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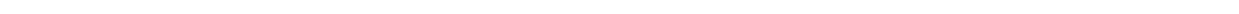
LIFE EQUIPPING STATIONS

TRAINING THE SAINTS TO ADVANCE THE KINGDOM



Life Equipping Stations

by Dr Will' Marais (PhD. Theology)



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STATION ONE (1)

UNDERSTANDING NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

This material has been prepared with the primary purpose of assisting believers as to who they are, what their purpose is in this life and how best to accomplish it. Each station covered covers a different facet in the life of a believer.

Please note that due to the content covered in this manual, it is very important that you take the time to read all of the scriptures listed.

The Church and the believer

The first question that we need to consider is:

"What connection is there between the Church and a person who has yielded their life to the demands of Jesus Christ after accepting Him as both Lord and Saviour?"

Well, the Bible tells us that following any persons' acceptance of Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour there are certain Biblical essentials they must comply with, and one of the first of these essentials is that a person join a local New Testament church family, i.e. a local church with Father-figures called 'elders,' as soon as possible. The responsibility of the elders, i.e. these godly men who are usually married, and if so, with each having only one wife, is to make sure that every local church family member in their care is looked after and equipped in the plan that God has for their lives. It is interesting to note that nowhere in the New Testament do we find believers not being accountable to a local church leadership team (i.e. to the elders). This is why, to be a part of Gods family, the Bible teaches us that every believer must belong to, fellowship faithfully at, and be in submission to the elders (father figures) in a local church family context (Hebrews 10:24, 25). Unfortunately, this does not mean that everyone who attends a local church is living a lifestyle in submission to the demands of Jesus Christ.

We as leaders know that our God
will only inhabit what is
compatible to His purpose.

of people who make up His family, after accepting Him as their Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. This is people who have repented of their sinful, independent lifestyles and have made a vocal commitment to God, indicating their desire to serve Jesus Christ His Son, as their Lord. As followers of Jesus Christ they must be faithful in coming together regularly at specific venues, to worship Jesus as their older brother who died and was resurrected from the dead on their behalf. Besides remembering His death, burial and resurrection, they also come together to remember the contents of the Will and Testament that He left for each of them to enjoy, following His resurrection from the dead

Many thousands of people attending church meetings all over the world often fail to realize that the church spoken of in the Bible is not referring to a building where religiously inclined people, with Christian beliefs, gather together. It actually has nothing to do with a building. Rather, it is a name given by God to a very specific group

(1 Corinthians 14:26). These born-again, hope-filled, spirit enthused people who are obedient to Christ by obeying His Word, are whom the Bible calls, the Church.

This is why it's important for us to realize that the church is made up only of people who have been born again after having repented of their sin. As a result of repenting of their sin and asking Christ to be Lord of their lives, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within their bodies (Ephesians 1:13,14) and the benefits of Christ's last Will and Testament become their own. No person can belong to the family of God, benefit from Christ's last Will and Testament or enter into heaven, without being born again and as a result, live out a righteous life. Without being born again, is like someone trying to listen to an FM station when they only have an AM crystal installed in their radio. To receive an FM frequency on any AM radio set, one will first need to install an FM crystal. It is exactly the same with every person born of natural birth into this world. Sin has totally de-activated the spiritual 'crystal' needed for mankind to have fellowship with God and this is why we need it re-activated within us. The truth of the matter is, we don't become sinners because we sin, rather, we all sin because we are born sinners (Psalm 51:5). The 'crystal activator' that Jesus Christ gives to us is the person of the Holy Spirit and once His presence enters our bodies, our own spirits (i.e. our crystal sets) are activated and made alive and sensitive once again to the voice and promptings of God. The Holy Spirit re-activates our spirit-man by breaking the power of what has now become 'cancelled sin' and makes us alive to God. This is a mystery which only God can accomplish in our lives (Romans 8:9).

So, as believers, the Bible tells us that when we come together and do things in unity as the church, God our Father supernaturally makes His presence known amongst us by being 'in the midst of us'. Because we cannot apply what we can't acknowledge (i.e. we cannot do what we don't know) we as the church need to be informed, and it is for this reason that we gather together for the purpose of being taught what the Scriptures say about what we must do, how we must do it, where our power comes from, where Jesus lives, who His father and Spirit are, how we are to behave while on earth, where we go after death etc. Opportunity is also given to instruct the church in matters such as Bible doctrine, evangelism, prayer, early church practice, operating in the miraculous and basically learning how to live out a life that imitates Acts 2:40-47.

What importance do we place on our 'church' meeting times?

We as the leaders believe it vitally important for every congregational meeting to align itself as closely as possible with the modelled 'blue print' of the early Church given to us in the New Testament. This means that every time we meet together, whether at mid-week, Sunday or corporate gatherings, we want to model our behaviour on this pattern given to the early believers. This original pattern recorded in the New Testament allowed the early church to be a beautiful 'picture' of God's purity, grace, acceptance, forgiveness, power and love. In the New Testament era, when this 'picture' of church was witnessed by unbelievers living in surrounding villages and even cities, it resulted in lives being transformed and whole communities being won to Christ (Acts 11:25,26 and 1 Thessalonians 1:8,9).

As leaders, we want to do everything possible with God's help, to assist each saint to regain the capacity to live in the exciting manifest presence of our God with increasing intensity, daily.

It is for this reason that the leaders have come to the realization that if we want what the early church had, we must do what they did, but to do this we must first know what they knew.

The Early Church

What was the early church's secret?

Well, the Bible shows us very clearly that the early believers knew that the church was God's only means of bringing His Kingdom rule onto the earth. He had no 'back up plan' or 'plan B'. The church was it! A magnificent example of this truth is seen in Paul's first letter to the church at Thessalonica, which has been referred to by church historians as one of the most persecuted churches in history. In Paul's opening chapter we see recorded in the first ten verses Paul saying, because of what they knew concerning who they were in Christ, the gospel was spreading into the surrounding areas like a wild fire (verse 8). These believers knew that God had chosen them as a special group of people to be filled with His Holy Spirit and live their lives out in a way that showed they were willing to die for each other (verse 4). As a result they stood firm when Roman persecution took the lives of their wives, husbands and children (verse 6) but because of what they knew, they stayed enthusiastic and full of God, rejoicing in the promise of a great resurrection (verse 8). Finally, Paul tells us that in the midst of all this heart-ache and loss, they knew that it was not foolishness on their parts to be willing to give up their lives on earth, which they could not keep, to gain an eternity in the presence of God, which they would never lose. This was a great church with great values and a great witness.

Following the day of Pentecost, the church in Thessalonica, as well as many hundreds of others, became the window through which the Kingdom of God was being displayed with much effect. Sadly to say, something far more than is being portrayed in many places today. We also see from the Scriptures that the early believers saw the church as something far more comprehensive and multifaceted than is being evidenced in many church meetings today. When the early church came together they saw a glorious assembly of God's people fulfilling varied and strategic roles (Romans 12:3-8). They saw themselves as being a house and a city, an army and a bride, a building but also a body, filled with life, love, energy, enthusiasm and a God-given purpose. Each of these God-given concepts was designed to stretch the believers in their thinking as to who they were and as to what their God-given purpose was to be on the earth. The picture given to us of the early church in the Scriptures was a picture portraying community, spontaneity, Divine energy, ecstatic worship, acceptance, forgiveness and unconditional love one for each other. This was their lifestyle practice not only on Jewish Sabbaths or at Sunday meetings, but was lived out on a daily basis. That is, they made this their lifestyle practice every day of every week of every month of every year. One can say they practised the presence of the Holy Spirit all the time.

But over the centuries most church gatherings have become rigid and predictable and when this happens, they also become manageable i.e. we can plan and direct them ourselves. We no longer need God or the presence of the Holy Spirit to be present because we can now run the church in a way that suits us. When this happens, the church starts to degenerate

As His church, God desires that others recognise us by who we are, and not by our religious practices that seldom, if ever, touch other people's lives.

and the Bible tells us that we are left with nothing more than an old wineskin.

We as leaders have learned that God will only inhabit what is compatible to His purpose and this simply means that God is not responsible to breathe life into anything which He has not planned. This is why we are so determined to have His Biblical blue-print which He gave to us in the New Testament as our only modus operandi for doing church. We have chosen this stance so that we can always be compatible to His purpose and thereby allow Him opportunity to show His presence and power amongst us, whenever and however He wants to.

As leaders, we want the church to constantly live in the life and power of God as did the early New Testament churches.

The Real Thing

As we allow the Lord His rightful place as Head of the Church we're seeing a need for a lot of our lifestyle practices to be changed. For instance, in the past, one saw 'church-people' being recognized by the way they dressed on a Sunday and also because of the 'church' buildings they entered into for worship purposes. Today, we believe God is restoring a 'lifestyle' that will allow us, irrespective of the way we dress or the buildings we attend, to be seen as His church. This is seen by the way we worship Him, approach life and by the way we respond to difficult circumstances in the work place and in life.

As we allow the Holy Spirit opportunity to help us live lives that glorify Christ, we are learning new truths about church. God wants people to see his presence in us. The bible tells us that God wants others to recognize us as 'believer's by who we are, and not by our religious practices that very seldom affect other people's lives.

By being Kingdom centered (i.e. 'God and other people' centered) we want our lifestyle and speech to make it so obvious to others, as to who we are, that we won't have to call attention to it. For instance, if you are a man, we know that we don't have to go to the shopping mall to tell people that we are male, they can see it. It's obvious. When we call attention to the obvious we are seen as behaving strange. Well, it should be exactly the same when we live out the Acts 2:42-47 blue print in our lives on a 24/7 basis. We'll be seen as followers of Christ who make up His Church and as a result won't have to continually call attention to the obvious. This was the case in Antioch where we are told that the early disciples were recognized as believers because of their lifestyles, and as a result, were later called 'Christians' by the unsaved community. Note, they didn't call themselves Christians because if they did so, this would simply draw attention to the obvious. No, Scripture tells us "they were first called Christians in Antioch". These people were sold out to Christ's cause and as a result were recognized as Christians in everything they did and in everything they said (Philemon verses 1-7). As a leadership, we are desperate for God's kingdom to be seen in each of our lives in exactly the same way.

This is why it's our desire to continually refocus our attention back onto Christ and His original blue-print, an exciting blue-print that resulted in people being added to the local church daily. This is also why it's so important for each one of us to be willing to let go of any incorrect concept of church that we might have been influenced with in the past. We need to allow God to enable us to become the exciting, community changing people whom He always intended us to be from the

God lives in our
friendships, not in our
meetings

beginning i.e. to become a people who have a lifestyle that others have always longed for, a lifestyle that reflects life, forgiveness, acceptance, community, hope and laughter.

In the past it has often been reasons such as the inadequate preaching of the Gospel, coupled together with an inconsistent Christ-centered lifestyle, and further frustrated by the absence of a basic doctrinal foundation, that has resulted in many people not being 'fully born' into the Kingdom. When this happens, we find some 'Christians' not willing to submit to the leading of the eldership, others who have a non-committal attitude in attending vital meetings of the church whether on a Sunday or mid-week, others who are ill-disciplined in their personal times with the Lord and still others who argue against tithing and financial support. Basically, these people are still independent in spirit with a limited understanding of the claims of the lordship of Christ on their lives. Over the years, it is believed by men such as Dr. Billy Graham that tens of thousands who have 'responded' to the gospel, fall away because inadequate 'spiritual birth procedures' being put into place. This happens when the new converts are not informed of the Holy Spirit coming into their lives at conversion; when they are not given instruction concerning baptism; and are not introduced to a local church family and community (life group) so that they can be cared for and discipled from day one.

Because we as leaders desire God's best for His church, we are NOT wanting to produce a mutant breed of genetically 'in-house' engineered 'Converts'. That is, a breed of people whose relationship with the Lord and with others is established on what we think, and not on what the Scriptures say. We don't want to expose people to teachings that will result in them being left with a shallow and inadequate theological base and philosophy of church.

To the contrary, we are convinced that the real Gospel is not "Come to Jesus and get all your desires fulfilled" but rather "Jesus is Lord, so what are we all going to do about it?"

We want the mystery and the majesty of our God to be lived out through the lives of each one of us coming together to form His church, in the city and the nations. As leaders, we want to do everything possible with our God's help, to assist each member in this church family to regain the capacity to live in the exciting manifest presence of our God with increasing intensity, every day.

Finally, two of the primary values we hold dear are our personal relationships with our God and Father, and our community relationships with each other as Christ's church. We have come to realize that God lives in our friendships, not in our meetings. It is the love or lack of it between us i.e. the love God puts in our hearts for each other as His people that will attract others to Him. People will always firstly be attracted to us and our values, and only thereafter, attracted to our God. People must first see something in us they desire, before we go offering them something synthetic which they see no worth asking for. The Bible says we are the 'living stones' that build up this thing called the church, and it is God's love within us that acts as the cement that binds us together (1 Peter 2:4,5 and Ephesians 2:19-22).

God wants to build us together in such a way that His strength will be seen through our unity. But our enemy, the devil, knows this truth and as a result wants to infiltrate our relationships, split us apart, divide us, create offence and cause the living stones to be detached one from the other. This is why we need to know who we are and why we are here so that we can become intentional about practically

Let us not offer people in our communities something they don't see worth asking for in our lives

loving each other, speaking well of each other, as well as being patient and more accommodating with each other.

It has been said that there is no time like the present, so right now could be a great time to get alone with God, and as you do, re-establish your covenant with Him by making a fresh commitment on your part toward the other believers involved in your local church family.

A great starting point would be to firstly covenant with the Lord in your commitment to love the guys and girls in your church family. This can be done by faithfully attending both the Sunday and midweek community meetings, as well as our corporate monthly gathering times when all the congregations come together at one venue. Everything else on your social agenda should come second to these designated ‘church family times’ together, because our fellowship with each other will result in God’s blessings coming upon our individual and family members.

“We are no longer essentially human beings living out a temporary spirit experience, but rather spirit beings living out a temporary human experience soon to see our King and God”

STATION TWO (2)

UNDERSTANDING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The King's rule

When the Bible speaks about the Kingdom of God, it always refers to a specific area where God is being worshipped, honoured and served by angels or men or both. Just because a certain geographical area belongs to Christ the King, this does not mean that His Kingdom is visible there, because the Bible tells us that His domain actually includes everything i.e. "the earth and the fullness thereof". So, even though the earth belongs to the Lord, billions of people rebel and reject His Kingship and His rule over their lives e.g. Hindu's, Muslims, Atheists, Agnostics and dozens of others, and thereby prevent His Kingdom and its benefits being seen and experienced.

However, in our modern language when speaking of a king's rule on earth, the meaning of the word "kingdom" is a designated realm or area over which a king exercises authority, whether the subjects honour his rule or not. This is not the case with God's rule on the earth, even though it belongs to Him. God only rules over people and pours out His supernatural Kingdom benefits onto those who submit to His Fatherly authority and Divine Will. If we approach the Scriptures exclusively with our modern understanding of the word "kingdom," we will not always understand what the Bible is trying to tell us.

When a person allows Christ to direct the affairs of their life, the Kingdom of God and its attributes become visible in and through them

love people and in the same way, to be a Kingdom focused person, I must be seen to be actively serving the King.

When any person allows Jesus the right to be King over their life, the Kingdom of God manifests itself in and through that life by the person's godly actions. The fruit of the Spirit that will reveal itself in a person's life confirms that person's submission to Christ's rule, and this provides a confidence that the miracles and signs and wonders that follow, are coming through a life that is glorifying God.

In the New Testament the chief meaning of the word "Kingdom" is God's absolute rule or reign in any given area of a life to which He has full right. The Gospel of the Kingdom of God is best understood when rendered as "**the good news of the reign of God.**" The Kingdom of God is seen through His rule, His authority and His government in the lives of people.

To receive the Kingdom of God is to accept God's government over our lives. When we pray this prayer, "Your Kingdom come..." we are asking God to take absolute control of our lives

On the earth, the Kingdom of God can only be visible through the lives of born again people. People cannot visit it like thousands do, when travelling to Disney World, in Florida. When a person reveals the Kingdom of God through their lives, it is exactly the same as when one reveals their love for another. For instance, we cannot identify a person as being a loving person except through their actions i.e. because "love isn't a commodity that comes to stay, love isn't love till' we give it away". That is, to be a loving person I must actively

and futures. When we do so, the Kingdom of God is given opportunity to manifest itself in and through our lives.

Jesus said we must ‘receive the kingdom of God like little children’ (Mark 10:15).

In other words, we must receive the government of God over our lives in exactly the same way as disciplined children respond when obeying loving and gracious parents. It is this perfect, divine Kingdom rule and government that God wants to reveal to the world through us, His church.

His Church

Jesus has built His church using people who have submitted to His Kingly rule as rail lines or building blocks. The degree to which we faithfully support the weight of His Kingdom by denying our own desires and interests, is the degree to which our God and King is going to reward us for doing so on the day of His return to earth. The **active church** consists of people who have responded to the Gospel and have been called out of the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of Christ to reveal the attributes of this new Kingdom. God rescues men and women from the rule and control of satan and transfers them into the reign and Kingdom rule of His beloved Son, King Jesus (Colossians 1:13). He does this so that He can reveal His Kingdom order through their lives. Jesus always identifies the children of God as sons of the Kingdom and never as sons of the Church.

Jesus always identifies the children of God as sons of the Kingdom and never as sons of the church

Jesus uses the word “church” to collectively identify those He has called ‘sons of the Kingdom’, i.e. those who have placed their lives under His reign and rule. All people who have submitted their lives to Christ are called sons of the Kingdom.

In this world we find religions that teach people that they must attend special places, such as designated temples, before they can engage in worship. This is an Old Testament practice, the New Testament tells us for us that the temple of God is a spiritual temple, a temple not made by skill of men. It is a **spiritual building** made up of living persons who have responded to the message of the Good news of the Kingdom of God. Collectively these people are identified as the Temple or Body of Christ. These people can meet anywhere and at anytime. As we saw in the previous chapter, when looking at the teaching on the Church, the people who are born again make up the House of the Lord like living bricks. These born again people, i.e. these who constitute the Church, make use of any building, facility, beach or field that suits their needs. The building remains a building whether the church is meeting in it or not and is nothing more than a venue to protect them from physical elements such as rain and wind. The Bible tells us when even two or three believers who are living lives in submission to Christ, meet together for worship and prayer the Kingdom of God can reveal itself because Christ is there in the midst of them.

The Church and the Kingdom

One of the many areas of controversy and confusion that occurs amongst many believers is the area, which relates to both the distinction and relationship of the Church with the Kingdom.

Questions often asked are:

Is the Church and the Kingdom synonymous? Is the church in the Kingdom or is the Kingdom in the Church? Is the church 'Gentilish' and the Kingdom Jewish? Is the Kingdom past, present or future? Is the Kingdom materialistic or spiritual?

The Kingdom defined

Well, the word "Kingdom" is made up of two words: 'King's Domain'. It is the territory or area over which a King rules and reigns. God's Kingdom is the reign or the rule of God, whether in Heaven or through the lives of men and women on earth. Although God's reign and rule is eternally and perfectly visible in heaven (i.e. all of the time), it is not so on the earth. It is up to the church to reveal its influence and presence on earth. The Kingdom of God does not appear unless the church allows it to do so when submitting to their King. The Greek word used for Kingdom is '*Basileia*'. This word speaks of the sway, rule and the administration of a king.

As far as God is concerned one cannot separate King Jesus from His Kingdom and only where the King is ruling, will we find His Kingdom and its heavenly appearance. Where Jesus isn't being honoured as King, there His Kingdom cannot reveal itself. It should be the heartfelt longing of all saints to have the Kingdom and its attributes clearly visible amongst us. That is, to have King Jesus ruling in and over our lives so that His Kingdom can be clearly seen through salvations, healings, deliverance, righteousness, joy and peace, which, through our obedience to Christ will become more and more an everyday occurrence amongst us.

This however will only be possible as we honour Jesus Christ as the '**King Supreme**', by submitting to His Word and saying 'Yes Lord' when He speaks. It is interesting to note that the word 'Kingdom' when used in conjunction with the church in the New Testament is used about 160 times in this context. Because the early New Testament church consisted of 'Yes Lord' people, the Kingdom of God 'broke out' in and among them on a daily basis.

How long has the Kingdom of God been in existence?

- The Bible tells us that the Kingdom of God is an everlasting Kingdom (Psalms 145:10, Daniel 4:3). There has never been a time when the Kingdom of God has not been in existence, it has neither beginning nor end.
- The Kingdom of God is sovereign, ruling over all other kingdoms whether physical or spiritual (Revelation 11:5)
- The Kingdom of God is all-inclusive and consists of the total universe, the heaven and its angels, both seen and unseen realms, the fallen angels, all creatures and mankind on this earth. All are under His control and dominion. None can exist or act without His sustaining power (Psalms 103:19; Exodus 15:18, Psalms 145:10-13) even though God allows them to act and exist independently of His will.

What is the difference between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven?

There is no difference at all between these terms, they are synonymous. The following Scripture shows that what is said of the Kingdom of God is also said of the Kingdom of Heaven.

‘And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it (Matthew 23:22).

Heaven is the perfect picture of how God intends His Kingdom to function. Matthew (writing particularly for Jewish converts) almost invariably uses the expression “Kingdom of Heaven”, while Mark, Luke and John substitute it with “Kingdom of God.” It was customary among the Jews to use the word ‘Heaven’ for God, and as we saw in Matthew 23:22, the Lord Himself states that to swear by heaven is to swear by “the throne of God and by Him that sits on it.”

The Kingdom of God in the Church

The relationship between the Church and the Kingdom is evident from Matthew’s writings (Matthew 16:18,19). Jesus said, “Upon this Rock I will build my **Church** and I will give to it the keys of the **Kingdom** of heaven.”

The Church has become the instrument for the demonstration of the Kingdom of God on the earth and is entrusted with the administration, authority and power of the kingdom symbolised by the “Keys of the Kingdom”.

Distinction and relationship

The church and the Kingdom are distinct, yet related. The Kingdom is the universal authority and sovereignty of God held over all creation and creatures, including the universe of worlds, with angels and men. The Kingdom of God is all inclusive.

The Church on the other hand is exclusive, and is composed of redeemed believers only, men and women saved to serve the purposes of their heavenly King while on earth. The Church does not include angelic hosts, so we may say that the angelic hosts are in the Kingdom, but only redeemed men and women are in the Church **and** also in the Kingdom.

The Church is in the Kingdom and the Kingdom is in the Church, but the Church is not the totality, but only a part of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom is far more inclusive than the Church. The distinction, yet relationship between the Church and the Kingdom, needs to be recognised and understood to avoid confusing the real issues involved in both. We do not pray ‘Thy Church come’ but the Church prays “Thy Kingdom come” (Matthew 6:6-10). Nor do we preach “The Gospel of the Church”, but the Church preaches the “Gospel of the Kingdom” (Matthew 24:14) i.e. the good news associated with the rule and reign of God. We as the church have been highly privileged by God as His exclusive chosen people, to reveal His Kingdom on the earth.

The church is the vehicle through which God wants to reveal His Kingdom rule on the earth

The Kingdom is in the Church, but the Church is not the totality, but only a part of the Kingdom of God.

The Church and the Kingdom

The word “Church” is used about 115 times, and the word “Kingdom” about 160 times in the New Testament. A study in the book of Acts, along with other major Scriptures from the Gospels shows that the early Church was indeed the channel, the instrument, the vehicle and the vessel for the expression of the Kingdom of God. It was through the Church that the Kingdom of God was extended in the earth in the hearts of men. We note some of the major truths concerning the Kingdom in these verses:

- Christ would build His Church and give the Church the keys of the Kingdom (Matthew 16:18,19)
- Repentance and faith combine to form the doorway into the Kingdom (Matthew 3:2; 4:17, 23).
- One must be born again from above by heavenly birth to enter the Kingdom (John 3:1-5).
- The Gospel of the Kingdom is to be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations before the end comes (Matthew 24:14; Mark 16:15-20).
- The Kingdom of God is within the heart (Luke 17:20).
- The Church preached and demonstrated the power of the Kingdom of God in the Book of Acts e.g.
- Phillip, from the church at Jerusalem, preached the Kingdom of God as an Evangelist (Acts 8:1,12)
- Paul preached the Kingdom of God (Acts 14:22; 19:8; 20:25) as an apostle from the Church.

Believers were born into the Kingdom as subjects of the Kingdom (John 3:1-5) and were added as members to the Church to show God’s Kingdom glory (Acts 11:24; 2:41-47

STATION THREE (3)

OUR SIX PRIORITIES FOR SAINTS

Different church groups and denominations have different areas of doctrine and theology they believe important. As a result, they prioritise these areas and make them necessary for people to conform to, before accepting them into the body of saints.

It's interesting to see that Luke focused on certain New Testament church practices that he thought necessary for people to accept before being able to join the church. In one instance he says that only those who believed that Christ was the Son of the living God were 'added to the Lord' and 'added to the church' (Acts 5:14, 8:37, 11:24 and 15:9-11).

Every person who is born again spiritually must belong to a local church family

In Luke's opinion, every person who is born again spiritually must then be joined to a local church. But, joining the church is not like joining a club. This is because one must first be joined to the Lord through the work of the Holy Spirit, before being joined to the church. In other words, you cannot relate to the

church simply because of your relationship with other church members. To become a part of the church, one has to relate to the church through the Head of the church, Christ Jesus i.e. just because my parents belong to a local church does not mean that I have automatically belong to the church because of something they or someone else did on my behalf when I was a baby.

The Bible makes it very clear that I can only be a part of His Body (which the Bible calls the Church) if I am connected to the Head, who is Christ Jesus (Colossians 1:15-18; Acts 5:13,14) . This can only happen if I am born again spiritually.

The six priorities for saints to belong to the Church:

Priority 1

A person must be born again spiritually

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears[a] we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. (1 John 3:1-3)

This simply means that someone has to personally repent from their sinful and selfish lifestyle, ask God to forgive their past and believe in the finished work of Christ completed on their behalf. Repentance from sin means:

- Turning your back on your previous self-centered life-style and to be willing to allow the Holy Spirit to lead you into a Christian lifestyle spoken of in the Bible (this is a lifetime process).

- Secondly, you must have ‘faith towards God’ i.e. to put your trust and future in His control.

Priority 2

Baptism by Immersion

At the inception of the church on the day of Pentecost, we find all the new converts being baptised in water by immersion. ‘Believers’ baptism was the initial step taken by a new believer when being added to the church. Only those people who had repented of their sin personally were able to be baptised.

Scripture tells us the following;

- Baptism is a public declaration on the part of the believer of their faith in Christ.
- Baptism paints a picture of the believer associating (by faith) him/herself with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ on their behalf (Galatians 2:20).
- Baptism involves the person being totally immersed in water to show their burial with Christ.
- Baptism is not only an act of faith but also a declaration of one’s willingness to submit, through obedience, to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Baptism is a vital step to being obedient to Christ.

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in[a] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:37-41)

Priority 3

Participating in local church family

The one thing every person has or should have in this life, is relatives, because it was always Gods intention for every baby born to be a part of a family. Well, when a person becomes a part of the greater (i.e. universal) Christian family by being born again spiritually, they must also become a part of a local church family. In the New Testament everybody had a job to do in the household, and in this regard Paul the apostle says it should be exactly the same in the church.

Everybody is a participator and nobody should be a spectator.

Paul writes to Timothy and says; "All God's family should know how to conduct themselves in His household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15).

Here Paul is speaking about the local households (local church families situated all over the world) living out lives that clearly reveal the love and grace of family members toward each other.

Unfortunately, over the centuries, the people of God have moved away from being a family to being an organisation or institution. This is something that God never intended for His Church. God always intended for every believer to be a part of a local church family with loving father figures (elders) whose primary responsibility would be to secure and equip each member. We want this lifestyle of 'community' to be seen and experienced by all saints through their love and commitment for each other.

The Bible also speaks about us being gifted in many different ways through the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives, so that we can all participate in one way or another in the 'house' i.e. to fellowship and function in a local congregation (Romans 12:4-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:18-20).

Priority 4

Personal devotion with the Lord

Dr. Billy Graham once spoke of the 'sinkhole syndrome' that occurs in a believers life, when any believer stops having a regular personal relationship with the Lord. As an example, he pointed out the necessity for mining groups worldwide to fill unused mines and tunnels situated deep underground, with pressurised water. He added, that if failing to do so sinkholes would result which was the cause for large craters being formed on the surface. If there were buildings or developments situated where these craters were formed, oftentimes they would simply drop tens of meters into the earth. This came about as a result of the empty space created by the mining tunnels excavated in hidden domains hundreds of meters under the surface. Because nature abhors a vacuum, it will use gravity to fill this space, thus resulting in the surface collapsing and dropping into the earth. The same effect comes about when natural underground rivers dry up, or in a person's life when we as believers grow dry in our relationship with the Lord. This does not happen overnight, but after a period of 'back-sliding' and growing spiritually cold in our relationship with the Lord, the 'inner river' spoken of by Christ in John chapter seven dries up, and our own lives collapse in on us.

Jesus tells us that we are just like the earth and are in need of the presence of 'water' within us to stay sound and secure. Jesus said that He Himself is the source of this 'living water'. Our responsibility is to stay connected to Him at all times through prayer and by reading the Word so that the spiritual 'water-pressure' within us stays consistent. This has a two-fold result:

1. Our own lives are secured and stabilized.
2. There will always be an overflow of Christ's presence flowing through our lives into the lives of others. The overflow coming through us into the lives of others will allow these other people opportunity to be exposed to the same source of life that we have discovered in our relationship with Christ.

'There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God' (Psalm 46:4)

Priority 5

Sharing our testimony with unbelievers

Another important and exciting part of our value structure has to do with Christ's command given us to share our faith with those who do not know Him personally

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.
Matthew 28:19,20

Just as baptism is a public matter, so is our responsibility in sharing our personal faith and trust in Jesus Christ with others. We cannot be secret disciples in the Kingdom even if we feel we are not extrovert in personality or 'natural evangelists'.

We don't have to be 'super-equipped' Bible teachers or first class evangelists before we can be effective in winning and influencing others to put their faith and hope in Christ. This is not the case. The only two ingredients necessary are:

1. You have personally given your own life to Christ and have as a result experienced His love and forgiveness.
2. When someone who does not know the Lord, shares a personal or private need with you, pray with them and tell them what Christ means to you and that He wants to be their Lord and friend as well. They will more likely reach out to Christ and you can then lead them on to the road of salvation.

Among the members of the congregation where you attend, look for those who continually bring others to Christ because these are 'Fathers' in the Kingdom of God. You may discover some who are great teachers or preachers of the Word but the true test of who qualifies to be a Father or Mother in the faith, is the one who reproduces 'sons and daughters'. I cannot be a father without having children. For instance, the Bible introduces us to Andrew, who after meeting Jesus, runs out to get his brother Simon Peter, and after testifying to him by saying "I have found the Messiah" brings him to Jesus where he gets 'born again' spiritually (John 1:41). Here we see Andrew being a Father to his own brother, Peter. May we all continually be on the alert to recognise those spiritually needy people whom God will bring across our paths, so that we can introduce them to Christ and His gift of salvation.

Priority 6

Tithes and offerings

The word ‘tithe’ simply means ‘one tenth’ of any given amount, and we are told in the Bible that in the life of God’s people, this one tenth has always been Holy to the Lord because it was used primarily for the well-being of the priests who served God and the people (Leviticus 27:30-33). We are first introduced to the tithe in the Bible when Abraham, who lived 800 years before Moses, met Melchizedek the King of Peace (Genesis 14:19,20). The person that Abraham encountered was none other than Jesus Christ Himself.

The last story of tithing being mentioned in the Old Testament is found in the book of Malachi where God is rebuking the people of Israel for not giving Him His tithe, i.e. His tenth of all that He had blessed them with. As a result, the Lord tells the people that they have opened themselves, their family members as well as their material possessions to the influence of the enemy, whom God calls the ‘Devourer’ (Malachi 3:8-12).

Today, there are some Bible teachers who say that because tithing was under the Mosaic Law i.e. 1400 B.C. (Moses era) of the Old Testament, it is no longer valid in the New Testament. They make this assumption because we are told that Jesus has redeemed us from the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13) and as a result are now under grace and no longer under law. They say that when Christ died ‘the old’ was done away with and we were freed from the curse of the law. Regarding salvation, this is absolutely true, because the New Testament tells us that we no longer have to sacrifice the blood of innocent animals and birds to have our sins forgiven, as was given to Israel to do in the law of Moses. However, nowhere in the New Testament does it ever refer to tithing being done away with. This is because tithing was not initiated through the law in the time of Moses (although later spoken of in the law of Moses), tithing was first introduced as a relational principle in the Biblical account when Abram met Melchizedek 800 years before God gave the law to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Tithing was later ‘expanded’ along with the law given by God to Moses, but thereafter remained intact (as with some of the Ten Commandments) **after** having transitioned through the cross, from the Old Testament dispensation into the New.

The cross of Jesus Christ acts as a filter for all the law coming from the Old Testament era into the new and if the law is not spoken of as being changed or done away with, then it stays intact.

We can safely say that in the Old Testament, the New Testament is concealed, but in the New Testament the Old Testament is revealed.

Not only does the Bible instruct us to give God His tithe, simply because it belongs to Him, but goes on to tell us that when we do so in an attitude of worship, joy and thanksgiving, we get it given back to us many, many times over.

In the New Testament we find a letter being written to the churches which had mostly Hebrew speaking believers in them, and we find the writer referring to the same incident when Abram met Melchizedek and tells the church “when giving our tithe to God (readers, please remember he is addressing the matter of the giving of the tithe in a New Testament context) it is received by men in the church here on earth”.

He says, “when the tithe is given now, it is seen and received by Christ Himself in heaven, thus declaring that He lives” (Hebrews 7:5-8).

What he is telling us is this: When we bring the tithe and offerings into our local church households, Jesus sees us giving Him His tithe on earth and also receives it in heaven, as if given to Him personally. Our motive in giving to the Lord must never be so that we can get back in return, but rather because it belongs to Him in the first place and we return it with gratitude, worship and thanks.

What a wonderful response to get from such a generous God when showing Him that we see Him as being the source of all we have anyway.

Furthermore, through our giving we are given yet another opportunity to experience God's abundant kindness of character shown towards us when giving Him, not His tithe, but a free-will offering that is not actually required from us. This we do when assisting another believer in some practical area of need or by giving financially to assist a trans-local ministry. The Bible tells us that when we assist the poor and needy or a ministry that is situated in a poor environment, it is like a sweet sacrifice being offered to God (Acts 11:29, 2 Corinthians 9, Romans 15:26).

STATION FOUR (4)

UNDERSTANDING BIBLICAL FAITH

What is faith?

In the New Testament letter written to the Hebrew believers, we find the following definition given us;

"Now Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"
(Hebrews 11:1).

In this passage of Scripture, we find the writer joining faith and hope together, so that the one can serve no purpose without the other. Actually, one can say this definition implies that a person does not need faith if they have no hope. It can then rightly be said that hope gives faith direction. Hope gives faith something to aim at!

Faith is such a vital ingredient in our relationship with the Lord, that without it, we cannot begin our Christian walk, let alone develop it in any way. The Bible goes on to tell us the

following: "Without faith it is impossible to please Him i.e. to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). We have to exercise faith in order to be able to initiate a relationship with the Lord, as well as live out Godly lives as His disciples. This is so because our entire Christian experience is based on a firm 'belief system', and that belief system hinges on our faith

in the Lord Jesus Christ and what His Word says. This means that it is not enough for a person to simply believe in God, we must transition from **believing in God, to believing God.** There is a world of difference in believing in God and believing God, because James the Apostle tells us "even the demons believe in God and tremble (James 1:19), and this is why Paul the Apostle tells us in Romans 4:3

"and Abraham believed God, and God credited him with righteousness. Abraham not only believed in God, but he transitioned his faith into 'believing God'.

The Bible tells us that faith is a positive 'active response' on the part of a believer to what God has said or promised in His Word. We exercise faith when we choose to believe what God says in His Word, even though circumstance may be 'telling' us otherwise. To illustrate this point we can look at the life of Abraham who when God told him that he would have as many children as there are stars in the heaven, was childless and a hundred years of age. In the natural, when he looked at Sarah his wife, who was then ninety years of age and many years past menopause, his natural senses told him this was impossible. Scripture **however** tells us;

"and not being weak in faith, Abraham did not consider his own body already dead (being a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what God had promised He would perform"
(Romans 4:19-21).

So we see that Abraham not only believed in God, but we are told that he fully believed God when God spoke and did not doubt that God was able to perform this. Nevertheless, Abraham had to do His part.

How do I acquire faith?

The Bible teaches us that each and every person who is born again into the family of God is given a certain amount of faith by God (Romans 12:3). However, before any person can be born into Gods family and obtain this initial deposit of faith, they must first have *saving faith* which will enable them to believe in Gods offer of salvation. This *saving faith* comes about as a result of a person having their spiritual eyes opened when hearing the Gospel being preached (2 Cor 3:14-16, 4:4-6). When this Good News i.e. the salvation message is preached, faith is supernaturally generated in the heart of a person, and it is this *saving faith* that allows a person opportunity to be born again. This is why Paul writes to the church at Rome and tells them:

Faith comes about as a result of hearing through the Word of God - Romans 10:17

When the Word is preached or taught, faith is generated supernaturally by the Holy Spirit in the person's heart, resulting in the person's spiritual eyes being opened to the truth and allowing them opportunity to respond to Gods offer of salvation. Once we have been born again as a result of 'saving faith' working in our lives, we thereafter receive a permanent 'measure' of this miracle working substance called faith. But, it is then up to us to ensure that it increases in our lives. When Jesus was on the earth ministering with His disciples we are told the following:

... and the Apostles said to Jesus: "Increase our faith", so the Lord said to them - "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, be pulled up by your roots and planted in the sea, and it will obey you (Luke 17:5)

Note, Jesus didn't say 'faith the size of a mustard seed' (although a mustard seed is small) but rather said '*faith as a mustard seed*'. The size of the seed doesn't matter, neither the quantity. We don't need more faith-seed because the faith seed we have been given by God is sufficient.

Plant the Seed

The Bible tells us that everything God does, He does by Faith. God formed the worlds by faith. Everything God made, He made by faith (Hebrews 11:3). It's no different for each one born again by the Spirit of God. What works for God, will work for us. The key to shaping our world is coming to understand faith - and living by it.

I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them. Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! Oh, fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack! The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing. (Psalm 34:4-10)

Four aspects of faith

1. Faith gives God access into our lives

Faith is a window through which God can funnel into our lives all His favour and blessings spoken of in Ephesians 1:3. By faith we choose to receive the promises of God. We receive divine health and healing by faith. We receive financial prosperity and deliverance by faith. Our faith is an opening through which God can save us, baptise us with His Holy Spirit, prosper us in business or promote us at work and make that which appears impossible (as with Abraham), possible. The devil wants us to look at the enormity or hopelessness of the situation and be filled with fear. Fear always cancels faith and this is why Jesus told the ruler of the synagogue, whose daughter had died:

Fear not - only believe (Luke 8:50)

God wants us to look to Him in the midst of the hopelessness and obey what His Word tells us to do. We must be very particular concerning the sowing of *faith-seed* and focus on that part of Scripture that will produce the seed necessary to meet the need. Once we have sown it in faith, God will watch over it and grow it (Jeremiah 1:11 and 12). Growing the seed to maturity is God's responsibility – our responsibility is to find it in God's Word, plant it in our hearts (or in the case of salvation, in the heart's of others) and water it with prayers of thanksgiving and anticipation.

Faith is movement –
faith is a mouth in
action

2. Faith is always available when we need it

Faith always comes to anyone who is willing to give attention to the Word of God (Proverbs 4:20-22). As recorded in Romans 10:17, we receive God's Word into our hearts by reading it, speaking it, hearing it, meditating on it and doing it. When we do this, His Word has the ability to cause faith to manifest and rise up within our spirit man and draw the promises and provisions of God from the spirit realm into the natural realm. Faith gives the blessings of God substance. The Bible says:

"Now, faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"
(Hebrews 11:1)

When processing our requests in the spirit realm, we are processing our hope in a realm that is unseen. But when we take hold of it by faith (just like a mid-wife in a delivery room) we take hold of what we don't see and 'give birth to it' in the natural realm.

3. Faith acts

Whenever words are spoken in faith, things change for the better. Right at the beginning of time we read in Genesis chapter one, God saying; "Let there be firmament. Let there be light. Let there be man etc. When God said, it was so! God spoke again and it was so! This is why we are told in Hebrews 11:3 "the worlds were fashioned (framed) by the Word of God. This is the same way we re-frame our world to conform it back to the way God originally planned it to be. We have been created in Gods' image to live like Him. Notice that the Bible doesn't say, "And God thought and it was so". This is also why when we come to a time of prayer with other believers, we need to open our mouths and pray so that others can agree with our prayer. Otherwise, when we remain

Faith is when I call that
which isn't, as though it is!

silent and deep in thought, we are merely in a state of meditation. Silent meditation precedes faith and does not replace it. Faith must be spoken and Mark emphasizes this in his Gospel account recorded for us in Mark 11:23 and 24. Faith is the result of meditation on the written Word and thereafter acted upon with the Word being spoken.

Faith is God's Word in action. It has been said 'Faith is movement - Faith is a mouth in action'. In Mark 11:23 and 24 we read from the moment we release our faith we must talk and act as though it is done. We must take action by speaking as God spoke and as Hebrews 11:1 tells us, thereby giving 'substance' to what we need in life i.e. what we hope for. Once again, we as a leadership team know that without faith we cannot please our God and therefore want to keep each member on their front foot when it comes to believing and acting upon Gods' Word.

4. Faith forgives

Returning to Jesus' teaching on faith mentioned in Mark 11:23,24 we see recorded for us in verse 25 that after we have established God's Will, and have spoken it out as a 'feit accomplie', we are then told;

"When you stand praying, you must forgive anybody you have something against so that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses" (Mark 11:23,24)

If we want to be people who walk in faith and in the full favour of God, we must forgive. If someone is speaking or acting falsely against you, don't do them a further favour by allowing them to stop you getting what God wants you to have, because of unforgiveness. Why let bad-natured, or evil-minded people ruin your life by short-circuiting your faith through unforgiveness. Don't let anyone keep you sick, in debt or mentally tormented and without joy, because of unforgiveness. Irrespective of what any person has done to you, forgive them, and stay in the flow of God's love and favour. The Bible tells us in Galatians 5:6

"For in Jesus Christ, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith which works in love" (Galatians 5:6)

As a believer, faith should always work by love. It should always be energized by love and put into motion by love because Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

"If I speak like angels...have prophetic powers...can supernaturally move mountains...give everything I have to the poor...become a martyr... but don't have love...it means nothing to God and I get nothing back as a reward" (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

God wants each one of us to stay in close fellowship with Him daily so that we can always walk in love. God wants us to walk in love because love never fails. He wants the best for us as His church, and since the best is found in love, we must purpose at all costs to walk in love.

Let us always remember that if we don't act on the Word of God and forgive, we will never walk in the full measure of God's favour. In fact, we won't even get close.

STATION FOUR (5)

UNDERSTANDING BIBLICAL GRACE

The Bible speaks much about God's grace, alongside other words such as forgiveness, salvation, repentance and the love of God. The word used in the original language in which the New Testament was written, was 'charis', and this word also carries the meaning of 'God's unmerited favour'. Some preachers have taken the word grace and through the use of alliteration have called it 'God's Riches At Christ's Expense'. This is exactly what we have been favoured with because of God's great love for us, we who are His creation having been made in His image.

So, regarding this grace that God shows toward us and thereafter also gives to us, we see two distinctions.

The first of these is that of 'saving grace' and the other part is that of '*enabling grace*'. We are going to look at both these aspects of God's grace so that we can firstly understand who we have become 'positionally' in Christ, and thereafter see how we are enabled by God's grace to transition into the new creation he has made us to be. The one thing that appears to be clear to the believers in the New Testament church was the fact that they had been saved positionally to serve the King functionally.

God's justice demands punishment but His mercy always looks for an alternative

John Piper, a very well recognised contemporary theologian, speaks of (i) beginning grace, as well as, (ii) future. He points out that God initiated His grace towards us by revealing to us His willingness to allow His only Son, Jesus Christ, to die on our behalf. This grace (unmerited favour of God seen best in Ephesians 2:1-10) was initiated and demonstrated toward us, in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

This provision for the salvation of mankind was planned by God before the world was made.

Ephesians 1:4

....even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love...

As a result of this unbelievable 'grace gift' that God the Creator gave to all of the mankind when His Son died on our behalf, we now see that He paid a debt for someone else's sin that He did not owe, and as a result, we as mankind now owe a debt to our God which we can never repay. So, let us look firstly at *saving grace*.

Saving grace

The Bible tells us that God so loved the world (i.e. mankind whom He had made in His own image) that He could not think of abandoning them after they disobeyed Him in the Garden of Eden when eating a fruit He had told them was forbidden to eat. The end result of eating the fruit was separation from God forever. But, because of His infinite love, He made a way back for mankind that would allow them an opportunity to restore their broken relationship

with Himself, which had come about because of sin. The ‘way’ that God provided for mankind to have their relationship with Him restored once again, was through the death of His only Son, Jesus Christ.

Because God is both eternally just and eternally merciful, He cannot allow His mercy to override His justice. God’s justice demands punishment for disobedience, but His mercy always looks for another way so that His justice’s demand for rebellion, disobedience and sin can be met.

In the book of Hosea, we see Him comparing His covenant people, Israel, with Admah and Zeboim, two neighbouring cities situated next to Sodom. These two cities had also become spiritually contaminated through sexual sin and devil worship. Because of their contamination, His Justice demanded that He destroy them, which He did. But although Israel, now at a later stage, had become as sinful as these other nations, God’s mercy and grace stepped forward and said “although my Justice demands punishment, my heart is turned towards you, I love you as my own child and call you my son, I will pay the debt Myself” (Paraphrase of Hosea 11:1-9). In this passage we see God making a ‘Way’ for His just demands to be met and his anger toward sin and mankind to be appeased, that which the Bible terms ‘appeased’.

When on earth, Jesus called and pointed to Himself as ‘The Way’, and this ‘Way’ would give men and women an opportunity to get back to the Father (John 10:10). In this passage of Scripture Jesus says; “I am the Way and nobody can get to the father except through Me”. Jesus was the living signpost that would show mankind which way to get back to the Father. This is what the Bible reveals as ‘saving grace,’ and when responded to by men and women, it results in their sins being forgiven, God’s anger being appeased (the Bible calls this appeasement - Romans 3:24) and the death penalty being removed. Without saving grace being offered and provided for by God, mankind would have been lost in his sin forever and condemned to hell. Once we have responded to God’s gift of salvation, He gives us the power to live victorious sin-conquering lives.

Without saving grace being offered and provided for by God, mankind would have been lost in his sin forever and condemned to hell

Enabling Grace

This power is revealed to us in Titus 2:11 as enabling grace. The enabling grace that God gives to us after our repentance and acceptance of Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour is a powerful deposit of His own enabling power. This power (i.e. enabling grace) will assist us in becoming all that God has positionally declared us to be in His Son Christ Jesus. Enabling grace is not a perpetual sustaining grace i.e. it is not a grace that God gives to us that will ‘preserve us’ like bottled pickles, kept in a perfect state until we die. It is rather, a

powerful provision that God gives to us, that will enable us, *through choice on our parts*, to become all whom He has already declared us to be, because of *the finished work* of His Son Jesus Christ. But we determine how we will respond to His grace

We cannot become by doing – we are because of what Christ has done – but now that we are.... we must become

All the work necessary to secure the salvation of any person who accepts Jesus Christ as their Lord has

been finished. Jesus saw to that. Nothing more needs to be done to make us acceptable to God other than we repent of our sin, acknowledge Him as Lord and receive by faith the benefits of His death and resurrection on our behalf.

So, when speaking of enabling grace, we speak of a grace that will assist us to become and do what God has called us to do *after being born again* i.e. after being fully justified. We are not speaking about doing anything to merit 'saving grace', as was the case with the Law given to Moses in the Old Testament. There was a period in time where people had to do certain things before they became good enough to be temporarily accepted into Gods' presence. But since Calvary, now that God has made the perfect and complete sacrifice on our behalf, we need never again do anything more than what Christ has already done on our behalf. Christ has made us totally acceptable to God.

In actual fact, Paul the Apostle speaks strongly against any idea of us assisting God with our Justification and implies that we can actually 'undo' our salvation if we think we must add some good works on our part to what Jesus has already done for us (Galatians 3:1-3). The truth of the matter is that we cannot 'become' by doing anything, 'we are' because of what Jesus Christ has already done on our behalf. Our role is to repent and receive.

But once we have received the free gift of pardon and salvation from God, we need to become who He declares us to be. This is where 'enabling grace' assists us (Titus 2:11-12). To help illustrate this truth, we see that after the King of England was born King, he still had to mature and fulfil the responsibilities of a King. Kings are not born to remain in the crib. They must be equipped to rule and act responsibly because this is what they were born for. But, fulfilling his duties responsibly did not make him the King. He is born a King but now that he is born a king he must act like a king or be deposed. It is the same with every person born again by the Spirit of God.

As a child of God, the 'who I am' and the 'what I do' should never be separated, so that the 'what I do' should always qualify 'who I am'. The 'enabling grace' given to me should always be used by me, to point others to a just God who wants to show His mercy (i.e. His saving grace in my life), which made me His child.

John Calvin put it this way; "It is faith alone that justifies, but thereafter, such faith that has justified, can now never be alone". In other words, if I'm not eager to live a life that glorifies God following my conversion, I have no inner assurance that I am a child of God. An eagle is happiest when free and soaring in the sky because it has the spirit of an eagle within it - well, a child of God will only be truly content and at peace when doing what God wants him/her to do because they now have His Spirit and nature within them.

Hyper-Grace

Of late, there has been a teaching on the subject of grace that has down-played the aspect of enabling grace, and has propagated a sentiment that says 'Because of saving grace we are always in a good place with God, regardless of whether we are sensitive to Gods Holy Spirit or not. Some base this teaching on God seeing us perfect, in spite of.'

This kind of thinking denies the fact that Gods Justice and hatred towards sin exists. This will result in a rude awakening on the part of any person who thinks that they can go on sinning after conversion and believe that there will be no consequence for their ungodly actions.

It is vitally important for us to know that saving grace has enabled us to be declared absolutely righteous before a Holy God, all because of the finished work of Jesus Christ. But,

now that I am righteous I must practice righteousness i.e. I must be who I am. I must behave like a son/daughter of God because that is who I am. I must talk and live like a child of God because that is who I am. Furthermore, when convicted by the Holy Spirit, I must repent immediately, ask God to forgive me of my sin, and apologise to my heavenly Father for grieving Him.

Granted, there can be very few things more frustrating in this life than the annoyance of a good example, and the inability to accomplish the same in one's own life. But when God tells us to imitate His Son Jesus and to practice righteousness it is not to frustrate us with an impossibility because He has given us 'enabling grace' to empower us to do the same (Titus 2:11,12). John the apostle makes this truth very clear to us in his letter;

"If you know that Jesus is righteous, you know that everyone who continually PRACTICES righteousness is born of Him" (1 John 2:29)

"Little children, let no one deceive you – only those who practise righteousness, are righteous, just as He is righteous" (1 John 3:7)

"Whoever does not practise righteousness is not of God" (1 John 3:10).

When Jesus was asking John His cousin to baptise Him in the Jordan River, John responded by saying that it was he who needed to be baptised by Jesus. Jesus answered John by saying:

"You must baptise Me so that I can fulfil all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15).

The Bible tells us clearly that although Jesus was *absolutely* righteous, He knew that if He did not obey His Father's request to be baptised, He would be acting independently of God's Will, and would *enter into a state of unrighteousness*. *If this was possible with Jesus*, it's possible for everyone else. In Romans 12:1, Paul the Apostle tells of all that Christ has done on our behalf, and then goes on to tell his readers to "present their bodies as a living sacrifice to God". In other words, Paul was saying; "Become all you have been made to be, and let God remove all that is not pleasing to Him!".

Peter also tells us that:

"God's divine Power (Enabling grace) has given us everything pertaining to life and godliness; He has given to us His precious and very great promises that through believing and appropriating these, we may escape from the corruption that is in the world and become partakers of His Divine nature". Then Peter goes on to say; "For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith, virtue, and to virtue, knowledge, and to knowledge, self-control" (2 Peter 1:3-8).

Here we are told that God has given to each believer the ability to become a partaker of His Divine nature. Because of the 'enabling grace' that is now within us Paul tells the

Philippian church to "work out their salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12-13).

Godly discipline is not a work of legalism but a work of faith

He also exhorts Timothy to not only stir up the gift that is within him but to also emulate the hard working farmer, the single-minded athlete and the soldier on active service (2 Timothy 2:3-6). He also tells the Ephesian church to

buckle on their armour, to always pray in the Spirit and to always “be on the alert with all perseverance” (Ephesians 6:10-18).

Godly discipline is not a work of legalism but a work of faith. The acid test for each of us is whether we are serving God because we are trying to win His favour as servants, or whether we are behaving in a loving, forgiving, serving, caring, praying, tithing and worshipping way, because we know that we are sons ‘in the house’ serving the interests of our Father and His greater Kingdom.

Jesus said;

“My Father is still working and I am working” (John 5:17). Jesus didn’t say “My Father is working, so I don’t have to work” or “My Father is watching so I better be working”.

Finally, concerning the wonderful provision of this ‘enabling grace’ that our God has given to each one of us, we see Paul saying just before the end of his ministry time on earth;

“His (enabling) grace to me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them” (1 Corinthians 15:10).

May this wonderful provision made by God toward each of one us, not be a provision made in vain.

STATION SIX (6)

A 'DAILY' LIFESTYLE CHANGE

In station one we saw that every person who surrendered their life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ has had their 'spirit-man' made alive. As a result, this has enabled them to enter into a relationship with God. This happens instantaneously at the point of conversion when we put our faith in the fact that Jesus Christ took our sentence of death upon Himself and died in our place (2 Corinthians 5:17 and Ephesians 1:13,14). The sentence He took from us is the death-penalty of sin, which every person inherited at the point in time when they were conceived in their mother's womb. The truth of the matter is, when Adam sinned thousands of years ago, he represented every man and woman ever to be born, and as a result of his representation on our parts, we received his sentence passed onto each of us through this invisible deadly inherited DNA. Theologians call this deadly DNA, 'imputed sin'. This DNA is an invisible spiritual disease that still prompts each one of us to reject and oppose God's rule over our lives every moment of every day (Romans 7:15-25).

After the first perfect man (named Adam) disobeyed God, as recorded for us in Genesis chapter three in the Old Testament, the Bible introduces us to the second perfect man recorded for us in the New Testament (called Jesus) who was actually the Son of God, and who became a human being just more than 2,000 years ago. After Jesus was born, He grew up as a perfect sinless man just like the first Adam had been before this first Adam disobeyed God i.e. before the first Adam sinned. In this perfect physical and spiritual state, Jesus (now called the second or last Adam) could undo mankind's sentence of death, by becoming the first Adam's substitute. This He did by being unjustly crucified and dying in the first Adam's place as a perfect man. When Jesus died as an innocent man on the cross, which was supposed to be the sentence for murderers, and thieves the benefit of His innocent death filtered down through the ages to all mankind who were willing to accept His sacrifice on their behalf (1 Corinthians 15:45-49).

As humans, we are essentially made up of *three parts*, but it is only the spirit-part that is made brand new at conversion. As a result of our spirit-man being renewed, we can now continually have contact with God, anywhere and anytime. This is all made possible by us receiving God's Holy Spirit, who in turn re-activates our own spirit's, which in turn makes us alive to God and His will for our lives. The other two parts, which make up our *tri-part-being*, are our body, which is not renewed at the time of conversion (but will be made brand new as a spiritually indestructible heavenly-body when Jesus Christ returns to the earth at the end of time). Our own unique souls and personalities (which comprises of our mind, our emotions and our will). Our soul is not like our spirit-man and continually needs to be brought into order (continually renewed) because it has a preference for those things that are not in the best interest of God's Kingdom (James 1:21). The ability of the soul of man (i.e. our creative thought processing ability) to make Godly, beneficial and life-producing choices, fluctuates all the time. Sometimes it makes good decisions and at other times the decisions it makes are not beneficial for our spiritual well-being. This is why, if our mind is not continually renewed through disciplined

Our Spirit continually needs to be renewed, every moment of every day as and when the Holy Spirit prompts us

reprogramming on our parts, by reading and meditating on the Word of God, our soul i.e. our minds, emotions and wills, will start to regress and move away from making Godly choices. This result can be likened to a person who walks up an escalator that is going in the opposite direction (Romans 12: 1,2). In the case of the escalator, if we stop walking we will always end up going backwards to where we began. The escalator does not stop and become stationary simply because we stopped walking, we will never stand still. Our spiritual lives are exactly the same. We must continually be feeding our minds on the Word of God and disciplining our lives through prayer and obedience to the Word. Because of this continual *tug-of-wartaking* place between our fleshly, carnal wills and the Will of God, we can say that our souls are still ‘bent’ on back-sliding (Hosea 11:7).

So, if our minds are not renewed **daily** by being exposed to the Word (the Scriptures) i.e. the Will of God which we meditate on and pray into our lives, the soul can also be likened to a malfunctioning pancreas within the human body. When the pancreas no longer produces insulin necessary for the absorption of sugar from the blood, the body starts to malfunction. The result is that the person will suffer from diabetes which can be fatal unless controlled by daily doses of pharmaceutically engineered insulin. Without this medication, symptoms such as lethargy, abnormal thirst and sores that refuse to heal start to manifest, even blindness and eventual death. These all rob the person of quality of life. This is exactly what happens in a spiritual context with every human being who does not spend time renewing his or her mind daily. Our soul, like the pancreas, because of the presence of sin, is now in a state of malfunction. It cannot function correctly by always making Godly decisions because **sin** has given it its own will. Without our ‘God-provided’ medication (i.e. the Word of God), taken on a daily basis our soul will regress and continue to malfunction, resulting in us thinking, feeling and speaking contrary to God’s purpose and plan for our lives. In truth, our souls prefer the ‘junk food’ that the world has to offer us through the medium of advertising, radio, television, secular literature, internet, live entertainment, etc. rather than sticking to God’s prescribed diet from His Word which reprograms the mind with life-giving principals. Without the necessary disciplines in place, believers soon become inconsistent in taking their daily medication, with lethargy, spiritual thirst, and sinful habits that won’t ‘heal’, resulting.

Because the mind is no longer in tune to God’s Spirit, wrong choices are made, harmful words are spoken, alternative substitutes are sometimes sought and life can soon become exhausting, meaningless and emotionally demanding.

Without prioritising personal times for the reading and meditation of the Word as well as time for intentional prayer, spiritual growth and transition will not be possible. However, as soon as a person is willing to discipline themselves in this area of relationship with the Lord, and if necessary ask forgiveness for their lethargy and anything that resulted from it, they can once again start to enter into an exciting stage of transition with God. This is real transition which will always conform us to the image of Jesus, anything less powerful is merely external behavioural change that won’t last.

God wants each one of us who ‘makes up’ His church, to continually be in a state of transition (2 Peter 1:5-10). But Godly transition has its own character i.e. it is not God’s intention for us to keep backsliding and reverting back to our old lifestyles. Actually, Godly transition is at odds with the ‘inconsistent’ changes that

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sometimes appear, and then later disappear in some people's lives. God is wanting progressive internal value changes, changes that result in us living out lives according to the spirit within us, i.e. in a consistent 'day in and day out manner'. For example, fish swim because they have the spirit of a fish in them, eagles soar and don't flap because of the spirit of the eagle within them, and lions roar because they too have their own 'lion-spirit' within them.

Well, we should also long to worship, love, sing, share our faith and choose to live lives that are pure according to God's standards because through the process of the re-birth, we have God's Spirit within us. However, mankind is not like fish, eagles and lions. These animals remain consistent with who they are created to be. Lions don't swim and eagles don't roar, but mankind has the capacity to become inconceivably evil, destroying himself and everything good and often precious to him, because of the presence of sin in his life. This is why Jesus said what He did about the author and initiator of sin "The devil has come to steal, kill and destroy" John 10:10. Nevertheless, even though the presence of potential evil within us cannot be removed, it can be controlled by God's supernatural grace and the power of His Word (Titus 2:11, 12). The degree that we intentionally feed our Spirit man on the Word of God is the degree to which the Spirit will have control over our thoughts and lifestyles. This 'spiritual disease' which mankind has inherited, this disease that is called **sin**, unless controlled with daily medication, will stop every believer from becoming who we have been reborn by the Spirit to be, i.e. it will stop us from being able to live, walk, talk and behave like sons and daughters of the living God (2 Peter 1:2-4).

Whatever '*good things*' we have to give up in our journey of transition will be seen to be insignificant in comparison to the majesty and magnificence of His presence that we will be exposed to. Whatever pleasures we put aside now that are in conflict with the Gospel's claim on our lives, are always replaced by Jesus in many different ways, both in this life and in the life to come (Mark 10:29,30).

It is far greater and more satisfying proving God in our personal lives than attempting to prove some theory about God.

through times of corporate worship with others. It is as a result of the revelation of experiencing Christ as our Warrior King that we are sustained through personal times of difficulty, loss and hardship. It will be good for us all to remember that during any time of personal spiritual transition, i.e. transition which is for the good of the Gospel, there will always be testing. This will always be the case as seen in the lives of all the examples given us in Scriptures. One can say that with God it is very much a case of 'faith that can't be tested can't be trusted'.

Joseph found this to be true in his own life when patiently enduring rejection, being lied about, deceived and enduring extreme loneliness while waiting for God's promises for his future to be fulfilled. Once the promise was given, the testing began....and only after the process was completed did the victory and great reward promised by God become his own (Ps 105:16-22). God is always worth waiting for. It would appear that the whole church

God wants each one of us
who forms a part of His
church to continually be in a
state of transition

Through this process, Jesus also gives us of Himself. The ultimate prize when 'decreasing' is experiencing Jesus personally as He breaks into our lives. Transition also always demands warfare and perseverance. It is standing our ground and discovering Jesus as the Warrior King. It is about being exposed to His majesty and Supremacy through times of personal devotion as well as

throughout the world is going through a state of transition and testing, whether we like it or not; whether we understand it or not; and whether we are prepared for it or not. It is becoming obvious to many that God wants His church to live right.

We know that Jesus is coming back again and desire for every saint to be as ready as they can, at His return. As we feel heaven pressing down upon us, we want to have the confidence that we have built a church model in conformity to the blue print He has given to us in Acts 2:42-47. We want to be a part of that church model that is capable of welcoming the manifest presence of God amongst us right now. A church model built for His ministry, not ours; a church model that allows every individual saint to be appreciated, as well as for opportunities to be made available to all men and women for advancement, according to individual gifting and ministry. It will be good to remember that transition will always take us to a new level of awareness, and every time we get to a new level we will meet a new devil, and the new devil will be stronger than the last. But the new level of awareness that we get to in God, will show us that God does not want us strong, but wants to reveal His strength through us as we continue to experience one breakthrough after another (1 John 4:4). The first level is always about the flesh and so the first rule of spiritual warfare is that we cannot take ground from the devil, if he has ground in us. The first level of warfare is always spirit verses flesh and the only way we get victory on this level is by dying to our selfish wants and desires and by submitting to the Spirit of God. This is why we have a saying that says "Come, die, live"! Even during Jesus' ministry on earth, the devil looked for something in His character whereby he could disqualify Him. He looked for something that he could use against Him. Jesus makes this point very clear when He says "The prince of this world (speaking of the devil) has come, but he has nothing in me" John 14:30. We as a leadership want to, with God's help, live our lives as Godly examples to each other and to everyone we encounter, anywhere and anytime. Our desire is that we all start to live in such a way so as to encourage one another to realise that it is greater and more satisfying proving God in our own personal lives, than attempting to prove some theory about God.

As has been already stated; because we are not essentially human beings having a temporary spirit-man experience, but rather spirit beings having a temporary human experience. Let us determine to fill ourselves with His Will, His Word, His Character and His Passion to do Church His way.

When we beat the devil on the level that we are on, he becomes
the footstool that we use to get onto the next level with

STATION SEVEN (7)

UNDERSTANDING ‘PROPHETIC PRAYER’

The degree to which we are able to walk with the Lord relationally, will determine the degree to which we will be able to hear with clarity what He is saying to us, and thereafter, start to see what He is doing around us. This was Jesus' *success strategy* while on earth (John 5:19). Jesus did not wake up each day and waste His time trying to do things *for* God. Rather, He awoke each day (sometimes early) and got into step with God by spending time with the Father before each day began. As a result, He became sensitive to the Holy Spirit's presence directing and prompting him at exactly the right time, to do things together **with** God His Father. Jesus never did anything **for** God; He always did everything **with** God. When we start to discipline ourselves primarily in the time we spend with the Lord in private conversation, private worship and private adoration, we will as a result, start to see the invisible (that what God sees) and then, as a result, start to do the impossible. The secret is to see the invisible so that we can do the impossible. Through time spent with the Lord, this is very possible.

This will not happen overnight, but as a person becomes more desperate to partner with God in revealing His Kingdom on earth, God will bring revelation and fresh insight into what He wants you to pray prophetically, i.e. both into and over. Prophetic prayer is not intercessory praying or prayers of petition. That kind of praying is when someone asks God to intervene or to correct a situation, or for God to reveal His will or direction concerning a certain matter. Although this kind of praying is vital at various times in a believer's life, it is not prophetic praying. Prophetic prayer is when a believer **knows** what God wants to do in any given situation (following times of meditation and intercession) whether for the purpose of making a business decision, choosing a marriage partner,

What we often call guidance, God calls relationship.

healing a sick or infirm person, buying a property, moving in a word of knowledge etc, and as a result, that person speaks Gods Word with authority and conviction into such context.

This kind of authoritative praying comes as a result of revelation from the Word, which leads to the person

being filled with faith. Prayer is the key to breakthrough but faith is the hand that turns the key. Both prayer and faith must work together for the Kingdom of God to come about on earth, and when it does, prophetic prayer is the result.

Participating in prophetic prayer

To participate in the realm of prophetic prayer, a three-fold process must first be accomplished:

- Firstly, our minds must receive information from the Word about what God is telling us.
- Secondly, after meditating on the information received, this information supernaturally

When we see the invisible, we will be able to start doing the impossible

goes to the heart (and if we do not become distracted or allow riches or worry to choke it to death) this information becomes revelation.

- Lastly, after the information becomes revelation (that is when the written Word ‘logos’ becomes a living Word ‘rhema’) it filters back to the mind, which results in transformation taking place. Once this process is completed we start to see in the spirit realm those things which we first heard or read of in the natural realm (this process the Bible calls metamorphoses or *transformation* - Romans 12:2).

This three-fold process is clearly seen in the prophet Elijah’s life when he instructs his servant to go and look for a sign after he had killed Queen Jezebel’s wicked 400 Baal prophets. This incident took place at the end of a draught period that had lasted for more than three years. Six times the servant was sent by Elijah and six times he returned with the same report that there was nothing visible in the sky. Elijah then sends him again the seventh time, telling him that there must be something in the sky because Elijah was hearing in his spirit the sound of much rain and water. The result was that after the servant went to look the seventh time, he reported back to Elijah that he saw a tiny cloud on the horizon. It was this same tiny cloud that grew into a mighty storm, which later caused a major flood that same day. In this context we see that although Elijah had ‘heard’ the Word of God, he knew that he still had to ‘see’ it before it materialised (1 Kings 18:41-45). It is the same today.

Prayer is the key but faith is the hand that turns it.

For this to happen in our own lives, we must win the battle in the mind. The close connection between God, and our minds and hearts must be recovered fully – not just the ability to understand the revealed truth of Scripture, but actually the capacity to know the mind of God in terms of our life and the directives He has for us on any given day. The Lord has thoughts about us daily. He knows what He wants us to say and whom He wants us to meet. He knows what He wants restored and what disorder He wants to bring into order through our words. What we often call guidance, God calls relationship. Some of the wisdom and ways of God are difficult to comprehend at first. This is usually because we make our minds the critical point of reception and the focal point of belief (like Thomas who said to Peter “unless I see Him, touch Him and put my hands into His side, I won’t believe”). Although at first our mind receives spiritual information, it is our heart that processes the information received into revelation. Our mind then applies what our heart admits (Proverbs 3:5-6).

When revelation flows from God to our trusting hearts, our lives are profoundly affected as a result. When the heart combines with the mind, our thought processes are renewed and our lives are transformed. So, once again, this is how it works: God’s Word comes into our mind as ‘logos’ i.e. as raw-God-inspired information. This ‘logos’ is processed in our hearts during times of meditation by an invisible ingredient that God supplies to us, called faith. It is faith that changes the information into revelation. This revelation then goes back to our minds, which in turn alters our attitudes and expectations. This positive shift in our attitudes and expectations is called ‘transformation’. When we are fully persuaded about any matter

that Scripture endorses, we can speak God’s Word with authority and conviction and expect the disorder to come into order, and for any specific need to be met. The problem with most people today, including believers, is that they are always looking at the adverse circumstance that surrounds

There are many believers
who (as a result of disappointment)
don’t give up the faith, but they do
give up the fight

them and say “Why?”, instead of allowing their minds to be transformed by the Word of God, and rather say “Why not”!

Jesus told a great story that Luke recorded for us, illustrating prophetic prayer as a powerful means of breakthrough and triumph.

And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’” And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”
Luke 18:1-18

In the first verse of this passage, Jesus starts by telling his hearers that they must never lose heart simply because their prayers have not been answered. Rather they are to stay focused on the promises of God's Word and allow revelation to become transformative truth. The Bible translators (those who have given us the various versions of the bible today) have not always been true to the Greek text when putting in sub-titles as headings to various passages of Scripture. For instance, the heading for the above passage implies that there was a widow who kept on coming to the Judge until she eventually tired him out.

This title is not totally consistent with what the Bible teaches us at all. Let us look more closely at the text:

- **Verse 2** introduces us to a judge who was neither religious, nor a man who was open to bribes-we are told that he didn't regard man nor did he fear God. He was only interested in the law and what the law said. He was an excellent judge. If you had a case and could prove it, he would give you what was rightfully yours. He could not be bought or intimidated.
- **Verse 3** tells us in the original Greek that this widow came to this judge (this verb is written in the imperfect context and implies that she came more than once (possibly only twice) and is written in a way that shows that the action happened in the past more than once, then stopped - if it had kept on being repeated it would have been written in the present continuous voice and not the imperfect. In this context the action was repeated by the subject, being the widow, but had ceased because the desired result was obtained by her intentional approach to the judge. Not only are we told that she came to the judge with conviction and knowing what her rights were in the case, but we are also told that when she came into the judges presence, she came speaking much. She came with a sound case and told the judge in no uncertain terms that it was his responsibility to legally force her 'adversary' to give back to her what was rightfully hers.
- **Verse 4** tells us that he obviously didn't like her attitude because it 'troubled him within himself' and as a result he decided to grant her request.

- **Verse 5** we are told in the Greek that he also knew she would come back again and again because she knew her legal rights and we are given in the original transcript the words ‘hina mei’ which means ‘lest’ or ‘just in case’ she comes back again. In other words, the judge knew she would be coming back for maybe a third or fourth time because this widow knew what was hers legally, and he knew that this woman was fully persuaded and that the judge had an obligation to give it to her. The judge didn’t want her back.

Jesus concludes this parable-story by saying; “When the Son of man returns will He find such faith on the earth”. Here Jesus is referring to the brazen faith-filled attitude of the widow based on her knowing what was hers. God loves it.

So here is what we are being told in this passage of Scripture recorded by Luke in chapter 18:1-10

1. There was an excellent judge who could not be bribed or manipulated.
2. A widow went to him demanding that he attend to her legal rights.
3. The judge wanted to procrastinate but knew that the woman would return again and again
4. As a result, because this woman had a legal right, he gave her what she asked for.
5. Jesus wants to know if we have the same determined attitude when approaching the Father.

This is prophetic prayer, this is when we know that our God is obligated to grant our request because of our legal right to possess it given to us in His Word. Because of our legal right afforded to us through His Word, i.e. the Scriptures, we don't have to beg, cry or become emotionally manipulative when approaching the courtroom of our God. We come into Gods presence fully confident (i.e. faith-filled because of the promise in His Word) that what we are requesting from the Father. It's worth knowing that He not only has the ability to give to us, but that He wants to give it to us more than we desire or need it. Yes, many people don't give up The Faith, they just give up The Fight – they know God can, but don't know if He will.

The problem with this kind of thinking is the fact that God won't...until we believe He will! Faith is vital (James makes this clear in his letter in chapter 1:6-8)

To activate this type of prayer we must also comply with certain specifics given us by Christ:

Jesus gives specific instructions to His disciples near to the final stages of His ministry on earth. The first of these instructions relates to the fact that after His ascension into heaven, the disciples must never again ask Him personally for anything - i.e. never ever again; "And Jesus said, in that day you must ask Me nothing. Most assuredly I say to you that whatsoever you ask the Father in My name He will give it to you. Up until now you have asked nothing in my name, but from now on, ask (the Father) and you will receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:23,24)

Jesus tells us - 'don't ask me anything - from now on ask the Father.'

6. Jesus tells His disciples to listen very carefully to what He is saying because they will get no prayer request answered if they approach Him personally in prayer, and furthermore, if they do, He is not going to help them out by asking the Father on their behalf;

"In that day you must ask in My name and remember that I will not ask the Father on your behalf for the Father Himself loves you..." John 16:26,27.

7. Jesus also reassures His disciples time and again that they must not only ask the Father in His name but that He (Jesus) will personally ensure that the request is granted when asked for in faith, because the Father will be glorified through their needs being met;

"And whatever you ask the Father in my name, that I will do, so that the father will be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it" (John 14:13, 14)

8. We as believers must abide (i.e. continually remain in a personal relationship) in Christ by being sensitive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. To do whatever He says we must do, and to refrain whenever He removes His peace.

"If you abide in Me and allow my Word to abide in you, you will ask anything you desire and it will be done for you" (John 15:7)

STATION EIGHT (8)

OUR WORDS - A CREATIVE FORCE

The Bible tells us "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof" Proverbs 18:21.

Christianity is called the *Great Confession*, but most Christians (if not all) who are defeated in life, are defeated because they believe in and confess the wrong things. Proverbs says when we speak words of doubt and hopelessness we put ourselves in a state of bondage;

King Solomon writes "Beware that you are not snared with the words of your mouth" Proverbs 6:2.

- Faith-filled words that agree with The Scriptures will always reproduce hope and life.
- Fear-filled words that disagree with what God has said will always result in defeat and loss.

One of the past presidents of the United States of America, J.F. Kennedy, once said "Many men see things as they are, and say 'Why?', but others will dream things that never were and say 'Why not!'".

It is God's desire that we start seeing what He sees in the invisible realm and start to dream His dream, so that we can start to speak what He has spoken. When we see the invisible, we will do the impossible.

Our mind, our most powerful weapon

Our words will always be governed by how we think, and our mind will always be governed by what we expose it to. This is why it is so vitally important for us as sons and daughters of God, who represent His Kingdom on earth, to focus our minds properly onto the Truth. We must do so, so that we can think correctly in difficult and trying times. The Bible tells us in *Proverbs 23:7* "*As a man thinks in his heart, so is he and out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks*".

Denis Waitley, one of America's most respected authors, said "**It is not who you are that will hold you back in life, it's who you think you're not**". Programming one's mind properly applies to everyone. In life, one's thoughts become spoken words which program one's Spirit, either for success or defeat. These words are containers and they will either carry faith or fear, and will produce after their own kind. Faith has to be generated through spiritual conversion (rebirth) before it can be developed. Therefore, because Godly faith is only present in the lives of believers, it will enable only the 'born-again' person who is focused on the Word of God, to place the truth of God's Word above any given facts.

It is always our responsibility to speak what Jesus has said (the Truth) regardless to how impossible the situation looks because of the facts. This applies to all areas of life, such as, salvation, wealth, health and spiritual breakthrough. When Paul writes to the church in Rome, he explains how important our spoken words are to us as believers when saying

"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" Romans 10:17.

Faith comes to one much more quickly when you hear yourself quoting, speaking and saying the things that God has said. We will more readily receive God's Word into our spirits if we ourselves are saying, speaking or quoting it, than if we hear someone else say it.

We must learn to measure our words

Believe it or not, the Bible tells us that we can have what we say if we learn to release faith from our hearts in our spoken words. Jesus said, "As you have believed, let it be done unto you" Matthew 8:13. Note, Jesus didn't say it would only work when we believe correctly and confess positive truth. No, the Bible tells us that both death and life are in the power of the tongue. If we sincerely and fully believe that the sickness will get worse, the debt will increase and a certain person will never get saved, then it will be as we have believed and spoken. In the last world war, Britain warned the families of those serving abroad in the British navy, not to disclose where their family members were stationed. They said that the enemy had spies everywhere and that the result of disclosure would be "loose lips sink ships". Words are powerful in a constructive and destructive sense. This is why Isaiah felt he could not represent God to the people of Israel because when living among them he had been speaking as negatively and as destructively as they had. In the book of Isaiah, we find him saying to God;

"My heart is troubled and I am not fit to serve You because I am a man who has been speaking contrary to what my God has said and have been agreeing with the negative ungodly chatter of the people among whom I live" (I am a man of unclean lips living amongst people of unclean lips) (Isaiah 6:5,6)

In the immediate verses that follow the above passage, we see God instructing an angel to take a coal from the altar in heaven and supernaturally touch Isaiah's lips. This act on God's part purified Isaiah's heart and cleansed him from the negative ungodly words that he had been speaking and confessing amongst the people. He vowed to change his speech and become something of a thermostat instead of behaving like a thermometer, which, instead of governing the social climate, was being himself governed by it.

The Bible tells us that when we speak, our words are like seed that fall into the ground and they will reproduce after their own kind. Paul the Apostle writes to the church at Galatia and says;

"God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

We must train ourselves to speak God's word

In Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus he instructs them to practice or imitate God's speech patterns;

"Be followers of God as dear children" (Ephesians 5:1)

In this passage of Scripture Paul is telling the believer to imitate God just as an earthly child watches and imitates his or her father. When a child imitates his or her father, they will start to walk and talk like he does and pattern his every move. In John's Gospel we find Jesus telling His disciples that he only speaks what His Father in heaven tells Him to say. When we disobey or disregard Christ's instructions, we are directly disregarding and disobeying the instructions and teachings that the Father gave Him to tell us.

When we study the life of Jesus we find certain pointers given to us that enabled Him as a man to overcome sin, temptation, the world, the flesh and the devil.

Here are but a few"

- He spent much time in prayer, but it does not appear that He ever spoke the problem. He always spoke the provision i.e. the answer to the specific challenge or need on hand.
- He never exaggerated, lied or made excuses but always spoke the truth accurately, sincerely in love and oftentimes to His own hurt.
- He always spoke the desired result and expected those with specific needs to do the same e.g. when asking the lame man at the pool of Bethesda what he was hoping God would do for him, the man began to speak about the hopelessness of his situation and expounded on his disability. Jesus was the Provision but he focused on the problem. Jesus always used the written Word in His defence against satan when tempted or directly attacked spiritually (Matthew 4:3,4,10 and 11).
- Jesus also always spoke directly to the problem. It is interesting to see that He did so not as the Son of God but as the Son of man. Jesus operated as a man on the authority of His Father's Word. We too, can and must realise the power that God has allowed us to possess through His written Word, when we fill our hearts with it and confess it with our mouths.

Jesus came to earth and operated as a man under the authority of His Father's Word. People who are born on this earth are the only ones who have authority here, more so, men and women who are born again by the Spirit of God and who possess His Word.

As human beings we are programmed to always say what we are going to do, before we do it. We say "I am going to work or I am going to the beach...". It is interesting to see in the Scriptures that God never did anything without saying it first. In Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth we find written:

"We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, therefore I spoke; well we also believe and therefore speak" (2 Corinthians 4:13)

In Peter's second letter we see him telling us that we too can have all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3) if we come to the knowledge of Him who has called us to glory and virtue. *If we want what Christ had, we must do what Christ did, but to do what He did, we must know (come to the knowledge of Him who has called us) what He knew.* He knew the Word. He knew the Word worked. He knew God would watch over the Word and perform it. We too must be convinced of this truth and keep on confessing it, persuaded, until it happens. **It won't happen overnight.** It won't happen because you say it once or twice. We must be convinced of it coming about and stay with our confession until it does. The Bible tells us in Matthew 11:12; "The Kingdom is forcefully advancing but only the violent (i.e. single minded and persuaded will take it by force). We must stay with it and keep on keeping on.

Let the words of our mouths and the meditation of our hearts be accepted in His sight. Let us choose to be continually filled by Him with His Spirit and to speak His words of life, healing, prosperity, godliness, deliverance, salvation and worship to our God. Let us start and never stop. Why not!