

Samuel Fentem

THE CHARACTER OF GOD

40 days reflection on the fruits of the Holy
Spirit

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INTRODUCTION

Having completed the 40 days of Lent reflecting on the beatitudes from Matt Searles book, Quietness and Trust, I had an idea that I should try and write a book of 40 day reflections. Various ideas came to mind, for example, the 40 years in the wilderness that the children experienced when they came out of Egypt or the 40 days Moses was up the mountain with God and the commands he received. Then there is a subject like chapter 40 of Isaiah, an amazing chapter with that wonderful conclusion. "They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall rise up as on wings of eagles, they shall run and not grow weary, walk and not faint." But the subject that resonated with my heart is the fruits of the Holy Spirit as listed in Galatians 5. Nine fruits, or better put, nine character traits of God, Our Father. These character traits of God give us an example of what our lives should look like as we seek to reflect Him.

So many of these character traits are demonstrated through the life and death of Christ and through the gospel story. By reflecting on Gods character it will make the reason for Jesus coming and dying for us clear.

As I considered this subject, I realised that most of the teaching I have received and given on the fruit of the Holy Spirit always focused on what we should be like without any focus on how God has manifested his character in his dealings with man. So these reflections will first look at God's demonstration of each attribute before we examine our own lives. Through them I pray that you will be brought to a place where you have a clearer picture of the character of God and a greater desire to be like him.

This is the first time I have written a devotional book and will be a reflection of my own personal reflections on each fruit. There will be reflections and prayers to help you consider and meditate on each day's thoughts and scriptures. I pray that it won't be just a book you read but a time of drawing closer to God and, as Paul puts it, that the eyes of your heart might be enlightened to the hope to which he has called you. (Ephesians 1 v 18)

This book starts with three days introducing the fruits of the Holy Spirit and our responsibility to be fruitful. This is then followed by 4 days on each of the nine fruits, apart from self-control where there are only three, leaving the last couple of days for final reflections on the subject. Each day there is a verse or passage of scripture with an accompanying devotional. If you wish to use this book for Lent, then please remember Sundays are not counted in the 40 days of Lent. Therefore, on Sunday, I would encourage you to spend the time reading over all six days that have preceded it and get a broader picture of the subject which the individual reflection does not provide.

However you use this book I pray that you will make Paul's prayer for the Ephesian Church your own as you progress through these reflections.

Ephesians 1 v 17

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give me the Spirit^l of wisdom and revelation, so that I may know him better.

Day 1

THE CHARACTER OF GOD

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

(Galatians 5 v 22-23)

One of the joys of having children is seeing something of yourself in them. Even with new babies people can see likeness with the parents (he has his dad's eyes, he has his mothers mouth, similar comments I am sure you will have heard and said if you've been around children long enough.) As they grow, it is not just in their physical appearance where you notice likeness, you also begin to see it in their abilities and character. My daughter has two boys and they are completely different, one takes after my daughter, very arty and expressive, the other after their father who is very logical and methodical.

When God created mankind, there is an important message about what we should be like.

Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground."

So God created human beings in his own image.

In the image of God he created them;

male and female he created them.

Genesis 1 v 26 - 27

We were created in the image of God, in his likeness, to be a reflection and representation of Him on earth. We were therefore created to

reflect love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Even though man sinned and as a consequence took on a sinful nature, these qualities are still present to some degree in everyone and people still continue to reflect some of the beauty of God's nature.

God never changes and the fruits listed above are His eternal nature.

"I the Lord do not change" (Malachi 3 v 6)

He never deviates from expressing them although sometimes in ways we do not understand. His dealings with mankind, as we shall see, have always expressed something of these qualities, qualities we see continually expressed through His Son, Jesus. As we progress through these devotions, these qualities become more evident as we look to the cross, and Jesus' sacrifice for us.

REFLECTION

So at the start of our 40 days of reflection on the fruit of the Holy Spirit, let us first focus on the nature of God and the beauty of His character. Let us examine our hearts. Do we desire to see His beauty, His character in us?

Psalm 27 v 4

One *thing* I have desired of the LORD,
That will I seek:
That I may dwell in the house of the LORD
All the days of my life,
To behold the beauty of the LORD,
And to inquire in His temple.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, Beautiful Lord, I was created in your image, fearfully and wonderfully made to be the light in this dark world.

Help me to see your beauty. Increase my desire to reflect your character in all that I am and do.

Make me more like you through the work of Your Holy Spirit in me. Give me a greater understanding of who you are.

Amen

Day 2

CALLED TO FRUITFULNESS

This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit,
showing yourselves to be my disciples.

(John 15 v 8)

If you look back over your life, particularly over the past twelve months since you last celebrated lent, ask yourself this question, "Am I more like God than I was a year ago." So often we measure our spirituality by the things we do for God, the meetings we attend, the people we have talked to, the miracles and healings we might have been involved again, even the length of our prayer times etc but rarely look at our character. As we saw in yesterday's reflection, the character of God is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. So as you ask yourself that question, am I more like God than I was a year ago, ask yourself, am I more loving, more at peace, more joyful, etc than I was last year. As I look back over my life, had I asked that question, the answer would have been I've done lots, been really busy doing things for God but the truth was I had grown little and there is little fruit.

Fruitful Christian's bring glory to God. We can do all the mighty works of God but it can count for nothing if we are not manifesting his character. Look at this warning Paul gives to the Corinthian church. .

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. (1 Corinthians 13 v 1 – 3)

There is something beautiful about a person who reflects the nature of God, they might not do mighty works, but by the example of their lives they bring a fragrant atmosphere wherever they go. People see God

through their lives. They bring him glory. Like a flower fully opened, it brings beauty and fragrance and points to the creator.

We are called to bear much fruit to bring glory to God. God is a God of abundance and as we walk with His Holy Spirit, He will bring forth fruit in us. A tree doesn't force the fruit to grow; it simply grows as it draws strength from the tree and its roots. The tree we are rooted in is not weak and dying, it is Christ Himself, the abundance of life, in whom the fullness of God dwells. As we abide in Christ and draw on all His fullness, so fruit will grow. The fruit will be God's character revealed in us. Jesus said,

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15 v 5)

The final statement of this verse, tells us that it is the evidence of the fruit of God's character in our lives that will reveal us as His disciples.

Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. (Matthew 7 v 17 – 20)

Before you pray, just take time to read John 15 v 1 -17 and ask yourself, am I growing in fruitfulness, growing to be more like God.

REFLECTION

If you were brought before a court and charged with being a Christian, would there be enough evidence from your character to convict you? Are you producing the fruit of God's nature in your life?

PRAYER

*Lord God, my Father
Help me to be open and loving in all that I do
To be contagiously joyful
A vessel of your peace, both knowing it and showing it
Compellingly patient
Respectfully kind,
Always good, not as the world sees good, but as you are good
Unwaveringly faithful
Humbly gentle
And vigorously self controlled
Always aware of the Holy Spirit at work in and through me.
That I might bring glory to God, in who I am
Amen*

Day 3

GOD IS A GARDENER

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

John 15 v 1 – 2

Not everyone is interested in gardening, in fact to some a garden is just a work demand, but to a gardener, having a garden to tend is a delight. True gardeners love to be in their garden, tending the plants, weeding the ground, watching the tiny shoots burst from the ground. They will spend hours carefully planting seeds in trays in a greenhouse, then transplanting them when they are strong enough to withstand the outside elements. They protect the plants from pests, they treat the plants when disease is found, and feed them to encourage growth. Then there is the cost they pay, the money they spend, the time they invest, the thinking that goes into planning and researching and the physical effort they put in. A gardener considers all are worth it. Whether it be to produce flowering plants bringing colour and beauty or plants that bring a harvest of fruit or vegetables, a true gardener loves their garden and all that grows in it.(apart from weeds)

In this picture that Jesus uses, he identifies His Father as a gardener, a keeper of a vineyard where He, Jesus is the central trunk, the life source of the vine and we are the branches, branches that are called to bear fruit. Fruit grows, it doesn't just appear overnight, it takes time for it to mature and come to complete ripeness. A true gardener will delight in seeing the tiny grapes appearing on the vine. They know that given the right weather conditions, the fruit will grow and a harvest will be reaped. God delights in seeing even the smallest appearance of the fruit of the Holy Spirit beginning to manifest in our lives. It's easy for us to judge ourselves and condemn ourselves because we are not patient enough, or not kind enough or for our lack of self control, but God, the

gardener sees differently. He can see the first signs of growth in our lives and he delights in those first signs.

However regardless of our fruitfulness, a gardener knows that the vine branches need to be pruned in the right season in order that they will produce even more fruit the following year. The gardener feels no sadness when they are pruning, no thought that there is something wrong with the vine, it is part of the process to bring forth an even greater harvest the following year. Branches that are unproductive, that just suck life from the vine and give nothing in return are cut off so that all the life of the vine is channelled into the strong branches that produce fruit.

When we are going through situations and circumstances that are tough and God is addressing issues in our lives, remember it is not because he is judging us or punishing us, it is because he sees the potential in us to be even more fruitful, for us to grow and reflect more of His character. He prunes our lives with joy because he knows and sees the fruit that will be produced in the right time.

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful.
Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness
and peace for those who have been trained by it.
(Hebrews 12 v 11)

So in this time of reflection, if God wants to do some pruning in your life it is because he loves you and delights in you and wants you to be even more fruitful in the years ahead.

REFLECTION

Spend some time thinking about how much time, energy, effort and money a gardener will invest in maintaining their garden. From this, then consider how much God has invested in you.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, the maintainer and sustainer of our lives, help me to see that you delight in me and love me as a gardener loves their garden and all the plants in them. Help me to know that your desire for me is that I might be fruitful in you. I pray that You would remove any areas in my life that hinder me from being fruitful in Your service. Thank You, that You have given me everything that is needful for godly living and a fruitful life. Thank You that you have loved me, tenderly cared for me, invested in me for your glory

Amen

.Day 4

GOD IS LOVE

And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

1 John 4 v 16

At the age of 12 I was led to accept Christ into my life by my elder brother Michael who God had called and equipped to be a children's evangelist. Over the next few years, I went everywhere with him, he mentored me and I followed his example. During this time I learnt all the stories he used to tell the children, understood and studied all the various illustrations and materials he used; I saw and knew how he did everything. A few years later, I was given the opportunity to do some children's work, so I did all that he had done. I even considered that I actually did them better than him but I didn't get the same results. Children responded to his message, but with me they didn't. The reason for the difference was he was a child evangelist, called and equipped by God, it was who he was whereas I was trying to do child evangelism.

Now you may be wondering what this has to do with the subject of today's reflection on love. In the scripture above we see this difference when it comes to loving. It doesn't say God loves, he doesn't just do the task of loving us, it says God is love. It is who he is. He is pure love. We speak of falling in love and falling out of love, demonstrating that for us, love is something that can come and go, Our love can be weak, conditional and affected by the behaviour of the person, it a choice we make. God however doesn't choose to love, He is love. He can't help himself, he can't stop loving, it isn't just an aspect of His character, it is His character. All the rest of the character traits manifest in the list of the fruits of the Holy Spirit are expressions of that love.

A simple children's song we used to sing had two verses which reflected this. The first verse said, "There is nothing I can do to make

you (God) love me more.” The second verse said “There is nothing I can do to make you love me less.” His love for us is not based upon who we are, what we do or don’t do, He simply is love and so in all His dealings with mankind His motivation, His desire is love.

Stuart Townsend captured a little of this in his song, Grace. Here is the chorus

‘Cause its grace.
There’s nothing I can do
To make You love me more,
To make You love me less than You do.
And by faith
I’m standing on this Stone
Of Christ and Christ alone,
Your righteousness is all that I need,
‘Cause its grace.

God declares the nature of that love in His revelation to the prophet Jeremiah. His love is eternal, it always has been, always is and always will be there because He is love. (Jeremiah 31 v 3)

The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying:

“I have loved you with an everlasting love;
I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.”

Yesterday, today, tomorrow you are loved by God, He never changes and His love for us never changes regardless of our behaviour and circumstances.

REFLECTION

Spend some time considering the difference between God is love and God loves. Is there a difference and do you think there is ever a time where he does not love you or individual people in the history of mankind?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, In the whirlwind of life, amidst the noise that distracts and the fears that dismay, I seek a moment of solace in Your presence. Lord, open my heart to the powerful truth, you are love.

Let it wash over me like the first light of dawn, dispersing the shadows of doubt that linger within. Teach me to recognize Your love in the simple blessings that embroider my day — a smile, a kind word, the beauty of nature.

May this knowledge transform me, guiding my actions, grounding my faith, and shaping my journey back to You. For in Your love, I find strength, purpose, and peace.

Amen.

Day 5

GOD'S LOVE IN ACTION

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

1 John 4 v 9 – 10

Every year approximately 1 billion valentine cards are sent worldwide making it the second largest card sending holiday after Christmas. In the United States alone, 145 million cards are sent. Add to the cards, the chocolates, the flowers, and other gifts, it is the biggest expression of love in a single day each year. There was a time when cards were sent in secret, but now cards, chocolates, flowers and other gift are openly exchanged between couples that have been together for years. Valentine's Day is the one day when people openly say "I love you."

But this expression of love is nothing compared to God's expression of love to mankind. As we saw yesterday, He is love and love expresses itself. The greater the love, the greater the expression. When God caused his goodness to pass before Moses, He makes this statement about Himself.

And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, (Exodus 34 v 6).

He doesn't just declare that He loves, He declares of Himself that He is abounding in love. There is no end to his love, it cannot be measured and his love abounds towards us and is great. But anyone in a relationship will tell you, words are not enough, words can be cheap and meaningless. Only when there is a cost involved can the full extent of that love be measured. He demonstrated His love for us by giving what was most precious to Him, His only Son. No greater gift, no greater price could be paid as an expression of His love. Probably one

of the most well known and quoted verses captures God's love for us and how He expresses it.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only
Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but
have eternal life. (John 3 v 16)

But this doesn't capture the fullness of that love, it is only when we realise that God's plan, and Christ sacrifice for us, was planned before the foundation of the earth, that is before man were even created, before Adam sinned and mankind was subject to being slaves to sin. Even though He knew what Adam would do, He still chose to go ahead and create mankind, mankind that would reject Him. Having created man, he then expressed His love for us by giving His only beloved Son to die in our place, to take upon himself our sin, our punishment, so that we might know His love and enter into a wonderful relationship with Him. His love was expressed through the actions of His Son.

REFLECTION

Take time to meditate on the words of this Samuel T Johnson Hymn and the greatness of God's love for us demonstrated through His Son. Let the words penetrate your mind and heart.

O the deep, deep love of Jesus, vast, unmeasured, boundless, free!
Rolling as a mighty ocean in its fullness over me!
Underneath me, all around me, is the current of Thy love
Leading onward, leading homeward to Thy glorious rest above!

O the deep, deep love of Jesus, spread His praise from shore to shore!
How He loveth, ever loveth, changeth never, nevermore!
How He watches o'er His loved ones, died to call them all His own;
How for them He intercedeth, watcheth o'er them from the throne!

O the deep, deep love of Jesus, love of every love the best!
'Tis an ocean full of blessing, 'tis a haven giving rest!

O the deep, deep love of Jesus, 'tis a heav'n of heav'ns to me;
And it lifts me up to glory, for it lifts me up to Thee!

PRAYER

Father God, I thank You for loving me so much that You gave Your one and only Son, Jesus Christ, so that I might have eternal life, surrounded and filled with your amazing love. You demonstrated your love for me by paying the greatest cost, beyond all understanding.

Lord Jesus, thank You for sacrificing your life on the cross for my sins. When faced with a choice, you chose to surrender yourself and take upon yourself my punishment because of love

Open our eyes and heart to grasp the greatness of your love for me.

Amen.

Day 6

THE STRENGTH OF HIS LOVE

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8 v 38 - 39.

Tom Marshall in his book *Right Relationships* speaks of four key elements necessary for good relationships, love, trust, respect and understanding. Of these he said that love is the most durable whereas trust is the most fragile. Love continues even after relationship breakdown or death whereas the smallest thing can damage the ability to trust. God's love is, as we saw in yesterday's reflections unaffected by our sins, our failures, our rebellion and cold heartedness. His love continues towards us regardless of the condition of our lives.

In the parable of the prodigal son, the son shames his family by asking/demanding his inheritance from his Father and then he goes and squandering it all on riotous living. When he comes to his senses after ending up starving and feeding pigs, the lowest of the low job to a Jew, he decides to return home. I can imagine Jesus' listeners already deciding what response he should get when he reaches home. A slammed door in his face, mockery, judgement, rejection, so they would have been surprised by the next stage of the story.

So he got up and went to his father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. (Luke 15 v 20)

What followed was the son being reinstated to the family, given the best robe and then a party to celebrate his return. The Fathers love for

his son remained regardless of his previous misdemeanours. Jesus was demonstrating something of God's love for us, it never dwindles, never fails. However it certainly doesn't feel like that, from personal experience when I've failed, particularly if it's a repeated failure, then I feel a chasm have developed between me and God. At such times, the devil whispers those words many have heard, "he can't love you after what you have done" and we believe those words and darkness grips our soul. He is called the father of lies for a reason.

Paul tells the Corinthian Church that he is convinced, certain, sure of, persuaded that nothing can separate us from the love of God. To him it is a fact he lives his life by, God loves him and nothing can stop that. What shuts out that love is our own understanding, our sinful nature and unrenewed mind that tells us his love towards us varies according to what we do. We are the ones that shut the door to God's love. Nothing external to our lives, not all the demons of hell can separate us from his love, but we can cut ourselves from it by believing he can't love us or his love will be diminished towards us because of our lives and action. What a difference it would make if we simply accepted that God always has and always will love us.

REFLECTION

Does this poem reflect your thinking at times?

Do you love me?
After all I have done, all I've been through
My sinful ways, my turning from you
How can you love me, I'm such a wreck
Am I to you just a pain in the neck?
How can you love one such as me?
Open my eyes and help me to see
Your loves the same, by day or by night
Whether I draw close or I take to flight
It never changes, always the same
In all my failures, in all my pain
You never turn back or turn away

Whatever I do, whatever I say
You're always open, wanting to give
Always there is the life that I live
Love unconditional, love so free
That's why you love one such as me.

PRAYER

Father, I thank you for your amazing love. Thank you that nothing can separate me from your love. Forgive me when I have believed differently and have felt you have turned away. I open my heart now to receive again your love.

Amen.

Day 7

LOVE POURED OUT

And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Romans 5 v 5

A teacher stood before the children they was teaching and on a table before them was a large glass jar and it was empty. The teacher then took some large pebbles and started to fill the jar until they could get no more in. The children were asked, "Is it full?" They all responded "yes." The teacher then pulled out a bag full of small pebbles and started to pour them into the jar, occasionally lifting it and shaking it until all the gaps left by the large pebbles were filled with the small pebbles. When they couldn't get any more in, they asked the children, "Is it full?" They all responded "yes," although some weren't as sure as before. Next the teacher pulled out a bag of sand and began to pour it into the jar, occasionally shaking it causing the sand to sink and fill the whole jar. When the sand started to pour over the sides, they again asked, "Is it full?" This time they were met with a resounding "yes", clearly the jar was full. At this point they left the children staring at the jar as they walked over to the tap, and filled a jug of water. When they returned, they started to pour the water into the jar, in it went into a seemingly full jar, full of pebbles and sand. The water filled the space between the sand particles filling the jar completely.

God's desire for us is that we be filled with his love, not just part filled, but filled completely. As we have previously seen he loves to express his love, now we see he loves to share it. He doesn't keep it to himself, he pours it into our hearts, according to his measure. The measure God loves to give is full, abundant, overflowing.

Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." (Luke 6 v 38)

But our ability to receive that love is, I believe, subject to the condition of our heart. Some of us have hard hearts, resistant and unyielding. Such hearts are like stiff dried out sponges. The love God is pouring out just doesn't penetrate hearts like these as they are resistant to it and resistant to the change. People with such hearts miss out on so much.

Then there is a broken heart, that's like a jar that is full of holes. However much is poured in, it quickly disappears leaving the person empty and longing to feel love again. Even when they feel God's love it's only momentary and it quickly goes as the heart has been broken, wounded by broken relationships, by failure of dreams not being fulfilled, by loss, to name a few things that can cause this.

Then there is a fearful heart, a heart that desires safety over entering into the vulnerability of open relationship with God. Such people are unwilling to trust, apart from trusting themselves. Whilst the heart is not hard, they have built up so many walls of self protection, it actually keeps out the fullness of God's love for them. It's like they put up an umbrella as God pours out his love and most of it never reaches the heart.

There are many other conditions of the heart the Bible speaks of, for example, a divided heart, a failing heart, a foolish heart, a deceitful heart, a jealous heart. All these have an impact on a person's ability to receive the love God pours out, love so full and free. There is no lack on God's part to fill us, the issue with us, so maybe it's a good time to ask God the same thing David did.

Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

(Psalm 139 v 23 -24)

REFLECTION

When was the last time you felt filled with the love of God? Think about the circumstances that had brought it about. Are there lessons you can learn from that moment which will help you to encounter Gods love filling your heart again?

PRAYER

*O Father, I humbly seek the warmth of Your
Divine Love to envelope my heart and soul.*

*May I feel Your presence in every moment,
guiding me with compassion and grace.*

*Help me to share this love with others, fostering
unity and peace in our world.*

*Let Your embrace heal my wounds and inspire me
to reflect Your light.*

Amen.

Day 8

FULLNESS OF JOY

You will show me the path of life;
In Your presence *is* fullness of joy;
At Your right hand *are* pleasures forevermore
Psalm 16 v 11

I was driving home thinking how to start this reflection when I got a phone call from a friend. This man has serious health issues, sclerosis of the liver and heart failure, together with anxiety issues. He has not worked for over 12 years and generally never goes out of the house he is renting. Recently he has been issued a Notice to Quit by his landlord. His situation is terrible, however when I answered I was surprised by his attitude, his voice, there was something different from usual. Since receiving his Notice to Quit he has started praying, asking God for help even though he didn't know him. He then told me what had happened how someone unseen came and sat beside him in his room and how he was filled with joy. He even got up, left the room then came back and he was aware that the person was still there. He knew it was God's presence. It completely changed his life. Joy filled his heart and with it confidence that everything was in God's hands. Since then he has been having conversations with God, not just talking to him, but God talking back and all the while, joy and peace fill his life. His final words to me were thank you for introducing me to God.

Here was a man that had nothing to be joyful about, his future uncertain, his health failing and yet simply being in the presence of God filled him with joy. Being in the presence of someone who loves you unconditionally is wonderful, and God loves us unconditionally. He is full of joy, it is part of His nature. You can even experience this, to some degree on a human level, when in the presence of someone full of joy, if you are open, then their joy rubs off on you.

The problem we have is often we get joy and happiness mixed up or think they are the same. Happiness is a reaction to something and is

easily experienced and soon lost. Ask any football fan who even in the space of 90 minutes can experience, the depth of despair to the heights of extreme happiness, euphoria. Joy however is different. Even when in the middle of trials and tests we can know Gods joy. Pastor Rick Warren of Saddleback Church, USA is quoted as saying “Joy is the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life, the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright, and the determined choice to praise God in every situation.”

David tells us that God makes us glad with his presence

Surely you have granted him unending blessings
and made him glad with the joy of your presence. (Psalm 21 v 6)

The Hebrew word interpreted glad primarily conveys the sense of rejoicing and being glad and is often used in relation to celebrations, such as deliverance from enemies. The term emphasises an internal state of joy that often manifests outwardly. God’s presence causes us to be joyful if we are open to Him.

In both our scriptures we find the location of this joy, being in the presence of God. So often we can be in too much of a hurry, too pre-occupied with the pressures and responsibilities of this life to spend time in God’s presence and experience His joy. But we can be in his presence but not present, our minds and attention are elsewhere. God wants us to be present in His presence. When we are then one of the things we may encounter is His joy as my friend did. At other times we might experience his love, his gentleness, his peace.

The measure of joy we experience in His presence, is fullness of joy. Not a trickle, because that’s not God’s nature, in is full abundant, overflowing joy.

REFLECTION

American minister Barney Elliott Warren, who wrote over 2000 hymns captures this joy in one of his songs. How would you describe it?

"I have found the joy no tongue can tell,
How its waves of glory roll;
It is like a great o'erflowing well,
Springing up within my soul.
It is joy unspeakable and full of glory,
Full of glory, full of glory;
It is joy unspeakable and full of glory,
Oh, the half has never yet been told."

PRAYER

Dear God, I humbly come before You, yearning for a deeper connection with Your presence. I desire to know You more intimately and experience Your love and joy in a profound way. Please reveal Yourself to me, and draw me closer to Your heart. Help me to seek You earnestly, with a sincere and open heart.

Amen

Day 9

GOD SINGS IN DELIGHT

The LORD your God is with you,
the Mighty Warrior who saves.
He will take great delight in you;
in his love he will no longer rebuke you,
but will rejoice over you with singing."
Zephaniah 3 v 17

Whether people still sing lullabies today, I am not certain with the many different means of playing music and sound, I suspect, particularly in western cultures singing lullabies is probably disappearing. But for generations, mothers have sung lullabies over their children, they are expressions of love, of comfort to the child and soothes them and helps them to sleep. Lullabies have ancient origins, with the earliest transcribed examples dating back to around 2000 BC, found etched on Babylonian clay tablets. The word "lullaby" itself likely derives from Middle English, combining "lullen" (to lull) and "by" (near). Now I can't imagine anyone singing over a child when they are angry with the child, certainly not word that would comfort and lull them to sleep.

Singing over a child is one thing, but singing over someone, or to someone requires great vulnerability and intimacy. Many love songs have been written, particularly in operas and musicals which demonstrate and express the intimacy of love and often there is a response to the song sung. But such is the joy God feels about us and how he desires intimacy with us, that he makes Himself vulnerable in expressing His joy to one who could reject him, by singing over us.

The thought of God singing over us in joy, in intimacy is probably one a lot of people would struggle to accept. How could God rejoice over us, wretched sinners who constantly fail Him? The reason we find it difficult to accept that God would do this is because we have a wrong impression of the nature and character of God. If you said to some people God loves to have fun and to party, they would feel that you were almost blaspheming but that is the true nature of God. Just one

look at the details of some of festivals God instructed the children of Israel to keep will show you that.

Jesus reveals this in three parables about loss, the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son in Luke 15. When the lost son returns home this is the response of the Father and His household.

“Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” So they began to celebrate.

Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. (Luke 15 v 23 – 25)

The picture, although speaking of an earthly family, is a picture of heaven rejoicing and God instigating a party with feasting, music and dancing over us. Such is His joy when we return to Him and our relationship with Him is restored. We may never hear his actual voice, but as we rest in His presence we can experience the effects of His joy. We are also told why he rejoices over us with singing, because he delights in us, again another difficult thing to grasp, God delights in you and me and we bring Him great joy, so much so he burst into song over us.

REFLECTION

Do you have difficulty accepting that God delights in you? Think how a mother delights over her little child and then imagine God doing that over you, his precious child. Can you imagine the lyrics He may be singing? Is it a lullaby? Or maybe it's a ballad telling of how you fit into His story.

PRAYER

"Loving God, thank you for your immeasurable love and delight in me. I humbly acknowledge that you take joy in my existence and rejoice over

*me. Help me to understand and experience this delight you find in me.
Guide me to live a life that brings you pleasure and satisfaction, and
may I be a vessel of your joy and love in this world.*

Amen.

Day 10

YOU ARE HIS JOY

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12 v 1 – 2

Have you ever wondered why athletes put themselves through so much pain? The daily hard training whether in warm fine weather or in the freezing cold. They push their body to the extreme; have ice baths, a strict diet and certainly no McDonalds. When I was a teenager I was picked to take represent the school in the local schools cross country championship. One Saturday morning I turned up at the designated place, it was winter, it was cold and the ground muddy. Then I had to strip down to shorts and a vest then wait on the start line, the cold eating into my body. Any joy at representing the school robbed was from my brain, it was horrible. When I eventually ran. I didn't enjoy it, it was my first and last time running for the school. Why athletes go through so much pain and suffering? They do it simply for the prize, the joy set before them, winning.

Jesus, God's son endured the cross. Here is an extract from a poem I wrote called 'The agony of Gethsemane.'

He could not escapes the images before him
The coming pain, the cruel whip
The shredded back and pieced brow
The torment, mockery, abuse
The blows, time and time again
Until his legs would fail
And this was just the start

A cross awaits, a slow agonizing death
The most brutal way to kill a man
But that wasn't all
On his shoulder would lay the foulest sins of all mankind
And in the darkest hour
Final separation from God, his Father

Why would anyone put themselves through such pain, such torment and agony if they didn't have to? What would motivate anyone, most of all God's Son to go through all that? We can point to Jesus paying the price for our sins, we can point to Satan being defeated and stripped of his power on earth, we can point to his love for us, but the writer in Hebrews points to something else. 'Who for the joy set before him.' What was that joy? It was you and me and the thought and knowledge of us having an eternal relationship with him carried Him through the cross.

Not only is God full of joy, not only does he delight in us and rejoices over us with singing, but the knowledge also that we would come to Him, be restored in Father/son relationship with Him gave Him the joy to endure the cross.

Understanding this will help us to understand what James said.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1 v 2 – 4)

Mature is defined by Paul in Ephesians 4 as 'attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.' Just as Jesus went through the cross for us, so we can go through trials knowing that the goal, the prize is being filled with the fullness of Christ, and what greater joy can there be.

REFLECTION.

Look at a loving parent with a young child or baby. They child or baby can do little or nothing for themselves and yet the bring great joy to their parents. That is how God feels about you and me. Is that what you see and believe?

PRAYER

Thank you, Lord Jesus, that You saw me and the image of me being in relationship with You strengthened You with joy so that You could endure the punishment for my sins by dying on the cross. Lord, I find it hard to understand that You would find such joy in me. Help me to know and see what you really think about me, that I am your delight and that I bring you great joy. Help me to see when I struggle with self doubt, self worth and self condemnation to remember I am Your joy.

Thank you

Amen

HE GIVES JOY

Hear, LORD, and be merciful to me;

LORD, be my help.”

You turned my wailing into dancing;

you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,
that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent.

LORD my God, I will praise you forever.

Psalm 30 v 10 – 12

The clothes people wear often tell us about a person wearing them. If you ever take time to people watch, so much is revealed by the clothes people wear. Uniforms for example often reveal a person's employment. At one time, clothes identified a person's class, you had white collar workers and blue colour workers, the white collar workers being the upper class who worked in offices, the blue collar workers being the manual workers. Then in the sixties you had mods and rocker and the flower people. Following this you had glam rock, punks, goths, steam punks and many more. The clothes they wore all said something about them. Personally, the clothes I wear of often affected by my feeling, when I'm feeling happy and secure I will dress up a bit it bright clothes, happy to be seen. When I'm struggling I'll wear clothes that help me blend in with the crowds.

In the verses we are considering the Psalmist cries out to God in his need and God answers Him. We don't know what his struggle were or the answers God gave but we do know it was transformational. God clothed him with joy, so much so, it caused him to dance and sing. We see a similar thing in that great prophecy about Jesus in Isaiah 61 when it says he gives the oil of joy for mourning and a garment of praise for a spirit of heaviness. The joy God has he doesn't keep to himself, he wants to share it with us and when he does it is transformational.

Peter and John were going into the temple when they were confronted by a cripple who had begged at the doors of the temple for years. He

had been lame from birth. They had no money to give him, but they gave Him the greatest gift he could have imagined, healing. His response was this.

He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. (Acts 3 v 8)

It was an expression of exceeding joy. God's joy causes the heart to sing, it causes a response when we receive it. Whilst the man's joy was a consequence of his healing and change in circumstances, God's joy goes much deeper.

Many years ago we used to sing a song which said "I've got that joy, joy, joy down in my soul. Where? Down in my soul, Where? Down in my soul." The problem was, if people did have the joy of God, it was hidden so deep it certainly didn't show on their faces. The joy of God dispels the darkness of mourning and despair and causes great rejoicing. This is the joy he wants to clothe us with. I love the picture of being clothed, God providing a beautiful garment of joy that we can wear. It's not an undergarment, something that is hidden from sight rather it should be an outer garment for all to see.

But receiving it is conditional.

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." (Acts 15 v 9 -11)

It's about abiding in the love of Christ and walking in obedience and as we do His joy will be in us and that joy will be complete and is everlasting. The joy God's want us to receive and live in is not momentary but is everlasting and will be strength to us to face whatever the world throws at us. As Dwight L Moody said "The Lord gives his people perpetual joy when they walk in obedience to him."

REFLECTION

Spend time considering this quote from S D Gordon. “ Joy is distinctly a Christian word and a Christian thing. It is the reverse of happiness. Happiness is the result of what happens of an agreeable sort. Joy has its springs deep down inside. And that spring never runs dry, no matter what happens. Only Jesus gives that joy. He had joy, singing its music within, even under the shadow of the cross.”

PRAYER

Father, thank you that you are full of joy and that your desire for me is that I be clothed with that joy so the world will see you in me.

Help me to remain in the love of Christ and walk the path of obedience so that I may know and grow in the joy that you give, lasting eternal joy.

Holy Spirit, joy is a fruit of you dwelling and reigning in our lives. Help me to grow that joy and show that joy.

In Jesus name

Amen

Day 12

GOD OF PEACE

The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Romans 15 v 33

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9 v 6

If you switch on the news anytime over the past few months, it is likely that you will hear the talk about peace, and peace talks. With wars going on in Ukraine and in Israel, there is a push by world leaders to see an end to these wars and for there to be peace. Often when we think of the word peace, we think of the absence of war, strife etc. The Cambridge dictionary defines peace as 'freedom from war and violence, especially when people live and work together happily without disagreement.' It is something most people want, normally on their own terms, but is never likely to happen across the world due the selfishness and hatred in the hearts of men.

God is a God of peace, he is peace. His Son is referred to as the Prince of Peace. The Son is the manifestation of His Father on earth and yet when you look at His life, wherever he goes, he often causes conflict not peace, and in the end dies not because of being at peace with all men but because men hated Him and wanted Him dead. So the peace of the Bible must reflect something different to our worldly view of peace.

The Hebrew word interpreted peace in the Old Testament is the word "Shalom." Shalom means "to be complete" or "to be sound." The verb conveys both a dynamic and a static meaning" to be complete or whole" or "to live well." Understanding its true meaning, helps us to understand that God is a God of peace. He is complete and whole, lacking nothing, in right relationship, in perfect union with the Son and

Holy Spirit, three in one. So when Paul says “the God of peace be with you” he is not telling us that if God is with us life will be without conflict, without trouble and strife, he is saying he comes to bring wholeness and completeness into your life. Worldly peace is based upon external circumstances whereas biblical peace is based on the inner condition of our hearts and lives. It is from this place of wholeness and security, of being complete that biblical peace is worked out through our lives into external circumstances.

The peace of God is not the absence of storms but peace in the middle of the storms. An inner security and tranquillity that is unshakable regardless of what comes along. Nothing shakes God, nothing causes him to worry or fret, nothing takes Him by surprise. He lives in total security, total harmony, knowing who he is. He is complete and whole. He is not detached from the issues of the world, the depravity of man, he grieves at man's sinfulness and feels the pain of the suffering of his children but in spite of this He remains in perfect peace.

Here is my description of the peace of God. It's an extract from my poem Peace.

Peace, o joyest peace, a peace beyond compare
Deep rivers of contentment, deep waters of delight
Beyond all imagination
Outside of understanding
And yet to me so real.

A quietness in the storm
A strong tower of security
A still small voice of all is well
A steady hand, a comfort arm
Peace, this is peace to me

REFLECTION

Think back to a time when you experienced God's peace in your life and reflect on the circumstances you were in when you experienced it.

What did it feel like? Was it a consequence of your circumstances changing or something happening inside?

PRAYER

Lord, I thank you that you came to bring me peace, to bring me into wholeness of life and into restored relationship with you. I thank you that you died to make that possible. Help me to see when read about peace in your word that it doesn't mean the absence of strife and trouble, but security, tranquillity in the midst of that trouble. Thank you for your peace.

Amen

Day 13

PEACE, GOD'S BLESSING

The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;
the LORD is enthroned as King forever.
The LORD gives strength to his people;
the LORD blesses his people with peace.

Psalm 29 v 10 – 11

Before the days of cheap flights, it was cheaper to drive to Romania than it was to fly, which was a great way to see Europe. The only problem for me was the English Channel. This was before the days of the tunnel and rough seas don't agree with me. I tend to turn green and suffer greatly. On this one occasion, the day we set off from Glossop in Derbyshire, England was being battered by strong winds which were destroying properties and blowing over trees. For the whole of the journey to the port of Dover, the car was buffeted by winds and as we neared, my imagination told me I was about to face my worst nightmare, incredibly rough seas. But as we neared Dover a miracle happened, the wind stopped blowing and instead of facing a crossing of horrendous waves, we crossed a channel that was perfectly still and flat. Like Jesus rebuking the storm and speaking peace, the storm both on the sea and in my mind was at peace.

One of the themes we have seen in love and joy which we again see here is that God loves to give and as the scripture says "He blesses His people with peace." That as we saw yesterday is not the absence of trouble, it is wholeness and completeness in him so that whatever the world throws at us we can be at peace, in that place of security and tranquillity. To get a picture of what it looks like, you only need to look at Jesus with disciples when they are crossing Lake Galilee

Matthew 8 v 23 – 27

Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so

that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"

In the middle of the storm Jesus slept. When he was woken by panicking disciples he is not influenced by their fear, he was unmoved by the storm around them. It is important to remember at this point in time, Jesus experienced everything as a man, but a man who trusted completely in His Father. He is at peace and unmoved in a negative way by the situation. This is the nature of the peace God wants us, as His children to experience.

God loves to bless, that is to give us something that will be a blessing to us. To know His peace in our lives, especially when we face the storms of life, the relationship difficulties, the redundancy, the financial struggles, that lack, rejection and failure, then to know his peace is certainly a blessing.

The Psalmist explains it this way;

In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD,
make me dwell in safety. (Psalm 4 v 8).

When we know His peace then we can sleep at night.

REFLECTION

What do you do when a storm arises either around you or deep in your life? Do you worry and panic or turn to God and ask Him for His peace? How good are you at receiving what he wants to give? He longs to bless you with peace.

PRAYER

"Heavenly Father, in the midst of life's storms, grant me inner calm. Let Your peace wash over me like a gentle stream, soothing my anxieties and restoring tranquillity to my soul. Help me to know you are in control and I am safe in your hands. In Jesus' Name.

Amen."

Day 14

WAR AND PEACE

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Colossians 1 v 19 – 20

.On the 8th May 2025 we celebrated 80 years since VE day. 80 years ago after six years of intense, bloody war the allies of World War 11 formally accepted Germany's unconditional surrender, and this sparked great celebrations across the world, the war was over and peace now stood a chance. History shows us unfortunately that whilst war ended in Europe, it wouldn't be 80 years of peace as wars broke out across the world, in various nations and at various times. Each time, there is a cry for peace and end to war, but sadly this rarely happens. When there is a war, then peace has to be fought for until someone surrenders and this can take years. There is a cost involved, not just financially, but in with the lives of people to bring about peace. During the Second World War it is estimated that between 70 million and 85 million people lost their lives.

When I think of Adam and Eve in the garden, I have a picture of bliss but in reality they entered a war zone. Satan and a third of the angels had been thrown out of heaven to the earth and his intent was to steal, kill and destroy all that God had created, including mankind. Man subsequently succumbed to Satan's deception and sin entered the world. From the moment mankind battled with his sinful nature and true peace, wholeness in God was impossible. So Jesus came with a mission to destroy the works of the devil, take our punishment upon himself and to bring us into peace with God, a restored relationship. Battles were fought, not just in the three temptations we read about, but throughout Jesus' life. He was tempted like us but did not succumb. Then he gave himself to death in accordance with the will of

God and in the process defeated the principalities and powers that controlled the earth.

Colossians 2 v 13 -15

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

The powers of darkness were defeated, the battle for mankind fought and won by Christ's death and resurrection and peace is now available to mankind. There was no other way for peace to be won.

Colossians 1 v 19 - 20

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Christ's death brought us peace providing we believe in him and put our trust in him which means handing over control of our lives to him.

REFLECTION

Romans 15 v 13 says "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." How much are you willing to trust? Do you prefer to keep things under your own control, determine your own way rather than trust God to direct your life and bring you into His peace?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, who are called the Prince of Peace, who are Yourself our peace and reconciliation, who so often said, "Peace to you" – please grant us peace.

Make all men and women witnesses of truth, justice and brotherly love. Banish from their hearts whatever might endanger peace. Enlighten our rulers that they may guarantee and defend the great gift of peace.

May all peoples on the earth become as brothers and sisters.

May longed-for peace blossom forth and reign always over us all.

Amen.

Pope John Paul 11.

Day 15

FIX YOUR MIND

You will keep in perfect peace
those whose minds are steadfast,
because they trust in you.

Trust in the LORD forever,
for the LORD, the LORD himself, is the Rock eternal.
Isaiah 26 v 3 – 4

In England, it's estimated about 1 in 4 of us will experience a mental health problem at some point each year. Research shows that adults and young people alike feel their wellbeing is getting worse. The scale and severity of mental health need is spiralling, with over 2 million people on the National Health Service waiting list for mental health support. 1 in 5 school-age child or young person has mental health difficulties with only a third able to access treatment last year. The reasons for vary according to age with pressures such as social media affecting young people and relationship breakdowns and financial pressures affecting older people. Mental illness is a problem we are probably all aware of and we don't have to look far to see people struggling with such issues, even in the church.

In most cases mental illness is a reflection of a lack of inner peace, a lack of wholeness. God is a God of peace and the source of peace and he longs to give you His peace. His peace goes beyond our natural understanding and will guard our hearts and minds (Philippians 4 v 7). I had been married for just a few months and Jackie, my wife, was pregnant when one lunchtime I rang her to tell her that I had been called to go to Toxteth, Liverpool where violent riots had broken out the night before and I didn't know when I would be back. In that moment fear struck, panic rose, but then God spoke into the situation, "not a hair on his head will be harmed" and with it came peace beyond natural understanding.

When I looked into the verse above, particularly at the fuller meaning of the word interpreted mind, it speaks of inclination, imagination, framework. Our problem is that when difficult circumstances hit us, we allow our imagination to run loose conjuring up all sort of scenarios instead of trusting in his word and in his promises. We forget how he loves us and delights in us. He is faithful to His promises and His love never fails. We have to choose to trust, we have to keep our minds fixed on Him.

Tom Marshall in his book *Right Relationships* defines trust as follows: "The essence of trust is that I voluntarily make myself dependent on another person for some outcome or something. Trust is therefore a choice I make and it cannot be forced upon me. The evidence that I have actually made such a decision to trust is that I have made no contingency plan to protect myself or my interests should that person fail me"

Peace comes from a place of trust, knowing he will direct your path, knowing he is control regardless of the circumstances.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways submit to him,
and he will direct your path
(Proverbs 3 v 5 – 6)

This is what Paul in *Philippians* demonstrates.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (*Philippians* 4 v 6 – 7)

REFLECTION

What are those issues you are currently dealing with that try to rob you or have already robbed you of your peace. Imagine giving them into

God's hand and allowing him to take control. Ask yourself this question, "Is he able to deal with it?"

PRAYER

Heavenly Father,

I humbly surrender my situation to your capable hands. Take control, O Lord, and guide every aspect according to your divine plan. I place my trust in Your unwavering wisdom, seeking comfort in knowing that Your ways are higher than mine. May my heart be receptive to Your leading, and may Your control bring peace and assurance.

Amen.

Day 16

GOD IS PATIENT

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

1 Corinthians 13 v 4

Patience is a virtue we all, at times struggle to manifest, and it is often a something we ask God for particularly when we are having to wait. How many of us when we reach the supermarket checkout immediately look for the shortest queue, weigh up what each person has before deciding which queue to join. One only has a single person which a large trolley full of groceries, another has several people, all with only a few items, which queue do you join? But then things don't run smooth whichever queue you join. The person in front of you, had to find their purse or wallet which is in the bottom of the bag they have just packed. Then their card doesn't work right and all the time you are getting more and more frustrated. Why can't people be ready to pay, they know they are going to have to, so why not get their payment method ready even before the checkout assistant starts pushing things through. I'm sure it's not just me that gets impatient.

As we start these next four reflections on patience, I decided to look up the definition. Here are three I found, all expressing similar themes, but all bringing a different slant on patience.

- the capacity to accept or tolerate delay, problems, or suffering without becoming annoyed or anxious (Online dictionary)
- the ability to wait, or to continue doing something despite difficulties, or to suffer without complaining or becoming annoyed: (Cambridge Dictionary)
- the quality of being able to stay calm and not get annoyed especially when something takes a long time.(Collins Dictionary)

The first thing you notice is the initial comment, the capacity, ability and quality. Patience is not just one of these, it is a combination of the three. Our capacity is our reservoir of patience, our ability is something that we are naturally gifted in, (some more than others) and the quality is its beauty. These three things form together to describe our measure of patience, and we all have a measure for all in us, for we have been created in the image of God and God is patient.

Being patient isn't just manifest in waiting, but as we can see above, it's remaining calm, untroubled, not getting angry in the face difficulties, problems, sufferings, and I'll add another, injustice. Things wind us up, cause anger and frustration to rise, for judgement and condemnation to manifest, sometimes even small things, checkout queues, bad drivers etc. All test our patience. Aren't you thankful that God is not like us?

Our verse today, simply says love is patient. We see this with a parent and a child, especially a young child learning to walk. Love supports, encourages, doesn't get impatient at the slow progress, but delights in each tiny step the child takes. Love is the motivation that brings out the patience within us.

In our scripture, we can substitute the word love with the word God, because as we saw in our reflections on love that God is love. He doesn't get annoyed and impatient waiting for us to return to Him. He endured suffering and pain when Jesus died on the cross for us, when Jesus became sin for us. Throughout all our lives, all our difficulties, all our failures He doesn't get annoyed at us, frustrated with us, abandon us and move on to the next person. In love He is patient with us, He never gives up on us and silently suffered for us.

REFLECTION

Consider your life and all its failures and sins, then reflect on how God has been with you. When you came to him, did he turn you away? When you confessed, did he condemn? Did he get impatient waiting for you to come to Him? Thank him for this patient dealing with you.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I am overwhelmed by Your love for me. Your love is unconditional, unwavering, patient and everlasting. Thank You for loving me even when I fall short and for always being there to lift me up. Thank you that you are patient with me, that you never give up on me. Forgive me when I have been slow to come to you in my troubles and sins, Thank you that you wait patiently for me and welcome me when I come.

Amen

Day 17

SLOW TO ANGER

And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD,
the LORD, the compassionate and gracious
God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness,
Exodus 34 v 6

In the UK alone approximately 11.5 billion sandwiches are sold each year, yes you read that right, 11.5 billion. Sandwiches are important to the British economy and who doesn't love a good sandwich. It starts with the bread, white, brown, wholemeal, sourdough, gluten free to name a few. Then you come to the fillings, cheese and onion, tuna mayo, ham salad, chicken and stuffing and BLT. These are the basic but then you get onto the more fancy fillings. If you add that the fancy fillings that are now available and wraps and burgers which are a form of sandwich the range available is massive. They are easy to make and are the staple diet of many a lunch box. We all have our favourites according to our personal preferences and even this can vary according to the mood we are in.

Why talk about sandwiches, if you look closely at the declaration of God about himself, we can see a sandwich, gracious and compassionate on one side and loving and faithful on the other. In the middle is this statement, slow to anger. This revelation is repeated time and time again throughout the Old Testament, sometimes when people are describing God, others when he describes himself. Imagine if it said the opposite; that he is quick to anger, how that would totally undermine the other revelations he makes about himself. It is just like someone who continually loses their temper, and are quick to get angry but tries to say all the time, I love you. You would quickly get to a place of not believing the words as the actions prove differently.

It is his declaration that he will treat us with patience because of his amazing love for us. He does get angry, angry at injustice, angry at

hypocrisy and idolatry and we even see Jesus getting angry, but even in his anger it is sandwiched between love and compassion. We can be very intolerant with people, and allow small things to get us annoyed, which is often the starting place for anger. Imagine if God responded as we do, we can immediately get angry at a total stranger who happens to jump the queue in a traffic jam or at the checkout. Often we are more tolerant with the people we know than with strangers, and that is because of friendship, love and affection. If we are like that, then, how much more will God be patient with us, for he knows us completely and passionately loves us.

Some people actually see God as an angry God, quick to judge and punish. They interpret things that might go wrong in their lives, or even interpret world tragedies as judgement from God, but they are so wrong. God will one day judge the world, but Jesus made it perfectly clear that isn't now and it not while He came.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him (John 3 v 17)

We see an amazing picture of God's patience and His heart after the resurrection of Jesus. Before He commissions the disciples He makes this revelation, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." (Matthew 28 v 18) He had the authority to judge those that had condemned Him to death, that had treated Him with injustice, but He didn't. Rather we see His disciples sharing the gospel message, the message of salvation with those same people. Such is His love.

REFLECTION

Just spend time considering the last time you got angry, was it something small that stirred that anger? What feeling did it stir within you? Now imagine God in that same situation, how would He respond?

PRAYER

Thank you Father that you do not respond to my failings like I do with other people. You are slow to anger at my failings and sin. You are patient with me and always respond in love towards me. Forgive my impatience and help me to be more like you. Help me to forgive as you do and to speak blessing as you do, even with those that curse and hurt me. Grow your patience in me for your glory.

Amen

Day 18

HE WAITS PATIENTLY

So he got up and went to his father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

Luke 15 v 20

Abraham was given a promise by God that he would have a son through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed. This was a remarkable promise as his wife who was already 65 was barren and had never bore him a child. Still Abraham believed, or at least for a while but then as the years passed, impatience sets in and before long Abraham and Sarah decide on a different course of action to help God fulfil his promise. So Sarah gave Abraham her servant and through her they had a son, Ishmael, but it was not the son of promise. That would come later when it appeared totally impossible with Sarah being 90 and Abraham 100. If things take a long time we can get so impatient, but thankfully God isn't like that.

Our scripture today is part of the wonderful parable of the prodigal son that Jesus told. The son had turned his back on his father, in fact he had shamed him with his request for his inheritance. It's as though he already counted his father dead. Then he disappears, for how long we do not know, but it could have been years. But what the story shows is a father patiently waiting for his son to return. He hopes, maybe even expects it happen. Then we read this amazing response of the father. When he was still a long way off his father saw him. When I imagine this scene, I picture a cowboy ranch and the father sat on the front porch, looking into the distance, day after day waiting patiently for the moment when he will see his son again.

Again we see the sandwich we looked at yesterday, compassion, slow to anger and love and forgiveness. He patiently waits until we are ready to respond. When I was ten years old I attended a youth club run

by my elder brother. Each week he would share a five minute message at the end of the night. It was always the same message, “you must be born again.” (John 3 v 3). I listened, I laughed, I fooled about for two years hearing the same thing week after week. Thankfully God was patiently waiting till I was ready to respond. My brother never gave up, even though no one responded. He was God’s representative and demonstrated the patience and passion of God towards me. Then one night, the light came on and I knew I needed to accept Christ as my Lord and Saviour. God patiently waited for me.

We are the ones, like Abraham that get impatient, impatient to see the promises he has made to us fulfilled and then we push and strive to make things happen and move from a position of trust into works. John Ortberg, pastor, author and podcast host tells about a time he asked Dallas Willard how to be spiritually healthy in the midst of a demanding schedule. After a long pause, Willard said, “You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.” We expect everything instantly and we are quick to lose patience when that doesn’t happen. We are always in a hurry for things to happen. Thankfully God isn’t.

Just look at the prophecies concerning the coming of Jesus and God’s plan for salvation. Thousands of years passed between the first prophecy in Genesis 3 and Jesus eventually coming. God was not in a hurry. He patiently waits the appointed time.

“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3 v 9)

REFLECTION

Consider your own life and how long it took you till you came to the place where you entered into that personal relationship with God. Maybe you spent years living your life like the prodigal son before you came to that place where you turned to God. He never gave up on you, he waited patiently for you.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, I am grateful for Your patience with me. There are times when I fall short, but You are slow to anger and rich in love. Thank You for giving me time to grow, to learn, and to draw closer to You. I am thankful for Your gentle corrections and for the grace You extend each day. Your patience teaches me to be patient with others. I praise You for Your enduring love.

Amen

Day 19

THE APPOINTED TIME

Then the LORD replied:
"Write down the revelation
and make it plain on tablets
so that a herald may run with it.
For the revelation awaits an appointed time;
it speaks of the end
and will not prove false.
Though it linger, wait for it;
it will certainly come and will not delay.
Habakkuk 2 v 2 – 3

They always tell you the same thing when you book a flight, get to the airport at least two hours before your flight time. Now depending on the time of your flight and the airport you are flying from two hours can either be cutting it tight or is far too early. An early morning flight from terminal 3 at Manchester Airport is always hectic, whereas a flight from Shannon Airport is a breeze. I try to avoid the rush times but I still arrive two hours early just in case. But then comes the wait. The flight will leave at an appointed time, so it's just sit and wait. In such circumstances have you noticed time slows down? I keep getting up to check the board for the gate number, but time and time again all it says is stay in the lounge. I have to wait the appointed time. It's easy to get impatient, restless and irritable, but nothing will change that time, wait you must.

We touched on this yesterday as God waited the appointed time to bring salvation to the earth through his Son. Another time has been set, this time for the return of his Son to earth. God has appointed a time and until that day he waits. No one knows the time of his return, not even the Son. We have been given signs as clues to the day nearing but we must wait.

“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. (Matthew 24 v 36 – 37)

In the meantime God never alters his mind, never changes the date, he is never in a rush. In the days of Noah it says that every intent of the heart of man was evil, (Genesis 6 v 5) so it will be when Christ returns but in the meantime He waits and extends his compassion, love, grace and forgiveness to mankind.

For he says; “In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you; I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation.” (2 Corinthians 6 v 2)

We are living in the day of God's favour and salvation because he patiently waits. His desire is all should be saved and he waits, giving mankind time to respond. As he waited two years for me to respond to his call, so he waits patiently in love, whilst His Spirit moves across the earth calling mankind to Himself.

REFLECTION

Have you ever considered that one day, on a date unknown to man, Christ is going to return to earth and take those that are His to be with himself. Generation after generation of believers have looked forward to that day and still we wait. It could be tomorrow, it could be in centuries from now. What are you going to do in the meantime whilst you wait, how do you choose to live your life?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, I know that one day you will return to earth, that you await the appointed time. Thank you for giving me time to follow

*you and to draw closer to you day by day. Help me to be ready
for your return.*

Amen

EVERLASTING KINDNESS

In a surge of anger
I hid my face from you for a moment,
but with everlasting kindness
I will have compassion on you,”
says the LORD your Redeemer.
Isaiah 54 v 8

When I started to look at this subject of kindness, little did I realise its importance in life. We all like to be on the receiving end of someone's kindness, whether it is a massive act or a small gesture, kindness impacts our lives. But what do we actually mean when we speak of kindness. This is a definition I found which I think covers what kindness is. “Kindness is the sincere and voluntary use of one's time, talent, and resources to better the lives of others, one's own life, and the world through genuine acts of love, compassion, generosity, and service.” Worldly studies have shown the following benefits of kindness.

- It improves mental health
- It helps reduce stress
- It has physical health benefits
- It enhances relationships
- It increases happiness
- It prolongs life

Kindness touches mankind, physically, mentally and emotionally in a positive way, so if we never experience kindness it will also affect us physically, mentally and emotionally. We can add to that, as Christians, spiritually. God's kindness towards us, touches all these areas. Kindness is the fifth fruit of the Holy Spirit mentioned in Galatians five, it is another attribute of the character and nature of God. The original Greek word interpreted kindness gives us an insight into its fuller meaning, its origin is in words that mean useful, profitable, both of

which true kindness are. This speaks of the heart of God towards us, when he displays his kindness toward us, it is both useful and profitable for us to receive it. Just looking at the benefits of kindness above, kindness is certainly profitable, of great benefit to our lives.

In the verse above we see a quality of God's kindness that can't be said of any other, that it is everlasting. It is continual, eternal, never ending. He isn't kind one day then the next, once his mood has changed and he becomes a vengeful angry God. That's just not possible. Again if we go back to Paul's explanation of the nature of love as we did with patience, after he said love is patience, he says "love is kind" (1 Corinthians 13 v 4). We already know the God is love, that his eternal nature, so his eternal nature is one of kindness. His kindness is eternal, because it is part of who He is and He is eternal. He cannot be anything but kind towards us, for to be so is to deny who He is.

When we speak of someone being kind, meaning they are nice people that do good things, but when we dilute kindness to niceness we miss out on its power to transform lives. Saying God is kind can seem weak, a poor reflection of who he is, but that is because of our lack of understanding of kindness. In the next three reflections we will explore the beauty of God's kindness towards us.

REFLECTION

What comes to mind when you think of the kindness of God? Can you think of any incidents in your life where you can say God has been kind to you? Did you realise it at the time and what was your response? Did you take it for granted or were you thankful and expressed your gratitude? Give thanks for His kindness towards you.

PRAYER

Father, I thank you for your everlasting kindness towards me. Open my eyes to see your kindness in my life. Forgive me for when I've taken

your kindness for granted or failed to see it. Thank you that your kindness towards me is continual and eternal. Give me understanding to know the fullness of your kindness towards me.

In the name of Jesus,

Amen

Day 21

GOD SHOWS HIS KINDNESS

“He gives his king great victories;
he shows unfailing kindness to his anointed,
to David and his descendants forever.”

2 Samuel 22 v 51

There is a World War II story that shows how the smallest deed can make all the difference. During the last months of the War, the British conducted daily bombing raids over Berlin. One night the bombers were attacked by a large group of German fighter planes. During the dogfight one of the Bomber Planes got separated from the protection of British Fighter Planes. They watched helplessly as a German Fighter Plane came within range. Bullets whizzed by over and over until five bullets slammed into the fuselage of the bomber near the gas tank. The crew braced for the explosion, but it never came. Fuel poured from the bullet holes, but there was no explosion. After landing, a mechanic handed the pilot 5 bullets he had pulled from the plane. The pilot carefully opened the shells. They were empty --- except for a tiny wad of paper with a note that read: "We are Polish POWS forced to make bullets. When guards do not look, we do not fill with powder. Is not much, but is best we can do." Five tiny bullets, made by a few weak and lowly prisoners ... but for the Crew of that British Bomber it made all the difference.

Kindness is a virtue that requires expression, it requires action to be taken. As we saw in the story above, a small act of kindness can have massive implications. Kindness is not passive. You cannot say of a person, they are kind unless it is demonstrated their in words or actions. The same can be said of God, His kindness can be seen. David, a humble shepherd boy, considered insignificant by his own father when the prophet comes to anoint a future king. But he wasn't insignificant to God, God looked on His heart and choose him. Then He gave him great victories, victories that cannot be attributed to David's fighting prowess or his physical stature, in fact His enemy

Goliath considered him a dog. But David won the battle. Many more battles followed which David won and the verse reveals why. It was the unfailing kindness of God that made the difference.

Yesterday we saw that God's kindness is eternal, everlasting, today we can add another adjective to describe it, the NIV Bible describes it as unfailing. Maybe you have experienced a situation where you have acted in kindness, only for the person you have shown kindness to, to fail to see it or acknowledge it. You were kind but your actions failed. Sometime we do things which we think are acts of kindness, we are trying to help but rather than being seen to help we are seen as interfering, taking over, undermining etc. Our acts of kindness fail. But with God that never happens. His kindness towards us never fails because he knows us, he knows our needs, he knows what will be useful and profitable to us.

His kindness towards us is one of the keys to repentance. We can take it for granted and it fails to lead us a change in our thinking which is what repentance is.

Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness,
forbearance and patience, not realizing that
God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?
(Romans 2 v 4)

If you want to win the heart of someone, kindness is one of those things that you will show. God reveals his kindness towards us to win our hearts, to draw us to himself. He isn't passive, he acts.

REFLECTION

Think of a time when you saw God's kindness shown to you, whether that be in healing, provision, direction, wisdom etc. How did you respond to that kindness? Did it draw you closer to Him? Did your understanding of Him change?

PRAYER

Thank you Father for your kindness towards me. Thank you that your kindness never fails. Grant me a greater understanding of your kindness and its out workings towards me. Help me not to miss those small acts of kindness you show, those answers to prayers, those small provisions as well as the big acts of kindness. Help me change my thinking about you so that I can see your kindness in greater measure than ever before.

Amen

Day 22

KINDNESS REVEALED IN HARD PLACES

Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined.

But while Joseph was there in the prison, the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favour in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there.

Genesis 39 v 20 - 22

Of all the people in the Bible who could question God's kindness, Joseph would be one of those people. God spoke to Joseph in two dreams and tells him he will be a ruler and that one day even his brothers, mother and father would bow down to Him. What a calling he had on his life, but it doesn't take him on the journey he would have imagined. Firstly he is beaten and nearly killed by his brothers then sold as a slave into a foreign land. That doesn't look like God is being kind to him. Then he is brought by Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials and he starts to prosper, so much so, Potiphar puts him in charge of his whole house. Just when things are going well, he is falsely accused of trying sleep with Potiphar's wife and then he is thrown into prison. Again where is the kindness of God in that situation? Then in prison he finds favour, interprets two of Pharaoh's servants dream correctly and he sees an opportunity, maybe he will be freed but the servant forgets about Joseph for another couple of years. Even so, it states that God showed him kindness in the prison.

Sometimes we might find ourselves in situations which would be best described as being terrible, but in the middle of that terrible place we encounter something of the kindness of God. When we decide what the kindness of God should look like, we can easily miss it and instead of being thankful for what he is doing, we complain. Imagine you are that fruitful branch on the vine, you are really prospering and then God comes along with his pruning tools and starts to cut away at you. It's painful as you watch part of you be cut off for what you consider no

valid reason at all. But God is a gardener and the reason He cuts at the fruitful branches is so they can be even more fruitful. The reason Joseph took the journey he did was to position Him to be second in command over the whole of Egypt, a prosperous powerful nation at the time.

Some of God's kindness is only realised as we look back on our lives and see how His hand and His leading has led us to a place of blessing. Is it kind to discipline your child? Hard as it sometimes feels, it is necessary for their long term growth. The writer of Hebrews makes this point clearly

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12 v 7 – 11)

If God just left us to our own ways, he would not be being kind towards us. But like Joseph in prison, we can still experience the kindness and favour of God in the middle of our difficulties and pain. In those difficult places in our lives God in His kindness is still at work in you to bring out the best in us. The point I'm making, the kindness of God doesn't always feel nice, but as we trust Him and surrender ourselves to Him we will see what He is doing. Remember this promise.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Romans 8 v 28)

REFLECTION

Look back at a difficult situation you came through. Can you see God's kindness at work in that situation? If not, ask Him to reveal it to you.

PRAYER

Father, Your word tells me that Your ways are higher than my ways and Your thoughts higher than my thoughts. Help me to see Your kindness at work in my life in all situations, even in the painful ones. Help me to trust You, like a child who trust their parents, especially when I don't understand. Help me to remember you are kind, just as you are love, that kindness is part of your eternal nature.

Thank you for your kindness towards me

Amen

Day 23

HE LEADS IN KINDNESS

It was I who taught Ephraim to walk,
taking them by the arms;
but they did not realize
it was I who healed them.
I led them with cords of human kindness,
with ties of love;
I lifted the yoke from their neck
and bent down to feed them.
Hosea 11 v 3 - 4

Those of a certain generation will remember the days when you put your children in reins. You don't see them the same now. Probably because most people drive everywhere; just one look at any nursery and you will see this. Reins/ harnesses are straps you put round your child to help them to walk independently but where you still have control over them. They are considered good for the child as it allows them to strengthen and enjoy their legs whilst maintaining safety. If they try to walk out into the road, you can restrain them and protect them. As of 2019, rule 4 of the Highway Code recommended that parents or caregivers use child harnesses (reins) for very young pedestrians children when walking alongside or crossing roads as a possible alternative to a pushchair to ensure safety. Basically reins/harnesses are a kind way of helping a child develop whilst maintaining safety.

As I read the scripture above I see this same picture, God gently teaching Ephraim to walk. He puts a harness on them, limits what they can do for their own safety and so they can grow strong. This is how God demonstrates his kindness. He knows each one of us, our limits, our capabilities and he leads us gently and with kindness if we are only willing to follow him and submit to his ways and leadings. Things start to get difficult when like a small child, we decide we want to go our own way and we find the way blocked. We can have a tantrum with God, rebel and kick up a fuss, but gently he seeks to restore and comfort and put us on the right track again. The restraints we

sometimes feel are his restraints of love and care. He knows our future.

Proverbs 16 v 9

In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps.

Proverbs 19 v 21

Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.

When I was in my late 30's I had just left a church and felt I should start a new church a few miles from the original church. I had previously had a calling from God to feed his sheep so with this calling I was convinced this was the right thing to do. But this was my plan, God had other things for me, things I could not get see. Thankfully in his kindness he gently corrected my course and led me in a different direction. As I look back at my life, I am so thankful that he did. I wasn't prepared, wasn't equipped and had issues in my life which would have caused problems, particularly the need for control. He didn't scream at me, tell me I was wrong, rather he carefully opened a new door before me and invited me in.

He always wants the best for us, such is his heart towards us. Kindness as we saw at the beginning of our reflections is always for the benefit of others. So when it says he leads us in kindness it is always for our benefit even though sometimes we fail to see it.

REFLECTION

Spend some time considering how God led the children of Israel through the wilderness and how he displayed his kindness towards them. What lessons can you learn from the children of Israel which can be applied to your life?

PRAYER

Thank you Father that you treat me, your precious child, with great love and kindness. Thank you that your desire for me is always for me to grow in your love and security. Thank you that you gave me your Holy Spirit to lead me and guide me. Thank you that you lead in kindness. Help me to see your leading and your kindness in my lives.

Amen.

Day 24

HE IS GOOD.

When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the LORD above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave thanks to the Lord, saying, "He is good; his love endures forever."

2 Chronicles 7 v 3

When I was a school, there was one word I hoped for to be written on top of my homework when it had been marked. That word was 'excellent.' That reflected an outstanding piece of work, something that reflected what the teacher was looking for. It was rarely achieved, but I did get a few 'good' written on top of the page. Good was a step down from excellent. This early exposure to the word good has stayed with me and good is very much the okay of today. A meal can be good, the weather can be good, you can look good but good is not the best. Good is acceptable, but when we encounter outstanding, good fades into the background. We are less likely to talk about something that we have enjoyed that was good, whereas we will rave about something that is outstanding.

This is where our language can rob us of the richness of scripture, we can read 'God is good' and sort of see him as mediocre, alright, average when he is far from that. His goodness is so great that he cannot even display it all to man. Excellent, outstanding, awesome are inadequate words to describe God's goodness towards us.

Moses encounters God on Mount Sinai and he asks God to show him his glory. You can read the whole story in Exodus 33 and 34. In response to Moses God tells him "I will cause my goodness to pass before you." His goodness is his glory. But Moses is hid by God in the cleft of a rock until he has passed by so that all he sees is his back and hears his declaration about himself. I think we will all agree that the glory of God is something magnificent, overwhelming, beyond our

imagination. Now substitute the word glory for goodness. His goodness towards us, if manifest in all its power and glory would be overwhelming, it is beyond our imagination.

The children of Israel connected his glory with him being good as we saw above. What preceded this outpouring of the glory of God was the dedication of the temple by Solomon and the priests. Solomon prays

“Now arise, LORD God, and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might. May your priests, LORD God, be clothed with salvation, may your faithful people rejoice in your goodness. (2 Chronicles 6 v 41)

So how should we define God's goodness? Finding words adequate enough to express what God's goodness is, is hard because of the different aspects of its nature. Here is one definition I read which I feel begins to describe it. “Divine goodness is the overflowing bounty of God by which he communicates blessing to his creation and to his creatures. God's goodness is the opposite of harshness and cruelty. To experience divine goodness is to enjoy the sweetness, friendliness, benevolence, and generosity of God.” (Kevin DeYoung). I love the phrase, the overflowing bounty because it speaks of God's goodness being shown to mankind. God's goodness isn't just a passive part of his character, it is also manifest towards us. We explore further this in the next few days.

REFLECTION

When you read God is good, what image comes to mind? Do you think it correctly represents God's goodness?

PRAYER

Father, forgive me for the many times I have song and spoken those words, you are good and have never connected with what that means.

I have expressed words without understanding or seeking understanding. Thank you for your great goodness towards me, goodness I don't deserve. Help me to see that you manifest your glory in your manifestation of goodness towards your children. Open my eyes that I might see your goodness in my life.

In Jesus name

Amen

ABUNDANT GOODNESS

One generation will commend your works to another;
they will tell of your mighty acts.
They will speak of the glorious splendour of your majesty,
and I will meditate on your wonderful works.
They will tell of the power of your awesome works,
and I will proclaim your great deeds.
They will celebrate your abundant goodness
and joyfully sing of your righteousness.
The LORD is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and rich in love.
The LORD is good to all;
he has compassion on all he has made.
Psalms 145 v 4 - 9

Since the introduction of social media, the ability to communicate news is so easy. Facebook, Instagram, Tik Toc, Snapchat, the list goes on, all instantly communicated with friends and family news. We live at a time when we can communicate our whole life to people all over the world at the push of a button without speaking a word. Most post the best, communicating a message that everything is good all the time. They post, they boast, images for all to see, all that they enjoy, all that is great. It has taken over the lives of people, from the moment they wake to going to sleep it can dominate lives completely. But communication hasn't always been like today.

In the Psalm above we read of 7 different methods of communication. Seven things he encourages us to do. To commend, that is to praise formally and officially, to tell, to speak, to meditate, to proclaim, to celebrate and to joyfully sing. The subject of all these forms of communication, God's abundant goodness manifest in the things he does and his heart towards us. One form of communication is inadequate to communicate the fullness of that goodness. The

psalmists is effectively telling us to continually find a way to talk and communicate God's goodness to others.

The psalmist also describes the nature of God's goodness, using the word abundant. The word abundant used in the scripture is frequently used to describe abundance or greatness in both quantitative and qualitative terms. The psalmists is encouraging us to speak of the vastness of God's goodness and its amazing beautiful quality. They point to his glorious splendour, wonderful and awesome works, his mighty deeds, his compassion, grace and love as examples of his goodness towards the children of God. The hearers would be familiar with the stories of the children of Israel's deliverance to the day when the kingdom is established under David. They would also be familiar with God's compassion, grace, and power towards their ancestors, how God never abandoned them even when they rebelled and turned to other god's. He still remained faithful; to His word and continually showed them compassion and love. In it all both his character and his actions towards his children were good and his goodness was abundant.

REFLECTION

Consider the various stories concerning the children of Israel from their slavery in Egypt to the establishment of the kingdom under David and Solomon. In what areas do you see God's goodness manifest. Now consider your own story, your own journey. Are there similarities to the children of Israel's journey and can you see God's goodness manifest in your life.

PRAYER

I thank you Father that your generous extravagant heart towards me is expressed in your goodness, both in the way you treat me and the things you do. You do mighty deeds for the benefit of your children. In your goodness you are compassionate and gracious towards me even

when I mess up. Help me to see and speak of your goodness so that others may see and come to know you.

Amen.

Day 26

IN GOODNESS GOD CALLED YOU

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

2 Peter 1 v 3 - 4

At 17 years old, I joined Derbyshire police force as a police cadet. At 18½ years old, I became a fully qualified police constable. During my final training at Police Headquarters, I was chosen, out of all the new recruits and the other police officers working at the headquarters, along with a police woman to be photographed and become the face of Derbyshire Police in its recruiting campaign. Little did I realise when photographs were being taken, that my face would be plastered all over giant billboards in Derbyshire, on the back of buses and in magazine. It was a great honour and privilege to be chosen. I was called out of learning for a while, whilst photographs were taken. Seeing my face on billboards certainly made me feel good. It was a great feeling to be singled out and called.

It is so easy to think that we came to God and miss the fact, that he called us in the first place and that all we were doing was responding to His calling. He was the one that put that thought in your mind you call out to Him when you were in desperate need. He was the one that convicted you of your sin and revealed to you, you needed a saviour. He was the one that started you on your journey by planting the thought to try church. The circumstances surrounding us coming to him will be varied and personal, but in each case, it is Him that does the calling and something inside of us responds. We don't deserve to be called, for we have all fallen short of God's glory, but in His goodness, love and compassion he calls us.

Peter reveals the something of the nature of God's goodness in our calling in that it comes with divine power, knowledge, promises and an invitation to participate in the divine nature of God and to escape the corruption of the world. What's the point of being called to something impossible, if it is made impossible because we are not given the tools to do what we are called to. It's like asking a man to build a house but giving him no tools or materials. That would be cruel and frustrating. God in his goodness is not like that, in His goodness, when he calls us He gives us all that is necessary to walk in that calling.

With that calling comes promises, many promises. Here is one that again reflects God's goodness towards us.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Romans 8 v 28)

But as Peter reveals, it isn't just being equipped, God's goodness goes beyond just equipping, it comes with an invitation to participate in His divine nature, not just to imitate him, be like him but to become part of Him. For his nature to be ours. As Jesus prayed.

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. (John 17 v 20 – 21)

Such is the goodness of God's calling, that we might be one with Him as Christ is one with Him.

REFLECTION

Take time to think how you came to know God personally. Can you see God's goodness manifest in your calling? Take time to thank Him for drawing you to Himself.

PRAYER

Father, I ask that You may give me the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know You better. I pray that the eyes of my heart may be enlightened in order that I may know the hope to which you has called me, the riches of your glorious inheritance in his holy people, and your incomparably great power for me when I believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength you exerted when you raised Christ from the dead and seated him at your right hand in the heavenly realms.

Amen

Based on Ephesians 1 v 17 - 20

Day 27

PURSUED BY GOODNESS

Surely goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.

Psalms 23 v 6

An event in the Olympics which Great Britain is particularly good at, in both the men's and women's event, and at which we regularly win medals is the individual pursuit. The individual pursuit is a track cycling event where two cyclists begin the race from a stationary position on opposite sides of an oval track. The men's event is held over four kilometres and the women's event over three kilometres. The riders start at the same time and set off in pursuit of each other. At such an elite level one rarely catches the other so the race is decided by who is closest to the other rider. In the men's event, for 16 laps, the riders pursue each other. It's fast, it's full on and there is no let up. For a full, approximate 4 minutes at elite level you are pursued by the other rider whilst at the same time you are pursuing them. Imagine being chased like that.

Why do I speak of being pursued? When you look back into the original language in which the Psalm was written, the Hebrew word interpreted follow in the scripture above full meaning is to pursue, to chase after, to persecute. It is used 140 times in the Old Testament and only on this one occasion is it interpreted follow. Generally it is used in a negative sense, like an enemy pursuing after you or, for example, the armies of Israel pursuing after their enemies to inflict punishment and defeat. It's connection to the word persecute gives you an idea as to its general nature. It therefore seems a strange word that David uses in connection with the goodness of God. Surely God's goodness is not something negative, something to run away from although many do.

By using the word pursue, David is speaking of God's relentless pursuit of us, with a view to pour out His goodness and mercy upon us. It's full on and there is no let up, in fact David tells us that he pursues us for the purpose of expressing his goodness and mercy all the days of our life. It is an amazing thing to see and clearly shows the heart of God, our Father, towards His children. Have you ever been in that situation where you have gone out for coffee with a friend and they insist on paying all the time. Even though you argue, they are persistent in their desire to pay and therefore bless you. This is in a small way like the heart of God, he consistently want us to know his goodness.

His goodness, as we saw in Day 24 is the overflowing bounty of God by which he communicates blessings to His creation and creatures. God's goodness is the opposite of harshness and cruelty. To experience divine goodness is to enjoy the sweet friendliness, benevolence and generosity of God. God is pursuing after you with this goodness and he won't stop, such is his nature.

On this occasion, His goodness is connected with His mercy through which we know salvation. Look what Paul says;

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. (Ephesians 2 v 3 – 5)

REFLECTION

It is easy to imagine and end up in fear of something or someone pursuing us to bring us harm. Instead of thinking on the negative, consider how God is pursuing you with a view to bless you. Maybe you need to stop running and let him catch you.

PRAYER

Father, I find it hard to grasp that your goodness pursues after me. So often I feel I don't deserve it. Help me to see that it is not about who I am but about who you are. Forgive me when I am running my life so fast, so full that I haven't time to stop and receive the goodness you want to show me. Open my eyes to see your goodness manifest in my life. Thank you for it.

Amen

LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS

And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."

Exodus 34 v 6 - 7

If you were asked to describe yourself, not just your physical appearance, rather the person God created you to be, what would you say about yourself. Some people would struggle to say anything positive about themselves due to poor self esteem and image. Others might be boastful and exaggerate qualities that are there in a very small way or even speak of things that are not really there, just wishful thinking on their part. Not existent. Often to get the truth of who you are, your true personality and qualities you need to ask your closest friends, your family, those people who truly love you and know you best. They are the ones that see the real you. I was once given a list of qualities that described me, some of which I didn't see in myself, but others did. Some were connected to my character, which meant they could change, but others related to my personality, the person God created me to be. The qualities they described were the truth about me.

God does not lie, he always speaks truth. So when he makes the above declaration about Himself to Moses he is speaking the truth about who He is and what He is like. He is compassionate, gracious, patient, loving, faithful, forgiving and just. God declares Himself as being faithful. So what do we mean by being faithful? At its core, faithfulness in the Bible refers to loyalty, steadfastness, and the unwavering commitment to fulfil promises and obligations. The Hebrew word for faithfulness, '*emunah*', connotes reliability and trustworthiness. Because He is constant or faithful in keeping His promises, and therefore he is worthy of trust.

It is interesting to note that God's declaration of faithfulness is sandwiched between abounding in love and maintaining love to thousands. At the heart of true faithfulness is his love. They go together as the Psalmists reveals.

Love and faithfulness meet together;
righteousness and peace kiss each other.
Faithfulness springs forth from the earth,
and righteousness looks down from heaven. (Psalm 85 v 10 – 11)

Faithfulness is connected to relationship. We speak of people being faithful in their relationship or being unfaithful. Faithfulness brings security, trust, peace and love. It's a beautiful thing to know and live with but unfaithfulness brings heart ache, pain, hurt, suspicion, turmoil, insecurity and mistrust, to name a few of the consequences of unfaithfulness. Trust is at the heart of any good relationship, it is often hard to build and quick to break. Thankfully God is always faithful, it is part of His eternal nature. His faithfulness towards us means that we can trust Him with our lives and He will never fail us. But choosing to trust is a decision we have to choose to take. However regardless of what we are like he remains faithful.

if we are faithless, he remains faithful,
for he cannot disown himself. (2 Timothy 2 v 13)

REFLECTION.

How would you define faithfulness? Do you think your definition adequately describes God's faithfulness towards all He has promised.

PRAYER

*Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father;
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not;*

As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.

Great is Thy faithfulness!

Great is Thy faithfulness!

Morning by morning new mercies I see:

All I have needed Thy hand hath provided—

Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Amen

Day 29

HE DOES NOT CHANGE

“I the LORD do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.

Malachi 3 v 6

One of our boys whilst still a toddler was also very strong willed and certainly knew what they wanted. The one thing that fascinated him was the fire; it seemed to appeal to him so he would stand up and then wobble over on his tiny legs towards it. He knew by this time the meaning of “no” but with the fire it made no difference, it was as if he never heard. He would continue to get closer and closer and the only thing that would stop him was direct intervention and to remove him away from the fire. But whilst this stopped him for a minute or two, very soon he would be up on his feet again moving purposely toward the fire. This continued for a while, each time him being removed before he could be burnt. We never turned our back on him, rejected him for his disobedience, he was and is our son.

The children of Israel continually repeated their failings, from immediately after the time of Joshua right through to their return from exile from Babylon. After Joshua we read this statement.

“After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel.” (Judges 2:10).

So throughout the book of Judges, we read of them turning to idolatry, ending up in a mess, crying out to God and God sending a deliverer. The pattern continues as we enter the period of the kings, bad kings who turned to idolatry followed by good kings who followed the ways of God, until eventually they are carried off to Babylon, into exile. Even Solomon, the wisest of all the kings, started life well following after God then going into idolatry. But throughout the history of the children of Israel, from their miraculous deliverance from Egypt right through to

this present day, God has not turned His back on His people or abandoned them.

As we have seen, He is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. He doesn't change regardless of the actions of people. He is the same with us, He remains a loving Father who wants the best for His children. This is one aspect of faithfulness. The phrase faithful friend now day's is often connected to a pet, a dog or cat. They remain the same whether we have had a good day or bad, they are not bothered by the mood we are in, they are always there for their owners. The same can be said about a true friend, they are always there for us, they don't change like children in a playground, I'm your friend today and tomorrow I'm not.

This quality of faithfulness is revealed in Jesus. The writer of Hebrews puts it this way;

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” (Hebrews 13 v 8).

God declares it in another way as He reveals himself to John.

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God,
“who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”
(Revelation 1 v 8)

God does not change, as Bill Johnson, Pastor of Bethel Church, Reading said, “God is in a good mood.” His own goodness and love keep Him in a good mood, which of course in a human concept, but one we understand. His mood is not determined by external factors, such as the way we behave, rather by his character of goodness and love. He is faithful and does not change.

REFLECTION

Spend time considering the story of the children of Israel and how they continually failed God, but God never abandoned them, and neither does he abandon us when we fail.

PRAYER

Father God

You have shown yourself faithful throughout Scripture. Thank you for being faithful in my life too. Forgive me for all those times I have doubted you in the past and at times, taken things into my own hands, and not trusted you with my situation. You love me and want the best for me. Your love for me is immeasurable and unconditional. You never change

Thank you

Amen.

Day 30

FAITHFUL TO HIS PROMISES

Your word, LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens.

Psalm 119 v 89

Have you ever made a promise that afterwards you wish you hadn't because you know, deep down that you are not going to be able to keep it. That promise that said, "I will be there", even though you have already got another appointment booked, it's just you had forgotten about it. Or I promise "I will return it," only to find years later you still have it in your possession. Words can easily come out of our mouths without consideration of the implications. Then there is the other side of the picture, where someone makes a promise to you only for them to break it sometime later. For example; "I'm telling you in confidence, promise you won't tell anyone." Only to find that others soon know all about it. It hurts when people break promises and it can wound us deeply inside. Thankfully God is faithful to his promises.

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. (Hebrews 10 v 23)

One of the key elements to a good relationship is trust and part of that is being able to trust what a person says. That is being able to trust what they say is true and also that they will do what they say. God does not lie, he is always true and therefore what he says is always true. There is no falsehood in God. Sometimes our understanding of his word is poor and unclear so we question what he says, but our lack does not alter that fact that His word is truth. Not only can we trust what he says, what he promises is truth, but we can also trust that he is faithful to His promises. Whilst we might fail to fulfil our promise to Him, he never fails to fulfil His promises to us.

David in Psalm 119 continually refers to the promises of God and reminds God what he has promised to do.

- May your unfailing love come to me, LORD, your salvation, according to your promise (verse 41)
- Be gracious to me according to your promise. (verse 58)
- May your unfailing love be my comfort, according to your promise (verse 76)
- Sustain me, my God, according to your promise (verse 116)
- Preserve my life according to your promise (verse 154)
- Deliver me according to your promise. (verse 170)

Many are the promises of God, but just looking at the ones above are great things to meditate on. His Unfailing love, His grace, His comfort, His sustaining power, His preserving of our lives, His deliverance, and he is faithful to all these promises. He won't break His promise towards us. Paul puts it this way;

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God. (2 Corinthians 1 v 20)

His word, and therefore His promises to us are eternal, they last forever and He is faithful to fulfil all that He has promised.

REFLECTION

One promise Jesus made to His disciples is “surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28 v 20). As you look back over your life, can you see that God has been faithful to this promise even when things have appeared dark and you had passed through the darkest valley? If you see times where it appears he has abandoned you, ask Him to show you that He was there with you even though you couldn't see him.

PRAYER

O Father, I come before you with gratitude for your unwavering promises. Help me to trust in your word, knowing that you are

faithful. May I find peace in the assurance that your promises never fail. Guide me to walk in faith, believing in the fulfilment of all you have declared. Amen.

Day 31

LIVING IN GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

Test me, LORD, and try me,
examine my heart and my mind;
for I have always been mindful of your unfailing love
and have lived in reliance on your faithfulness.
Psalm 26 v 2 - 3

It is one thing to speak about something that you believe is right, it is another thing entirely to live your life by it. I had been invited to speak at a men's breakfast and I happily shared a message on Psalm 139 where David says "search me o God and know my heart, test me and know my anxious thoughts." I was feeling pretty pleased as I finished, I could see it had really challenged some of the men. Then one of them spoke up, his words were not what I was expecting and also not what I wanted to hear. He said, "Let's pray and ask God to search us and know our hearts." At that moment in time the message I had shared was suddenly turned back to me. Were they just words or was I willing to put them into action and live my life by them. I knew deep in my heart that if I prayed such a prayer with openness, it was one that God would certainly answer. It challenged me, did I really want it, was I ready not just to speak words but to live by them. It was a battle that thankfully I won as I surrendered and opened up my life to God.

The psalmist continually speaks of God's faithfulness in the psalms. Here are just a few examples. There are far more if you want to search the Psalms.

- Your love, LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies. (Psalm 36 v 5)
- For the word of the LORD is right and true; he is faithful in all he does. (Psalm 33 v 4)
- Do not withhold your mercy from me, LORD; may your love and faithfulness always protect me. (Psalm 40 v 11)

- Send me your light and your faithful care, let them lead me (Psalm 43 v 3)
- I will praise you with the harp for your faithfulness, my God (Psalm 71 v 22)
- I will sing of the LORD's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations. (Psalm 89 v 1)

In our verse for the day, the Psalmist David makes this declaration, I have lived in reliance on your faithfulness. He isn't just speaking words, He is declaring how God's faithfulness has governed the way he has lived his life. It wasn't just an instant thing that happened, it was something he had to learn as we see later in the Psalms when he cries "Teach me your way, LORD, that I may rely on your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name." (Psalm 86 v 11). If we don't understand the ways of the Lord, then it's easy to question His faithfulness. We like to pick at scripture and always chose the good stuff, the blessing promises, but the ones where he speaks of trails and tests, of discipline and being remodelled like a piece of clay on a potter's wheel we tend to forget or chose to ignore. But he is faithful to His word, he will refine us like silver which means exposure to heat until all the dross, the bad stuff comes to the surface for Him to remove.

David's ability to be total reliant on God's faithful, came through being taught, often in the furnace of affliction, but through it all God was faithful, he never abandoned him and brought him into the fullness of all He had promised. It's one thing to say God is faithful to fulfil His promises to us, but another thing entirely to live our lives in reliance on God's goodness and faithfulness when we are in the middle of a storm and feeling like we are sinking. He is faithful, but we have a choice whether to believe it or not.

REFLECTION

Think of all the times you have sang about God's faithfulness, songs like "Great is your faithfulness" and the "Goodness of God." Words so easy come from our lips, but do we really trust in God's faithfulness

when we are in the middle of a storm. Do we really believe He is faithful to fulfil His promises?

PRAYER

Lord, I join my words with the Psalmist, "Teach me your way, LORD, that I may rely on your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name." So often I fail to understand your ways and then question you Lord. How can I know your ways Lord unless you teach me, for your ways are higher than our ways and your thoughts higher than our thoughts. Bring me to that place of total reliance on your faithfulness towards me. Holy Spirit show me and lead me I pray.

In Jesus name and for your glory

Amen

Day 32

GENTLENESS – CONTROLLED STRENGTH

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Matthew 11 v 29

Just before Jesus died, Jesus had a conversation with His disciples in the Upper room during which Philip asked Jesus for the following. ““Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”(John 14 v 8). They will have heard so much from Jesus about His Father, but having never seen or encounter Him it will have left many questions I am sure in their minds. The best way Philip obviously thought to know the Father was if Jesus could simply show His Father to them, to allow them to see what He saw. His answer must have surprised them. “Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?” (John 14 v 9 – 10). It is easier for us to grasp this because we have the scriptures and have been taught about God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, three in one, but for them this must have been mind blowing. If we want to see the Father, what He is really like, we just need to look at Jesus.

In that famous passage where Jesus calls those that are weary and heavy laden to come to him, he reveals another aspect of the character of the Godhead, that is gentleness. When you ready of that word gentleness, what comes to mind? In the original King James version, gentleness was originally interpreted meekness, which is not a word that is generally used now days and when it is it give a totally wrong impression of what the scripture is saying. The Collins Dictionary describes meekness as follows:

If you describe a person as meek, you think that they are gentle and quiet and are likely to do what other people say.

This is not the Jesus we see in the Bible so clearly meekness in Biblical times means something very different. Biblical meekness (gentleness) is not weakness but rather it refers to exercising God's strength under control. Its strength used in gentleness, this is the nature of God's gentleness towards us.

There was no limit to the power and authority available to Jesus, power we see demonstrated time and time again in the miraculous things that he did. Remember the story where he cursed the fig tree and the following day it was dead. Imagine if he had chosen to do that to the religious leaders and Pharisees. Then there was the times when James and John wanted to call down fire from heaven because the people didn't welcome them. Jesus who too will have felt that rejection rather than telling them to go ahead, rebuked them. He had the power but chose a different path, the path of meekness. Even on the cross, he could have called down legions of angels to rescue him and punish the earth, but he not to respond in anger but in meekness and gentleness. He chose the path he took.

Imagine how His Father felt as he watched the Roman soldiers whip and beat his only Son to near death. Imagine how he felt as he heard the screams of pain. As a Father if that was my son, I would want to act, to punish those who did that to Him, but restrains himself for he knew this is the only way we could be set free and be restored in relationship with him. This might not sound like gentleness, but this is true biblical gentleness (meekness).

Jesus demonstrated this gentleness throughout His ministry, not reacting to but rather acting, being in control and using his power and authority where necessary but only in what we would call gentleness.

REFLECTION

Think about the life of Jesus, the different things that happened to him. From him being tempted by the devil, the people of his own town trying

to kill him, the Pharisees continually trying to trap him and ask the question, would I have responded as he did in that situation? Jesus chose how used his power and authority.

PRAYER

Almighty Father, it's so difficult for me to grasp the fullness of what it means to be gentle as you are gentle. Open my eyes to understanding that I might fully grasp what it means to be gentle and meek as you are.

Thank you for gentleness toward me that even in my sin and rebellion you remained patient and loving towards me and in your power you did not destroy or punish me, even though we deserved it. Thank God.

Amen

Day 33

GENTLE JESUS

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Matthew 11 v 29 - 30

Near the end of the Civil War in America, there was a touching scene that showed the gentleness and tenderness of President Abraham Lincoln. While he was visiting near the battle lines, Lincoln noticed three kittens, who had lost their mother. Moved by their mewing, he picked them up in his arms to comfort them. Lincoln then spoke softly to the lost little creatures, "Poor little creatures, don't cry; you'll be taken good care of." Then turning to an officer standing close by, watching the strange actions of His President he said, "Colonel, I hope you will see that these poor little motherless waifs are given plenty of milk and treated kindly." The colonel replied "I will see, Mr. President that they are taken in charge by the cook of our mess and are well cared for."

Gentleness is a character trait that needs to be expressed in word and deed for it to be seen. When looking at synonyms of gentleness the following came up. Kindness, sweetness, attentiveness, patience, responsive, willingness, pleasantness, warmth, tender heartedness, understanding, all if reflected in someone's life we would say were beautiful. There is something beautiful about gentleness in a different way to some of the other characteristics we have looked at. Here is a short poem I read that captures that beauty

In whispers soft, a touch so light,
Speaks volumes in the silent night.
A feather's graze, a tender care,
In gentle touch, love's sweet declare.

Amidst the storm, a calm so deep,
In kindness' arms, fears gently sleep.

A soothing balm, a quiet mirth,
A gentle touch, heaven on earth.

In every gesture, kindness flows,
In every touch, warmth gently glows.
A world embraced with soft caress,
In gentle touch, lives happiness.

There is a lot to learn from the above teaching of Jesus about the heart of God towards his children. Jesus tells the people to learn from him because he is gentle and humble of heart. So if we really want to understand what the gentleness of God looks like we need to read through the gospels and look at the actions of Jesus and how he responds to the people he encounters. Whether that is the small children, or a Samaritan woman at the well, a religious leader child is dying or a Roman centurion, he treats them with care, without harshness or impatience. Just take one example, read the story then try to imagine yourself as one of those people that are encountering Jesus.

REFLECTION

Take time to reflect on the story of the woman caught in the act of adultery in John 8. How do you think Jesus looked at her and spoke to her? Although he had the authority to condemn her to death for He was the only one without sin, I believe he treats her with respect, kindness and gentleness, for to do otherwise would have been contrary to His character.

PRAYER

Father, we praise You for Your great and mighty power! As we see the greatness of Your hand in the heavens and earth that declare Your glory, we acknowledge that You alone are the Living God and You alone are worthy of all our praise! We thank you for the gentleness You have shown us through the sacrifice of Jesus. Though we didn't

deserve such mercy and grace, yet You hung there for us on the cross, oh Jesus, taking our place, dying for our sins, that we may be made righteous through faith in You and Your finished work on the cross. Give us a humble heart, a teachable spirit, willing to be corrected, willing to take the lower seat, willing to surrender to Your ways and Your will. May we grow in the gentleness of Jesus, a divinely-balanced strength, through the power of Your Holy Spirit, that we may look, talk and think more like Jesus, day by day. For Your glory! In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen.

Day 34

IN GENTLENESS HE COMES

This took place to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet:

“Say to Daughter Zion,
‘See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”

Matthew 21 v 5

The football season has ended for another year, or at least the main competitions, and everything has been decided. Liverpool won the Premier League, Crystal Palace, the FA cup, Newcastle, the Carabao Cup, Paris Saint Germain, the Champions League, Tottenham the UEFA cup and Chelsea the UEFA conference cup. All were accompanied with great celebrations at the time. Several days later, to celebrate their victory, the teams will organise a celebration around the city or area in which they are based. This will generally involve an open bus touring the city with all the players on board proudly presenting the cup to their fans. It gives the players, managers and staff an opportunity to revel in the adoration of the fans, as well as enjoying the moment themselves with champagne and other drinks. The fans love it too, some of whom on some occasions celebrate to excess and probably regret their actions the following morning. It is a celebration of victory, a triumph procession.

Our text for today is taken from the story of Jesus riding into Jerusalem a week before his crucifixion and the people praising and rejoicing at His coming. Take some time just to read the full story in Matthew 21 v 1 – 11. We continue to celebrate this event on Palm Sunday, a day when we remind ourselves of this story. It's called Palm Sunday because as part of their worship and praise the people cut down palm branches and took off their robes and laid them on the ground before Jesus as he entered the city. They saw Jesus as a coming king, the son of David, the one who came in the name of the Lord. This, you

could say, was like a victory procession, but unlike any other. When football teams have their processions, they use only the best open top coaches, not a run down dirty bus. When the Romans entered a city after victory, the commander would ride on the best of horses, a symbol of power and status. But with Jesus we see a completely different picture.

There is no horse, no chariot, only the foal of a donkey. Having watched children riding donkeys on Blackpool beach, I can't say I find anything majestic in the scene. Then to imagine Jesus riding on one entering the city surrounded by such praise and adoration, it seems the picture is wrong, that is until you see his heart in the middle of it. "See your king coming to you, gentle and riding on a donkey." It this one simple act he is making a statement. He is not elevated, above everyone, untouchable, unreachable, disconnected in many ways from the lives of ordinary people like kings of old, or Premier League footballers; He is gentle and connected to the people. That word gentle is again interpreted in other versions as meek, that controlled strength used in gentleness. Donkeys, after the time of Solomon were used only by poor people and generally for carrying burdens. By riding on a donkey he is reaching down, in humility to the level of the poor, the needy and demonstrating the heart of God the Father, saying He is not distant, unreachable rather He comes down in gentleness to where you, the poor and needy are at. This is a picture of gentleness demonstrated with humility.

REFLECTION

Imagine yourself in the crowd of people at the side of the road celebrating Jesus. Is his gentleness something you are aware of or are you just caught up in the praise? It's easy in large celebration of praise and worship to miss different aspects of the character of God. We tend to celebrate His victory over sin, His forgiveness and mercy, His love for us, His power and glory but rarely do we celebrate His gentleness, any yet His gentleness towards us is beautiful.

PRAYER

Thank you God that you are gentle and kind and that you demonstrate that gentleness towards me. Throughout my life your gentle hand has held me, directed me and kept me from falling. So often I have failed to see you and seen your gentleness because it is so gentle. Draw me closer to Your heart that I may know and see your gentleness at work in my life.

Thank you God for your gentle dealings with me

Amen

Day 35

TREATS US LIKE CHILDREN

He called a little child and had him stand among them.

And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 18 v 2 - 4

I was visiting a friend and he told me of a lesson he learnt about communicating to his young son. He had been visited by a friend of his, someone from all outward appearances you would not want to cross. He was a big rough looking fella from the rough part of London and he had been a boxer. He had been in many fights, not just the ones in the ring. Well, whilst he went to get him a drink he left him in the same room as his young son. When he came back he found the man on his hands and knees talking to his son. He had come down to the level of the child to communicate. At that moment he realised how many times he had stood over his son and looked down on him when communicating, especially when telling his son off. Suddenly he saw a different way, a gentle and humble way.

We are God's children, in love, adopted into his family. To become as a little child is the only way to enter the kingdom of heaven. Any good parent always treats their child with gentleness, particularly in the early years of their development. They protect them from harm and only expose them to things that will help them to grow. When they are learning to walk, they are there to catch their child should they fall, to encourage them to keep trying however many times they fail and they never condemn them for failing. If, we as natural parents know how to treat our children with gentleness, how much more does God.

In my own walk with God, I can see his gentleness in his dealings with me. He has come down to where I am to communicate with me. He

has known my needs, my failings and always treated with respect and gentleness. But his dealings with us go further than just being there for us. Solomon tells us something about how to raise a child in Proverbs. Here is one thing he says.

Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old
he will not turn from it. (Proverbs 22 v 6)

I've highlighted an important point to Solomon's instruction, it's about seeing and knowing the child and training them for their destiny, which is not always the one we would want. The same applies with God's dealings with us, he trains us, raises us up for our destiny in him. He is not harsh or cruel in his dealings with us, he is there when we fail to pick us up, to encourage us to try again and never to condemn us.

One final thought on God treating us as children.

When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them,
"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder
them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."
And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on
them and blessed them. (Mark 10 v 14 & 16)

This is God's gentleness displayed.

REFLECTION

Take time to remember when your child was small, or if you have never had children, think of someone you know who has and reflect on how the young child is treated with such gentleness. This is how God treats his children.

PRAYER

Thank you that you are God, our Father and that you treat us as your beloved children with tenderness and care. You know each one of us

and what is best for us. In your gentleness train us to be the people you created us to be.

Amen.

Day 36

SELF CONTROL

Jesus gave them this answer: "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed

John 5 v 19-20

Have you ever been in that situation where someone is trying to explain how you should do something, something that you believe can be done a different way? There was a time, before the days when computers controlled cars where I had a good understanding of how cars worked. On this one occasion the car wouldn't start so I lifted the bonnet and got to work checking everything, the plugs and points, the fuel input, the starter motor, but whatever I did brought no success, the car refused to start. It was frustrating as I needed to the car. After a while my wife came out and simply said, have you checked the alternator? Now she had no knowledge of cars and certainly not anything about things such as alternators, so clearly she had had help, God's help. Now I had a choice, ignore her or listen and do as she said. Do it my way or submit. I chose the latter and sure enough there was some loose cables which once tightened resolved the issue. The car started first time.

When God said "Let us make man in our own image", this came with the freedom and ability to make choices. We see this with Adam and Eve and their choices led to sin and mankind becoming slaves to sin. God has the power to make whatever choices he wants, but as we see demonstrated in the life of Jesus, he exercises self control for the good of mankind. Jesus laid aside His deity when he came to earth and faced the same choices we have, but he exercised self control and chose not to sin.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. (Hebrews 4 v 15)

Not only did he exercise self control in his resistance to temptation, but as we read in the verses above he chose only to do the will of the Father. He followed his Father's instruction, recognising He could do nothing of himself. Having spent an eternity to this moment with His Father in heaven, in unity together with the Father and Holy Spirit, creating the world, exercising great power and doing awesome deeds, he now lays all that to one side and only does what He sees His Father doing. He must have been tempted on many occasions to do things His own way, because we certainly are, so if Jesus was tempted in like manner to us, then He faced that choice time and time again. But through it all, he exercised self control and made the right choices. It's a strange scripture in one way to understand, what was God doing that Jesus saw? We don't know the fullness of what that means, but what we do know is that Jesus demonstrated the self control of His Father in the choices he made and His subsequent actions.

This ability to choose what is right is one of the ways we can see self control in action. Jesus demonstrated it throughout His life, from initial temptation by the devil to His final death on the cross. God is self controlled in what He does.

REFLECTION

Put yourself in the place of Jesus, for example on that one occasion when the people wanted to force him to be king, (John 6 v 14 – 15), how would you respond? Which was easier, to accept what people want or what His Father wanted?

PRAYER

Dear heavenly Father, though there are days when I, the clay, presume to tell you, the Potter, what to do; and stories that I a small-bit character, want to dictate to you, the perfect Author, how the plot should change; and circumstances about which I, your subject, want to order you, my King, into action... you remain so kind and patient with me.

I am so thankful that you are God, and I am not. I am so thankful that you are the Alpha and the Omega, and everything in between. I am so thankful you know the beginning and the ending, and every other moment as well. I am so thankful that you are in control and that you exercise control to see your word fulfilled. Forgive me when I choose to take control of my life out of your hand. Lead me and direct me for your glory

In Jesus name

Amen

Day 37

NOT MY WILL

He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

Luke 22 v 41 - 42

During Holy week, each night we had a time of reflection at the church, and each day I wrote a poem to reflect something of the story of Jesus during that week, covering his entry into Jerusalem to his death and resurrection. It struck me for the first time that Jesus faced all that he did in his humanity which meant he probably didn't know exactly what was going to happen. Certainly he wouldn't have known or faced the pain he would bear. So we see in that moment the greatest example of self control exercised by the Father and Jesus in his agony in Gethsemane. Both will have felt the pain, both knew death was just around the corner and the Father had the power and authority to stop it, but he didn't. He chose to put His Son through it all for us. Here is the poem I wrote capturing the agony Jesus faced.

Gethsemane

Never in the history of mankind
Had one man faced such a trial
Alone, forsaken
His closest friends sleep through his battle long
He asked for help
But even one hour was too much to give
And yet in return he would give it all
He could not escapes the images before him
The coming pain, the cruel whip
The shredded back and pieced brow
The torment, mockery, abuse
The blows, time and time again
Until his legs would fail
And this was just the start
A cross awaits, a slow agonizing death

The most brutal way to kill a man
But that wasn't all
On his shoulder would lay the foulest sins of all mankind
And in the darkest hour
Final separation from God, his Father
How he longed for another way
A different answer to pay the price
The price of our sins
But there was none
So in pain beyond compare
He cries
Father, not my will but yours be done
And in the moment surrenders his life for us.

As we saw yesterday, Jesus only did the will of his Father, and it was the Father's will, which had been prophesied long before

Isaiah 53 v 10

Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,
and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin,

The cost, the pain, deeper than we can ever imagine would have been experienced by the Father as he crushes His only Son on our behalf. God whose love is pure and beyond understanding, so great and vast withhold his hand as he watches on and experiences, for the first time in eternity separation from His son. Yet he chooses not to act to save Him, such is His control.

REFLECTION

If you saw your son or daughter being hurt, being abused by other people and had the power to intervene, what would you do? God choose not to intervene, he exercised great self control despite the pain of watching on because through His Son's death we might have life.

PRAYER

Father as I look at the story of Gethsemane I struggle to understand and grasp the magnitude of that moment and the pain both you and your Son bore for me. Help me in my own struggles to follow the example of Jesus and cry out those words “not my will but yours be done,” whatever the cost. Thank you for choosing to face personal pain over comfort for me.

Thank you for all you did for me

Amen

RESTRAINT

Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?”

Matthew 26 v 52 – 54

Some years ago whilst visiting a friend in America, I was taken to a college American football game. This is a big thing in America, and the one I went too was no different. It had marching bands, cheerleaders and even skydivers performing before the all important match. It was bigger than some Premier League matches. I stood with the home fans to watch the spectacle not prepared for what would happen. I knew a little of the rules which helped me understand what was happening and just looking at the score as the second half started told me the home time were getting well beaten. The atmosphere in the stadium was dead, that was until a moment of magic occurred. The visiting team kicked the ball almost up to the home team's posts where it was collected by a player who then set off running. Whilst the whole of the visiting team stood in front of him, ready to stop him, somehow he managed to run through them all and score a touchdown. The place went wild, and this singled a change, as touchdown after touchdown followed and victory was won. By the end I was screaming and cheering like everyone else, I had got caught up in the atmosphere and excitement of the home time

Whether it is something harmless, like just cheering for a team you have no connection with or something a lot more sinister, it's easy to get caught up into things you wouldn't normally do. You see this when there are riots and looters, that so often some of the people who get arrested have no previous criminal convictions, they just got caught up in the situation. Even watching television, particularly is it's a series

and all the episodes are available at once. Your intention might be to just watch one, but one leads to another and before long the whole evening has gone.

The reading above comes from the arrest of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. Judas had come, along with soldiers and a band of people intent on arresting Jesus. Judas identifies Jesus to the soldiers by greeting Him with a kiss. The soldiers then step forward to seize Jesus. Now Peter, who has a track record of speaking and acting before thinking, draws his sword and takes a swing and chops of the ear of the High Priest servant. He is caught up in the moment and comes out fighting, and I'm sure had Jesus not spoken the others may have joined in. But in the middle Jesus demonstrates complete self-control, not responding in a negative way to his betrayer, stopping the fight before it really gets going. At that moment he reveals a fact that shows his restraint. One word to His Father and he would have legions of angels at His disposal, and from reading the Old Testament, one angel alone could have killed all those opposed to Him in a moment.

The Father and Son are in agreement together, in the middle of circumstances which could have easily provoke a wrong response, they respond with control for they see the bigger picture, that this was the path Jesus had to take. Jesus doesn't respond in a negative way, but rather still demonstrates care and compassion to His enemies. Jesus turns to the man who is now in great pain, blood pouring from his face, his ear on the floor and in love and compassion reaches out and heals Him. The exercising of self control by Jesus isn't just about not getting caught up in a fight, but also choosing to respond in a right way.

Self control isn't just about restraint, but also choosing to do what is right. It isn't just about the actions we take, rather the attitude of the heart. At that moment demonstrates what he had taught his disciples,

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,” (Matthew 5 v 43 – 44)

This is another example of the self control God demonstrates and he wants us to do the same.

REFLECTION

Can you think of any other examples in the Bible where God exercises restraint? What does this example set by Jesus teach you about the self control, both the Fathers self control and how we should be? Even in small things like, being cut up by another car can provoke a response. In such situations, how would God respond?

PRAYER

Father, thank you for the example of your Son, that even though He had the resources available to Him to destroy His enemies, He responded in care and love. Father so often, I respond so quickly in negative and sinful ways when things happen, forgive me and give me strength and Your self control to respond in a right way. Holy Spirit, cause the fruit of self control to grow in me so that I may bring glory to you, Father. In Jesus name

Amen

Day 39

FRUIT TO BE ENJOYED

And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Genesis 2 v 9

At the house where I grew up was, what appeared to me as a child, a very big Bramley apple tree. It was tall and wide but also easy to climb. It was generally a very fruitful tree and come autumn each year I had the joy of helping to pick the apples. Because I was smaller than both my mum and dad at the time, and also enjoyed climbing, I was allowed to climb the tree and pick the apples from the top. It was a job I loved doing. Carefully they were handed down so they wouldn't be bruised and then they would be stored for the winter. Those apples made many a pie or crumble, all gratefully received and really enjoyed whether served with custard, cream or ice cream. It would have been a real shame if they had just been left to fall from the tree and rot on the ground. Fruit is made to be enjoyed as we see in the scripture above.

So often what we see in the natural are just illustrations to the realm of the Spirit. Just look at the parables of Jesus, many are illustrations from the natural environment of the people of that time. The seed and the sower, the lost sheep, the wheat and the tares, the mustard seed, the yeast in the bread, all are natural examples of spiritual principles. So it is not by accident that the character traits of God as listed in Galatians 5 v 22 - 23 are referred to as fruits. Fruit is a good source of food, minerals and vitamins that the body needs. They are, on the whole, sweet to the taste and something most people enjoy consuming, especially in desserts. Listen to what David said

My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods;
with singing lips my mouth will praise you. (Psalm 63 v 5)

If, again in our natural lives, a beautiful sweet dessert often bring satisfaction and pleasure. I can go out for a lovely meal but when it is completed with a beautiful desert then it takes the meal I have just eaten to a whole new level of satisfaction. If that is what a fruity dessert does in the natural, how much more will our heart and soul be satisfied when we enjoy the sweet delight of God's love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self control, on top of a good meal from his word. But like at a restaurant where the waiter offers you the dessert menu and you decide whether you want a dessert, so it is in our relationship God. The psalmists says,

Taste and see that the LORD is good;
blessed is the man who takes refuge in him. (Psalms 34 v 8)

Those apples on the family tree were there to be picked and enjoyed. It is the same in our relationship with God, all these beautiful attributes are for us to access and enjoy. He doesn't keep them to himself. His Spirit lives in us and His Spirit brings these fruits and makes them available to us and when we experience them they bring satisfaction to the soul, they strengthen us for our walk with Him and equips us to be fruitful in Him. Without them we will be weak and will struggle in life, but the more we know and encounter them the fuller our life will be. Through them we will know what Jesus promised, life, abundant life.

REFLECTION

It says "taste and see that the Lord is good." The question is how. Clearly it is a decision we have to take, it requires us to do something, but what? Take time to consider times in your life when you encountered one or more of these fruits. What was going on inside you at the time?

PRAYER

Father God, as the Psalmist said, "as the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O my God." My soul thirsts for you my God, I long to know you in all your beauty and glory and to feast up the fruits of your Spirit that satisfy the soul. Increase my hunger for you and forgive me for when I've treated the delight of your presence lightly. Draw me closer to your heart so that I might be like you.

In Jesus name I ask and for your glory

Amen.

Day 40

FOLLOW HIS EXAMPLE

I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

John 13:15

As we come to the end of our 40 days of reflection on the fruits of the Holy Spirit or putting it another way, the character of God, our Father and Jesus, His Son we are called to follow His example. This seems, so often, difficult if not impossible in this sinful world in which we live with all its day to day pressures that can easily overwhelm us. It's an easy thing to say to someone when you are showing them how to do something, just do what I do, but for the person receiving the instruction it just isn't that easy. They don't have the years of experience you have, they may not have the skills and abilities that you have and what seems easy to you, is for them a difficult task, even when being shown. Then what happens when you are not there is another thing entirely, can they remember all you shown them and then do it for themselves. Do as I do just isn't that easy.

So then when we come to manifesting the different aspects of the character of God, His love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self control, following Christ's example it seems like an impossible calling. It is, if we see it as a command to do, a command to love, and command to be at peace, a command to be joyful, as if it is something that we should strive after achieving, a goal to be reached. We have even fallen foul to this subtle distortion, where we are told we need to be more loving, more patient, more kind and so we put ourselves under pressure to learn these character traits and try through the strength of our will to be those things. But what's the point in being outwardly patient when inwardly you are fuming, or acting to be joyful when inwardly you are struggling in despair. This is not how it is meant to be.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance,
kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-

control. Against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5 v 22 – 23)

We are told this is the fruit of the Spirit, it is what he produces in us, not what we can grow by our own efforts. As we read the verses that surround this statement we are told to;

- Walk by the Spirit (v16)
- Be Led by the Spirit (v18)
- Live by the Spirit (v25)
- Keep in step with the Spirit (v25)

We don't have time to explore all the different aspects of these statements, but to me it is clear that if we are to produce in our lives the character of God and follow the example of Christ in the way we live then we cannot do it in our own strength and understanding. It is only going to happen through living in communion with the Holy Spirit who dwells within you. We need to recognise we can only walk the path of salvation and the kingdom through the Spirit, that he will lead us, if we listen and obey and that He is the one that brings the life of God into us.

One final thought, all this life flows from being first joined to Christ.

"I am the sprouting vine and you're my branches. As you live in union with me as your source, fruitfulness will stream from within you—but when you live separated from me you are powerless. '(John 15 v 5 – The Passion Translation)

REFLECTION

When you read or hear about the fruit of the Holy Spirit, do you consider this to be the character and nature of God towards you? Do you see this manifest in the way he deals with you, causes you to grow and in His leading of your life? Take time to review your life and look for the different aspects of the fruit in his dealings then thank him for them.

PRAYER

Loving Father, I thank you for who you are and the beauty of your character. I thank you for your endless love, your perfect peace, and the abundant joy you give. I thank you that throughout by life you have been patient, kind and gentle even the toughest of times when I have sinned and grieved your heart. You are always faithfully and good and I thank you.

Help me to set my eyes and my heart on you afresh. Lead me by your Spirit and give be a sensitive heart that I might show you through my life and bring glory to your name.

Amen.

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