

TRANSFORMING
SYDNEY

From the National Coordinators

Dear friends,

I would like to ask you two questions - I'm not going to give you the answers as the Holy Spirit will give you the answers;

"I have said all this while I am still with you. But the one who is coming to stand by you, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will be your teacher and will bring to your minds all that I have said to you." [John 14:25-26 JBP]

My questions are:

1. Would Australia still be a nation without people? If you suddenly removed everything from Australia, buildings, animals, trees, mountains, rivers, etc. and only the people were left on a bare landscape - would we still be a nation? What if suddenly all the people disappeared but everything else was left - would this still be Australia?
2. Is prosperity the new miracle? Since we're not regularly seeing healing and other miracles across the western church, the only obvious measure of God's blessings must be how well off a Christian is with money, a good house and other assets, respect from the world and high standing, position in the church/elders/etc. Is this the way to test if a Christian is successful? What if they don't have money, success, flashy cars, kids in top schools, are unknown at church (or avoided at any rate) - are they cursed? Perhaps they don't have faith? Maybe they still have sin in their lives and that's why they are sick, needy and depressed?

As with everything, pray on it and seek His face.

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT REGARDING THIS NEWSLETTER

Next year 2017 we are reducing the number of editions to 4 per year instead of 12. Thus the next edition will be published in March. As the seasons change through every year, there are seasons of change throughout everyone's lives and in our ministries to each other.

He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. [Ecclesiastes 3:11 NIV]

Grace and peace,

Bjorn Schmid, Public Officer for Transforming Sydney

prayerstrategy.org businesswomenhealingministry.org transformingsydney.org



Reflections on Christmas.....

Professor Michael Adams, Dean of Law, Western Sydney University,

The lead up to Christmas is quite strange, as the many university students have conducted their examinations in November – papers are marked and results moderated and inputted into the systems. Most students head for summer jobs or travelling, and academics drift into their other main role – research. Opportunity to catch a breath and read and read and, well yes, read (maybe write something as well). But in the midst of these change, comes the realisation that as the southern hemisphere goes into the summer vacation, to return in the new academic year in February, the Christmas season commences. In Australia the politically correct terminology of “End of Year Festivals” becomes more common and pictures of snow and santa appear – with little reference to the birth over 2,000 years ago of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

For many years, I chose to work right up until Christmas Eve, then rush off home for the local church service with family in tow. But each year the craziness of the pace took the joy and fun and true celebration of this amazing event. Thus, with the University's decision to actually close down all campuses for two weeks, starting a few days before the public holiday and until early January – I realised we need time to breath and adjust to life – a new life. Thus, I chose to take the whole week off work before Christmas officially starts to get my body and mind and spirit in a better peaceful place. Thus, many of the errands are done with joy and peacefulness. So the birth of Jesus and its formal church services and family traditions can be fully enjoyed without the crazy rush.

With that, I send my blessings to all the academics and students around the world.



Refocus this Festive Season

It's started.

Recently we made our way to our local shopping centre to be met with utter chaos. The car park was crammed to overflowing – angst and animosity in abundance... and inside was worse!

I don't know why it took me by surprise; the countdown to Christmas is ON!

The retail atmosphere has changed from relaxed browsing to a high intensity, 'get out of my way,' 'every man for himself' approach, that's sadly become synonymous with this erstwhile season of good will.

And it comes at the end of a spectacularly stressful year all round. It started with an outbreak of Zika virus in the Americas, followed by terror attacks in Belgium, then there was #Brexit, and finally a drawn out and highly divisive US election, peppered with wild weather events and global uncertainty in between.

Focussing on the world around us, it's easy to feel hopeless... helpless even, during this 'most wonderful time of the year.'

It's so easy to forget that around 2,000 years ago, a precious little baby boy took His first breath... and 30+ years after that, with His dying breath, He gave us life... and life to the full!

During His time on earth, Jesus taught us all a thing or two about focus.

Read Matthew 14:22-33 – It's one of my favourite bible stories. Jesus' Disciples are far out at sea in a boat, battered by the waves, when they see Jesus walking towards them across the ocean. Wait... What? I can't imagine how I'd respond if I saw someone walking on water under any circumstances, let alone amongst battering waves.

Naturally, they're all terrified at first but Peter remembers that this is Jesus, after all, so in an incredible act of faith he decides to climb out of the boat...

'But when he looked down at the waves churning beneath his feet, he lost his nerve and started to sink. He cried, "Master, save me!"' Matthew 14:30

See what happened there? While Peter's focus was on Jesus, remembering who Jesus is, he was capable of the supernatural but as soon as his focus shifted to the thing he feared, he started to sink.

Sound familiar? Not the walking on water bit but the part about focussing on what scares you, rather than the one who can reach down and pull you out of it, if only you'll let Him.

'Jesus didn't hesitate. He reached down and grabbed his hand. Then he said, "Faint-heart, what got into you?"' Matthew 14:31

I love that Jesus never loses patience with our lack of focus. His response is so gentle and kind. A stark contrast to how I respond to my little ones when they don't do what they're told! And that line: 'He reached down and grabbed his hand.' What a beautiful metaphor for salvation. Jesus reached down and grabbed your hand when you fell beneath the waves of life. You needed only to cry out as Peter did "Master, save me!"

For so many of us, the fear that grips us comes when we shift our focus from Bethlehem to the latest bad news.

This festive season, turn off your news feed for a bit and shift your focus onto the greatest news story ever told!

Have yourself a **merry** little Christmas and a **happy** new year, no matter what happens in 2017. **Spoiler Alert:** God's got this!

Annette Spurr
Creative Director
Blueboxmedia.com.au



Blue Box Media
Be Seen! Be Heard!



The Story of an Available Stutterer

By Mark Tronson

There are 460,000 Australians who stutter (speech impediment) and I have written of this in my daily articles published in Christian Today. Although in 1976 I went for a two week speech course at NSWU Clinical Sciences where we were retaught to speak, the number of times I get caught out is constant.

But the stutter has had one impact upon my walk with the Lord, I have had no choice but to rely on the Lord in my ministry. To illustrate, listed below are some of the ministries the Lord has seen fit to honour over 39 years of Christian ministry.

Working backwards

Tweed Heads Respite – missions people house-sat our home in Tweed Heads while we were away from 1-17 November. These missionaries knew nothing of our prayers as to whether we might offer our Tweed Heads home for missions respite. They rang as we prayed – they house sat 1-14 November.

Laguna Quays Respite – ill with stress (a medical certificate) I took early retirement as a Baptist minister at the end of 2010. With the superannuation we purchased in 2011 a beach house on the Whitsundays which has been consistently utilised by missionaries for respite over the past 6 years.

Young writers ministry – in 2008 Christian Today rang me to become a daily columnist, 12 months later asked me to add a sport article. This I gave over to five young sport writers and this led to additional young writers in 'Comment writing'. Today we have 85 young people in the program. In November last year I founded Christian Today New Zealand whereby the Kiwi young writers now have their own site.

Country Town Tours – athlete, coach, corporate person over 30 years to a regional or rural area for several days engaging in ministry to youth groups, the community, service clubs, churches, men's breakfasts or dinners - remarkable. Our last Country Town Tour was to Mackay Queensland last November.

Art Ministry – 1999 began to paint for relaxation and this turned into a community ministry with Mr Basil Sellers AM donating funds to construct an art gallery in Moruya on the NSW south coast, opened 2003. This led to a Basil Sellers \$15,000 Moruya Art Prize, then the \$100,000 Basil Sellers Sport-Art in Melbourne and the \$2000 Midge Point Art Prize, a small regional area. A touch of the Lord!

Athlete Respite – another idea from the Lord was the Basil Sellers House athlete respite lodge in Moruya was opened in 1992 as a respite ministry to the Australian Institute of Sport elite athletes. Nick Farr-Jones World Cup Wallaby Captain and yachting world champion Jeanine Treharne opened it. An astonishing ministry. It was

replicated in Tweed Heads in 2006 for the SE Qld AIS Sport Units.

Sports Chaplaincy – 1982 I was 'hockey' writer for The Australian and invited to Hong Kong for the second world congress on sport missions - as a Baptist minister and industrial chaplain (InterChurch Trade & Industry Mission). Returning, I established Sports Chaplaincy over 18 years to 2000. I negotiated 150 sport chaplaincy appointments in Australia's major professional sports. This was re-badged Sports Chaplaincy Australia in 2005.



Steve Waugh and Mark

Australian cricket team chaplain – 1984 I was appointed the cricket team chaplain and this ministry continued to 2001 (17 years) when Life After Cricket was initiated. This ministry allowed me to travel the world and conduct sport evangelistic missions (and Sth Pacific missions) and opened many doors for ministry. My editorial team for the Life After Cricket retired cricketers bi-annual newsletter is Allan Border, Greg Chappell, David Boon, Kim Hughes along with Cricket NSW and Cricket VIC.

Olympic Ministry – Kevan Gospel AC IOC Vice President also Chairman of Shell Australia (I was industrial chaplain) invited me to 1984 Los

(continued next page)

The Story of an Available Stutterer (...continued)

Angeles Olympics Religious Services program. In 2000 he sent me to the IOC in Lusanne Switzerland to assist developing a 'transfer of knowledge' of Olympic Village Religious Services. In 2009 my wife Delma and I were presented the Olympic Ministry Medal by Olympian of the Century Carl Lewis.

Footplate Padre – as a former train driver and author of 16 books on railways, I was invited to become the Footplate Padre resulting in writing, visiting railway depots and locomotive crews. This has been a very enjoyable part of my portfolio ministries.

Reality philosophy – the reality is that although the Lord established these in my heart, it took many helpers to see these come to fruition. The numbers of people coming to Christ as a result of all these / teams of people is remarkable. Moreover, for me, a stable family life – Delma my wife of 39 years, our four children and grand children.

It would be silly to say this journey has been all roses – never is - the reality of human experience, there are some who will try to bring you down, make false accusations - ask any leader, Secular or Christian.

One term I often utilise for my ministry outcomes is 'the touch of the Lord' which I often refer to in my messages as 'resurrection moments'. I have preached this message at One Day in Melbourne, the CoolyRocksOn Church Service, and elsewhere to the joy of the Lord.

Some just don't get it it couldn't happen ... if it did it certainly wasn't you! You stutter, you're triple big, you dress way too ordinary, you speak like a train diver, you're one 'of those' who believe the bible ... and on it goes.

I have never assumed the Lord's service is an easy road or a welcoming one. Ministry is fraught within and without by obstacles, lies, deceit, enemies, hardship - yet bold belief and faith steps



Winter Olympics meeting

are the only requirements. My advice – Trust the Lord!

A remarkable part of this journey in the Lord has been the faith finance over 39 years to see it all happen – for our family and our ministry - along with the 'touch of the Lord' upon do many who continue to give including Mr Basil Sellers AM with his continuing mission projects' financial support.

Many have said the stammer has been the

Lord's greatest gift to me as it has ensured I need to depend upon Him and not on my own understanding.

Links to my articles of being a stammerer

Stuttering - 460,000 Australians

<http://www.christiantoday.com.au/article/stuttering.460000.australians/23035.htm>

Stuttering - 460,000 Australians - Part 2

<http://www.christiantoday.com.au/article/stuttering.460000.australians.part.2/23043.htm>

CV

Dr Mark Tronson is a Baptist minister (retired) who served as the Australian cricket team chaplain for 17 years (2000 ret) and established Life After Cricket in 2001. He was recognised by the Olympic Ministry Medal in 2009 presented by Carl Lewis Olympian of the Century. He mentors young writers and has written 24 books, and enjoys writing. He is married to Delma, with four adult children and grand-children.

Dr Tronson writes a daily article for Christian Today Australia (since 2008) and in November 2016 he established Christian Today New Zealand.



Mark and Delma Tronson wedding 1977

Mark Tronson's archive of articles can be viewed at

<http://www.pressserviceinternational.org/mark-tronson.html>

Photos

Mark and Delma Tronson



Christmas: Why Did Jesus Come?

By Bill Muehlenberg, posted Dec 23, 2013 on Cultrewatch

<https://billmuehlenberg.com/2013/12/23/christmas-why-did-jesus-come/>

The most important event in human history was the Incarnation – God coming in the flesh to earth in the person of Jesus Christ. That was not only the turning point of human history, but the one true event of cosmic significance. Everything changed when Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem.

Two thousand years on from that momentous day, the world still commemorates his birth. Yet many folks of course no longer really know what Christmas is all about, and why this time of year is so significant. They are quite aware of the commercialisation and so on, but the real meaning is all but lost.

The Bible, which is the record of God's dealing with mankind, tells us all about the reason for the Incarnation. It makes it perfectly clear why Jesus came to live among us, and to die a cruel death. And it has little to do with various popular conceptions, many even found in our churches.

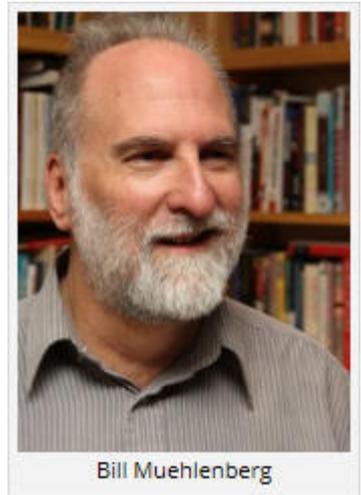
Jesus did not come to get us to be better people, or to live more moral lives. Indeed, he did not come as some mere moral teacher, urging us to improve, and to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. He did not come to offer generalised platitudes about being kinder or more loving.

He did not come as some religious guru, to offer us religious instruction as so many others had. He did not come to tell us that we are all a rather nice bunch, and that he is happy with how we are living our lives. He did not come to say 'you can be a better you' or 'you can have your best life now'.

He did not come so that we might become rich, succeed in our careers, have a nice new home, be loved and praised by others, or live a trouble-free life. Most of the reasons so many folks give for the arrival of Jesus – and heard often from so many pulpits – have nothing to do with what Christ himself said about his coming.

He came to save us from our sins, and to get us back into a right relationship with God. That was his mission. That was his purpose for coming. Plenty of times he spoke to his reason for being here. Let me offer just a few such passages.

In Matthew 20:28 we read that "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many". And in Luke 19:10 we find Jesus saying this: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."



Bill Muehlenberg

One of the most famous texts of course is John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." And later in John's gospel we find these remarks by Jesus: "I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness" (John 12:46).

Paul gives us more of the same in 1 Timothy 1:15: "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners". And John also speaks to this: "The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (1 John 3:8).

All these texts make it quite clear as to the redemptive nature of Christ's coming. That is the reason for the season. We are all engulfed in a massive sin problem which none of us can extract ourselves from. We are all dead in our sins and selfishness with no way out.

The works of sin, Satan and darkness had to be overcome if we could ever hope to be set free and made right with God again. That is why Jesus came. He was not on about silly sentimentalism or self-improvement or having a successful life and lots of money. He was on about dealing with our core problem.

That is the Christmas message and that is what we must proclaim. The truth of the Incarnation must be stated clearly and forthrightly to a broken and needy world. Indeed, truth in general must be proclaimed, in a culture that denies truth and is immersed in relativism.

(continued next page)

Christmas: Why Did Jesus Come? (...continued)

Just yesterday morning in a church in Perth I spoke about these matters. I insisted on the importance of truth, and how believers must lead the way in fearlessly promoting and defending truth. I was told later that there were even several non-Christians in that service and they too were quite moved by the words spoken there.

That is because truth is the means by which God works. He can never work apart from truth. The Holy Spirit in conjunction with the proclamation and living of the truth is the most powerful force on earth. As Jesus plainly taught in John 8:32: "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Truth transforms, and believers have an obligation not just in late December but all year round to stand for truth. Indeed, this too is a major reason why Christ came. Recall the words of Jesus in his discussion with Pilate as found in John 18:37:

"'You are a king, then!' said Pilate. Jesus answered, 'You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me'."

This is why Jesus was born; this is why Jesus came: to testify to the truth. And as you recall, Pilate went on to then ask Jesus, "What is truth?" Incredibly, he did not hang around to get an answer. Here we had perhaps the most important question one could ask, and asked of the most important person to ever walk the planet. Yet he left without hearing the reply!

We dare not be like Pilate. We must learn from Jesus about the truth. And then we must share that with a truth-starved world. People need to hear the truth, not just at Christmas, but

every day of the year. We are to be truth-bearers. We are to share the truth of the gospel – always.

So please, explain far and wide to others why Jesus came. Tell people the truth they so much need to hear. That is our calling. That is our mission. Let me finish with the words of Frederick Buechner as he reminds us about the truth of Christmas:

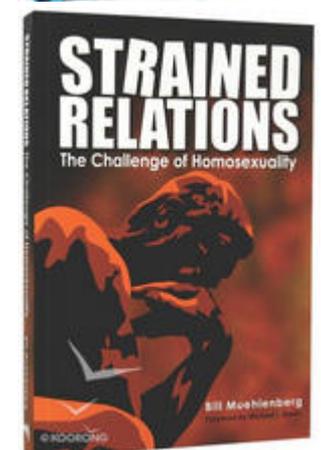
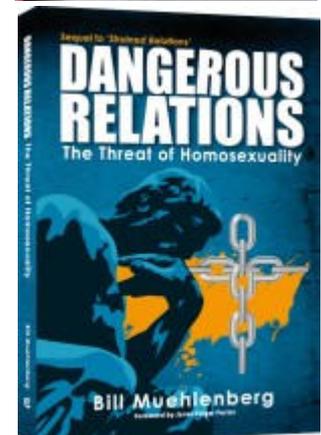
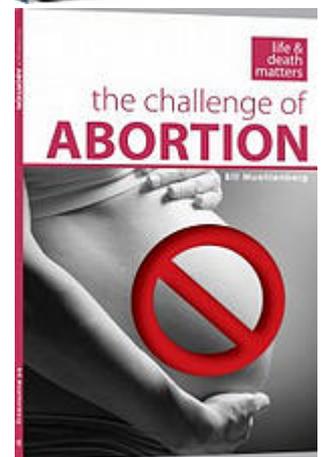
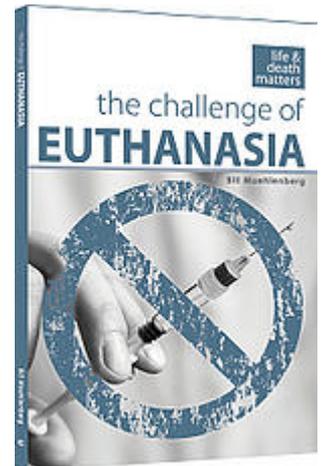
"It is impossible to conceive how different things would have turned out if that birth had not happened whenever, wherever, however it did ... for millions of people who have lived since, the birth of Jesus made possible not just a new way of understanding life but a new way of living it. It is a truth that, for twenty centuries, there have been untold numbers of men and women who, in untold numbers of ways, have been so grasped by the child who was born, so caught up in the message he taught and the life he lived, that they have found themselves profoundly changed by their relationship with him."

About Culture Watch

We live in an age where we see evidence of cultural decline, the erosion of values, the decline of civility, the denial of truth and the elevation of unreason. Many people are asking, "Where is our culture heading?" This website is devoted to exploring the major cultural, social and political issues of the day. It offers reflection and commentary drawing upon the wealth of wisdom found in the Judeo-Christian tradition. It offers reflective and incisive commentary on a wide range of issues, helping to sort through the maze of competing opinions, worldviews, ideologies and value systems. It will discuss critically and soberly where our culture is heading.

Happy reading!

Latest Books



LIGHT BULB MOMENTS

perspective on life

They Are Not You

Any relationship is the meeting of two imperfect people. We can either get frustrated by our differences, or understand and embrace them. Many relationships really struggle if one is excessively practical and the other very emotional. Both extremes are detrimental to relationship.

This is possibly one of the hardest differences to manage. We often hear the practical one say, "If it were me, I would..." when they are frustrated by the emotional reaction from their friend, spouse or workmate. Well it must be realised that they are not you and process differently. The frustration may come as a result of many things; such as, the practical party being too tight with finances so the family has no life, or the other party engaging in emotional spending or having a reactive attitude to time constraints. Here are a couple of tips:

- **Communicate expectations.** Pick a suitable time to discuss your differences and set some guidelines to avoid conflict. Both partners must agree that guidelines are necessary. It takes two!
- **Major on the majors.** If both react to every action, major and minor, they will drive themselves crazy. It is important to be selective as to what needs to be addressed.
- **Delay addressing the issue.** Either party addressing inappropriate behaviour in the moment usually heightens the emotion. Leave it until everyone is calm and then go back to the issue.

Here are some real life stories for each around the 'Design a Decade' program.

Communicate expectations.

A couple contacted us for support. One, the emotional one, was very upset because they believed their spouse did not want them to take a new volunteer role at their church. When they sat down with support as a couple they discovered that their perception was not correct. As the discussion continued it turned out that they each had a very different perception, but the truth was somewhere in the middle. Both could have made adjustments to avoid the clash. The practical partner had not taken the time to understand the role and so mistakenly thought the role would be a detriment to their marriage; their impression was that the role would

be every week, however it was on a roster and not every week. The emotional partner could have explained the role in more detail, which would have prevented their spouse from having to make assumptions.



Major on the majors.

For another couple both the practical partner and the emotional partner would comment negatively about every action of their spouse. After some discussion with their coach they realised this meant that when an action was required that could have a major negative effect, they could not bring themselves to discuss it because *everything* had been criticised. They have since learnt that it is important to pick the significant battles. Now when they do react to something they know it must be serious and are open to consider their actions, because they have not reacted negatively to things that have had no real consequence.

Delay addressing the issue.

I was negotiating a real estate purchase on behalf of a buyer. After a long negotiation process agreement was reached on price and conditions and the contracts were exchanged. Several days later the agent contacted me saying that an error had been made and he wanted the buyer to agree to another condition in the contract. However, I informed him that that change should have happened prior to the exchange and the new condition would not be agreed to. The agent reacted very emotionally and criticised the buyer and myself! In this instance I withdrew from the conversation. Several days later the agent rang on another matter. He was calm so after discussing the matter at hand, I said, "Can we go back to Monday night? I was very surprised at your reaction as we had a good relationship during the negotiation." The agent now apologised for the outburst and admitted he had lost his cool because he had made an error. Had I taken exception to the comments in the emotion of the moment it would have been a much more difficult reconciliation.

If you are struggling to manage differences in your relationships, trusted third party input is essential. Feel free to contact me at chris@chrisjfreeman.com to arrange to help you find the balance.

Cheers, Chris

Is it time for you to tidy up your past, enjoy today, and set up your future? This book introduces you to the in-depth knowledge and wisdom that Chris has developed to help him and his wife Heather – as well as many individuals, couples and businesses – to a better life.



Design a Decade - <http://www.chrisjfreeman.com/resources.html>

Copyright © 2016 Chris Freeman, All rights reserved.

My Encounter with The Life: A Brief Autobiography or Testimony

Shivraj K. Mahendra

I was born and brought up in a marginalized Hindu family in Chhattisgarh, central India. At a very young age of less than a year, I lost my mother in the curse of family idolatry and witchcraft. This made my childhood a story of struggles for survival! I wanted to live a happy life. I had developed a deep desire to make money and get famous. This led me to experiment with painting, photography, poetry, and journalism. Along with my studies I was involved in all these things, however they could not satisfy me and I soon started practicing palmistry and numerology, etc. I was also a leader of the Ganesha festival. When about two months were remaining to complete my senior secondary studies; all of a sudden I fell sick, both physically and psychologically. I had huge unrest and horrible dreams added to it. Much of this was due to my practices in idolatry and witchcraft-type activities.

During this critical time a serious question began to haunt in my mind: What will be the use of lots of money and popularity if I have to die one day? Death claimed to be the greatest threat, which will put an end to everything. So, I got into the search of someone who had conquered death and is able to deliver me from its fear and give me an eternal hope. Among the hundreds of gods and goddesses in my religion, no one had come back to life! And even if someone did, he or she did not have an empty grave to prove it! I was reminded of Jesus about whom I had heard from one of my uncles. So I went to him completing a half-day journey. He gave me the Bible. I read the gospel and I said, this is not enough! I prayed to Jesus: "Lord, if you have really come back to life, please appear to me, and talk to me. I will fast and pray until you show up!" Interestingly, this was the holy week!

The Lord is good! He did not delay. I met the Lord Jesus Christ in a personal encounter on the fine Easter morning of April 7, 1996. It was the third day of my fasting. I found myself in the Garden of Gethsemane. The Lord Jesus, in the form of a bright shining human-like figure, stood before me and said, "*I am the resurrection and the life... Follow me!*" The vision of the resurrected Lord had translated my fear of death into the joy of an everlasting life (John 11:25-26; Psalm 118:17). This was my Encounter with The Life. I accepted Him as my personal savior on that very day. This day I had received the vision, mission and message of my life (Micah 6:8; James 1:27; 1 Corinthians 1:18).

I had first desired to become an engineer, for which I was preparing myself in school; and later, to seek a career in acting, I wanted to go to Bollywood (Indian Film Industry), from where I had received a call letter. However, with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, I finally decided to become a Christian minister for lifetime. I left everything dear to me. And followed the Lord by faith, travelling 1000 miles further north in obedience to the call of Jesus. The Lord guided me to come to Dehradun to be equipped for the ministry at New Theological College (NTC) where I went on to become a faculty. Since my seminary graduation in 2002, I have been involved in translation ministry with the commitment to increase the number of theological literature in Hindi, the national language of my country (13 titles thus far). Apart from translation and writing (3 books and several articles), with the commitment to develop indigenous Christian leadership, I am also involved in teaching ministry. I have taught at Doon Bible College and presently on study leave from the faculty of New Theological College, pursuing PhD studies at Asbury Theological Seminary, USA. Over the years we have also produced gospel program for radio, served as counselors for World Vision India, and involved in various ministries of leadership, prayer and intercession, etc.

I am married to Anita, and we have two daughters, Roohi and Smriti. Anita comes from a devout Christian family in Dehradun. She is a humble, hardworking and prayerful woman deeply committed for God's work. Roohi is married and lives with her husband and family in India. Smriti is in middle school and loves to play basketball. Please pray for us so that we may fulfill God's call in our lives. He is calling us to reach millions of fishers of central India, who do not know Jesus, with the gospel of Christ.

To know more about our ministries, our needs and challenges, please connect via Facebook or email: shivrajkm@gmail.com

Please pray for our vision for Fishers for Christ. Thank you so much!

God bless you!



Pebbles and Stones' fall/winter newsletter

Partner with us in prayer. Rejoice with us over what God is doing around the world.

Keeping Pebbles and Stones Local



Listening to God

This fall The Potter's House School in Grand Rapids, Michigan, launched the Pebbles and Stones ministry model for students K-8. Paul Dull, Dean of Spiritual Formation, said that he did not have words to express what he felt as he saw the student body posturing themselves to hear from God.

"I love the change in the way the students come to the Family Worship. They come anticipating that God will meet them," one teacher remarked.

We are excited that the school is looking for more ways to extend Pebbles and Stones into their

discipleship events and spiritual disciplines. Visit the school website to learn more about their ministry to students in West Michigan: pottershouseschool.org

Downtown Christian Church

After attending A Pebbles and Stones Training, the leaders and volunteers at Downtown Christian Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan were excited to implement the Pebbles and Stones model as a regular part of their children's ministry.

Now, three years later, the children still look forward to listening, journaling, and praying together. Children as young as three, and as old as fourteen are enjoying and thriving in the unique atmosphere that our model helps foster as they learn to hear God's voice.

International Partner Update

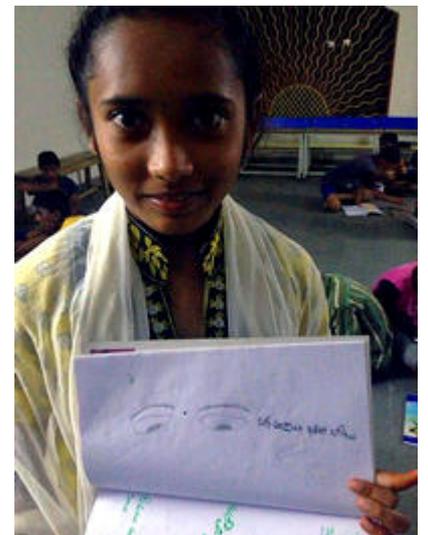
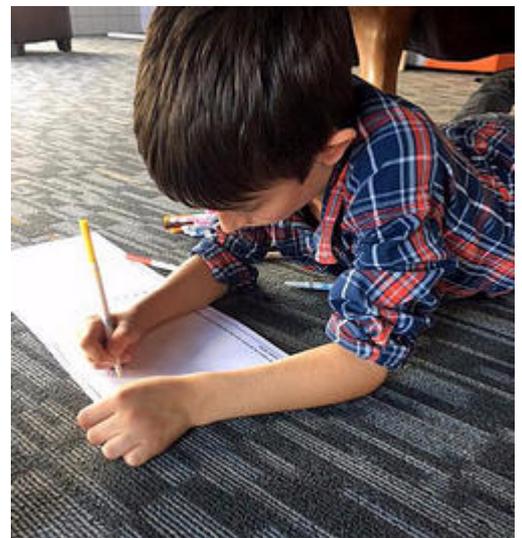
A report from abroad: Like all believers we are called to, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." Matt 28:19a

Our nation happens to be a long distance away, in South East Asia. We are on a journey of learning to trust and obey. It is the 5th year that we have been overseas and absent from life events in our family, but we can testify to the provision and wonders of God's sustaining Grace and Power over us!

Every Sunday night for the past four years we have been going to Grace School to help during a time of worship, praise, and prayer. Since we have started using the Pebbles and Stones model, (two years ago) and are teaching the children listening prayer, they have testimonies to how God has heard them and answered their prayers.



Jessica, (not her name) a 12-year old girl who is from a Hindu family has grown so much during the past two years. She is a praying girl, and always shares with the group how God has answered her prayers. Praise God!! I still get tears in my eyes thinking about the love this young girl has for Jesus, and for others, and she always volunteers to pray for anyone who asks for prayer. God truly has given her a heart of prayer. Jessica's story and stories of other children have filled our hearts with hope and a belief that Jesus will draw them to Himself.



(continued next page)

Pebbles and Stones' fall/winter newsletter (...continued)

Our ministry is one of Business as Mission and our journey has brought us to begin new endeavors in our area. We have four areas of focus. They are Grace Christian School; A.Ku designs which provides employment for marginalized women in the community; Crown Farms to provide a sustainable alternative for our fourth project, Selah Center which is a place for children who are caught in the cycle of poverty, forced labor and trafficking.

To help support these projects, please contact the Luth family by emailing rsluth.2@gmail.com

Prayer and Praise

- Pray for our January 2017 training trip taking place in a "sensitive" southeast Asian country where pastors and teachers are waiting expectantly to be taught to implement the Biblical Pebbles and Stones model in their communities.
- Kathleen has been invited to speak at the International Council on Children. Join us in prayer as we prepare and plan for the trip to Herrnhut, Germany in May 2017. prayerandmission.com
- September's training at Lifequest Church in Zeeland, Michigan included attendees from several area churches and ministries. "I was reminded that children are such a blessing," one participant said. Another participant remarked that during the listening time God filled her with a renewed respect and appreciation for her husband and children.



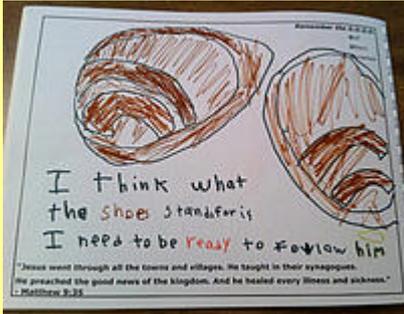
"Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

- 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 ESV

2017 International Training Opportunity

January's upcoming Pebbles and Stones training in the "sensitive" country mentioned above will be offered free of charge. In addition to the cost of materials, we would like to provide daily meals for the pastors, teachers, and leaders who will attend.

Your donation of any amount will ultimately touch the hearts of thousands of children with the Good News



Listen, Journal, Share, and Pray

Impressed by the Holy Spirit to draw a pair of shoes during the Pebbles and Stones journaling time, a middle school student felt God saying to be prepared to follow Him.

We would love to feature a journal page from your group in our next newsletter or on Facebook. If you have one to share, email it to info@pebblesandstones.com.

in a country where less than three-percent of the people currently know the love of Jesus Christ.

Will you help us meet this need and other facets of our mission?

info@pebblesandstones.com | 1-800-676-0519 | www.pebblesandstones.com



Bringing generations together to experience God's love.

Find us on Facebook and watch for our new website coming soon!

Pebbles and Stones,
PO Box 625, Ada, MI 49301
USA



Transparent Imagination

By John Yates - posted 21 December 2016 - <http://cross-connect.net.au/transparent-imagination/>

16.12.16

Personal Matters

An old joke about the influence of prosperity theology misquotes 1 Timothy 6:5, “godliness with great gain is contentment”. At the heart of the issue Paul is tackling is folk “*imagining* that godliness is a means of gain.” (1 Tim 6:4). Why cannot people see the truth of Ecclesiastes, “Then I considered all that my hands had done and the

Christmas is certainly a time when people’s imaginations run wild about a secular season of happiness none of them have ever experienced

toil I had expended in doing it, and...there was *nothing to be gained* under the sun.” (2:11). We live in a time when the human imagination is totally out of control, the fantasising of pornography, the motivational techniques of visualisation, the boundless world of virtual reality. Christmas is certainly a time when people’s imaginations run wild about a secular season of happiness none of them have ever experienced. When I hear of believers pleasure cruising the oceans I know the ability of the human mind to conjure up another Eden is as real inside as outside the Church. The Lennon classic “Imagine” boldly states, “Imagine there’s no heaven It’s easy if you try...no hell...no religion”. In Lennon’s secularising prophecy we are left with humanity at perfect peace in a world without war, greed or need. This is very much the thrust of the temptation story in Eden.

Pride Ends it All

Ancient Christian tradition sees the Fall as the outcome of proud humanity’s attempt to create for itself a substitute world to the one God had made. A situation affirmed by the Spirit inspired words of Mary, “he has scattered the *proud in the imagination of their hearts*” (Luke 1:51). But why would Adam and Eve dwelling in the delights of Eden be arrogant enough to want to imagine another world? Why would they, and us after them, “raise up lofty opinions against the knowledge of God” (2 Cor 10:5)?

The answer is found within the warning, “in the day that you eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall surely die.” (Gen 2:17). These words of God were not spoken dispassionately,

but through a Heart transparent to the reality of “the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world.” (Rev 13:8). The LORD already foresaw how his heart would be “filled with pain” because “*every imagination of man’s heart was only evil continually*” (Gen 6:4, 6). Since this warning in Eden was spoken not in relation to God’s loss but ours, it was one of pure, perfect, selfless transparent love (cf. 1 John 4:18).

The word about death spoken to Adam was a painful word for God to speak and for the man to hear, but the purpose of pain is to be a warning. To the *corrupted mind pain means loss rather than gain* and this is exactly how Satan put it. ““You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”” (Gen 3:4-5). So “the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for *gaining* wisdom, she took some and ate it.” (3:6). This was a blatant wilful decision to gain a wisdom that transcended the likeness of a God for whom pain was a real experience. Who wouldn’t want to gain a life of painlessness; especially if the way you knew “good and evil” meant freedom from guilt and shame? Of course Satan’s promise was illusory, for the loss of the glory of God meant precisely the gaining of shame and guilt.

Jesus

Whereas lost humanity rejected being in the likeness of a completely selfless God for whom pain was real, the true Son “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” (Phil 2:6-8). When Christ warned, “what will it *profit a man if he gains the whole world* and forfeits his soul?” he directly attacked the profit motive at the foundation of our consumer culture, a drive he personally denied when tempted by the devil in the desert (Matt 4:8-10; 16:26).

The climax of Jesus’ humility comes at the cross

When Christ warned “what will it profit a man ...” he directly attacked the profit motive at the foundation of our consumer culture

(continued next page)

Apostolic Truth (...continued)

where pridelessly he prays, ““Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”” (Luke 23:34). So lowly is the Son of God that he *refuses to take pleasure in angrily imagining the punishment of his crucifiers* (1 Pet 2:23). The pinnacle of his pain for us is expressed in the cry, ““My God...why have you forsaken me?””; this is the place where in taking on our selfishness he is unable to share the pain of his Father over our sin (Mark 15:34; 2 Cor 5:21). Where Jesus feels completely unlike God he is most completely like his Father (Ezek 18:32; 33:11).

The sole goal of Christ’s suffering is to move the state of our humanity from degradation to exaltation; this he has perfectly realised. Now on our behalf “God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name” (Eph 1:19-21; Phil 2:10).

Seeing the Word

“In the Spirit” the apostle John “saw the voice” of the glorified Christ and the result was the vision of Revelation (1:10, 12). *How is it that contemporary Christians indwelt by the same Spirit cannot see the sin in their lives* (Gal 4:4-6)? What has happened to the transparency of our spirits to the Word so that there is no grief over sin? Our problem is that we want to share Christ’s majestic status without sharing his suffering (Phil 1:21; 3:8-10).

What has happened to the transparency of our spirits to the Word so that there is no grief over sin?

Whereas all who empathise with the griefs of God see clearly in the Spirit, we avoid the very persecution that alone can bring us revelation of the things to come (Acts 9:5; Rom 9:1-3). We shall judge the world and angels, but the great challenge for the Church today is to experience cosmic *exaltation with the mind of Christ without feeling pride* (1 Cor 2:16; 6:2). Paul’s painful “thorn in the flesh” dissolved all pride and taught him to be “content”

in lowly estate (2 Cor 12:7, 10). So many Western Christians however really do think “godliness with great gain is contentment” rather than “godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim 6:6). *Discontentment is the mother of vain imaginings*; contented believers never imagine a bigger home, better holiday, richer sex life, more ecstatic spiritual experience etc. (2 Cor 10:5).

Conclusion

John’s vision of the New Jerusalem, the Bride of Christ, is one of a completely “transparent” city (Rev 21:2, 9). No presence of evil obscures the revelation of the glory of God because all is seen through the presence of the Lamb (21:22-23). Every painful Word of judgment has from first to the last has been resolved in his resurrection from the dead (Gen 2:17 etc., Rev 5:6). *God is seen as God is in the perfect purity of his selfless love that takes away the fear of punishment on the day of judgement* (1 John 4:17-18).

It is this painful love that must be seen through the Church today if the fallen human imagination is to be healed. Through the transparency of our lives the glory of God seen in the crucifixion-and-resurrection of Jesus must be seen. There is however an order to all this (1 Pet 4:17). Transparency is a precondition for the Spirit’s revelation of sin in the Church and the repentance which sparks the revival we desperately need for the glory of God.

Let us pray: ‘Lord please send your Spirit to help me bring all my useless imaginings to the cross so that I might only do what I see you are doing, however painful this may be. For your glory I pray. Amen.’

Transparency is a precondition for the Spirit’s revelation of sin in the Church and the repentance which sparks the revival we desperately need

“As a Christian I may do anything, but that does not mean that everything is good for me. I may do everything, but I must not be a slave of anything. Food was meant for the stomach and the stomach for food; but God has no permanent purpose for either. But you cannot say that our physical body was made for sexual promiscuity; it was made for God, and God is the answer to our deepest longings. The God who raised the Lord from the dead will also raise us mortal men by his power.”
1 Corinthians 6:12-14 (J.B. Phillips)

Christmas: The Birth of Love & Peace

Compiled by Bishop Anba Daniel, St Shenouda Coptic Monastery, Sydney Australia - 1 November 2013

“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory” (1 Tim 3:16).

In these few Words, St Paul explained the secret of existence and the road to Immortality.

Some believe in a God who is in Heaven, distant, elevated and free of all evil and that is good.

Others reject the existence of God or deny Him because of the darkness in their miserable hearts.

But the Incarnation is the answer to all of Man's problems, for it brings the Almighty loving God, the wise Teacher, to wash man from the mire of Sin and to elevate him to heavenly immortality.

The Incarnation is thus the core of existence and it explains to us the journey of God to man:

1. The Everlasting God: Who created Heaven & Earth.
2. God the Creator: Who created us in His Image and Likeness.
3. The Incarnate God: Who came among us and whose Glory we saw.
4. God the Redeemer: Who lifted the Sentence of death from us and renewed our corrupted Nature.
5. The Indwelling God: Who accepted to dwell within us.
6. The God--- Whose light shines in the World through us.
7. The Eternal God: Who will take us at the end into a happy Eternity.

The Incarnate God:

Some believe that is not fitting to attribute incarnation to God, but the truth is that the Incarnation does not contradict:

1. God's Holiness.
2. God's Power.
3. God's Wisdom.
4. God's Honor.

The Incarnation does not contradict God's Holiness:

God is Holy and it does not diminish Him to take a body, for He is able with His Holy Divinity, to purify physical matter and make it sinless without

it contaminating Him.

St Athanasius the Apostolic, who was one of the greatest to discuss the Incarnation, gives us the simile of “The Sun” whose pure rays penetrates pile of rubbish and purifies it of insects and microbes, then returns to the Sun without being contaminated by the dirt in the garbage heap.

This is similar to the work of God in our sinful bodies. We believe that the Lord Jesus “*was like us in everything except for sin alone*”. His divinity was united to His humanity without sin, for the Holy Spirit had purified and sanctified the matter which the Lord took from the Virgin's Womb on becoming flesh. We do not say that the Virgin was conceived without sin or she would not have said: “*My spirit rejoices in God my Savior*” (Luke 1:47).

The Incarnation does not contradict the Power of God:

There is a simple question with a simpler answer: Is God omnipotent? And the answer is yes definitely. Therefore He is able to be incarnated.

Many prophecies foretold the Incarnation such as; “*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers, he will crush your head and you will strike his heel*” (Gen.3:15).

On the great day of Atonement (Lev.16) the chief priest offers two goats, one that he slaughters for the sin of the people and one that he lets go alive into the desert and which is called a “scapegoat”, that is, the goat who has “removed” the sins of the people. One is the symbol of Christ's death and the other is a symbol of His resurrection.

The Incarnation does not contradict God's Wisdom:

God is wise and He planned the Incarnation as a way to redeem mankind, because the fall of man meant Satan's victory and man's death contradicts God's love. Similarly, his (man) being forgiven would contradict God's justice and man's continuing corruption. That is why God saw fit to be incarnated in order to redeem man, for when divinity was united to humanity the result was the ideal redeemer who can, in His humanity, represent mankind and die for it.

In His divinity, He is infinite and able to bear infinite punishment. Because He was without sin, He was able to redeem but did not need to be

(continued next page)

Christmas: The Birth of Love & Peace (...continued)

redeemed Himself. The Redeemer, in His divinity, is the Creator who is able to remake man anew, to purify him from the corruption of sin, and to restore to him his original image. It is thus in God's sublime wisdom that the Lord took flesh to redeem us and it is in His perfect love that He forgave us and purifies us. It is perfect justice to die for us on the cross.

The Incarnation does not contradict God's Honor:

The unity of divinity with humanity does not diminish God's Honor. Man is the work of His hands and bears His image and embodies the amazing miracles of the Creator. So how can it detract from God to unite with humanity in preparation for His union with us, for His dwelling

within us and for His granting us the privilege of dwelling with Him on His Throne?

Real honor does not reside in raising oneself or showing strength, but in condescension and in loving giving;

"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (Jn 15:13)

It is amazing these days during Christmas, that people talk more about Santa than Jesus. Most of the Christmas Cards had Santa more than Jesus. What a shame, who is Santa after all? Although he is a saintly man but no way, he could be swapped with the Lord of Lords and King of Kings the Lord Jesus Christ.

Below are few humble comparison between The Lord Jesus and Santa:

Jesus is Better than Santa

<i>Santa lives at the North Pole.</i>	<i>JESUS is everywhere.</i>
<i>Santa rides in a sleigh</i>	<i>JESUS rides on the wind and walks on the water.</i>
<i>Santa comes but once a year</i>	<i>JESUS is an ever present help.</i>
<i>Santa fills your stockings with goodies</i>	<i>JESUS supplies all your needs.</i>
<i>Santa comes down your chimney uninvited</i>	<i>JESUS stands at your door and knocks.. and then enters your heart.</i>
<i>You have to stand in line to see Santa</i>	<i>JESUS is as close as the mention of His name.</i>
<i>Santa lets you sit on his lap</i>	<i>JESUS lets you rest in His arms.</i>
<i>Santa doesn't know your name, all he can say is "Hi little boy or girl, What's your name?"</i>	<i>JESUS knew our name before we did. Not only does He know our name, He knows our address too. He knows our history and future and He even knows how many hairs are on our heads.</i>
<i>Santa has a belly like a bowl full of jelly</i>	<i>JESUS has a heart full of love.</i>
<i>All Santa can offer is HO HO HO</i>	<i>JESUS offers health, help and hope.</i>
<i>Santa says "You better not cry"</i>	<i>JESUS says "Cast all your cares on me for I care for you."</i>
<i>Santa's little helpers make toys</i>	<i>JESUS makes new life, mends wounded hearts, repairs broken homes and builds mansions.</i>
<i>Santa may make you chuckle but</i>	<i>JESUS gives you joy that is your strength.</i>
<i>While Santa puts gifts under your tree</i>	<i>JESUS became our gift and died on the tree.</i>

It's obvious there is really no comparison.

We need to remember WHO Christmas is all about.

We need to put Christ back in Christmas.

Jesus is still the reason for the season.



Always Laboring Fervently, Kurikiti testimony, I am Thankful for...

From Rick Rupp, 17-Oct-2016

Hello Everyone! I am thankful for God ambushing my heart for the poor and oppressed in the Solomon Islands. I thank God for first establishing His 24/7 House of Prayer in Fa'arau back in February of 2009. I thank God for His provision and for allowing Fa'arau village to be our first successful water well project which was completed on Sept 5, 2012. I thank God that Fa'arau is now equipped with two tractor well drilling rigs to evangelize and help the poor people get clean drinking water! I thank God that since June of 2016 our Clean Water 4 Life projects have installed 37 water wells for desperate villages, schools, Churches, and clinics! I thank God for each of you and for your partnership! Wow this is truly Historic! I thank God that thousands of children in the Solomon Islands are drinking sanitary clean water for the first time in their lives! I thank God for hearing the cries of the thirsty ones in the Solomon Islands who are desperate for a drink of clean cold water!

Today I want to share with you some of the challenges our Fa'arau team has encountered.. Our tractor well drilling rig was transported to a remote Island using the small aluminium landing craft to rescue approx 200 people in the village of Kurikiti who were in desperate need of clean drinking water. Remember there are no roads on these remote Islands. Therefore these children have never seen a vehicle on there Island! We are truly pioneering wherever we go to and drill water wells with out tractor rigs! No one has ever attempted what we are doing in the history of the Solomon Islands!



The men of Kurikiti used their bush knives to clear a path of jungle brush and trees approx 1500 feet long by approx 12 feet wide through a swampy muddy area so we could install a water well up in a higher elevation and far enough from the salt water sea and it worked! Their water well is 36 feet deep and they now have fresh clean drinking water. But notice in the photo that the men of Kurikiti are carrying the 2 ton red well drilling machine. With muscles bulging and the sweat rolling please notice just how determined these people are and understand that there attitude is to do whatever it takes to solve their drinking water crisis. Even if it meant walking in knee deep mud!

To drive the tractor through the muddy swamp the men of Kurikiti cut tree's and made a path for the tractor tires. They split the tree's and put the smooth side up and the rounded side down in the mud. You can see from the photo that at one point the tractor slipped off and plunged deep down into the mud. It was a challenge but by using the front bucket and all the man power that was available we got the tractor unstuck.

Kurikiti community was established five years ago as a result of religious persecution and today its population is about 200 people. The 20 some households which make up the community were literally chased from their original village (Baraulu) and were forced to leave their permanent houses and other belongings behind, never to recover anything.

At the beginning, they relied on water from the main land (by canoe) and for the last five years, have had to depend on rain water for drinking and hand dug wells for washing and bathing. In fact one of the leaders described the conditions they were living in as that of a refugee camp.

Since settling at Kurikiti, they have improved the situation to a certain extent however the water situation remains desperate and critical. Everyone there admits that the well established by Clean Water 4 Life was a God-send and has since alleviated the water crises and has become a huge blessing to this community. I hope the photo of

(continued next page)

Always Laboring Fervently (...continued)

the Kurikiti water well with the happy children blesses your heart as much as it does mine.

During my trip recent to Bowling Green I visited the farm implement company where both Yanmar Tractors were purchased for the Solomon Islands. I explained to the owner that if Fa'arau had a backhoe attachment for the 49hp tractor that we could become the first septic system business on the Island of Malaita. Well guess what? There was a good used one in stock and the owner offered it to CW4L for \$1,000.00. The cost of shipping it to the Solomon Islands will be \$8,000.00. I'm just a low income prayer guy with a heart to continue helping one of the most underdeveloped nations of the world with some basic needs that we all take for granted. Plus they need Jesus! Pray with me that by years end I'll receive \$9,000.00 designated for this backhoe attachment ok?



The other good news I wanted to share is concerning the ongoing construction of the big two story Orphan/Visitor House. This one picture shows the lower elevation block walls with the framing for the windows are now up! Please consider sowing a end of the year tax deductible donation so we can continue installing more water wells and continue the construction of this Orphan/Visitor House!

Here is the link to watch the CW4L 5 minute video explaining the current drought conditions and how your donation can bring clean drinking water to a village, school, clinic, or church! <https://youtu.be/66ZwRzABRAE>

Currently CW4L needs \$100,000.00 more by years end to complete the financial milestone needed to provide a total of 50 more water wells installed in the first half of 2017 for the poor and needy people who currently fetch water either from rivers or shallow hand dug water pits.

I continue to pray and declare Philippians 4:19 expecting God will supply the funding for water wells on the Island of Bellona (7 wells), Savo (3 wells), Malaita (10 -15 wells) and Guadalcanal (15-20 wells) after we finish up our 30 wells in our Munda Project! It's justice that we would do this together!

Go online and donate today <https://mygiving.secure.force.com/GXDonateNow?id=a0Ui000000LvZpNEAV>

Here is the complete information and video: <http://www.cleanwater4life.com/25wells/us>

Here is the online link for the Australian House of Prayer for All Nations tax deductible contributions: www.cleanwater4life.com.au/25wells or Tax deductible donations in Australia can be made via **Mission World Aid**: Each donation of \$2500 AU will sponsor one well. **BSB: 105079 Account # 040615340 "marked": Clean Water 4 Life**

If you would like to become a monthly partner, you may do so online at IHOPKC giving e-link eGiving Code **RR587249**

<https://www.ihopkc.org/give/staffsupport/form/?cid=701d0000000OMOnAAO&sname=Richard%20Rupp> or with PayPal using my email rickrupp@ihopkc.org



To help fund a well project by mail:

Make check payable to National Christian Foundation, in the memo write **Acct # 1121806**

Mail checks to: **National Christian Foundation, 11625 Rainwater Drive Suite 500, Alpharetta, GA 30009**

Thank you partners for praying and sowing!

This link explains our goals for 2016 in the Solomon Islands. <http://www.rickrupp.com/newsletter/goals.php>

Online giving for these water wells projects use www.Cleanwater4Life.com or just email me!

Please contact me if you are interested in joining me for a future trip to the Solomon Islands!

Thank you!

Rick Rupp | NightWatch Dad
IHOPKC Intercessory Missionary
Director Of Topeka House Of Prayer

RickRupp@ihopkc.org
www.rickrupp.com
www.CleanWater4Life.com



Elders of the City

Compiled by Lilian Schmid to give honour to the Elders of the city of Sydney

An elder is one of a plurality of biblically qualified men who jointly shepherd and oversee a local body of believers. The word translated “elder” is used nearly twenty times in Acts and the epistles in reference to this unique group of leaders who have responsibility for overseeing the people of God.

The Office of Elder

As numerous passages in the New Testament indicate, the words “elder” (presbuteros), “overseer” (episkopos), and “pastor” (poimēn) all refer to the same office. In other words, overseers and pastors are not distinct from elders; the terms are simply different ways of identifying the same people. The qualifications for an overseer (episkopos) in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, and those for an elder (presbuteros) in Titus 1:6-9 are unmistakably parallel. In fact, in Titus 1, Paul uses both terms to refer to the same man (presbuteros in v. 5 and episkopos in v. 7). All three terms are used interchangeably in Acts 20. In verse 17, Paul assembles all the elders (presbuteros) of the church of Ephesus to give them his farewell message. In verse 28 he says, “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [episkopos], to shepherd [poimainō] the church of God.” First Peter 5:1-2 brings all three terms together as well. Peter writes, “Therefore, I exhort the elders [presbuteros] among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd [poimainō] the flock of God among you, exercising oversight [episkopēō] not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God.” The different terms, then, indicate various features of ministry, not varying levels of authority or separate offices, as some churches espouse.

A Plurality of Elders

The consistent pattern throughout the New Testament is that each local body of believers is shepherded by a plurality of God-ordained elders. Simply stated, this is the only pattern for church leadership given in the New Testament. Nowhere in Scripture does one find a local assembly ruled by majority opinion or by a single pastor.

The Apostle Paul left Titus in Crete and instructed him to “appoint elders in every city” (Titus 1:5). James instructed his readers to “call for the elders

of the church” to pray for those who are sick (James 5:14). When Paul and Barnabas were in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, they “appointed elders for them in every church” (Acts 14:23). In Paul’s first epistle to Timothy, the apostle referred to “the elders who rule well” at the church at Ephesus (1 Tim. 5:17; see also Acts 20:17, where Paul addresses “the elders of the church” at Ephesus). The book of Acts indicates that there were “elders” at the church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:30; 15:2, 4; 21:18).

Again and again, reference is made to a plurality of elders in each of the various churches. In fact, every place in the New Testament where the term presbuteros (“elder”) is used it is plural, except where the apostle John uses it of himself in 2 and 3 John and where Peter uses it of himself in 1 Peter 5:1. Nowhere in the New Testament is there a reference to a one-pastor congregation. It may be that each elder in the city had an individual group in which he had specific oversight. But the church was seen as one church, and decisions were made by a collective process and in reference to the whole, not the individual parts.

...the biblical norm for church leadership is a plurality of God-ordained elders, and only by following this biblical pattern will the church maximize its fruitfulness to the glory of God.

In other passages, reference is made to a plurality of elders even though the word presbuteros itself is not used. In the opening greeting of his epistle to the Philippians, Paul refers to the “overseers [plural of episkopos] and deacons” at the church of Philippi (Phil. 1:2). In Acts 20:28, Paul warned the elders of the church of Ephesus, “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which God has made you overseers [plural of episkopos]” (Acts 20:28). The writer of Hebrews called his readers to obey and submit to the “leaders” who kept watch over their souls (Heb. 13:17). Paul exhorted his Thessalonian readers to “appreciate those who diligently labour among you, and

Much can be said for the benefits of leadership made up of a plurality of godly men. Their combined counsel and wisdom helps assure that decisions are not self-willed or self-serving to a single individual (cf. Prov. 11:14). If there is division among the elders in making decisions, all

(continued next page)

Elders of the City (...continued)

the elders should study, pray, and seek the will of God together until consensus is achieved. In this way, the unity and harmony that the Lord desires for the church will begin with those individuals he has appointed to shepherd His flock.

The Qualifications of Elders

The character and effectiveness of any church is directly related to the quality of its leadership. That's why Scripture stresses the importance of qualified church leadership and delineates specific standards for evaluating those who would serve in that sacred position.

The qualifications for elders are found in 1 Timothy 3:2-7 and Titus 1:6-8. According to these passages, an elder must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money, not fond of sordid gain, a good manager of his household, one who has his children under control with dignity, not a new convert, one who has a good reputation outside the church, self-controlled, sensible, able to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict, above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, loving what is good, just, and devout. (For an explanation of these qualifications, see pages 215-33 of *The Master's Plan for the Church* by John MacArthur.)

The single, overarching qualification of which the rest are supportive is that he is to be "above reproach." That is, he must be a leader who cannot be accused of anything sinful because he has a sustained reputation for blamelessness. An

elder is to be above reproach in his marital life, his social life, his business life, and his spiritual life. In this way, he is to be a model of godliness so he can legitimately call the congregation to follow his example (Phil. 3:17). All the other qualifications, except perhaps teaching and management skills, only amplify that idea.

In addition, the office of elder is limited to men. First Timothy 2:11-12 says, "Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet." In the church, women are to be under the authority of the elders, excluded from teaching men or holding positions of authority over them.

The Functions of Elders

As the apostolic era came to a close, the office of elder emerged as the highest level of local church leadership. Thus, it carried a great amount of responsibility. There was no higher court of appeal and no greater resource to know the mind and heart of God with regard to issues in the church.

The primary responsibility of an elder is to serve as a manager and caretaker of the church (1 Tim. 3:5). That involves a number of specific duties. As spiritual overseers of the flock, elders are to determine church policy (Acts 15:22); oversee the church (Acts 20:28); ordain others (1 Tim. 4:14); rule, teach, and preach (1 Tim. 5:17; cf. 1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 3:2); exhort and refute (Titus 1:9); and act as shepherds, setting an example for all (1 Pet. 5:1-3). Those responsibilities put elders at the core of the New Testament church's work.

Biblical References

Exodus 3:16; 4:29; 12:21-28; 18:21-26; 19:7; 24:1

Numbers 11:16-17, 24-25

Deuteronomy 19:11-12

Joshua 23:2; 24:1

Judges 8:14; 21:16

Ruth 4:1-12

1 Samuel 30:26-31

1 Kings 8:1 ; 12:6-8; 21:8-14

2 Kings 10:5; 23:1

Jeremiah 19:1

Proverbs 31:23

Ezra 10:8

Ezekiel 8:1; 14:1; 20:1-3

Matthew 5:22; 15:1-2; 16:21; 27:1

Mark 5:22; 15:1

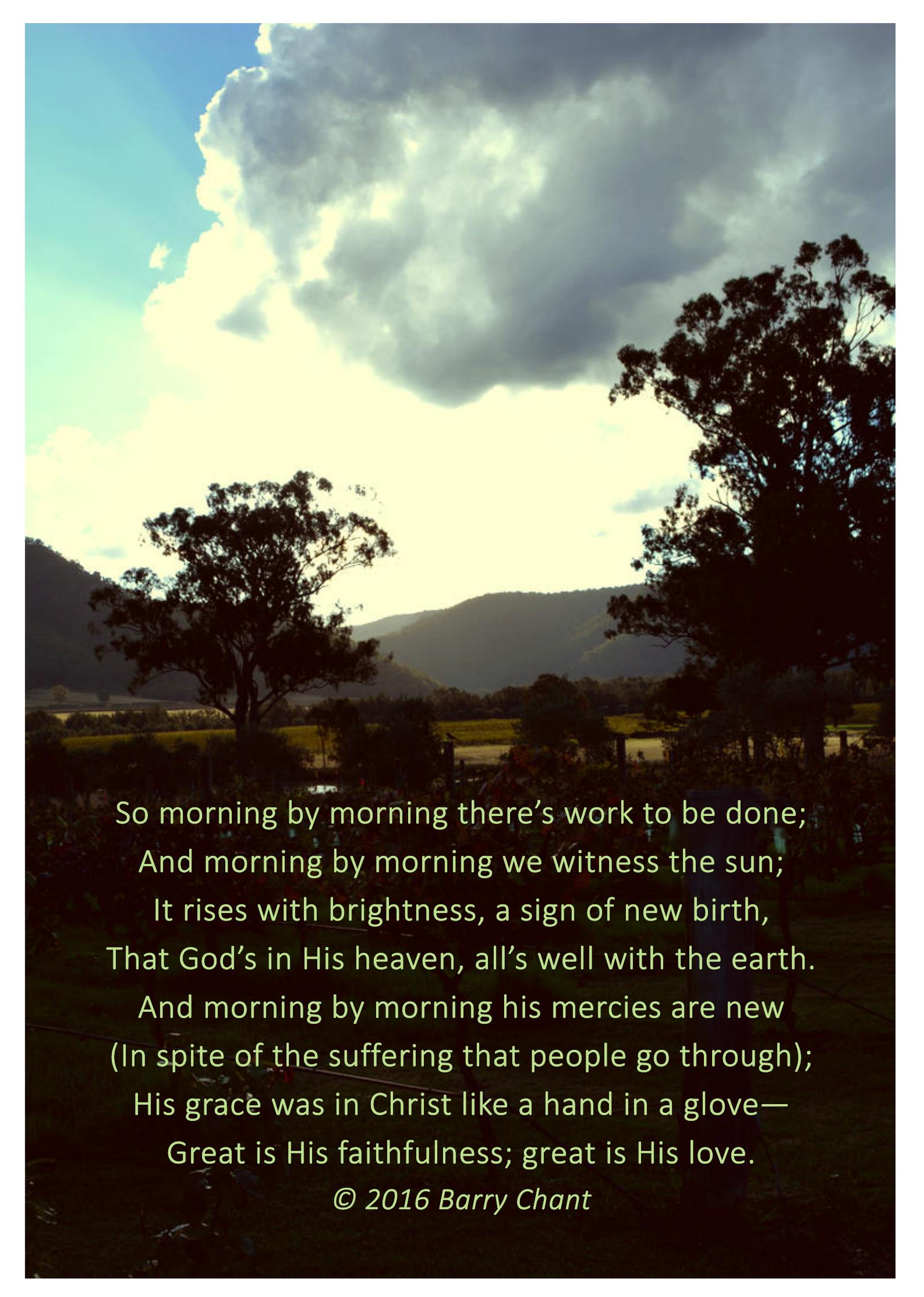
Mark 7:5; 7:3; 8:31

Luke 7:1-5; 9:22

Acts 4:5; 5:21; 6:12; 23:14; 25:15

Inspired and adapted from John MacArthur, *The Master's Plan for the Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991). For a fuller treatment of biblical eldership, consult this resource.





So morning by morning there's work to be done;
And morning by morning we witness the sun;
It rises with brightness, a sign of new birth,
That God's in His heaven, all's well with the earth.
And morning by morning his mercies are new
(In spite of the suffering that people go through);
His grace was in Christ like a hand in a glove—
Great is His faithfulness; great is His love.

© 2016 Barry Chant