The reign of the enemy in reality is over. But so many people do not see this and do not experience it every day in their own lives. Our task is literally, as Jesus' willing army, to force this onto the enemy who still deceives and lies to people about his so-called power in their lives. Our task is, like Joshua, to teach people to put their feet on the neck of the enemy in the name of Jesus. Off course it will mean war. The enemy won't give up without a fight. But, thanks be to God, because we do what we do in the Name of Jesus who already is the Victor! Therefore we will literally experience what is written in Romans 16:20, namely that God Himself will destroy the enemy under our feet. Closed doors will be unlocked, and chains around people will be destroyed.

2. Prayer is to protect one another.

In the Lord's prayer Jesus teaches us in Matthew 6:13 to pray: "lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil".

It is interesting that one of the words in Hebrew used for "pray" is the word "paga" and that this word is used to indicate "borders ore even walls of protection." It is literally as though we start building walls and borders around each other and situations when we start praying for one another.

The Bible is full of texts of God's promises about protection and even of how we can protect ourselves. Read the well-known Psalm 91, Ephesians 6:13-18 and James 4:7.

Off course God wants to protect and bless His children. But many times our own lack of faith causes these promises not to materialise in our lives. (Matthew 17:20; 21:21; James 1:6,7.) Or sometimes it is as a result of our own impatience or endurance, or merely disobedience (Hebrews 6:12; Malachi 3:8-12). Many of our problems and failures are as a result of our own faults or weaknesses and are not God's will for us.

The fact that God is a merciful God doesn't mean that He doesn't allow for our own responsibility. God is in control. But the laws of sow and reap, cause and effect, individual responsibility and free will, will remain true. It causes that also us as Christians are exposed to the negative in this fallen world with its broken people.

Protection against accidents, against destruction and satanic attacks doesn't come automatically for Christians. Therefore we have to pray: "deliver us from evil" and for that reason we have to continually pray for each other's protection.

Psalm 91:1 speaks of the fact that believers can literally dwell under the protective Hand of God. Yes, "He shall spend the night under God's shadow".

Let us pray with God every day for one another's protection.

Sometimes the Holy Spirit will encourage us at specific times to pray for one another. (Luke 4:18, 8:13). Satan and his powers come with cleverly plans and strategies with attacks and temptations at crucial times in our lives. (Ephesians 6:12, 2 Corinthians 10:4, Ephesians 6:18). It is therefore a great comfort to me that we are helped by the Holy Spirit who lives inside us, to also remind us at those specific times, to intercede for one another.

In this way you literally move people in under the shadow of the Almighty with your prayers. You literally build a strong wall around them with a door on which there is written: "In the Name of Jesus, stay away!"

CHAPTER 4 The Holy Spirit prays with us

Let's read John 14:26; Romans 8:14-17; and Romans 8:26 to 28

Every time I think about it, I stand in awe. To think that the Living God Himself came to live in me, as a follower of Jesus...in my body. To lead me, to be my Parakletos, as Jesus says, my Helper.

Romans 8:28 is so encouraging for most of us. To think that God uses every thing that happens to you and I as followers of Jesus, to our benefit, is a huge comfort. But we should not forget the context of this verse, and especially verses 26 and 27.

"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will." (NIV)

I know that verse 26 can refer to when we pray in our heavenly language, but it doesn't refer to that alone. It is written here that the Holy Spirit wants to stand by us in our "weaknesses" or our inability to get the desired results when we pray – especially if we have been praying for something specific for a long time, but nothing happens! Sometimes it seems as though the mountain you are praying about just doesn't want to move. It is then that we struggle to know exactly what we should pray in this situation.

Luke 13:10 to 16 tells us of such a situation where Jesus ministers that which is actually her covenant-rights to a woman who has been suffering for about 18 years (refer verse 17).

Sometimes we keep struggling on in our circumstances because we just don't know what exactly is in God's heart for us! Therefore it is so wonderful to know that God's Spirit lives in our bodies to make us aware of what my Heavenly Father's plan is in a specific situation.

Genesis 28:10 to 17 tells us of the opportunity when Jacob "by chance" stayed over at Bethel where God changed his life. Just think about this! Intercession (paga), also means that the Holy Spirit inside us also acts as our intercessor to ensure that we are at the right place at the right time to hear or ask the right things. It is literally as if you and I close our eyes, (to pray), and experience how we "shoot blindly" and doors start opening, people start changing and history is made...because God's Spirit is so faithful. Sometimes we see so few miracles because we expect so few miracles.

Let's start praying under the guidance of the Spirit so that things start happening...

Off course it requires a sensitivity to the Spirit of God and His voice as well as an obedience when He speaks. For this reason it is so important to pray when the Holy Spirit urges you to pray, and to pray how and for that which He urges you to pray, even if it makes no sense to you at that moment. Because you know that the Holy Spirit is there to help you...to literally take and lead you by the hand. Zechariah 4:6 tells us after all "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit" says the Lord Almighty. "

It is like that story where the ant tells the elephant: Watch how we shake this bridge together!

2 Corinthians 12:9 says: "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."

For those times it is a comfort to know that the Holy Spirit prays with us, that He will lead us. For months, if necessary, until the breakthrough manifests. (1 Timothy 6:12) God wants to use you.

Get up and let Him! Start doing what He shows you to do. Do what your hands find to do, step by step.

CHAPTER 5 When we pray, things are born

Let's turn to a couple of Scriptures and I will show you something about prayer that will make you as excited as a child.

1. John 7:38

“Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.”

The Greek word that has been translated here with “within”, is the word *koilia*, which can also be translated with “womb”. In other words Spirit-filled believers (with the Spirit of God in our bodies), are God’s womb here on earth in a manner of speaking. We cannot generate life, we can only “release” it, through prayer for instance, as He gives it! We sometimes speak of intercessors who are in “labour” for people’s salvation!

Call upon the Lord and remind Him constantly of His promises to you. Intercede for that person and let God lead you by His Spirit as to how you should “breathe” in prayer, while a spiritual birth happens.

Until God overturns the incense bowl with your prayers and things start happening there where we can see it.

2. 1 Kings 18:41-45

This is the well-know passage about Elijah who knelt and prayed for rain, and sent his servant out seven times to check whether a cloud had appeared in the sky yet. The thing that makes this passage relevant is that in this context Elijah assumed the position typical to the women of his day when they gave birth!

Intense times of prayer, under the guidance of the Spirit of God in us, can do wonders. Off course it is not us who are making things happen here, it is God’s work through His Spirit. He is the Birth-Giver of God (Luke 1:34, 35; John 3:3-8). He is the Power source (Acts 1:8; 10:38; Luke 4:14,18).

He was after all the power behind all creation in Genesis 1.

He is the One who generates life (Genesis 2:7; Ezekiel 37:9,10,14; Acts 2:1-4).

But what is important for us to notice here is that our prayers are in fact the birth-channel through which much of what God wants to do can be “brought to life” (like Galatians 4:19 and James 5:18-20 also shows us).

3. Genesis 1:1,2

Here we read in the Hebrew that the Holy Spirit “*rachapf-ted*”, which can be translated with “hover” in the English, or even “impregnate”. The meaning is very clear namely that it is the Spirit of God who brought about new life here. Therefore Psalm 90:2 calls it a birth that took place here.

When we start interceding through prayer for people, I anticipate that we will start praying that the Holy Spirit will “hover” over them the whole day and “breathe” life into them.

Some of the most wonderful stories I have heard in this regard are of believing women who started praying for their non-believer husbands. Even, during the night, on God’s command, anointed them with the prayer that the Spirit’s anointing will break and release all the strongholds! (Even if things have to get worse for a while before they can get better!)

4. Deuteronomy 32:10-18

God sees that Abraham and Sarah are barren. But then He “hovers” over them (verse 11) and suddenly there is life and a new nation is born of two very old people.

5. Luke 1:35

Here we find a similar situation when we read how the Holy Spirit “came upon” Mary, (in the Greek the word is episkiazo which is the Greek version of the Hebrew word “rachapf” which we had a moment ago.)

6. Acts 5:15

Here we read of Peter’s famous “shadow” that fell over people and they were healed! But you and I know that in reality it wasn’t Peter’s shadow that made the difference. It was the Holy Spirit that surrounded Peter that created the healing and new life.

7. John 11:33-34

We read in this passage: “When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.” In the Greek we find the word terasso here which can be translated with “troubled” or “stirred up” or “travail”. It is in fact this same action that happens in a washing machine when the washing is shook backward and forward until it is clean. You know what the result was: Lazarus was literally “shaken” from the dead.

8. Matthew 26:38

Jesus is praying in Gethsemane, and even though it cost His blood and He felt that He was dying in the process, the victory and salvation that He came to establish for us started here already.

9. Galatians 4:19

“My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.”

Paul is praying in the Spirit for people here. Just like you and I are currently praying for people...In order that spiritual births and supernatural breakthroughs can happen through God’s work of Grace in their lives.

May God give that it happens soon.

CHAPTER 6 Sometimes prayer means to wrestle.

To get to a point where you can just give over, where, like Jesus, you are prepared to willingly say: "Lord, not my will, but yours", happens mostly only after wrestling with God.

Do you also experience this in your own life? Jacob could testify to this. Lets turn to Genesis 32:24 to 32 where these events in his life are being written off.

Let me make a couple of comments about what we are reading here:

It is significant that these struggles with God often happen at night. Almost as though it needs to become dark first before we start looking for a different solutions to that which we had been convinced off thus far.

In Jacob's case his wrestling match with God happened at the Jabbok river. I don't know whether you know, but the word "jabbok" means to be "flushed or emptied out" - of yourself off course.

For Jacob it literally felt as though he was wrestling with this "Man". In the Hebrew text the word "ish" is used here which could also be translated with "champion". And this you discover once you start wrestling with God yourself! He knows all the grips. Therefore, you do not stand a chance. At some point, you'll have to give up. You literally only need to decide when you've had enough.

While He wrestles with you, He is busy, through His Spirit, teaching you a counter-grip for every grip with which the enemy, or your own flesh, or even later on, death, tries to pin you down!

It is also important to realize what you are actually busy wrestling with. You never wrestle with God's power. We are always wrestling with God's love. And that love only has one objective and that is to not leave you as you are now, but to conform you to His Son.

Sometimes it takes a whole night...because we have so much to work through. But also our flesh is in such a strong rebellion.

Like Jacob, we will discover that God doesn't want to kill us, but rather wants to bless us in the process. The masks must be removed and the flesh must be put to death, but God wants to bless us...like He did Jacob.

He also wants to change you from arch-deceiver to "Israel", "warrior" or "there where God now reigns".

Sometimes it means that we first have to realize, like Jacob, that your whole life up till now has been fraudulent, and that you literally need to be tapped dry in such a wrestling match with God. In order that God can fill you with His Heart and His Spirit in order that you can look like His Son. (2 Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 5:16-25; Ephesians 4:22-24).

Sometimes we stop praying too soon, we let go of God too soon. Make time for God to do that which He wants to do in your life, there where you are busy with Him. To get to a point where you can give over to God, to His plans for your life, in order that in the end the only thing that matters to you is His Kingdom and His will.

This wrestling match cost Jacob his hip joint. It is significant because "sinew" in the Bible is the symbol of the rebellion that in turn causes sin in our lives. God wants to bring to submission this spirit of rebellion in us, even if that means wrestling the whole night through. (Seems to me that in some of us it can take even longer than this!)

Someone send me this relevant story of a little girl that insisted her mother buy her a string of pearls ...for R19.95! Off course, they were fake pearls, but this didn't matter to her, because to her they were beautiful!

Her mother bought her the pearls, after they agreed that she would do some extra chores for them. She wore them almost every day, day and night, whenever possible.

One night her father came to her and asked her whether she really loved him, and if so, whether she wouldn't give her string of pearls to him. Off course she didn't want to part with it, so instead offered him her cute toy horse, which off course he affectionately declines.

A week later he asks her the same thing and this time she offers her favorite doll to him, which he declines again.

The following evening he finds her in tears in her room on her bed, and when he asked her what the matter was she held her hand out towards him with the string of pearls and said: "this is for you daddy".

Immediately he put his hand in his pocket and presented her with a blue velvet satchel holding a string of real pearls, which he then gives her.

How many times do we hold on to things that are so valuable to us. Sometimes what it takes is a wrestling match to get to a point of giving up, letting go and give over to God just to realize that God had something far better in store for you all along. Whether in our relationships with people, or in the things we keep ourselves busy with every day.

Off course, our struggle isn't always with God. Sometimes we discover that we are wrestling with the powers of darkness, of which James 4:7 speaks. That is why it is imperative that we are sensitive to the Spirit of God, His voice and His guidance in our lives, in order that He can make us aware of the enemy and his tactics. (2 Corinthians 2:11).

Some believers refer to this struggle with the powers of evil as spiritual warfare. But we must be sure of what we are saying when we speak of "war". We must understand that it is never about trying to "defeat" the enemy. He has already been defeated. After all, it happened on the cross already (Gen. 3:15; Psalm 2:9). What needs to happen now is that that which Christ has already established for us, must now be released and enforced. What He has already done should now be accepted in faith (1 Timothy 6:12).

Part of our struggle with the enemy is to take back the inheritance that Jesus established for us from the hands of the world systems, or the hands of your own flesh, or the hands of the powers of evil.

On this earth of ours we as saved children of God in Jesus have already been delivered from the authority of evil in our lives, but we still are confronted with his power and his abilities. (Colossians 1:13; Luke 10:19; Col. 2:15)

He is still like a lion waiting to devour people, to rob and kill if he can. He still shoots flaming arrows at us (Ephesians 6:16).

Therefore, you should never risk walking around or taking him on for a wrestling match without your armor!

I want to close: sometimes a part of this wrestling match is waiting on the Lord. But then waiting in trust, as Psalm 62:1 and 2 testifies to, or maybe it is a search for a more intimate relationship with God (Psalm 33:20).

I don't know about you, but for me waiting on the Lord in itself is a struggle as a result of this built-in piece of impatience in me.

But God has His timing. And His terms. And His methods. (See Joshua 6 as an example.)

And if it requires a struggle to bring you in line with His heart, you can start preparing yourself.

CHAPTER 7 Prayer lifts the veil in people's lives.

Let's read 2 Corinthians 4:3-6:

"And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God who said: "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

Sometimes I look back in amazement at my life, and then I know that what is written here is the truth: in my own life it was literally as though a veil prevented me from seeing and understanding...

- Before I met Jesus as personal Saviour and living Lord, I was caught up in religion. In fact, like the Word says, I was blind and dead. But, thanks be to God, Light broke through and suddenly I could see.

- Also, after my conversion and rebirth I regularly experienced seasons during which God came and removed other veils that were impeding my sight and held me captive in certain wrong ideas and lies.

Once the veil is lifted, a certain revelation breaks through...and God ministers His truth to us that sets us free.

When you and I pray for people, we become part of God's way of lifting the veil from the spirits and minds of people, in order that they can see...and can understand.

Lies distort everything and cause people see things in a distorted way and therefore to not understand them. Like the woman who tried desperately to shake off this truck that was following her. Driven by fear. She drove straight to the nearest police station and jumped out of her car, only to see the truck stop behind her and the truck driver jumping out and jerking a thief out from the back seat of her car where he had been hiding all along. Only then she realised: she was fleeing from her saviour!

People need light to really be able to see (2 Corinthians 4:4); to come to new insight and conversion in their lives.

It is really as though their eyes are opened for the first time. In Acts 26:18 Paul is busy telling us how God opened his eyes and then gave him the following commission: "I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."

There is a difference between information and revelation. Information only ministers to the mind, while God ministers to our spirit through a revelation, which then off course also breaks through and ministers to our mind and the rest of our person. (Read Psalm 119:18 in this regard.) It

is like seed being sown in us, which then starts bearing fruit through the working of the Spirit of God in the rest of our lives.

It is as though people are blind (2 Cor 4:4). It causes them to think they know everything, or that what they believe is correct. It can even cause them to not even want to listen to others any more, and they are no longer open to new insights.

It is for this reason that it is so important that you and I, when we start praying for other people, will do it correctly. 2 Corinthians 10:3 to 5 is part of God's strategy in this regard. On a practical level it means that we should realise, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, that these kinds of people cannot be convinced by all sorts of arguments and Biblical quotations. No, only the Word-dynamite of God can destroy these walls and strongholds that had been put up over the years.

After all, the Word shows us how the enemy builds theories, opinions, paradigms and viewpoints in people's lives with his lies, which become strongholds from which he rules and controls specific areas in their lives.

It is only God who can destroy these opinions with the dynamite of the Truth of His Word and who can renew our minds (Romans 12:2). Only He can expose our opinions and paradigms as lies and replace them with the truth. Only He can make us aware of the fact that our pride prevented us from seeing the truth. Only He can expose specific schemes and plans if they had their origin in hell.

This is what we should pray for for other people.

We need to pray that the Spirit of God – while we pray – will lead us in praying correctly, but will also show us which Truths will be the dynamite that will destroy the established walls in people in order that they can become free.

But we also need to pray that God Himself will, through His Spirit, prepare people for change.

In order that they will be susceptible and open to people who will enter their personal space and remove the veils in order that the Light of God can shine into their lives, when He wants to use us in their lives.

We are merely God's co-workers in this (2 Corinthians 6:1,2).

CHAPTER 8 Nothing can block God's light.

It is remarkable how often the work of God, Jesus Himself and believers is described as light, Light, and people of the light.

Let's turn to John 1:1-5 as an example: "Before the world was created, the Word already existed; He was with God, and He was the same as God. From the very beginning the Word was with God. Through Him God made all things; not one thing in all creation was made without him. The Word was the source of life, and this life brought light to mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out."

This light drives out the darkness. Nothing can block it.

I woke up at about four o'clock the other morning and just knew that myself and my people were being attacked from the invisible world. It was as if I was experiencing the same feelings as years ago fighting on our country's border when we came under mortar fire. I knew I had to get up and pray that God, who has already completely defeated this enemy in Christ Jesus, would help me to regain my peace. Prayed that He would drive back the enemy. Or, rather, for me to give the enemy his marching orders in faith, on the grounds of the victory of Jesus and my inheritance in Him, in the Name of Jesus. In order that Jesus, the Light, can dispel the darkness.

The image with which God restored my peace at that moment is that of the earth spinning through space, and in the process rotates more and more towards the light. And although at that moment it was still dark outside, the light of the sun and the new day was fast approaching. Nothing and no one could stop it.

Jesus was God's Light coming to earth (John 1:4,5). Therefore, when Jesus entered a place, it was the Light that entered that place, and darkness didn't stand a chance. Nothing could stop it. Suddenly there was just light.

Also with the events at His crucifixion, when He attacked the powers of evil to prepare the salvation of the world and its people, and even die in the process, darkness fell for three hours.

But He was victorious and rose again. And now we are this light, because the Light is in us through the working and inhabitation of the Spirit of God through the salvation and new life in us. That's why the Bible calls us "people of the light" and "light".

Off course this affects all that happens when we pray. To illustrate this I would like to refer to verse Job 36:32: "He seizes the lightning with his hands and commands it to hit the mark".

The verb in the Hebrew "paga" which means "pray" in certain contexts, can also mean "to hit the mark".

The image it awakes in my mind with regards to prayer is that prayer is in fact like taking a magnification glass and focussing the light there where you would like to see it burn. Or, put differently, prayer is asking God to figuratively send His lightning to make the things happen where it should.

Captivating, especially if one takes into account the fact that lightning is a concentration of energy that can reach temperatures of up to 30 000 degrees Celsius.

No wonder Psalm 68:2 says: "As smoke is blown away, so he drives them off; as wax melts in front of the fire, so do the wicked perish in God's presence." And Psalm 97:5: "The hills melt like wax before the Lord, before the Lord of all the earth."

No wonder Hebrews 12:29 says "...our God is indeed a destroying fire".

Luke 10:18-20 tells us that when Satan fell like lightning from heaven. The light of God literally "shocked" darkness and all embodiment of darkness from heaven.

Therefore 1 John 1:5 – 7 says we should stop playing games. Listen to how he puts it: "Now the message that we have heard from his Son and announce is this: God is light, and there is no darkness at all in him. If, then, we say that we have fellowship with him, yet at the same time live in the darkness, we are lying both in our own words and in our actions. But if we live in the light - just as he is in the light - then we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from every sin."

But this also has huge significance for when we need to act in the Name of Jesus under the anointing of the Spirit of God. Listen to what God tells Ezekiel, the prophet, in Ezekiel 21:9,10,14,15: "Mortal man, prophesy. Tell the people what I, the Lord, am saying: A sword, a sword is sharpened and polished. It is sharpened to kill, polished to flash like lightning. There can be no rejoicing, for my people have disgraced every warning and punishment. Now, mortal man, prophecy. Clap your hands, and the sword will strike again and again. It is a sword that kills, a sword that terrifies and slaughters. It makes my people lose courage and stumble. I am threatening their city with a sword that flashed like lightning and is ready to kill."

God's Word in the hands of the prophet was like a sword of the judgement of God that he handled and literally waved back and forth.

Let's ruthlessly draw a line through to ourselves today as children of the living God in Jesus: to there where you and I act, speak or pray on the grounds of God's commands or His authority. That which we pray or say in His Name is like a sword of light, like lightning, which does with great focus that which God wants it to do.

When we accept Jesus as Savior and Lord we become light. To such an extent that Isaiah can say of God's people: "Arise, Jerusalem, and shine like the sun; The glory of the Lord is shining on you! Other nations will be covered by darkness, but on you the light of the Lord will shine; the brightness of His presence will be with you. Nations will be drawn to your light, and kings to the dawning of your new day." (Isaiah 60:1-3)

In Ephesians 5:8 Paul says the same in the New Testament: "You yourselves used to be in the darkness, but since you have become the Lord's people, you are in the light. So you must live like people who belong to the light."

Intercession through prayer is like releasing God's light in the darkness of a situation or someone's life.

When we pray, we should never forget how strong this light in us is through the working of God's Spirit. This light has already defeated the darkness. Darkness must retreat before this light.

2 Corinthians 4:6 and 7 says that God's shekinah-glory is in us: "The God who said, "Out of darkness the light shall shine!" is the same God who made his light shine in our hearts, to bring us the knowledge of god's glory shining in the face of Christ. Yet we who have this spiritual treasure are like common clay pots, in order to show that the supreme power belongs to God, not t us."

We are the soldiers of the One who is called Light. Go, fearlessly confront the darkness in and around you in His Name, where He commissions you.

CHAPTER 9 Actions and words in the Name of Jesus make things happen

Sometimes we read something in the Bible and even repeat it to one another a hundred times without really understanding the immense implications thereof. An example of this is found in 2 Corinthians 6:1: “As God’s fellow-workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain”.

You and I are God’s fellow-workers.

I came under the impression that that which I pray and obediently say and do as God leads me to, fits into what He is busy doing somewhere. Have a look, for instance, at what is happening in Ezekiel 37.

Sometimes God demands certain prophetic actions or declarations from us where we have to say or do the things that is in God’s heart for that situation. In order to “open up and prepare a roadway” for what God is going to do next (according to Isaiah 40:1 to 5 and 62:10).

Where you and I walk and talk in obedience, there will always be reaction from God’s side. It is as though our obedient actions and words literally open doors and windows for God to enter and do what He wants to do.

He chose for it to be this way.

God literally starts moving in there where we cannot see, if we obediently pray His Word, (as He commands us to), or when we say or do something in a specific situation here on earth.

It almost sounds like revelation-knowledge when we say this, but we see it repeated in the Scriptures time and time again. Let’s name a couple such examples:

- In Exodus 14:21 Moses stretches his hand out over the sea and God drove the sea back and turned it into dry land.
- In Exodus 17:9 to 13 we read that as long as Moses held up the staff in his hands, the Israelites were winning
- In Exodus 17:6 Moses strikes the rock- because God commanded him to do so- to bring forth water for the people to drink. How logical can this be!
- In 2 Kings 13:14 to 19 we read how king Jehoash was ordered to strike the ground with his arrow and according to the number of times he struck the ground, God gave the Israelites the corresponding number of victories over their enemy.
- Joshua 9:6 and 7 and 2Kings 5:10 to 14 are examples of healing happening simply because people obediently went and did as God commanded them.

Then, off course, there are numerous examples of people commanded by God to make certain prophetic declarations to literally on His behalf say what His will is in a certain situation. Where they literally become His voice.

- Jeremiah 6:18,19,22:29
- 1 Kings 17:1,13-16
- In Romans 1:16 Paul describes the gospel as a power of God that literally just needs to be released (when you and I start witnessing to others)
- Isaiah 55:11 – This man’s words are my words, God says. He is My voice!

It is captivating that the Greek word that we translate with “witness”, is the verb “homologeō” which literally means “to say the same thing”. And this is exactly what witnessing is. Biblical witnessing literally to say what God’s says. Only then can our testimony be effective and can our witnessing and words become God’s Word to them.

The Bible takes this a step further and describes it as “seed” that we are sowing in people’s lives. In this way it becomes God’s way of reproducing new life in people’s lives through His Word. And it becomes part of His way of facilitating rebirth in people (1 Peter 1:23); or to cleanse them (John 15:3); or to make them mature (Matthew 13:23); or to deliver them (John 8:31 and 32); or to heal them (Ps 107:20).

Job 6:25 helps us understand that our words seal God’s promises (marats is the Hebrew verb), just like someone would seal documents in the king’s name and on his behalf, using his signet ring.

Ecclesiastes 12:11 helps us understand that our words are like nails firmly imbedding God’s Words in specific situations- when we obediently say what God tells us to say.

Ezekiel 37 helps us understand that we become God’s co-workers where we prayerfully and prophetically start speaking life when God tells us.

Many Christians went to speak to the Berlin wall because God told them to do so, and the day came that the wall fell! How many Christians aren’t currently praying “Heal our land” or “bring revival” because they are experiencing that this is God’s heart for now.

In my personal life I have experienced God calling me to do what is written in Isaiah 62:10: “Pass through, pass through the gates! Prepare the way for the people. Build up, build up the highway! Remove the stones. Raise a banner for the nations!”

The way I understand this is to minister old Biblical truths, that have become new to me, to people as God leads me through His Spirit and to see in the process how God Himself prepares the stage for that which is currently in His heart.

Therefore I call on you today as fellow-worker of God to start doing what you need to do. To pray when you need to pray. To speak when you need to speak. To prophetically start repeating a promise of God in a certain situation, even if it feels foolish and totally illogical.

We are, after all, God’s fellow-workers, His voice, which He wants to use.

2 Corinthians 5:18-6:2 says after all: “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of

reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. As God's fellow-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says, "In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation."

CHAPTER 10 While we pray, we change...

Sometimes we pray but it seems and feels that nothing is happening or changing.

Off course this is not true. By this time we know that something always happens when we pray. Even if it is only inside us.

I often ask people why we actually pray. After all, it is not as though God doesn't already know the things we want to say to Him or ask Him. He knows all these things and knows our thoughts. Why is it God's heart that we still pray...speak...ask?

Seems that part of this answer is contained in what happens to us when we pray. For this reason I would like to spend some time looking at this.

It strikes me how often the Bible compares God and being in God's presence, as fire and being in the fire. Let me show you a couple of examples:

Hebrews 12:29: "because our God is indeed a destroying fire."

Jeremiah 23:29: "My message is like a fire, and like a hammer that breaks rocks into pieces."

1 Peter 1:5-7: "They are for you, who through faith are kept safe by God's power for the salvation which is ready to be revealed at the end of time. Be glad about this, even though it may now be necessary for you to be sad for a while because of the many kinds of trials you suffer. Their purpose is to prove that your faith is genuine. Even gold, which can be destroyed, is tested by fire; and so your faith, which is much more precious than gold, must also be tested, so that it may endure. Then you will receive praise and glory and honor on the Day when Jesus Christ is revealed.

To be in God's presence – also when you are just there to speak to Him in prayer – is like being in the fire where the rubbish in you is systematically burnt away. Off course God doesn't want to destroy you, but in the process rather cleanse you, heal you, strengthen you and help you grow to maturity and even greater fruitfulness as believer.

Each one of us should go and honestly consider what all this "rubbish" can be in our lives. Maybe it is your own plans, your preconceived ideas about how things should happen, or what you see as the solution for a certain situation.

Jeremiah sketches for us how God takes us with His tongs, sticks us into the oven and holds us there until we are red-hot. Then He takes us out of the fire and puts us down upon His anvil, in order to hit us until we take on the exact form He intended for us.

Ouch!

I hope you hear; pain, losing control in certain situations, intense pressure and dramatic change.

Welcome to God's fire, also when you pray.

Off course, there in the fire we feel as though God has deserted us and as though we are speaking to the roof. But if we persevere, conscientiously keep praying and speaking – even though we keep quiet for periods because of the intense pain – we discover, like Daniel and his friends that Jesus is with you in the fire through His Spirit. You are not alone.

Those times when you pray and feel so alone, feel as though God is miles away, He is there with you.

Peter further consoles us when he makes us aware of the fact that precious things happen to us when we are in the fire.

To explain what he is saying it is necessary to attach another verse from Revelation 3:18, where it is written: “ I advise you, then, to buy gold from me, pure gold, in order to be rich. Buy also white clothing to dress yourself and cover up your shameful nakedness. Buy also some ointment to put on your eyes, so that you may see.”

It is actually captivating what is written here. Some things God gives away free of charge, out of grace. Things like eternal life, complete salvation in Jesus, His Holy Spirit in us, peace, joy etc. But in Revelation 3:18 we are told that there are things that we have to buy from God, as a manner of speaking: Gold purified by fire.

What does the Lord mean by this? Seems to me that this “gold” is at least two things:

This gold is faith that has been tested. The faith that Peter speaks of in 1Peter 1:7. Where we come walking out of the fire after a period of trials and suffering with a much stronger faith than we had when we entered that situation.

This gold is also a purified character. Like Job says in Job 23:10: “Yet God knows every step I take; if he tests me, he will find me pure.” Amidst these trials and struggles God will, through the working of His Spirit, burn more and more of Christ into your being in order that people really will see more of Jesus in your life when they look at you.

But this comes at a price. Whether the price we pay is the personal pain and continual perseverance until the things start happening upon which you hope and believe. Or plain and simply the practice of faithfully keeping your eyes fixed on Jesus, to keep trusting Him until He gives a way out or a breakthrough in a matter about which you are praying and trusting Him.

Off course there will be many times during such a time of testing there in the fire when you will need to make a choice. You need to chose to either stop believing and stop praying, and just give up; or chose to continue until the Lord has answered you and has given the breakthrough, and you have gold in your hand!

CHAPTER 11 In the fire, we become true believers

I would like to continue where I left off previously. Let me quote a couple of verses from Revelation 3:14 to 22: "I know what you have done; I know that you are neither cold nor hot. How I wish you were either one or the other! But because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I am going to spit you out of my mouth! You say, "I am rich and well off; I have all I need." But you do not know how miserable and pitiful you are! You are poor, naked, and blind. I advise you, then, to buy gold from me, pure gold, in order to be rich. Buy also white clothing to dress yourself and cover up your shameful nakedness. Buy also some ointment to put on your eyes, so that you may see. I rebuke and punish all whom I love. Be earnest, then, and turn from your sins. Listen! I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into his house and eat with him, and he will eat with me. To those who win the victory I will give the right to sit beside me on my throne, just as I have been victorious and now sit by my Father on his throne."

One of the most difficult questions to answer is the following: Why do bad things sometimes happen to believers?

Like I've said, it really is a difficult question for me to answer. Yet I would like to try and share one of the many answers to this question while we are on the topic of prayer. Let's just have a look first of all that is being written here to the church in Laodicea. This church struggled with the typical things you and I struggle with daily in the modern world. Namely to often find ourselves in situations where it would be all too easy to give in to and conform to what is going on around us, without considering the ramifications.

It literally happens without us even being aware of it. In this way materialism, hedonism, (where our own pleasures and enjoyment becomes all important), and almost an insensitivity to the pain and need in the lives of others around us.

Normally it happens in situations where we as believers are readily accepted where we work and live, and therefore do not experience any hardship or persecution because we are Christians.

This is typically the situation in most Western countries today. As a result Christians become very secure and comfortable. Which in turn causes people to fall into a comfortable, lukewarm, self-centered, powerless relationship with God and the people around them.

The flip side is that we actually open doors and windows in our lives during such times through which the enemy can come and steal what is precious in our lives. And when this happens it is literally as though we wake up to discover that the world around us is on fire.

I believe the miserable things that happen then is the work of the enemy. But I also believe that God works with us in a special way during such times. Yes, that He uses these attacks of the enemy on our lives as fire to purify us. To, as described here in Revelation 3 and also there in 1 Peter 1:4 to 7, build our character and faith in the fire.

Let me put it differently. And I want you to pay careful attention to how I say this, because I have a problem in my spirit with the regular way in which so many people say to each other “It is God’s will that such or such happened!

I personally feel it is Biblically more correct to say: In His grace God makes allowance for these events in our lives, and He uses that which happens to us as fire in our lives: whether financial challenges, or during times of illness, or amid crises in our relationships.

These are the times we earnestly start calling out to God in prayer. There, before God in prayer, we experience how God is getting busy with us. It is there, as though in a fire, that we experience our eyes and minds being opened by the heat of the flames – the eyepatches that caused us not to be able to see clearly or distinguish between what is really important in our lives and what is not to disappear.

Sometimes it takes time. Sometimes we pray for help and solutions, but they don’t come. We wait, and nothing seems to be happening.

But behind the scenes, there where we cannot see, inside us, things are happening: there inside us a hunger for God's touch grows again. There we discover anew, through the working of the Spirit of God, how we have missed that early intimacy, almost infatuation, we felt for God. How we start desiring that early enthusiasm and fire again.

There in the fire our faith is built and we are taught to persevere and trust God, trust His Word, and His unchanging love for us.

Mark 9:47 to 50 relates closely to this. It reads: “And if your eye makes you lose your faith, take it out! It is better for you to enter the Kingdom of God with only one eye than to keep both eyes and be thrown into hell. There the worms that eat them never die and the fire that burns them is never put out. Everyone will be purified by fire as a sacrifice is purified by salt. Salt is good; but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have the salt of friendship among yourselves, and live in peace with one another.”

The Greek word that is translated with hell here is the word Gehenna. Gehenna was the name of the waste dump outside the city of Jerusalem. King Hosea destroyed the altars for all the other gods there during the reformation. In this way it became the place where the rubbish of the city was disposed of. It literally was the city’s furnace that burnt day and night, where any rubbish could be destroyed for the sake of good health and life.

In this way Gehenna also became the name of the future fire of hell. Where God’s holiness will set alight all that is unholy and keep it alight forever.

Verse 49 is translated as follows; “Everyone will be purified by fire as a sacrifice is purified by salt.”

Already in this life each one of us will experience times when God gets busy with us in His holiness. It will literally be like fire that spreads through our lives in certain areas. In the process that fire will be like the salt that was sprinkled on the sacrifice to make it acceptable to God. In the fire we become “salted” believers!

In this lies our consolation. That it is better to experience now for a short time God's fire and the cleansing effect thereof in our lives, rather than discover in hell someday that there is no way out and no end to this fire.

I want to close. We can all testify to the fact that such times in the fire "fires" us up again, makes us want to talk about what God means to us and what He is busy doing in our lives. It is as though times in the fire ignites the light and fire in our lives and makes it burn high and bright enough for others around us to notice it.

There in the fire of the presence of God, in prayer, we once again become burning torches, light in the darkness around us. There we discover how we compromised in the past, and we choose anew to commit 100% to Jesus and we choose again to commit to live shamelessly according to His standards and values.

In this way we become what 2 Timothy 2:21 says; "If anyone makes himself clean from all those evil things, he will be used for special purposes, because he is dedicated and useful to his Master, ready to be used for every good deed."

CHAPTER 12 Ever felt like God has left and forgotten you in a cave?

In Hebrews 11:38 the Hebrews-writer describes the great heroes of our faith as follows: "The world was not good enough for them! They wandered like refugees in the deserts and hills, living in caves and holes in the ground." David is one such Biblical example of a believer who for many years had a cave for an address. Probably for between 7 and 10 years. No wonder he sometimes felt like God had forgotten him there.

To understand a bit of this man's experiences we need to go and look into his history. You know of course that David's life is described in more detail than any other figure in the Old Testament. Over and above that we are also in the privileged position to literally be able to see into his heart in many of the Psalms he wrote. There we read of his personal struggles and experiences; feelings and experiences so many of us can easily identify with.

The story of David starts where God sends the prophet Samuel to anoint him as the next king of Israel (1 Sam 16) because king Saul had become disobedient to God. In all probability David was about 14 years old at the time. Shortly thereafter, David, a teenager, takes on the giant Goliath and kills him in front of the whole of Israel. King Saul is so impressed by him that he invites him into his palace and David befriends his son Jonathan.

In the palace Saul starts experiencing David, the older he got, becoming a threat to his kingship. Therefore Saul starts doing things to strengthen his own position. He offers, for example, the hands of his two daughters to David in marriage (1 Sam 18). Eventually he decides that it would be better if David was dead, and David, (something between the ages of 20 and 23 by now), has to flee for his life.

Imagine the newly anointed King of Israel on "Police File" in Israel. It is at this point that David flees to the shelter of the cave of Adullam where he becomes the leader of a group of about 400 rebels and outcasts (1 Sam 22). There he lived in hiding, as I said earlier, for between 7 and 10 years.

What an address for one anointed by God: cave such-and-such, Moab! And what depressing housemates! No wonder David fell into such deep depressions from time to time! I can really understand why he so often felt that God had forgotten him during this period of time. Put yourself in his shoes. Remember that we are dealing with one of the most talented musicians in the Old Testament who composed so many wonderful songs and spent hours playing his harp! Remember his typically sensitive nature as a musician of his caliber.

What captivates me however is to see how God teaches David, there in the cave, amid his depressing surroundings, amid his impatience as the things God had promised was simply not materializing, amid the depressing company around him, to none the less praise and worship Him. To such an extent that he says in Psalm 103:1-5 "Praise the Lord, my soul. All my being, praise his holy name! Praise the Lord, my soul, and do not forget how kind he is. He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases. He keeps me from the grave and blesses me with love and mercy. He fills my life with good things, so that I stay young and strong like an eagle."

There in the caves of our lives we learn to look deeper and to really discover what is inside us. There we learn to get beyond all other things in order to get to a point where we can honestly praise God.

Can you imagine how lonely David had to be amongst all these rebels during those 7 to 10 years! With practically no one to talk to about what he was experiencing deep inside himself with regards to God. Yet, in Psalm 27, which was in all probability written during this time, we hear him sing:

...Verse 4: "I have asked the Lord for one thing; one thing only do I want: to live in the Lords' house all my life, to marvel there at his goodness, and to ask for his guidance."

...Verse 9-14: "don't hide yourself from me! Don't be angry with me; don't turn your servant away. You have been my help; don't leave me, don't abandon me, O God, my saviour. My father and mother may abandon me, but the Lord will take care of me. Teach me, Lord, what you want me to do, and lead me along a safe path, because I have many enemies. Don't abandon me to my enemies, who attack me with lies and threats. I know that I will live to see the Lord's goodness in this present life. Trust in the Lord. Have faith, do not despair. Trust in the Lord."

Do not lose sight of the fact that at all times David was the anointed of God intended to be the new king! He was at all times the talented, intelligent, brave, creative, strong, trustworthy and faithful man with an intimate relationship with God, while at the same time he had to live in a cave with a bunch of rebels. One almost feels: what a waste of so many good things, what a waste of time and opportunity!

Therefore we hear in the words of Psalm 27, and many of the other Psalms, how David cried out some days: Lord, why? What did I do? Why have you forgotten me?

Maybe this is why we can today, along with millions of other Christians through the ages, read these psalms and find strength and comfort in them.

When one looks at the further events in God's walk with David, one can see what the meaning was of this time of David's life. Then one remark how this time prepared and equipped him for the responsibilities and challenges that followed later in his life.

I do not believe that the time in the cave was meant to make a giant of faith out of him. He was already a giant of faith as a teenager when he took on Goliath. No, it seems to me that this time was rather necessary to prepare him for God's bigger plans with his life, because he was intended to be the one on whose throne the King of all kings would eventually sit.

We also see that this time taught David to trust God and Him alone above all with everything. Yes, to trust Him more than you would yourself and your own faith. Sometimes we find ourselves in a place in our lives where all our faith and all our trust in God can do nothing to change a situation. It literally makes us realize that God, and God alone, can and must make a difference in these situations. But at His perfect time and in His way.

Have you ever gotten to such a place in your life? This is what I also hear when Paul describes himself as a cracked jar in which the precious treasure of God's gospel and power is served to people.

I see two sides of the faith-coin being practiced here in the cave in David's life.

...David learnt that God gives us power and authority through his anointing on our lives as believers. Even to be king. The New Testament adds to this in that this anointing, which rests on us as children of God, even has as a result that the invisible powers of the heavens must obey when we speak.

...But on the flip side, through our experiences in the caves of the world, we learn something of our own fragility and fallibility. There we experience how we are shook up and how the fire of the situation burns away a lot of the rubbish in our lives.

Let me put it another way: In our Christianity we discover the power and wonder when God works and ministers through our lives through the gifts of the Spirit. But in the cave-times of our lives, we discover how the Spirit of God works out the character of Christ and the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. Also when we pray.

CHAPTER 13 Through the darkness into the light

Psalm 18:28 says: "O Lord, you give me light; you dispel my darkness."

All of us know the darkness of which the Psalm-writer speaks here. It's normally those times when our first words to God are: Why, Lord...?

In the well know Psalm 23 David describes this darkness as literally feeling as though you are walking through the shadow of death (verse 4). He knows how it feels not knowing where God is taking you, and to not be able to see the next step before you. But his comfort was in that he knew that God was there with him. One thing I know for sure and that is that the darkness that sometimes overcomes us is never a permanent fixture in the life of a believer. Sooner or later the light will break through.

The other thing David also discovered is that God, as the Shepherd, is always there during those times to guide us with His rod and staff to where He wants us. David knew that during those periods of darkness in the valleys of our lives, God could purify us without leaving us there. As our Good Shepherd His intention is to also lead us through these times, out the other end, back into the sunlight of maturity and fruitfulness.

In this regard, listen to that remarkable passage in Isaiah 40:3 to 5a: "A voice cries out, "Prepare in the wilderness a road for the Lord! Clear the way in the desert for our God! Fill every valley: level every mountain. The hills will become a plain, and the rough country will be made smooth. Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind will see it."

The meaning during times of darkness in our lives is to give us an opportunity to build a highway in our lives and in situations for God. And along this highway He leads us out of this desert or valley of darkness.

If you want to know how this roadway is to be built, then look at what is written there further. We normally regard these desert-times or times of darkness as very unhappy times. We see it as a cave out of which we want to escape as soon as possible. The wonder is that God actually wants to use this valley – in its depth and breadth – as the container, which He wants to fill with His fullness. He wants give you a new experience of His love and grace, and of the powerful working of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Therefore the Lord will work supernatural wonders amid this darkness. Before our very eyes, all that is hill and mountain will be flattened. All that is crooked will be straightened during these times, and all that is rough and uneven will be made smooth. Therefore Luke 3:5 and 6 says: "Every valley must be filled up, every hill and mountain leveled off. The winding roads must be made straight, and the rough paths made smooth. All mankind will see God's salvation!"

It will happen around us but very definitely also inside us. We will experience God forming our characters until we become the razor-sharp instruments that will deal the deadly blow to the enemy.

Therefore it seems to me as though one literally grows out of those dark valleys and caves in ones life while God is busy with you.

It is strange that we experience during these dark times that God is not talking to us. This is off course not true, because when we think back to these times in our lives we know that God definitely talked to us. It was in fact God's voice during these times that made us aware of the fact that He was in fact with us. But because of the darkness we couldn't see any other signs or evidence that He was in fact with us.

Therefore I would like to say to you: If it is currently dark around you: be sensitive to God's voice! Listen carefully to what He is saying to you during this time.

This time in the darkness, this valley or cave experience in our lives has a very distinctive pattern. I would like to distinguish five phases;

Phase 1 – Things are going really well with you and you really enjoy serving God.

Phase 2 – Then the crisis strikes you and you fall into the darkness

Phase 3 – You frantically start asking God for answers in prayer in an attempt to understand what happened to you

Phase 4 – You start gaining some insight and start understanding what God is busy doing in your life.

Phase 5 – God gives the way out after the purifying process has been completed and you can shout out in joy again that your prayers have been answered.

Let me show you some examples from Psalms that identifies these different phases for us:

Phase 1 – Psalm 47 is a good example. Life is great. All around you you witness growth, you experience fulfillment and is excited about the things God is busy doing. But it is also the phase where a small hunger for more starts breaking through, a hunger for more of God and more intimacy.

Phase 2 – Suddenly, as though out of nowhere, the crisis is upon you and you experience how you plunge into the darkness. Welcome to Psalm 88's valley. When you read this Psalm, it reads and feels desperately depressing and you experience this complete feeling of powerlessness. You feel that there is no hope, there is no faith, there is no joy, and there is no light. Those of you who have been there at some point in your life know that it is of comfort to know that it is exactly what others experienced when they were in the same spot.

Phase 3 – The one thing one clings to during those times of darkness in ones life is the Word of God. It is as though you cannot get enough of it. You read and meditate on what you've read, all in an attempt to get answers for that that happened to you. And as you search and read, and cling to it, you experience how slowly but surely you are lifted up out of the darkness to the surface. Not that it is light around you yet. It is still dark, but it is at least not as dark as before. Psalm 31 tells of this time when it is less dark than before. Where you know and believe God will bring you out of it.

Phase 4 – An understanding for that which God is busy with in your life is breaking through more and more. As it starts breaking though, it starts becoming easier for you to believe and trust that also this will work out for the best for yourself and also those around you. It is like driving up a mountain pass and although you are not at the top yet, you can look back and see the valley lying below.

Phase 5 – Suddenly you are in Psalm 40. This is the moment that you realise God has answered your prayers and you are at the top of the mountain. These are the time you can shout out: “I waited patiently for the Lord’s help; then he listened to me and heard my cry. He pulled me out of a dangerous pit, out of the deadly quicksand, He set me safely on a rock and made me secure. He taught me to sing a new song, a song of praise to our God. Many who see this will take warning and will put their trust in the Lord.” (Psalm 18 is also a good example of this.)

I would like to close with a word of encouragement to each one of you who is sitting in such a dark valley in his or her life. I know that you are not currently experiencing what I am about to tell you, but regard them as prophetic words that will shortly be fulfilled in your life:

Psalm 112 promises: “Praise the Lord! Happy is the person who honors the Lord, who takes pleasure in obeying his commands. The good man’s children will be powerful in the land; his descendants will be blessed. His family will be wealthy and rich, and he will be prosperous forever. Light shines in the darkness for good men, for those who are merciful, kind, and just.” One thing I know for certain and that is that it will become light again.

God doesn’t forget us there in the darkness. He knows exactly how long we are there for and what needs to happen there. He will once again let His light break through when His work in you has been completed.

The best advice I can give you during this time is to immerse yourself in the Word of God. Psalm 119:105 says for good reason that God’s Word is the Light for our path, it is especially true for these times of darkness.

Keep talking to God. Until He speaks to you. Wait on that Word from God for your situation. It is not for nothing that Isaiah 55: 10 and 11 tells us that the Word of God will not fail to do what He sends it to do. Nothing can block the Word of God. Once God starts speaking, exactly what He wants to happen will happen. When He speaks things change and nothing can stop this. Not even yourself or your own unbelief. Remember that right in the beginning with creation it was only necessary for God to say one word to bring light in the darkness. This can be the same for your life.

Isaiah 58:8 and Malachi 4:2 promises that along with the light healing also breaks through into the times of darkness in our lives. You know where it is that you need healing. Trust God also for this in your life.

CHAPTER 14 All in preparation for God's season

I would like to conclude this series on prayer. Let me start by telling you the story of Elzeard Bouffier, a shepherd, who lived in the French Alps in 1913. As a result of irresponsible deforestation, the mountains around the village in Provence where he lived, were without protective vegetation and therefore exposed to the elements. This started a whole process of degeneration in the area: rivers and streams stopped flowing, the wind started damaging the vegetation of the little town in the area and the inhabitants and as a result people started moving away after a while.

Elzeard, however, went out every day and collected pine cones and continued to do this until he had collected 100 perfect pine cones each day. He gradually started planting these against the slopes of the mountain. When the storyteller met up with him, he had already been busy with this for about three years. According to his calculations, he had already planted about 100 000 new trees of which at least 20 000 had started growing.

Elzeard continued doing this throughout the First World War. His actions set in motion a chain reaction: as the trees started growing normally again, the rivers started flowing naturally again and the ecology in the area was restored to such an extent that meaningful life became viable in the valley again. People started moving into the area again and a new community started forming. All because one man faithfully went about doing what he thought he needed to do. And all this while the world around him was literally in flames.

How often do we not pray for long periods of time without that which we asked for seemingly happening? How many times do we not trust the Lord for days, months and even years for a breakthrough without anything happening? How often do we not experience those times in the cave or in the dark valley and we become despondent and almost too tired to carry on and keep trusting God to change things...

God's and our concepts of time are very different. We are in such a hurry. Things should have happened yesterday already. It always feels as though God is late.

Let me quote Ecclesiastes 3:1 to 11: "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace. What does the worker gain from his toil? I have seen the burden God has laid on men. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end."

The more I study God's concept of time in the Scriptures, the more I realise that God has predestined a certain season for things to happen. One realises this when you look at how the New Testament speaks of the concept of "time". The use and context of two Greek words caught my

attention: chronos, referring to normal, chronological time, and kairos, which in turn refers to the “right time” or a specific and strategic moment.

It seems to me that our problem lies in the fact that we do not always recognise the relationship between the chronos-times and kairos-times in our lives. The chronos-times prepare us and eventually bring us to the much awaited kairos-moments. For God’s plans to realise there is always a normal, chronological passage of time required to eventually bring us to those specific moments which are then God’s season for things to start happening.

We normally frantically seek out those times when things start happening. It is after all wonderful when breakthroughs or miracles happen for which we have been praying for such a long time. In this way we disregard the long periods of time in between during which we were forced to faithfully keep praying and trusting God to make His promises come true. It is as though we do not realise that the times we have a cave for an address, or the times we feel that God has forgotten us in a dark valley, are just the normal passage of chronos time until the kairos moment arrive in which God brings the breakthrough.

No wonder Galatians 6:9 says: “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” When a farmer ploughs and sows, and has to wait months for his harvest, so many things can happen to make him doubt that there will even be a harvest. But if we have a word from God that there will be a harvest, we can know that there will be a predestined time, a kairos moment, where we will find ourselves holding the harvest in our hands.

It is like baking a cake. On their own the flour and baking powder we put into the mixing bowl taste horrible. But mixed in with the right ingredients, baked at 180 degrees Celsius for the correct length of time, it becomes a cake that is a pleasure for all to enjoy.

It is often the same in our own lives. A large part of our lives as believers, which include our times of prayer, is chronos-time. On their own seemingly tasteless and even horribly bad, but as part of God’s recipe, masterly mixed together and managed, it eventually delivers, at the kairos-moment, a product that we want to celebrate!

Let it be a comfort in the cave and valley times of your life, because you know that behind the scenes, God is busy preparing something very festive. Something in which you play a cardinal role, in which this whole, horrible experience play a cardinal role. Even if just to be a vehicle to bring us to the right place at the right time.

The danger is that our hope and expectation can start waning during these chronos-times. We have been praying for such a long time, but nothing is seemingly happening. It is then that Galatians 6:9 should encourage us to keep going.

If we persevere and keep trusting God during these chronos-seasons in our lives, we are, just like Elzeard, planting one pine cone after another in order that a seemingly lifeless, dry region can change into a life-sustaining region where God’s new life can break through at the kairos moment. And when the time is right for this to happen, it can literally happen in an instant.

Remember Abraham. For 24 chronos-years he and Sarah just had to cling to God’s promise that one day a son of their own will be born to them. Until that day in Genesis 18:10 dawned when God

came and said: this time next year you will have a son. They laughed, but a year later Isaac was born.

A luxury yacht, The Matchmaker, was on her journey back to Seattle when the captain heard a call over the radio about a sailboat that had capsized with a man and woman on board at the time. The man was able to swim to shore, but the woman was still missing. Various boats had been searching for two hours already in the area without results. Because he knew the currents in the area well, the captain realised that his vessel was in a perfect and strategic position and realised that the woman, if she was still alive, would be swept directly towards them. He ordered his crew to be on the lookout for her. And so it was. A few minutes later they heard her cries and the crew of The Matchmaker was able to rescue her out of the ocean.

Who knows whether God isn't using all the things that happened in the chronos-times of your life to ensure that you are now, at this kairos moment, exactly there where he wants to use you. Therefore, do not be discouraged. Hang in there during the chronos times, the kairos moment is on its way.

APPENDIX TAKE FIVE

A Prayer-care-share lifestyle

A simple and effective strategy to reach people who need the blessing of God in their lives.

Take Five is a simple concept to help you reach people with the gospel of Jesus Christ. In some places it is called prayer evangelism. This is a simple, effective strategy that all Christians can use to reach out to friends, family, colleagues and neighbours.

Step 1 - Select 5 friends or families to pray for

Pray and ask the Lord for the names of five friends, family members, colleagues or neighbours that you know that need the blessing of God in their lives and who need more of Jesus in their lives.

Write down their names:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

(Do not make this a law. If you feel five people are too many, start praying for two or three; it is fine if you want to pray for more than five people. We simply suggest you start with five.)

Step 2 - Pray five blessings for them, five minutes a day, at least five days a week for one year

When you pray for them, pray for five things:

1. Body - health, protection, strength
2. Labour - work, income, security
3. Emotional - joy, peace, hope, love
4. Social - love, marriage, good relationships with family, friends, neighbours, colleagues at work
5. Spiritual - salvation, faith, grace, mercy, spiritual growth

(You can add other things to pray for, but start by using these five prayer pointers as you pray for your five people or families.)

When you pray for the salvation of people, you can also ask God that through the power and work of the Holy Spirit, people will start to ask themselves the following questions:

1. Whom can I trust?
2. What is my purpose in life?
3. When will I be free?
4. Where will I go when I die?
5. Why do I hate or fear God? Why do I run away from God?
6. How can I handle my problems?
7. Where will I be safe? Who can protect me?

Step 3 - Care for people through attending to their felt needs

Can you do more than pray? Yes! Once you have started to pray for your five families or friends, you start to look and ask the Lord to care for them. One of them may become ill: cook a meal, take their children to school, do the laundry. Someone's car may break down: give him or her a lift to work, lend him or her a car. Every time they have a felt need, offer to pray for them. Do not make a fuss about it, simply ask them if they would allow you to pray for them and then lift them up to the Lord. Ask the Lord to help and bless them.

Step 4 - Share with them about Jesus and the goodness of the Lord

The next step is to look for "natural" opportunities to share your faith with them. Do not push it down their throats. Simply drop a Scripture verse, tell them about an answer to prayer or offer to pray for them. As you pray and care for them and your friendship grows, more opportunities will open to share your faith with them.

Number of Christians tripled in one year

In the 1960's the Republic of Central Africa had about 180 000 Christians. They were agreeing and prayed in small groups over one year - each person prayed for three unsaved people. The number of Christians grew to 600 000 in one year because of this strategy.

Step 5 - Persevere for one year

Keep praying with millions of other Christians in Africa during 2002.

Implementing these five steps in your prayer life, should lead to what is called a prayer-care-share lifestyle. It is a simple, practical, non-threatening form of evangelism - even children can do it. It is an effective way of reaching people with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Why must I bless my neighbours?

God said to Abraham that He would bless Abraham and that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through him (Gen.12:3) In Numbers 6:24-27 God teaches Aaron how to bless the people. In John 1:16 we are taught that through Jesus we receive grace on grace. In Genesis 1 we read that after God had created the whole earth, He blessed it. God wants to bless people and wants them to be blessed. Less than 10% of all people are open that you can speak to them about Jesus at a first meeting. But statistics show that more than 98% of all people are open that you can pray for them so God will bless them.

Why is this an effective strategy?

There are several reasons for this:

Not all people have the gift of evangelism, but all of us can pray, even introverts and people who find it difficult to speak to other people about their faith.

This is a non-threatening way of praying for people and building friendships with people and in a "normal" way start to share with them about Jesus.

More people are open to listen to what you want to share with them about Jesus if they can see in a practical way that you care for them and love them. Our deeds are stronger than our words.

Your attitude in prayer

Pray with faith - God answers prayer (Heb.4:16, 11:6)

When you pray you should know that nothing is impossible for God (Mark 10:27)

Pray with compassion (Matt.9:36)

Persevere in prayer (Luk.18:1)

Pray with a clean heart (Prov.28:9, 13)

Praying with others

You can pray alone, but it is always better and a great encouragement if you can find other people that will also Take Five and pray with you. You can encourage your family to pray with you or your cell group can do this together, or you can find 2-3 other fellow Christians at work or school to pray with you.

Scriptures for prayer

Some more Scripture verses that you may use in your prayer time: John 3:16, John 6:63, John 6:44, John 5:21, John 16:8-11, 2 Cor.4:3-4, 2 Cor.10:3-6, 2 Pet.3:9, Matt.18:14, 1 Tim.2:3-4

Will my prayers make a difference?

Millions of Christians around the world are using this method or strategy (in various ways) to reach their unsaved neighbours and friends with the gospel. Every day people come into a new or deeper relationship with Jesus, because of praying and caring Christians.

(Take Five is being presented in cooperation with Operation Sunrise Africa as one of OSA's evangelistic strategies. More information of OSA is available at website www.genesis.org.za (specifically for Cape Town) and www.operationsunriseafrica.org (South Africa and Africa)).