



THE DAY FIRE FELL FROM HEAVEN

A series of studies in Elijah's power encounter with entrenched political evil, false worshipers and an unbelieving nation – lessons for today.

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The Day Fire Fell from Heaven

Bible Reading: James 5:13-18

The Apostle James challenges us with the statement that Elijah the prophet was someone “just like us!” The Bible describes Elijah as a man who:

- Publicly confronted King Ahab and then had to run and hide to save his life
- Lived alone for months drinking only creek water and being fed by ravens
- Raised the widow’s son back to life
- Panicked and fled from the Queen when his life was threatened, before asking God to kill him
- Appeared with Jesus and Moses on the mountain of transfiguration
- Caused a drought by praying for no rain for three and a half years
- Caused fire to fall down from Heaven

Elijah was someone “just like us” - a person who showed great courage and great faith, and who suffered from isolation, paranoia and depression. He had high “highs” and low “lows,” “just like us”. Yet God used Him to bring fire down from Heaven in an event that caused a whole nation to believe in and serve the One True God.

When Elijah anointed Elisha to take his place, Elisha took Elijah’s cloak and smashed it into the creek shouting, “Where is the God of Elijah?” The answer was that God was where He had always been, with him. He had not changed. God is eternally with us! The question for us is not, “Where is the God of Elijah?” but rather where are the people who will:

- be “just like him”?
- pray against all odds for God to send His fire again to change an unbelieving nation into servants of the Most High God?
- confront the evil powers that hold people in bondage?

Elijah’s story helps us to understand our role in having God’s fire fall again. Before we look at the miracle, let us examine the context.

The Controlling Power of Evil

Evil was entrenched and systemic through the absolute power of the King and the religion promoted by Jezebel his wife.

- **King Ahab was notoriously wicked!** 1 Kings 16:30 “Ahab reigned for

22 years. And Ahab did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those Kings before him."

- **Despite being rebuked by Elijah, Ahab remained unrepentant.**

1 Kings 18:1,2 *"After 3 years of drought, God sent Elijah to confront Ahab so that the King would repent and the drought could end."* But Ahab refused and sent his servants out to try to find grass for his livestock to eat.

- **Jezebel sponsored the promotion of Baal worship.** Jezebel the Queen from Phoenicia introduced the worship of Baal. She personally sponsored 850 prophets of that evil religion by feeding them at her own table each day, and led a campaign to identify and murder as many of God's prophets as she could find. 1 Kings 18:4.

- **Together the King and Queen led the Anti-God coalition.**

- **Yet there were still leaders who were believers.** 1 Kings 18:3,4 *"King summoned Obadiah who was in charge of his palace. Obadiah was a devout believer in the Lord. He took a hundred prophets and hid them in caves, and supplied them with food and water."*

History is repeating itself today in countries under anti-Christian government. Though in Australia the opposition to God is not as blatantly obvious, Australia is now in a post-Christian era. Humanism and socialism are winning the battle to control the educational institutions and the minds of many. Governments, business leaders, unions, and even occasionally Churches, display an awful tolerance for corruption. Many Churches are forced to close because of declining numbers, and fewer Australians claim to adhere to Christianity. People do not know what to believe anymore! But praise God He still has many "Obadiahs" who devoutly follow the Lord and use their influence for good.

The Uncertainty of the People.

After all the people were assembled on Mt Carmel, Elijah issued them with a challenge. *"How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal is God, follow him."* 1 Kings 18:21. The historic religion of the Jews was a dangerous faith to follow. Only a small minority worshipped the true God. The religion of Baal was being officially sanctioned and cruelly enforced. People thought that they could choose whatever god they wanted out of the many who were available.

What gods are we worshipping? Our gods could be:

- self (we decide on the basis of what is best for me),
- work (before family, healthy lifestyle, worship)
- some celebrity or sport
- success (promotion, materialism, popularity, self-reliance)

Elijah's challenge was for the people to discover who the true God was, and then to "follow Him." Notice that none of this talk forced the people to make a decision - *"But the people said nothing."*

Elijah's words brought no response! What else is needed when there is no response?

The Courage of the Prophet.

Elijah was inspired to be courageous. Whenever God spoke to Elijah, he obeyed. What did Elijah's courage involve?

- **Confronting an evil King.** 1 Kings 18:1 *"Go and present yourself to Ahab in the midst of a three-year drought and tell him that I will send rain."*

- **Risking his own life** when he knew that Ahab had issued an international search warrant for his arrest. 1 Kings 18:14 On his way to the palace, Elijah meets Obadiah and says, *"Go tell your master that Elijah is here."* v8. He is unafraid! *"You and your family have abandoned the Lord's ways and have followed Baal."* 1 Kings 18:18. *"Now summon the people and the 850 false prophets and meet me on Mt Carmel. And Ahab did what Elijah told him to do!"* Elijah confronted the wicked king risking his own life. He went face to face with the terror and his enemy backed down! That is courage! *"For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline."* 2 Tim 1: 7.

- **Courageously facing the risks.** For Elijah, the risks included waiting for the fire to fall and the rains to come. There was a risk that the prophets of Baal would attack and that the people would reject him. Elijah recognised the risks, but had the courage to let the ever-present God show His supremacy.

The Contrast in Methods

Now it's time for us to recognise what Elijah had to do before the fire could fall from Heaven. We will see that the actions that Elijah took are exactly opposite to the actions employed by the 450 prophets of Baal. From my study of revivals and the Great Awakenings in history, and my personal experience here in the Pacific region, I can say confidently that the main actions taken by Elijah have been replicated many times since with similar results.

First, let us look at the actions of the false prophets to learn what does not work.

In 1 Kings 18:25-29 these 450 priests:

- Prepared an altar and a sacrifice for their god Baal
- Called all morning on Baal to hear them, shouting and dancing around

the altar

- Shouted louder into the afternoon, prophesying and cutting themselves until their blood flowed, but by late afternoon there still was no response. No one answered.

They were sincere, committed and had done everything they knew to do to excess! But in the end, it was all just . There was no god!

Sometimes we have worked all day with great sincerity and commitment, only to find that God has not done that necessary divine extra that is essential to conversions and transformations. Can we hear Elijah saying to us, "Shout louder! Perhaps your God is deep in thought, or busy, or travelling? Maybe He is sleeping and must be awakened!"

Edwin Orr wrote about decline in West (In 1920's and 1930's)

A generation was growing up which did not know what to do in times of spiritual decline – to engage in intercession as did the churches in the late eighteenth century. Even among those most evangelistically inclined, the idea promoted by Charles Finney that revival is nothing more than the right use of the appropriate means left the zealots seeking techniques and gimmicks rather than spiritual power. Too much energy was spent in polemics against the modernist establishment and not enough in prayer for an awakening. (Orr, 1976, p130)

We cannot work up revival through emotion and excitement, or even sacrifice! Revival is God's gift – it comes down from Heaven! We need the Fire of Heaven to fall! Where is the fire?

What did Elijah do that enabled God to send His fire?

1.Elijah obeyed God's directions.

He was not following his own plan or his own desires. God told him to go to the King – his enemy, and he did. God told him to instruct the King to summon all the people and the prophets of Baal, and he did! God told him to declare to the people that they must decide which god to worship – the false one or the true One, and he did. We know from our own experience, that it is hearing God's voice that most often inspires us to act in faith. As Paul wrote in Rom.10:17, "Faith comes from hearing and hearing from the Word of God." Elijah obeyed God's directions. We need to follow Elijah's example as this is the first and most basic step in discipleship!

2.Elijah called the people to witness the miracle of Heavenly fire (1 Kings 18:30).

He put his faith on the line. It is one thing to believe in your heart that God will do something e.g. heal a friend; it is another thing altogether to publicly

declare it! Notice that for Elijah, his faith and his works were meaningless unless they were done in the presence of witnesses. It takes an enormous amount of courage to say to witnesses, "I believe that God will do this!" For too long we Christians have been bold in our declarations in the Church and in prayer. but we have become silent in the public arena. Obedience and faith both require facing risks!

3.Elijah rebuilt the altar of the Lord. (1 Kings 18:30-32).

The people had allowed the altar to become broken down, indicating their failure to prioritise their relationship with God. Each broken down stone represented a tribe of Israel. Elijah needed to rebuild the altar. This act reminds me of Isaiah's words where he calls the people to "prepare the way for the King to return: level the rough places in the road, fill in all the potholes, and move aside the giant boulders!" Another prophet uses a farming practice when he says, "Break up your fallow (hard) ground, for it is time to seek the Lord." (Hosea 10:12) Before God comes, we must do the necessary preparations to restore our relationship with God and with others.

George Strachan – missionary leader in the Solomons revival said, "We found it essential that there be nothing, absolutely nothing, coming between any of us. Within the team, God brought everything out so that we were able to be in deep fellowship with each other and with the Lord." (Alison Griffiths, 1977: 172)

God is waiting to send us another Pentecost! But God is also watching to see how much we want it. It can be hard and painful work to bend our backs and pick up those heavy stones to rebuild our relationship with Jesus, but that is what it takes!

Once when I was praying for God to revive the Church He said to me that I must first go to two brothers who had offended me. One had told me a lie and the other had betrayed a confidence. God told me to apologise to each of them for holding this against them. I did it. It was embarrassing, painful and humbling because I was not to do it expecting an apology for the harm done. Two more stones on the altar! We all must be willing to rebuild the altar. With a greater commitment to prayer, Bible study and honesty in our relationships with others we can rebuild the altars. God is watching and waiting!

4.Elijah acted in integrity to ensure the proof offered by God was not counterfeit.

In 1 Kings 18:32,33 we see that Elijah built a trench around the altar, before inviting the people to absolutely drench the altar with water three times. He left no room for counterfeits! When the Holy Spirit moves in power, Satan often introduces counterfeits to spoil the work of God. He introduces false

prophecies and other messages to re-direct the movement of God's Spirit. He brings false teachers that lead people astray when they do not know the Word of God.

2 Cor.11:13,14 says – *“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.”*

Decline – Satan's tactics

1. *Destroy the work by persecution or discrediting.*
2. *Infiltrate and reinforce its defects to discredit.*
3. *Inspire counterfeit revival to confuse Christians and alienate the world.*

(Lovelace, “Dynamics of Spiritual Life”, 1979, p257)

More than ever, we need the gift of discernment and we must ensure that we give no ground to the devil to mislead or counterfeit the work of the Spirit of God.

5. Elijah placed the sacrifice on the altar. The altar was incomplete without the sacrifice. The sacrifice was meant to be an atonement for the sins of the people, but ultimately it pointed to Christ who gave His life as a sacrifice for all people for all time. In this case, Elijah was making a sacrifice. If he failed, then his own life would end there on the mountain and Baal would be the God of Israel. Elijah was offering everything up to God. And so too must we. Rom:12.1 says *“In view of God's mercy, I urge you to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.”* This verse does not talk about making some sacrifice, but rather that we ourselves are to be the sacrifice. If the fire of God is to fall in our day, then we must be willing to sacrifice the time, energy, other priorities, and indeed ourselves, to prayer. Let me quote from a prayer letter I received this past week.

Prayer must be brought back into our churches, real prayer that searches the soul and penetrates the heart. Many years ago, a very old man who experienced a revival when he was younger was asked why the revival ended. His eyes were filled with holy fire when he cried, “When you lay hold of God, never, never, never, never let go!” Let his burden be a warning as well as a reminder to never let go.

“We provide the sacrifice, God provides the fire!”

6. Elijah Prayed according to the Will of God. (1 Kings 18:36.) Notice in this instance there was no shouting, no dancing around the altar, no whipping up emotions or cutting the flesh with weapons – just a quiet confidence in

God. God had commanded Israel to offer two sacrifices every day – one in the morning and the other at Twilight. In Exodus 29:41 God commanded Israel to – *“Sacrifice the second lamb at twilight – a pleasing aroma, an offering made to the Lord by fire.”* Israel had not only neglected the altars, but also this command to offer a sacrifice. Now, once the altar had been rebuilt, it was time to make a new beginning. As night began to fall the voice of Elijah rang out in prayer for all the people to witness, *“O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God and that I am your servant and have done all these things AT YOUR COMMAND. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.”* (1 Kings 18:37.) Elijah asked God to do two things. First, he wanted God to prove that He alone was God. And second, he wanted God to turn the hearts of the people back again. Prayer has always been a necessary pre-cursor to revival and very humble yet powerful prayer has always been a feature of revived Churches and people. Here's an example from an Australian revival –

It was not long before the rising tide of prayer produced a flooding of revivals throughout the Australian Colonies. The Victorian revivals began at Brighton on 22nd May 1889. The extraordinary local movement began with testimony by revived believers, but before long ‘the cry of distressed souls’ marked the meetings. Special services were held daily. (Edwin Orr, 1976:51)

Elijah's two succinct prayer points were for God to prove somehow that He was the only true God and that Israel would come to repentance.

Australia (or the Western world) needs these two things desperately. Materialism says, “I am god!” Humanism says, “There is no god. Every human is god.” The vast majority of people follow this non-belief, even some Christians! It is time for both the Church and individual believers to pray like Elijah, “O God, let it be known that you are God and turn peoples' hearts back again!” We need to hammer in desperation on Heaven's door until God sees that we really want Him to act once more! Did not the Saviour tell us to ‘Ask, seek, and KNOCK!’

Then the Fire of the Lord Fell! (1 Kings 18:38,39)

Just as daylight was fading and Elijah's words came to an end, then, without a moments delay the fire of the Lord fell! The fire could have consumed all of them, or just the 850 false prophets, but God never misses His target! Imagine the reactions to the heat, the blast of light, the sounds and the absolute destruction as the fire consumed everything – the sacrifice, the stones, the soil and even the water in the trench. God took everything! The people now knew that, “The LORD – He is God!” When God reveals Himself, people believe!

What men wake up to in the light of a revival is their own condition and the nature of the true God. When God revealed himself to Job (Ch 42:4-6) Job said, "You said, listen now and I will speak; I will question you and you shall answer me. My ears have heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." (Lovelace, "Dynamics of Spiritual Life", 1979, p82)

I will never forget the night in the Solomon Islands when in response to faithful prayer, the fire of the Lord fell in our meeting. God shone His searchlight into every corner of our lives and we all cried out together in the pain of repentance. Prior to this we had only heard about God, but on this night, we saw Him with our own eyes and we realised that we were so unlike Him. Subsequent to this experience I have taken teams of pastors into the revival. When these leaders experienced God coming down, sins that had been hidden or even unknown became the subject of sincere repentance.

What happens when God reveals Himself? (1 Kings 18:39.) "When all the people SAW this, they fell prostrate and cried, 'The LORD He is God - The LORD He is God!'"

In the West we have a long tradition of hearing and knowing, but like Job, what we need is to see! It is in seeing that we are transformed!

But most of all, God is elevated again to His rightful place in His Church and in the eyes of many new converts to Christ.

On our part, we need obedience, courage, integrity, faith, intimacy with God and others, sacrifice and prayer! **We prepare the sacrifice: God sends the fire!**

In Indonesia, when God's glory was revealed in the Church, the presence of God transformed individuals, families, Churches and whole communities. Peters wrote in his history of the movement:

Common Characteristics in a Non-Western culture.

There were comas and rapturous experiences; visions, trances, dreams, emotional frenzies, overwhelming joy and peace; public confessions of sins and restitutions of wrongs; reconciliations and forgiveness of old and deep feuds between villages. There were healings, resuscitations, exorcism of demons and the restoration of demon possessed persons. Signs and wonders were reported everywhere. Healers, exorcists, prophets, and prophetesses appeared in most revivals and were not hesitant to make themselves known to the people.

There was also revival in prayer, Bible reading, church attendance, joy and boldness in witnessing, and readiness to sacrifice and to suffer for Christ. Obedience to those in authority and faithfulness in daily duties were reported and acknowledged by friend and foe alike. Church growth was reported after every revival. (Peters 1974: 49)

Elijah was a man," just like us". He prayed and the fire of God fell down from Heaven and the nation was turned! "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God! Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again." (1 Kings 18:37.)

Time to pause for a Moment...

We have studied the actions of Elijah that enabled God to send His fire to earth. Jesus said, "Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks!" (Matt. 12:34) Our words flow out from the contents of our hearts. It is the same with our actions! If our heart is filled with love, then we will display loving actions.

Elijah's actions came out of his deep relationship with God and the qualities that God had put in his heart. As I reflected on Elijah's encounter on Mt Carmel, I observed some of the good qualities that enabled Him to represent God faithfully on that day.

God looks for people who desire to intercede before Him with these same qualities - courage, obedience, faith, integrity, intimacy with God, sacrifice and prayer. We need to remember that the Apostle James wrote that Elijah was someone "just like us!" Despite his many imperfections, Elijah rose to the occasion when it mattered most by displaying these qualities, and so too can we!

Let us take some time to look briefly at each quality and ask the Holy Spirit to stir up these qualities in us. Where appropriate I will try to illustrate some points from my own experience in revival, or from someone else whom I know and respect, to give a better understanding of what revival is all about.

Some ideas for personal reflection follow each study.

The Quality of Courage

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and very courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." Joshua 1:9

Desmond Doss became famous because of his involvement in the Second World War. Despite being a conscientious objector who was convinced he could never kill another human being, as a twenty-six-year-old medic he served with his battalion on Okinawa. The battle was one of the largest and last battles of the war. Doss' battalion was tasked with climbing a treacherous 130-metre-high cliff named Hacksaw Ridge to get to a plateau using cargo nets. Thousands of heavily armed Japanese troops awaited them.

On the 5th May the tide of battle turned against the Americans. Between seventy-five and one hundred men were either killed or wounded. The rest fled back down the ridge to safety. Doss could not remain in safety while hearing the cries of many wounded comrades, so he climbed back up Hacksaw Ridge. Then despite the danger all around him, he found the wounded soldiers and lowered them one by one on a rope (that he had wound around a tree) into the hands of his comrades. Doss continued his efforts for more than five hours, despite the constant fire coming from the advancing Japanese soldiers. He prayed, "Lord, help me get one more. Just one more!" One hundred and fifty-five soldiers were involved in the attack, but only fifty-five were able to retreat safely. Doss saved the lives of approximately seventy-five soldiers single-handedly.

When Harry S Truman the U.S. President of the day awarded Doss his medal of Honour he was heard to say, "I am proud of you. You really deserve this. I consider this award to be a greater honour than being the President of the U.S."

Desmond Doss is a fine example of someone who showed immense courage.

What is courage?

Courage is defined as "bravery", "pluck", "guts," in the dictionary. Courage is also related to our convictions or beliefs. There is an English expression that is no longer in favour which describes a person as "having the courage of their convictions." Desmond Doss exemplifies both of these meanings. He showed wonderful bravery under fire and his prayer reveals his inner convictions that motivated him.

We should also note that courage is only ever displayed in the face of danger or threat. If we are determined to live a peaceful life protected from

any threat or risk then we will have no need of courage! But if we are committed to obey Christ and live to serve Him alone, then there will be times when courage will be required.

The source of our courage.

Think about Joshua. He was a young man who served as Moses' servant and was sometimes second in charge. He lived in Moses' shadow but did not experience God like Moses did. Until Moses died. Then suddenly Joshua was the leader! God commanded Joshua to do what Moses was unable to do. He was to lead the nation across the Jordan River into the promised land. Joshua's initial reaction can be summed up in two words, "discouraged" and "terrified." Nevertheless, Joshua acted courageously and succeeded where Moses had failed.

I can recall occasions when I felt alone and terrified when on a mission for God. I felt totally inadequate to do the thing that lay before me. Twice it was to take a sea voyage in a small canoe through dangerous seas where any mishap or failure of the outboard motor would mean certain death! Another time it was a faith challenge to trust God to provide for the needs of our small community of 130 people in an isolated location in the Solomons and to raise the money for a large building program to provide better College buildings and student housing. One other time I was called in at the last minute to preach the Gospel to a crowd of people that almost filled Brisbane's Lang Park! Terrified! Yes, I know the feeling. But in every case God came through! We survived the sea journeys. God provided food and finances to build the College and feed its community. And, I am not sure how Lang park went. I was told that some people came to Christ that Day so I thank Him for His mercy!

But we need to move from "discouraged" and "terrified," to "strong and very courageous!" What was the source of Joshua's courage?

First of all, it was the fact that God has commanded him. Earlier in Joshua Chapter 1 we discover that God had given Joshua a mission and that Joshua's success depended on him sticking absolutely to the words in the Book of the Law. It was never to depart from his mouth and he was to meditate upon it day and night! So, we have God's man on God's mission. His success depended on his filling his mind with God's words. This Book was his leadership manual! Any departure from the Book would mean failure - God's leader, God's mission, God's methods - the way to success! When we are unaware of the unique role in life that God has for us, there is no need for courage. When we fill our minds with work, or with the habits engendered by modern technology, or with following our sporting idols, and have not given priority space to living in God's Word, then we have no need for courage. Our lives will be bland. When courage is called for, we will not have the inner strength to cope.

Secondly, it was the fact that the Lord God was always with him. God promised Joshua that "the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." When you know that God is right there with you, then you can be courageous! In the midst of the battle, Desmond Doss prayed "Lord, let me save just one more!" He was not alone in knowing God would respond! When the three young men were thrown into the burning fiery furnace for refusing to dishonour their God, they did not die. Instead King Nebuchadnezzar said in amazement, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire? Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods!" (Daniel 3:24,25) When the Apostle Paul was taken before the Jewish Sanhedrin to give an account for his life and actions the dispute became so violent that the commander of the Roman troops thought that Paul would be torn to pieces. He ordered his troops to rescue Paul and take him safely to the guardhouse. (Acts 23:11) *"The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."*

We need to be people today who "have the courage of our convictions." This will only happen when we become people who know our mission from God, fill our minds with God's Word and experience the reality of the promise, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

When it is God's time to send His fire from heaven again in Revival power we will be blessed like never before. His presence among us will be tangible. But at the same time, Satan will try his best to spoil this precious work of God.

My good friend, George Strachan was one of the leaders of the revival in the Solomon Islands. Later George wrote a little book full of experiences and reflections of his time in the revival. I quote from George's book here.

But prayer is more than communion with God. It is also warfare against evil spiritual powers. Prayer has power when the Christian is living in touch with the Lord. Prayer is largely the means of our binding the strong man and spoiling his house. (Matt.12: 29)

At the time of revival our Church came into an area of spiritual warfare not known before. For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. (2 Cor. 10:3,4)

There were those delivered from sin; there were also many delivered from evil spirits. The Islanders believe that united prayer has more power than one person praying. Indeed, there

is good cause for this belief. On occasion united prayer seemed to be more effective than individual prayer.

With these thoughts in mind let me take you to the village of Fo'ondo on the road north of Auki on the Island of Malaita. I was there for an Easter convention together with a team of Baptist pastors from Queensland. Remember to keep in mind the twin themes of terror and courage!

About 1500 people were gathered in the Church which was located close to the sea beside the main road north. Across the road there were jungle clad mountains. In the Solomons culture of that day, the men sat in rows on one side of the Church and the women sat on the other side with the children.

We had been singing worship songs and offering directed prayers to God for about thirty minutes when the women at the front of the Church adjacent to the door that led to the seaside began praying together spontaneously. The worship and the united prayer of the ladies continued simultaneously for about ten minutes. As this was an unusual occurrence, those of us from Australia began to wonder what was going on. The leader paused the singing as the women's prayers increased in volume considerably. He walked over to the women's side so he could listen to their prayers. Then he returned to the microphone and announced to us all that the women had seen Satan himself come to the door in order to enter the Church building. Previously I had dealt with people who had been demonised, but I knew that Satan (unlike God), could only be in one place at a time. And here he was! Honestly, my first reaction was to be terrified. Then everyone began to pray united prayer against Satan. I can say that I wholeheartedly joined in with that prayer! It felt to me like 1500 Christians took Satan by the scruff of the neck and ejected him from the building. Gradually the praying died down and the leader was able to lead us in songs of worship to Jesus the conqueror.

In the local culture of the day the women were mainly illiterate and uneducated. Their role in the Church was not as valued as it is today. I recall the leader saying, "Well Satan came to visit us today but he is weak. Even the women could defeat him." Whilst I cannot agree with the sentiment expressed I am still in awe of those dear women and the courage they showed on that day.

What if the leader had announced Satan's presence at the door and then delegated me to go to him and pray him out. Would I have had the courage to act? Would you?

It may be that Satan's plan was to disrupt the conference because on the final day we all heard the sound of a rushing mighty wind. It sounded like a torrential downpour on the leaves in the jungle across the road, but the sun was shining!! I cannot say what impression others gained but for me, Jesus

came to the front entrance to the Church. Then as we all prayed I had the sense that Jesus was walking down the aisle. He came about ten rows down and everyone in those rows fell on their faces in conviction and worship - then another ten rows, and another ten. He seemed to pause near to the group of Baptist Pastors and I remember calling to him, "Don't stop, don't stop we all need your blessing!" What a day!

Remember courage only rises up when danger presents itself.

John Chapter 18 tells the story of the dark night when the Roman soldiers came to capture Jesus and lead him to trial, to scourging and ultimately to death on the cross. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons. Jesus knowing all that was going to happen to Him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "I am he - let these other people go." The courage of Jesus!

The Church worldwide needs a fresh infusion of courage for these terrible times. Our brothers and sisters in mainland China and other nations in South East Asia and Africa are being actively persecuted by the totalitarian governments. Christians are being taken from their homes at night by the soldiers and made to "disappear." Young men are conscripted into the army which is committing genocide. The local government in one municipality has ordered the closure of all Churches and made demands that make it impossible for the Church to function.

In Australia one Catholic Bishop has been threatened with the full force of the law because of the contents of his pastoral letter to his own people setting out the beliefs of his Church. Christian bakers have been sued for refusing to provide a service for a wedding because they cannot do so without conflicting with their own beliefs. What next for us?

Jesus is our example in all things! Have courage! *"Be strong and very courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."* Joshua 1:9

Reflection Ideas

1. Can you identify some point in your life where you have hesitated to act in accordance with Christ's commands through timidity? Can you do something about it today?
2. It takes courage to speak about Jesus to family and friends who may need Him. Pray today about who you can share your story with and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you and open the way.

The Quality of Obedience

The story of Elijah proves to us the power of obedience.

Jesus said, *"Whoever has my commandments and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.... If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching."* John 14: 21,23

We need to understand what Jesus said in this passage from John's Gospel. Notice firstly that true obedience to Jesus is motivated by our love for Him; and secondly, our love for Jesus draws us into the Father's love and allows Jesus to reveal Himself to us. This is amazing!

True obedience to Jesus is motivated by our love for Him.

I cannot count how many times new Christians came to me as their pastor greatly concerned at their failure to obey Jesus. Some still gave in to bad, destructive habits; others lacked the discipline to set aside time each day to meet with the Lord; still others were dismayed that old thoughts and desires resurfaced and caused them to sin. The thing they all had in common was that the Holy Spirit was now convicting them in order to bring about lasting life changes.

Fortunately for them, and for me, God had already been at work convicting me of similar issues and had taught me this truth – that the problem did not lie with my disobedience but with my lack of true love for Jesus. I simply did not love Him enough to put Him first rather than to give in to temptation. The way to deal with my disobedience was to gain an increase in my love for Jesus!

I did not know how this could be done until one day I discovered Paul's testimony about personal growth in Romans 5. *"We also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us."* (verses 3-5) God, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, has poured His love into our hearts until it overflows back to Jesus and out to others. If I am struggling with issues of disobedience then I can pray for the Holy Spirit to flood my heart to overflowing with God's own precious love. Then Paul reminds us of the quality of God's love. *"But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners Christ died for us!"* (verse 8)

So instead of condemning my young friends for their failures I prayed that the Holy Spirit would overflow Jesus' precious love in their hearts for God and for others.

The value of this was brought home powerfully to me when I was asked to speak two messages in a lively charismatic Church in Brisbane. The Elder was a long-time friend of mine who had just suffered a heart attack and he warned me that as a result he often cried during the service. He then asked what I was planning to speak about. I told him that God had led me to speak about the love of God. His response surprised me. "Good luck with that!" Jim said. I was taken aback at his negativity so I asked him to explain. He then told me that there was an 18-year-old young man in the morning service who just could not believe that God could love him. That morning we had a wonderful time in worship and studying God's Word together. When I returned for the evening service I could hear quite a few voices coming from the Church house next door. When I asked Jim what was happening there he told me that in the morning service Jesus had appeared to the young man and told him that He loved him. The youth leaders and other young friends had spent the whole of the afternoon praying and worshipping Jesus and needless to say, at the forefront of all of their praise was the 18-year-old new believer. God's precious love is poured out in our hearts motivating us to a wholehearted obedience to Him!

But secondly, our new love for Jesus draws us into an intimacy where we can know the love of the Father and the presence of Jesus every day! When we are in this place, how can we even think of disobeying?

This new love that God gifts to us when we become his children does have an emotional content to it, but it also motivates us to action! When we love God, we keep His commandments! Obedience is the first step in becoming a disciple. Jesus commanded His first followers to go into all the world and make new disciples by "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." (Matt. 28)

What is it that Christians are to obey?

Jesus would answer, *"Everything I commanded you!"* This is why it is so essential for us to be understanding God's written Word. It is not enough to listen to the preacher once a week. We must also make it our daily habit to feed our minds and our hearts on the one book authored by the Holy Spirit, the Holy Bible.

In addition, there are times in our lives when we need to have guidance about something not mentioned in the Bible. Life is full of decisions. Every day we make hundreds of decisions and the results can be life changing. Paul instructs us to, *"Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature!"* (Galatians 5:16) Today we live in the "want it, get it" age. In the Western world we can have instant gratification when we buy something bigger, better or smarter for ourselves. Most of us make decisions on this basis without ever thinking to ask the Holy Spirit in us what He wants. We

make our decisions; we spend our resources; we live our lives our way. And this is disobedience! More and more we need to develop the habit of listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit as we move through each day.

I recall driving with a young pastor at night from Hughenden to Charters Towers. He was with me because he was a potential Church planter. Earlier we had met with a group of Christians to discuss ways of helping out with God's work in that district. About nine o'clock at night we got into the car to drive away. There was no moonlight and the night was very dark. As I was getting into the car the Holy Spirit whispered to me, "Drive carefully and very slowly, there is danger on the road." So, we set out on the country road doing only sixty kilometres per hour in a one hundred per hour zone. We drove in silence for twenty minutes. I was wondering if the young pastor would think I was strange if I told him why I was driving so slowly. After about twenty-five minutes our car came up over a hill in the darkness and right there in the centre of the road lay a big black bull! If we had been travelling any faster we would have collided with the animal with disastrous consequences for both the bull and the two occupants of the car! Thank you, Holy Spirit, for the timely warning!

So, while obedience is essential in our lives there are some things that help us to obey readily. We can summarise them in a few words - loving, learning, listening and then obeying everything that Jesus has commanded us to do. Jesus is our primary example as we strive to live an obedient life. *"Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from what He suffered, and, once made perfect, he became the source of Eternal salvation for all who OBEY Him."* (Heb. 5:8,9)

Reflection Ideas

1. In the letter to the Church at Ephesus, Jesus commended the believers for their hard work, perseverance, adherence to the truth, intolerance of falsehood and the fact that they had not grown weary. Perhaps Jesus would say the same things about us today. But like many Christians today they had forsaken their first love and were told to remember the height from which they had fallen. Are our deeds lacking the motivation of our love for Jesus. We may need to return to the of that love to be refreshed.

2. Have we learnt to "walk in the Spirit" all day long so we are aware of His voice and promptings in all the practical things of life?

The Quality of Faith

"Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard from the word of Christ." Romans 10:17. "We live by faith, not by sight." 2 Cor. 5:7

In my devotions lately, I have been reading some of the extracts from the diary of John Wesley. Some of my younger friends may not have heard of John and Charles Wesley. Wesley was born in 1703 into the family of Samuel and Susannah Wesley. Samuel was the Anglican Rector in Lincolnshire, England. At the age of five, Wesley woke one night to discover that his home was on fire and that he was trapped in an upstairs bedroom. He pushed a box under the window and looked out. A man down in the yard saw him and shouted to someone to get a ladder so the boy could climb down. But another man said, "There is no time! I will lean against the wall. Find a light man and put him on my shoulders!" They did so, and the man on top lifted Wesley out of the window. Just then the whole roof fell in, but he was spared. His biographer wrote:

Wesley often used of himself the phrase, "a brand plucked from the burning". It described the urgency with which he always thought of salvation, as well as his infectious passion in spreading revival.

Wesley and his brother Charles, the famous hymn-writer were given the best possible education of their day. After graduating from Oxford, John was ordained into the Church of England. (Richard Kissack, 1962)

John and Charles did all they could to obey everything they read in the Bible, including visiting prisoners on death row and impoverished village people. To them, faith consisted of outward rules and regulations. In this state of mind, the brothers embarked on a missionary journey to Georgia in America for two years. Wesley wrote, "In this refined way of trusting in my own works and my own righteousness, I dragged on heavily till the time of my leaving England." On the ship, the Wesleys met a group of Moravians going out as missionary families. During a fearful storm at sea, Wesley noticed that none of the Moravians were fearful of dying, not even the children. Their testimony greatly challenged Wesley.

Upon returning to England, John Wesley went, very unwillingly, to a meeting in London. Someone was reading Luther's preface to the Book of Romans. Wesley said, "about a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ - Christ alone, for salvation,

and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins and saved me from the law of sin and death."

From then on, Wesley's ministry of constant travel by horseback preaching to crowds in the fields, brought revival to England and resulted in the establishment of the Methodist Church worldwide.

The source of faith is God and His unfailing Word

Wesley learned that faith is not a product of human good works, but the gift of a faithful God to all those who hear and respond to the message of the Gospel through the Bible. That is what Paul meant when he wrote, *"So then, faith comes from hearing the Word of Christ."* True faith is never based on feelings or past performance. It must grow out of the words spoken to us by God Himself.

Think about it. How did Elijah know that God was going to send fire down from Heaven that day? The same way that he knew why the country was suffering from a three-year drought! God had spoken to him.

This is also true for us. Some of us find our faith is weak and most of us would never dare to stand before the nation promising them a heavenly fire storm! Many of us are followers of the disciple Thomas who said, "If only I could see, then I would believe!" This is the very spirit of our scientific age! If something cannot be verified scientifically it cannot be true. Faith is dying in many people in the Western world, including in many Australians.

According to a recent issue of Sower Magazine, a survey has found that only 23.6 per cent of people believe with certainty that Jesus rose from the dead. Another 19 per cent believe that it is a possibility. J. Warner Wallace, a trial lawyer whose task it was to prove the veracity of evidence given in the courtroom, set out to look at the case for the resurrection of Jesus. He was an atheist. He found the evidence for Jesus being raised from the dead so overwhelming that he became a believer himself!

One thing that cannot be tested scientifically is the life that Christians will enjoy in Heaven after they die. In 2 Cor. 5:6,7 Paul writes *"Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the LORD. We live by faith, not by sight."* Christians are not science deniers or truth doubters. They are people who live with an added dimension of reality in their lives – faith.

I believe that the foundations for the series of revivals that the Christians experienced in the Solomon Islands were laid by faithful Christian farm owners in Bundaberg, Queensland, years before, when they taught the Islanders who were labourers there to read and to value the Bible. The Church that was later established by a returning farm worker in the Islands was firmly based on the Bible and the life of total faith in God.

Growing our faith

Keeping daily appointments with God. In the same way that we receive the gift of faith from hearing the Good News to become children of God, so our faith grows as we learn to act on what God tells us in His Word and what the Holy Spirit guides us to do.

In our busy world, one of the first things to go is the appointment that we should keep with Jesus every day with His Word in one hand and our prayer life in the other. Our faith will remain weak if the only time we have with God consists of saying a few prayers in the car or the bus on the way to work each day. It is essential for each of us to set aside time each day to understand and master the teachings of God's Word. When we do this in a disciplined way we will hear the whispers of the Holy Spirit and we will receive God's guidance about issues that concern us. Our prayers will then become conversations with God where He can steer our thoughts to follow His plan for us. In the intimacy of this relationship, God will confide His will to us regularly. We become God's dear friends. *"You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my father I have made known to you."* (John 15:14,15) If you really want to have the faith that hears when God will send down His Heavenly fire, then become a friend of God by meeting with Him in person, regularly. Faith comes from hearing the message.

Allowing God to stretch you. Another way I have discovered that God uses to grow our faith, is to put us in circumstances where we must depend totally on Him. These circumstances may relate to family needs, challenges at work, broken relationships, or ministry mountains to climb. Dick Eastman tells this story about Rees Howells, now famous for his life story called "Rees Howells – Intercessor" written by Norman Grubb.

Rees Howells lived doubt-less faith. He became a dedicated twentieth-century intercessor, establishing orphanages and a Bible school during the trying years of World War 2.

Once Rees Howells made ready his departure for Africa as a missionary. He and his partner were ready to board a train for London to make connections with an ocean-going vessel for the lengthy journey. They had only ten shillings between them, enough to take them twenty miles on the train.

"We felt sure the money would come so we went to the platform to wait for its arrival," relates Howells. "The time for the train to depart came and we decided to go as far as possible." Leaving the train twenty miles later they met friends who invited them to breakfast. "Surely," thought Howells, "God had sent these

friends to pay the way.” But departure time came and no offers of financial aid were given.

Rees Howells testified, “The Spirit spoke to me and said “ If you had money what would you do?”

“Take my place in the line at the ticket counter, “ I said.

“Well, are you not preaching that my promises are equal to the need? You had better take your place in the line.”

Rees Howells took his place in the line as if he had the money for the ticket. “When there were only two people before me,” related Howells, “ a man stepped out of the crowd and said, ‘ I am sorry, I can’t wait any longer... I must open my shop.’ He said goodbye and put thirty shillings in my hand!”

Notice the dynamics in this story – first, God speaking; second, faith responding; and finally obedience.

I learnt a mighty lesson about faith when I was the Principal of a Bible College in the Solomons. I was a very inexperienced missionary and my idea of faith came from the old-fashioned idea that quite a few Baptist women practised at the time by keeping a “promise box” in their house. If at any time they felt in need, they would go to the box and select a small piece of paper on which was written a promise from a Bible verse. No doubt, God used this to encourage man, but when I tried to follow a similar practice by desperately scanning the Bible in the hope that a particular verse would jump out at me to give me an answer, I rarely succeeded.

When the Church Executive told me that I was to act as the next principal of the College I immediately felt the weight of that challenge. But the Chairman went on to outline the Executive’s wishes for the development of the College. We were to double the intake of female students and we were to make it a priority to enrol mainly married students and their families. This would greatly increase the number of people we had to house and care for in our isolated jungle campus. In addition, we were no longer to seek for overseas sponsors to support this aspect of the College. All funds had to be sourced from the Churches within the country. The Executive also indicated that the main college building would need to be extended to double its size to allow for the extra students. The building would be done by local volunteers and approaches would be made through the partner mission for building funds.

With this huge mandate on my mind, I went into my office to lay it all before the Lord. This was not the time for promise boxes or Bible lucky dips. I remember as if it were today praying desperately, “Lord you know that I am young and inexperienced and I do not even know if it is your will to build

more buildings. If you want the buildings, then I ask you to provide the workers and the finances. I have too much else to worry about so I will not ever ask you again to provide. And Lord, we will do all we can to build gardens and work the copra to sell, but we need much more money. So, if you send enough to feed everyone for six months and pay the staff, then we will run for six months. If you send enough for twelve months, then we will complete the year. Whatever you provide will determine what happens. Thank you, Lord. I pass my burden over to you.”

Well, praise God, during that year volunteers completed the building projects and when I sat down at the celebratory graduation feast next to the man who had delivered the mandate to me earlier, I realised that God had enabled us to do all that the Church had required with exactly one dollar left over! After the celebrations I retreated to the office where I had pleaded with the Lord at the beginning and randomly opened my Bible to I Thessalonians 5: 23,24 and read, *“May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The ONE WHO CALLS YOU IS FAITHFUL AND HE WILL DO IT!”*

No matter what the size of our faith is, if it is directed towards God and we are in a position of serving Him, then God is faithful! He will never, ever let us down!

Because God stretched me beyond what I thought I could ever bear, I learned this powerful lesson well. In the years since I have been called upon a number of times to stand in faith, sometimes with others, until the last possible minute, waiting to see what God would do in His great faithfulness. And I can testify with praise to awesome God that every time God has provided an answer.

“We live by faith and not by sight! “ 2 Cor.5:7

Reflection Ideas

1. Have I learnt how to hear God’s voice in my “quiet time” with Him and throughout my day? What things distract me and cause me to miss the voice of God?
2. Where in my life are there spaces where I know that “I cannot,” but “God can?” Does God’s Word say anything about these spaces and how can I act on His Word?

The Quality of Integrity

Dr Bobby Clinton, my lecturer in Leadership classes at Fuller Seminary wrote a book called "The Making of a Leader." In the early chapters of the book, Bobby demonstrates powerfully that in the early stages of our Christian lives, Jesus is constantly testing three qualities in order to develop them in us. He calls these three tests, "Word checks, obedience checks and integrity checks."

In the historical record of Elijah's encounter with the prophets of Baal, we see an example of God testing Elijah's integrity. God had commanded Elijah privately to call the nation together and to contest Baal's power over all the population. In the ensuing events Elijah demonstrates his incredible integrity. God has commanded him to act in a private conversation, now Elijah fulfils God's command in public at the risk of his own life!

"We know that we have come to know Him if we obey His commands. The man who says, 'I know Him,' but does not do what He commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys His word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in Him; whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did." 1 John 2: 3-6.

Someone once asked a wise man, "What is integrity?" The wise man answered, "It is what people are in the dark!" If we are a different person when other people cannot see us, then it may be that we are lacking in integrity.

Integrity is the foundation stone of all leadership.

Without integrity a leader is worthless and powerless. The crash will certainly come sooner rather than later. All of us can tell stories of leaders who have fallen through loss of, or lack of, integrity. I recall feeling surprised and shattered when I have been made aware of pastoral leaders who have failed the test of integrity.

The dictionary defines integrity as wholeness, soundness, uprightness and honesty. I don't think you will be surprised to hear that integrity, courage and obedience all depend on our knowing and keeping the Word of God.

I have heard it said, and found it to be true, that Churches experiencing a season of revival often find that John's epistles form a guidebook for spiritual behaviour. As we look again at the verses in 1 John 2 we can learn:

- Obedience to Jesus is proof that we truly know Him v3
- Our obedience to Jesus, not our words proves that the truth is in us v4
- Our obedience allows God's love to be made complete in us v5
- Our claims to live in Jesus must be backed up by walking as Jesus did v6

Or, to put it in more contemporary language, if my talk does not match my walk, then I lack integrity. Apostle John would say I am a liar!

Think about it. If people cannot trust us then we are a liability to the Church, our family, and the society in which we live. In recent weeks our papers have published the results of surveys showing how the level of trust that people have in civic leaders has declined. People trust politicians, police and pastors far less than they did ten years ago! I know that there are many reasons for this lack of trust – some of them are based on ignorance or bias. But once trust is lost, it is almost impossible to regain it.

When Revival comes, God focuses His light on integrity

If there is one passage that describes simply what happens to people in revival on a day to day basis, it is 1 John 1: 5 -7. *"God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all... but if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin."* Failure to walk in the light with God and with one another is a failure of integrity.

Integrity begins with meeting God in the light. John spoke in his Gospel about "People won't come to the light. They love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil." At the beginning, revival is God revealing Himself to people as the Holy One. In His light we see ourselves as we have possibly never seen ourselves before. The motivation to confess our failings and sin to Him is all important and when we are done we feel clean and forgiven!

Integrity is maintained by walking in the light with God and others.

Our relationship with God has both vertical and horizontal dimensions. Once we have seen the "Light" in this way, we are filled with God's love for others. We want to walk as Jesus walked – in love. Two key words are "honesty" and "openness." If I have offended someone in my work, family or Church I cannot hide it. There is a patch of darkness that surrounds my life. Until I go to that person and confess my sin and ask for forgiveness, the stain of darkness will hide God's light from me. This is part of being an honest person. But to be open is something else! To be open with everyone means to let them see right inside of me. It also means that if God shows me something about a brother that he needs to know, then I must go to him in love and share in such a way that he feels encouraged, not put down. Walking in the light means having nothing between me and my brother.

When I served as the Principal in a Bible College in the Solomons I had to learn a new form of humility. We often experienced revival both in our monthly days of prayer and also in our weekly prayer meetings. As the Holy Spirit worked, students would become convicted about wrong attitudes and habits. Frequently during our prayer times in the Church, a student would

come up to me and tap me on the shoulder. I soon learned that this meant "Please come outside with me." Invariably the student would tell me that they had been cross with me because I marked them too low in a test and wanted me to forgive them for their wrong attitude. At first, I did not know how to handle these conversations, and wondered if I had marked too hard or made some mistake. Then I realised that all they wanted was to walk in the light with me by saying sorry and praying with me.

Our family returned home from the Solomons feeling strongly that we were to assist the Churches and to be available for God if he wanted to bring revival to Australia. Two years later I was appointed to an executive role in our Denomination as the leader of a small team of pastor/ specialists. Revival was always on our hearts and was expected at any time. One day as I was praying for revival the Lord told me that my attitude to two brothers was standing in the way. One was a senior pastor and the other was a team member accountable to me. I was not walking in the light with them. God told me to go to them, apologise for my attitude since they had hurt me, and not to expect an apology in return! It was embarrassing, but this is what it means to walk in the light with one another.

George Strachan wrote:

It is important to appreciate God's high purpose for us. He means us to live in a personal relationship with Himself, a relationship of life and love. We, too, must know a similar relationship with each other...The message is vital, "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all." Verse seven says that the fellowship continues as we walk in the light with each other. That is the big challenge to continuous revival. Such a walk demands complete honesty and continual humility. We were made for a life of fellowship and we are happy when we can live in such a fellowship which God controls. Things do not happen automatically nor can God's blessings be taken for granted.

George acknowledges that differences in our cultures may make this honesty and openness more difficult to achieve. I have found this to be true. The Australian culture is now hyper-individualistic. What the individual wants is far more important than what the group may need. So, when we moved home to Australia I realised that my expectation of a high level of honesty and openness was not appropriate. I encountered Christians who refused to speak to other Christians in their Church. When I tried to help someone by being open and honest with them I sometimes got the response - "Mind your own business." Even in our family, which is very loving and supportive of one another, I sometimes struggle to know when to be open and honest. As a grandparent I have discovered that there are occasions where it is not culturally appropriate for me to interfere with the parent/child relationship.

My conclusion for "walking in the light" at this present time is to focus on loving relationships and on following the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

I do not think that generally the Church in Australia is ready for the quality of intimacy and love with God and with His family that John says is absolutely necessary. Because integrity is walking consistently with the Bible and living as Jesus lived, then undoubtedly, we need to be revived!

Jesus' desire for His followers is recorded in his prayer in John 17:21. *"That they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us."*

If the Church has lost the respect of many Australians and forfeited the privilege of sharing God's amazing Gospel with millions of lost people, could it be that we have failed a basic integrity test? Jesus said, *"A new commandment I give you; 'Love one another.' As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this will everyone know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another."* John 13:34,35.

Reflection Ideas

1. Are there some areas remaining in my life where I do not want God to shine His light? How can I allow God to deal with these areas?
2. Are there some relationships in my experience that have become broken? What steps can I take to bring healing to these relationships? What can I do about relationships that I cannot heal personally?

The Quality of Intimacy with God and Others

"My prayer is not for them alone (the disciples), I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message (us), that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one." John 17; 20-22.

When Elijah began to rebuild the altar, we learned that not only had Baal's prophets failed, but also the people of Israel had failed to value their unique relationship with God, their creator and the founder of their nation. The altar lay in ruins and this was a picture of Israel's relationship with God.

Altars for sacrifice were important memory joggers for the Jewish people, as well as being necessary items for their worship of the One true God. The worship of God had been neglected in favour of worship of the false god, Baal. As a result, the altar was nothing more than a nondescript heap of stones. As Elijah began the tedious work of rebuilding the altar he carefully took (and probably named), each stone for one of the tribes of Israel. Each tribe was meant to enjoy a privileged relationship with God but every tribe had ceased to value this relationship. They had fallen so far away from God that they were no longer sure about who God was. Elijah's power encounter on the mountain in full view of everyone brought the nation to a bold confession, "The LORD He is God!" And they all fell on their faces in worship of Him. But this was only the beginning. God's plan for us is for us to share a life of intimacy with Him and with each other all the time.

What does Intimacy with God mean?

Intimacy involves all of the characteristics we have been considering in Elijah's confrontation so far. If we borrow a phrase from Jesus' words in John 17 we could say intimacy with God is

"Being one with God and with each other."

Try to imagine what the relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit would have been like prior to the creation of the world. God is love personified! God is light! There is no darkness! Imagine being in a relationship where perfect love is operating continuously - all light with no hidden agendas, no impure motives, no jealous thoughts; only perfect love, perfect harmony and perfect cooperation! We cannot imagine such a perfect relationship because our experiences of all our relationships are all spoiled by our fallenness.

But imagine if one day this perfect Trinity, motivated by the purest love, decided to invite you into the relationship. You would be number four - sharing in the love, knowing what God is thinking, acting in perfect harmony with the behaviours of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. How wonderful it would be for you to be enfolded in God's perfect love and to be a part of His plans for the world! God has not done this once, but millions of times in human history. Intimacy with God is our privilege and is exactly why we should prioritise our daily appointment with God. When we begin the day conscious of His loving presence, then we can carry the awareness of His presence into the day with us.

Intimacy with others

God's love is never selfish! Our relationship with Him is meant to also have a horizontal dimension that includes other believers. Many of us will have an appreciation for this kind of relationship if we have experienced it within our Church. But I believe that the prayer offered by Jesus in John 17:21, "*That all of them may be one,*" calls for an answer that involves all believers in the world. We who have believed the Gospel are to have God's love for every other brother and sister. God greatly values this inter-connectedness of all those who make up the Body of Christ. I have found that if there is a disconnection between myself and God, then all the people on the horizontal dimension of my life suffer. Similarly, if I allow something to come between myself and another brother or sister, then my relationship with God suffers. That is why Jesus told us in Matthew 5:23,24, "*Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First, go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.*"

Because of our fifty years in God's service, Irene and I have been privileged to meet with Christians in the USA, Philippines, Korea, Nepal, Thailand, Myanmar, Northern Ireland, Canada, New Zealand, Fiji, Samoa, Papua Niugini, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. In every country we have experienced the love of God through the people and the great unity of purpose that we share with them in extending the Kingdom of God. It feels like wherever we go, we find family. In some countries our friends call us their "parents" and in others we are their "grand-parents." Our greatest privilege is to be their friends! In all these friends we see the evidence of Jesus' answered prayer, "that we may be one."

Sometimes it is easier to be one with a brother or sister at a distance than it is to live in unity with people in your family or local Church.

Maintaining the Unity of the Spirit

In Ephesians 4, Paul takes up the theme of unity again - one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one hope, one baptism, one God and Father of us all. We are to

be patient, humble, gentle with each other, bearing with one another in love. Our responsibility is to *"make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit."* Paul knew that friction, misunderstandings and even theological arguments would arise between people. Through it all we should make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit that Jesus prayed for Himself. Like Elijah, if we see that one stone has fallen down from the altar, we need to ensure that it is restored to its proper place as soon as possible.

As if to underline how essential unity is within the Body of Christ, the Holy Spirit, through one of the songs of David in Psalm 133 says, *"How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity...For there the Lord bestows His blessing, even life for evermore!"* God delights to pour out His blessing on those who live in unity!

Here is a story from George Strachan that reveals how God deals with divisions in the Church when revival comes.

From then on, the Holy Spirit wielded His sword against all the spiritual enemies deeply entrenched in the lives of Christians within the Church. Where there was bitterness, hearts were melted when God spoke in power through His Word. Reconciliations were made between all. One meeting concluded with prayer after a message on 'love.' No one moved to go home. We wondered what would happen next. Before long people began to confess sin to one another. A matter that remained unsettled after being in court several times was brought to light. The parties concerned had not spoken to each other for years, but in one hour, through the Holy Spirit, tears flowed and this longstanding dispute was settled. The pastor stood, and with tears, loudly glorified God.

Any divisions among God's people hinder the work of the Spirit because God's blessing is poured out on unity.

Some of us, because of a difficult situation in our life, may be thinking that this is too idealistic and even impossible to achieve today. That might be true given the current state of the Church today, but what if God sends revival to us - what then? Here is another true story from the revival in the Solomons. I include it, not to justify abuse or even to imply that a wife should remain in an abusive situation, but simply to remind everyone that God is the God of miracles.

God's Kingdom is a Kingdom of love. This love is evident in revival. A woman whose husband beat her because she was involved in the revival was surprised that she felt no great anger or bitterness against him. This dear soul's only concern was that he did not know Jesus. At one stage, he ordered her to go back

to her father, but she replied, "I married you and I am staying to care for you."

Later he came to the point of admitting that he was the cause of their home being unhappy. In due time he too came to the Saviour and was filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. When we love God first, we love others more!

Intimacy with God and others can break down so easily with the pressures of work, family, Church life and the current state of the world. Real success in life depends on what it is that is the highest priority on our daily timetable. If we are devoting quality time to meeting Jesus in the Word and enjoying honest conversations with Him, then the rest of the day will flow with God's blessings. But if we are walking alone through all of the pressures and issues that come our way, then the blessings of God will not come our way and people whom we love most will suffer.

A medical doctor friend told her testimony to a gathering of mission leaders. Kath spoke about her experience as the only doctor in charge of an isolated hospital with a significant number of outpatient clinics in PNG. She was on duty twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and became exhausted. Kath wondered how she could continue. In her time with the Lord one day Kath asked the Lord for an answer to her problem. She was reading the story in the Gospels about Jesus' visit to the home of Mary and Martha. In the story, Martha complained that her sister could see that she was so busy, but Mary seemed content to sit at Jesus feet! The Master's reply stunned Martha and Kath! "One thing you lack!" Jesus said. And Kath saw the answer right away. If she lacked something, then that thing must be added to her daily schedule. So instead of rising each day at six, Kath determined to rise at five and add an extra hour, having fellowship with Jesus. It made all the difference!

Elijah's stones used in rebuilding the altar represented the names of each of the twelve tribes of Israel. For us, the stones that need to be set in place again in our lives may have different names such as "priority time with God," "discipline in TV time," "quality time with family," "less screen time," "commitment to regular attendance at worship or home group," "space for building relationships with people who are not yet Christians," or "wise stewardship." The Holy Spirit will guide us in this essential work of rebuilding the altar.

Can you identify at least one stone that has fallen aside from the altar of your intimacy with God? It is the right time to pick it up and set it in its proper place in answer to the Saviour's prayer that we might be one with Him and with our fellow believers.

Reflection Ideas

1. Am I more like Martha (always busy and practical), or Mary (wanting to sit with Jesus at every opportunity?) Both are necessary, but Mary chose the better part. Ask the Lord to help you to be willing to sit with Him as a priority.
2. Jesus said, "First go and be reconciled to your brother and then offer your gift!" We give much to the Lord but have we always been careful to do what He says must come first? Is there some lack of unity in your family or Church that is negatively affecting your relationship with God? How can you address this issue prayerfully?

The Quality of Sacrifice

"Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world." 1 John 2:2

"Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship." Romans 12:1

The brave actions of Desmond Doss give us a prime example of selfless sacrifice. This conscientious objector served as a medic for the United States of America in World War 2. In the promotion for the movie Hacksaw Ridge, Doss is portrayed as a man who "put his life on the line many times over a twelve-hour period to save the lives of seventy-five wounded soldiers." This is a description of sacrifice - to be willing to die for others! I believe that this was the spirit that motivated Desmond Doss.

The following night after the rescue, Doss was once again up on the plateau in the midst of heavy enemy fire. When he and three others were cut off from the main group, they huddled together in a crater made from an exploding mortar round. Doss saw a hand grenade that had been lobbed into the crater. The other three men ran, but Doss was too slow to react. Reflexively he covered the grenade with his foot. The grenade detonated and threw his body into the air. When he fell back to earth, the leg was still attached, but bleeding badly from severe wounds. Rather than call for another medic to risk his own life, Doss dressed his wounds and waited five hours until daylight. As the stretcher bearers arrived at dawn and began to carry the wounded medic away for treatment, they passed another critically wounded soldier. Desmond instructed them to put down his stretcher. Then he rolled off it and told them to take the other man. While waiting for the stretcher bearers to return, Doss was joined by another wounded soldier. The two of them set out for safety, leaning on each other for support. A sniper fired at the two of them and hit Desmond's arm which was curled around the shoulders of his wounded comrade. It created terrible damage to the arm but had this not happened, the bullet would have killed the other soldier. Later, seventeen pieces of shrapnel were removed from Doss' arm and leg and he was sent safely home on a hospital ship. His war was over!

Jesus was God's perfect sacrifice

Doss' actions displayed tremendous courage and self-less sacrifice and they are a powerful example of the way in which we, as Christians are to live. This one man's courageous example caused us to think back two thousand years to our Saviour, Jesus. Even though Jesus had led a sinless life for His thirty plus years on earth, He gave His life on the cross to atone for all the sins that all of us would ever commit. He was literally, God's sacrifice made once for

ever, for us! Humankind was estranged from God because of our many sins. But Jesus' sacrifice made it possible for us to come back to God and become members of His family.

Taking up the theme of sacrifice, the Apostle Paul in Romans 12:1 urges every Christian to have the same attitude that Jesus had and to adopt the lifestyle of sacrifice. Paul says that this is *"holy and pleasing to God."* He calls this sacrificial offering *"our spiritual act of worship."* Then Paul commands us to refuse to conform to the thinking of the world, but rather, through making this sacrifice, to be transformed. Then we will understand what God's will is for us. Many of us struggle to know God's will but refuse to sacrifice our dreams, relationships and hopes to God in order to fulfil His will! God's order is for us to first adopt the attitude of the sacrifice, then our lives will be changed and we will know God's will. Why is this important for us today?

Sacrifice runs counter to the spirit of the age

Paul mentored young Timothy into a leadership role in the Church and wrote extensive letters to him to encourage him and to keep him on task. In Paul's second letter to Timothy Chapter 3:1-5 Paul writes, *"There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves..."*

While we pause there, Paul goes on to describe the kind of behaviours that flow from *"People being lovers of themselves."* This list could be describing us today with our mainly "me first" attitude. It is almost like people sense that their personal survival is at stake so they must fight to preserve their own life even if they trample all over others. It is terrible that this attitude is so rampant in the community but Paul warned Timothy to watch out for it in the Church as well. The so-called Christians who love themselves instead of being *"lovers of God, have a form of godliness, but deny its power."* Timothy was to remove himself from their influence. Paul did not want Timothy's faith to be contaminated by the "love myself" movement!

Today, Jesus calls us to live as He lived as we have seen earlier. This means that in order to live an ordinary Christian life we need to keep our lives on the altar! We do not live to please ourselves but to bless others!

All that we have must remain on the altar

There are, of course, practical implications that come from being God's sacrifice. After the revival came in the Solomons, God changed people's attitudes towards money.

Sometime after our family had returned to Australia, I had the joy of re-visiting the College Campus where we had lived at One Pusu. On this occasion I was accompanied by Rev. Graham Paulson, one of Australia's finest indigenous leaders. We arrived from the North in a canoe and were given a place to sleep for the night before we were involved in some

ministry. We had come from an Easter Convention and had not had any access to a bank or a store for about ten days. As a result, neither of us had any money and we did not know how we were going to pay for our return to the North after our visit. We did not disclose this fact to anyone and I knew that the students who attended the College came from extremely poor backgrounds.

About seven o'clock in the night, someone knocked on our door. When I opened the door, a married student stood there. I did not know him. We invited him in thinking he had come for some fellowship or to "share his need" with us. But we were wrong! The dear brother shared with us that God had told he and his wife were to give us their tithe – an offering given in God's Name out of love for Him. Graham and I were both so humbled and though we wished that the student could keep his money, we knew that God had used him to supply our urgent need. This gift reminded us of Paul's teaching about giving out of grace and not duty in 2 Corinthians 8:2,3. There Paul refers to the Macedonian Churches who, *"out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For they gave as much as they were able and even beyond."*

When we served in the College on Malaita, one of our staff members, Joash, felt God was calling him to the life of an itinerant evangelist. So Joash and his family returned to his home village on the Eastern side of the Island. He established the South Pacific Evangelistic Association. He told me once that his Church had said that they could not offer him any financial support because they were too poor. Early one Monday morning, I was down by the small wharf that served the College and I saw someone coming in from the open sea in a heavily laden canoe – it was Joash! He had been travelling for about seven hours in rough seas. He had a story to tell. On the previous Sunday, Joash had preached in his Church about the sacrifice that Jesus had made to bring all the world into God's family, and mentioned the example of the Macedonian Churches. The Holy Spirit moved upon the congregation and in total silence they began to leave the Church and return after a short time with their gifts.

On that one day the people gave more than one thousand dollars in cash, together with thousands of coconuts, seven pigs, more than one thousand kilos of sweet potato and about thirty chickens. Once these had been sold, there was enough to support the ministry for more than a year! The people said they were too poor to give anything to God's work, but when the Holy Spirit worked in the Church they gave sacrificially to enable others to hear the Good News about Jesus. I have no idea how the people survived for food in the next months, because they relied on growing their own garden food, but I am sure that the Lord met their needs.

The lesson for us here is that to fulfil Romans 12:1,2 everything that we have must be available to God for Him to use whether it remains in our hands, or is made available to others at His direction.

The Example of Eric Liddell

Some of us may still remember the theme music from the movie "Chariots of Fire" and the footage of athletes training by running along the long sandy beach. The movie told the story of the Scottish Christian athlete, Eric Liddell, who won gold in the 400 yards race in world record time in the 1924 Paris Olympics. He also won bronze in the 200 yards, but his best race was actually the 100 yards sprint. Unfortunately, the heats of the 100 yards were scheduled to be run on a Sunday morning. Eric felt that he was unable to compete on a Sunday so he withdrew, thus forfeiting his chance at a medal in his best event. Liddell was a talented athlete and his world record in the 400 yards race stood for another twelve years. A family member gave me a copy of a book telling of Liddell's story up to this point, and then going on to recount what happened to him in the few years remaining in his life. I have since passed the book on to others to read so I will allow Wikipedia to tell more of Liddell's story. According to Wikipedia -

Soon after the Olympics, Liddell became a missionary and his first appointment was as a teacher in the north of China. In 1941 life in China had become so dangerous because of Japanese aggression that the British government advised British nationals to leave. Florence (who was pregnant with Maureen) and the children left for Canada to stay with her family. Liddell accepted a position at a rural mission station in Xiaozhang, which served the poor. He joined his brother, Rob, who was a doctor there. The station was severely short of help and the missionaries there were exhausted. A constant stream of locals came at all hours for medical treatment. Liddell arrived at the station in time to relieve his brother, who was ill and needing to go on furlough. Liddell suffered many hardships himself at the mission.

As fighting between the Chinese Army and the invading Japanese troops reached Xiaozhang, the Japanese took over the mission station and Liddell returned to Tianjin. In 1943, he was interned at the Weihsien Internment Camp (in the modern city of Weifang) with the members of the China Inland Mission, Chefoo School (in the city now known as Yantai), and many others. Liddell became a leader and organiser at the camp, but food, medicine and other supplies were scarce.

Liddell took a special interest in the young people and organised activities and sports to keep their spirits up. The

conditions in the camp were disastrous with fresh food and medical help in short supply. Liddell gave himself selflessly to all and laboured long hours each day.

Langdon Gilkey, who also survived the camp and became a prominent theologian in his native America, said of Liddell: "Often in an evening I would see him bent over a chessboard or a model boat, or directing some sort of square dance - absorbed, weary and interested, pouring all of himself into this effort to capture the imagination of these penned-up youths. He was overflowing with good humour and love for life, and with enthusiasm and charm. It is rare indeed that a person has the good fortune to meet a saint, but he came as close to it as anyone I have ever known."

Over the last months of his short life, Eric's health deteriorated rapidly. He suffered severe headaches which were caused by a brain tumour. In his last letter to his wife, written on the day he died, he told her that he had suffered a nervous breakdown and was no longer able to work.

According to a fellow missionary, Liddell's last words were, "It's complete surrender," in reference to the way he had chosen to live his life for God. He died while still in his thirties.

God does not have one standard for Jesus and for people like Eric Liddell and another for you and me. We are all called to present ourselves as a "living sacrifice!" For some of us, we will not offer the sacrifice until God sends His fire down from Heaven to bless us!

Reflection Ideas

1. Jesus put His life "on the line" for each of us. God's Word tells us that God wants our lives to be a living sacrifice. The word "living" implies that it must go on and on every day of our lives. On some days, the sacrifice may involve giving time - a few minutes to listen to someone with a need, an hour or two to go and help a neighbour, or to cook a meal for someone. How will I know that I am God's living sacrifice each day?
2. Where have I been caught up in the thinking of the "spirit of the age?" Where do I find myself thinking "me first?" Are there times when I can legitimately think, "me first?"

The Quality of Prayer

"I urge then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone...This is good and pleases God our Saviour, who wants everyone to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."

1 Tim.2:1,4

Did you notice a difference between the prayers offered by the priests of Baal and the prophet Elijah?

The prayers offered by the priests were characterised by emotion, frenzy, lots of noise and self-harming behaviours. And they were not answered!

Elijah's prayer was calm, brief and confident – just what we would expect coming from a person who was walking with God at the time, and God answered by fire from Heaven! Now, I have related earlier about the prayers that went up to God from the women when Satan paid a visit to an Easter Convention. These prayers were full of emotion, urgency and noise! I am not criticising these factors. But I think that the biggest difference between the two prayers offered on Mt Carmel lay in the level of expectation of receiving an answer. The Baal priests were the leading practitioners of an evil religion introduced by Jezebel the foreign Queen. They knew all the practices, sacrifices and chants but they had never been forced to prove the authenticity of their religious beliefs – until now!

Elijah, on the other hand, had heard the voice of God many times. He had seen God's provision when God sent the ravens to feed him daily in the desert. He had seen God multiply the widow's supply of flour and oil, and most of all, Elijah had witnessed for himself the miracle of God bringing the widow's dead son back to life. He had prayed for a three year-long drought and God withheld the rain. He knew that God answered his prayers.

Earlier, we discovered Paul's warning to Timothy about some religious people interfering in the Churches. They had a "form of godliness, but denying the power thereof!" In this sense, we can resemble the false prophets, desperately turning to prayer in moments of panic, only to find that God is silent to us. Prayer at its purest, is a daily relationship with God through the Holy Spirit and the intercession of the Lord Jesus. Within that relationship there are opportunities for asking, listening, sharing intimate desires and feelings, being speechless, and for being very, very thankful. So, when a crisis comes, we are ready. We are at peace and we know through the guidance of God what to do.

The Example of Mary Slessor

Dick Eastman tells of a question asked of Mary Slessor who spent a lifetime as a missionary in West Africa. When asked what prayer meant to her, Mary replied:

"My life is one long, daily, hourly record of answered prayer for physical health, for mental overstrain, for guidance given marvellously, for errors and dangers averted...for food provided at the exact hour needed, for everything that goes to make up life and my poor services. I can testify with a full and often wonder-stricken awe that I believe God answers prayer!" Then she added, "I know God answers prayer!"

What can we say in response to this proclamation? Are we living a life like Mary where we are daily, hourly and regularly praying and seeing God's answers? Or do we have our minds filled with other things that prevent us from this close, regular communication with God that relies much more on listening than asking? Have we learned yet to *"Be still and know that I am God!"* (Psalm 46:10)

George Strachan reflected on the lessons we modern Christians could learn from the revivals that have swept the earth in previous generations. Speaking about prayer, George observes;

Lack of real prayer is a major hindrance. For many of us, prayer is of no great importance, but rather just an "extra" to a busy life. But prayer that brings power takes precedence over all else. Nothing should be allowed to steal away time spent with God in prayer... When the work of the Holy Spirit starts to ebb, prayer is the first thing to suffer. Being one of the most effective ministries, it may well be the one to receive the greatest enemy attack.

Need for a balanced and regular prayer life

The Bible presents us with many different types of prayer and even records almost word for word some of the most personal and important prayers uttered by Jesus. It is helpful to make a study of the prayers of Jesus and Paul to learn lessons for our own lives. Writing to young Timothy, Paul describes some of the different categories of prayer in a way that allows us to compare our own experience and make necessary adjustments.

"I urge then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone...This is good and pleases God our Saviour, who wants everyone to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." 1 Tim.2:1,4

Each of these words in the Greek language describe a different type of prayer. This difference is not made evident in our English translations.

REQUESTS (supplications) are petitions made to God in humility about specific one-off situations in which He alone can help, for example - sickness removed or a problem overcome. (Normally personal)

PRAYERS are normally used to describe any form of approach to God. In this verse it refers to requests for needs that are always present, for example - the need for wisdom, a greater personal commitment, a deeper love for God.

INTERCESSION involves an interview before the throne of God during which we plead in the interests of others without holding back. The word actually means to go between two people or situations. Intercession can sometimes include an action such as Jesus dying on the cross making a way for us to be united with a holy God, or Elijah in a power encounter standing between God and His people. In the Old Testament we read that God *"looked for someone to stand in the gap before Him for the land, but He found no one at that time."* In intercession we join with the two perfect Intercessors, Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:27 – The Holy Spirit intercedes Romans 8:34 – Jesus intercedes (cp Hebrews 7:25)

Prayer in spiritual warfare can include any or all of these types of prayers.

Notice that Paul tells Timothy to pray in these ways *"for everyone"* and then *mentions those in Government especially, so that believers may have freedom to preach the Gospel*. There is a sense that our prayers ought to have a global dimension in addition to a personal and local dimension. In fact, the measure of the distance from our home to the places where the answers to our prayers are delivered by a faithful God is the measure of the love in our hearts for people in this world.

THANKSGIVING is completing the circle so that the blessings which come back from God return to Him in the form of gratitude. We are often guilty of asking too much and thanking God too little!

To the eye of God, such praying is excellent, admirable and to His heart it is acceptable and most welcome.

In order for our prayer lives to be effective, they must be balanced. These four words provide a healthy balance for us. But there is something else. If our prayers are to be effective at the most critical times, something must first be done in our hearts. Consider carefully the words of Rees Howells.

"This is the first condition of intercession, and the beginning of the life of the intercessor - to love enough to take the place of others."

It may be that the first effective prayer we should pray is NOT, "Lord make me an intercessor," but, "Lord, help me to love the world as you love the world." The founder of World Vision International began his ministry with that prayer and look at the results!

Prayer and spiritual warfare

The Apostle Paul refers to the warfare that every Christian is involved in because we have become a part of the Kingdom of God in a world influenced by "the Prince of this world – Satan."

In Ephesians 6:10-18 Paul wrote about the armour that God has provided for every Christian to wear. I have heard it said that the armour is entirely defensive but I have found that two offensive weapons have been given to us, The Word of God called the *Sword of the Spirit*, and *prayer in the Spirit*. Jesus defeated Satan in the temptations through depending fully on God and answering Satan with quotes from the Old Testament – "It is written!" Prayer led by the Spirit is also wonderfully powerful in binding the strong man and setting people free.

In 2 Corinthians 10: 3-5 Paul refers once again to the weapons God has entrusted to believers. *"For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we make captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."*

When God's people put their very lives on the line as living sacrifices and take on the full armour of God, including the Word of God, and prayer in the Spirit, then the false philosophies of the world will crumble. The entrenched corruption will be brought to God's light, and Satan's influence will be diminished significantly.

George Strachan's story about answered prayer will encourage us all to believe that God wants us to pray much more today than we have in the past.

The mighty weapon of prayer was so effective that the enemy used every trick and scheme to hinder it.

This was a new experience for us and emphasised the need to learn from all that was happening. Hitherto we had encouraged more prayer to press home for victory, but too often we had slackened off. Now that revival had come, walking in the Spirit and keeping everything in its proper place was a challenge. When the Holy Spirit came upon God's people there was a new power in prayer we had not experienced before. This was revealed when the challenge came to cast out demons in the Name of Jesus. Here we were in a previously unknown spiritual dimension, but almost every time there was a response. We found it the same when we prayed for people to "be filled with the Spirit." Even when there were many people gathered, the

Spirit came down nearly every time, even though some would remain untouched. For some reason He did not come upon everyone.

Elijah was someone just like us and when he prayed the fire of God fell down from Heaven. Lord, teach us to pray!

Reflection Ideas

1. What one change can I make today to make my prayer life more effective? Do I enjoy balance in my prayer life?
2. Are there people who I began to pray for but no longer do so? Ask the Lord to reveal to you the reason for this change.
3. Paul says that “we have weapons that have divine power to demolish strongholds.” Can you identify any strongholds that God wants you to demolish through your prayers?

A Personal Story

I would like to finish this series of studies by sharing some of my own personal story that relates to revival. I do this, only to give a greater awareness of what it means to be revived. My story is not about me really, but about God and what He can do for everyone. As you hear it, think of the key words derived from Elijah’s experience – courage, integrity, faith, intimacy with God, sacrifice, and prayer.

I do not often understand why God works as He does, but I realise now that the Lord was preparing me for a lifetime of service back in my teenage years. I went to Church with my parents every week, mostly twice each Sunday, and was blessed through the ministry of a Godly pastor. He preached the Gospel and lived it out sacrificially every day. He mentored me and gave me many opportunities to learn how to serve Christ. But at the same time, I was privileged to have outstanding Christian leaders like Corrie Ten Boom, J. Edwin Orr, Oswald Sanders and John G. Ridley coming to my Church. Their lives and their ministries had a great impact on me, even though I was still a teenager.

I developed a thirst to know more about God’s work and to grow. Even though I was not any kind of scholar, I began to read books about the deeper Christian life, missionary work and revival. These writers revealed to me that God wanted to do far more in me and the Church than I had ever experienced.

In my early twenties God intervened in my life and called me to serve Him full-time. After my training in Theological college, my wife, Irene, and I went on to pastor four Churches in Queensland. In the first three Churches we witnessed a wonderful work of the Holy Spirit in seasons of blessing and we saw quite a few people converted and enter the Church. We had hardly begun in our fourth Church when God intervened and called us in 1976 to go out as missionary teachers to the Solomon Islands.

The revival began in the Solomons in 1970 and God touched the lives of missionaries and Church leaders gathered on the isolated College Campus at One Pusu, on Malaita Island, for their annual retreat. By the time our family arrived I would say that the fires lit in that conference were a fact of history and no longer a daily present reality in that location. Elsewhere the revival still moved around the Churches. Although we could tell that it was a special place, and that God had done something wonderful, neither the college nor the Church possessed the fire as before.

Easter Convention in Rae'ou

The following Easter, I was invited to travel to the other side of the Island to speak at the East Are Are Convention at a village called Rae'ou. I was very aware of my inexperience and I was still learning the language and culture, but I agreed to go. The journey from One Pusu to Rae'ou involved travelling about eight hours in a motorised canoe in the open sea.

The meetings began as soon as we arrived on the Thursday night and continued with another three meetings on Easter Friday. Approximately thirty or forty people were being counselled after each meeting out of a crowd of fifteen hundred people. After the prayer meeting on the Saturday morning, Abiah, the Association leader, told me that the meetings would be cancelled so that the local leaders could have a time of prayer to find out why the Holy Spirit was not free to work. When I compared the meetings and responses with my previous experience in Australia, I was stunned. I had thought that things were going well, but apparently not!

All day long the local leaders met in the school house praying for God to speak to them. I was left to wander alone up and down the beach, much to the amusement of some small boys. Then, just as it was becoming dark, Abiah came back and announced that they were ready to proceed with the evening meeting.

I will never forget that night! I spoke from Ephesians about the Spirit filled life. My Interpreter was a brother who lived nearby the College. He was not the person I would have chosen to be my interpreter. I admit that I had no confidence in his ability to interpret God's message! The extended church building was partially lit by three kerosene pressure lamps when we began, but two of them ran out of fuel half way through the meeting! At the end of the message, my interpreter who was speaking in the Are Are language simply said to the people, in English, "Alright we have heard God's Word, now you pray!"

As was their custom, the people began to murmur their personal prayers. But very quickly, the sound level increased until it sounded like we were standing next to a giant Boeing 747 Jumbo Jet. As I was standing in the pulpit shouting out my confession of sin at the top of my voice, because that was the only way I could think, I remember praying, "Lord, I have been talking to people about their need to be filled with your Holy Spirit and I do not even know what it means!" Then I realised what I was doing and another thought occurred to me - that inner voice that belongs to self. It said, "What if someone hears you?" I could not have cared less! I knew that I had to confess my sin to God then and there, or there would be serious consequences!

Some time during this encounter with God I realised that I was standing facing a huge, brilliant, bright light (like a searchlight) that filled the building. This light could not have been coming from the kerosene lanterns, because two of them had gone out long ago. We were standing in the presence of God who is light and in whom is no darkness at all. He was present and we were all feeling aware of our own dirtiness. The prayer continued for perhaps another thirty minutes in the most intense fashion. Then, quite suddenly, all the prayers stopped and there was absolute silence, but the light remained. One brother at the back of the building then stood to his feet, and pointing to a picture of Jesus on the cross nailed to the wall behind the pulpit, began to lead us all in a joyous song. The song was sung in the Are Are language and in English. Some of the words went like this:

There was One who was willing to die in my stead, that a soul so unworthy might live;

And the road to the cross He was willing to tread, All the sins of my life to forgive.

He is tender and loving and patient with me, while He cleanses my heart of its dross;

But there's no condemnation, I know I am free, for my sins are all nailed to the cross!

They are nailed to the cross, they are nailed to the cross! Oh, how much He was willing to bear!

With what suffering and loss, Jesus went to the cross!

And He carried my sins with Him there!

Nothing can compare with the joy of knowing that you have been forgiven and accepted by our Heavenly Father!

After that meeting, the counselling teams worked day and night for the next three days helping people to move forward positively with Jesus. Sins were forgiven. Giftedness was discovered. People were filled with the Spirit. Miraculous healings occurred. People were reconciled to each other. Some were commissioned to go with God on His mission. Demons were cast out. People were set free!

The presence of God never left us while we remained there. God had revived His people!

What had made the difference?

The following morning while Abiah and I were having some cold sweet potato and black tea together, I asked him quietly what it was that God had said to them in the Saturday prayer time that took all day. He was reluctant to

answer at first, because he felt embarrassed, but since I desperately needed to know he confided in me.

In order to host the Easter Convention two nearby local Churches worked for a whole year planting extra food crops, extending the Church building, carrying coral rocks from across the harbour to build roads to and through the village and building temporary guest houses for the one thousand plus guests at the Convention. Just two weeks prior to the convention, the pastor had died while carrying rocks to make the roads.

But for some reason God was not pleased with them. Something had been overlooked! The people had worked for twelve months to prepare for the convention. They had prepared everything for the guests to come, but they had neglected to prepare their hearts for the Saviour to come. Due to all their busyness, they had not made the time for the two Churches to come together to ensure they were living in unity. It was a sin of omission not a sin of commission. They had neglected to honour the heartfelt prayer of Jesus, "that they may be one!" When this sin was discovered through waiting on God, they repented. Then the unity was restored and God was pleased - so pleased that He came in Person to visit with us!

What a lesson this was for me. My first reaction was to think that this was such a little thing but then I remembered what it was blocking - the tangible Presence of God in His Church. In my mind I immediately thought of people who had been in my Churches in Australia. I remembered two old ladies who would not speak to each other because one had been left out of a decision about buying new Church crockery. I thought of whole families who came to Church but simply avoided other families because of long standing hurts and disagreements. I remembered leaders who refused to be reconciled because "the other person had to apologise first!" And there were families shattered over some hurtful word spoken in the past. It was then that I realised why the Holy Spirit was so grieved with us and why His blessing was not often upon us in Australia.

We don't understand how powerful one "little" sin is. We think it is something that only affects us personally. But the impact of sin is like the Covid virus. The source of the infection may just be one person who has Covid 19. But as a result, other people have become infected, and soon the virus has spread to family and the local community. Our sin is like the virus. It can impact those we love. It can impact our fellow workers. It can impact our Church. It can even impact our whole city if it is something that is grieving the Holy Spirit and hindering His work.

Sin is serious. Jesus died on the cross for the whole world. He bore the fire of God's wrath against every sin in His holy Person. Every time I sin, I contribute to the pain and suffering that Jesus bore in my place. Sin is

serious! If I thought that every sin of mine was adding to the pain of my Saviour, then I would think twice before disappointing Him again. When God reveals His holy Presence to us, we realise how horrible our sin is and He empowers us to let it all go so that we can enjoy having Him with us!

Revival is not for the strong and successful but for the weak and needy. God can even convert a valley of dry bones into a mighty army!

When God comes to us in revival He comes as the light. Light comes to remove all darkness. He also comes as pure love as He enfolds us in His arms. Then He brings His grace for our forgiveness and our hearts melt with sheer joy! We are changed in an instant. We go forth, empowered by the Holy Spirit and motivated by God's love to be His servants in the world!

We pray with Isaiah of old, "*Oh God, rend the heavens and come down that your people might rejoice in you!*" (Isaiah 64:1)



College Campus at One Pusu



Campus chapel enlarged to house Easter convention



Children off to school Island style



Village housing where we lived

