

# Small Groups

A help Guide

Claude Tremblay

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Illustrations from "A Closer Look": Martial Maltais / [martialmaltais@sympatico.ca](mailto:martialmaltais@sympatico.ca)

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## Forward

I grew up in a farming village in North-Eastern Quebec. My parents adopted me when I was three months old. I had been placed in an orphanage, born to a single mother from Three Rivers, an unwanted pregnancy.

Mederic and Albertine weren't wealthy, but they loved each other very much. The small village where they grew up, to put in plainly, was barely two steps beyond the Middle Ages. On their farm there were no automobiles, no electricity, no sophisticated sewage system, no radio or television, and no running water. They would go fetch their water in barrels pulled by oxen, the same cattle they would use for working the fields. They went to the village by horse-drawn buggy.

Over the winter, my father left the farm to spend many long months in the woods working as a lumberjack. My mother and grandmother looked after the household. We weren't wealthy, but we lacked nothing, and we children laughed and played together around our large dinner table.

In those days, everyone went to church.

Things weren't perfect of course, but my parents believed in God, and passed their faith on to all their children. My grandfather would respectfully take off his hat as he stood in his field and asked God's blessing on the crop he had just sown; just as his father had done, and his father before that.

Each night after supper, the family would kneel in the kitchen to pray. Before going to bed, Father would kneel again beside his bed, sometimes for a long time. When I was alone with him, he would talk to me about God. He would tell me never to forget to thank Jesus for his goodness to us. My father always remained true to his beliefs until the day he died. I was fourteen years old when he passed away.

The loss of my father disturbed me greatly. Prior to that, I had always attended church regularly, and had even been a choir boy at one time. When I was nine, I remember waking up very early to attend morning mass before going to school.

In those days, the priest said the mass in Latin. In my young mind, I didn't understand all of the rituals and such, but I was captivated by the ornate paintings and artwork that decorated the interior of the church, depicting the life of Jesus. As I gazed at them, I sensed the presence of God.

I went to confession regularly, like all the other schoolchildren. The aging priest, who was slightly hard of hearing, would have to ask us to repeat all our wrongdoings so loudly that we feared our classmates, who were just outside waiting their turn, would be overhearing it all. We all found this quite funny, and of course often joked about it amongst ourselves.

I have many cherished memories of my younger years and always kept my deep desire to know God.

As a teen, my interest in the church began to wane. There were no Christian activities other than mass to feed my faith. My family eventually left the farm to move into town, and modern life was very attractive to me in many ways. I quickly became caught up with 'Beatle mania' and the whole "Rolling Stones fever". A few months after my father's death, I decided to quit school, and by the age of sixteen, I was smoking hashish with a girlfriend on the beaches of Morocco. What followed were many years of disappointments that I deeply regret today. The concept of "peace and love" was never able to give me back that indescribable feeling I had during my childhood years as I spoke to Jesus. What's more, because of the books I was reading at that time, I had completely turned against Christianity. Jesus became just another "Guru" among many others, and I lost all interest in communicating with him.

Fortunately, during a trip I took to Kansas City, I met two protestant Christians whose testimonies upset all my thinking. These two young men were very committed to their faith, and also to the needs in the community.

These two fellows struck me as decent, honest guys, and I knew they didn't belong to a cult of any sort. They never even tried to get me to go to their church. They simply sought to tell me that Jesus is alive today, and able to do work in my life if I merely invited him to share in it with me.

A few hours later, as I sat alone in my van, I decided to say a little prayer to Jesus. It wasn't a very long prayer. I simply asked that if he really existed, he show himself to me and come be part of my life.

He heard my prayer.

Instantly, I felt the presence of God all around me. I can't quite put it into words, but I knew beyond all doubt that Jesus was real, and that he knew me completely. It even felt as though he spoke my name.

I broke down in tears. I could tangibly feel the love and forgiveness of God being poured into me. He did not scold me in spite of my not paying him any notice whatsoever for all those years. All I felt was a sudden conviction with regards to the kind of life I was leading.

From that moment onwards, I was never the same. I had been reborn. I had rediscovered Jesus and would never leave him again. I began to have an unquenchable spiritual thirst, and a desire to read and understand the bible. Even my manner of speaking changed. I had been in the habit of "cursing like a sailor", but was suddenly no longer able to blaspheme using the Lord's name. I had fallen in love with Jesus, and the honeymoon still continues after thirty four years.

Following this, I returned to Quebec, was married and had four beautiful children. When we arrived in Montreal, we joined a small Protestant Evangelical church on Woodland Street in the city of Verdun.

The pastor and his wife were very warm, simple people. They welcomed us joyfully, in spite of our hippie ways and appearance, which were not easy things for the rest of the members of the church to accept. Over time, our morals adjusted gradually to those of the Gospel, and all was fine.

I thank the Lord for having directed me to that little church where I was able to discover the importance of studying the bible, and the joy of sharing my faith with other believers.

At that time, we were witnessing a sharp decline in attendance at Roman Catholic mass in this province, which made me very happy back then since I was convinced that the Protestants were going to save Quebec. Towards the end of the 70's, the French Protestant church experienced a significant period of growth in this province. Many little churches were started in many cities. Of course, God was moving, and the most adequate means available at that time for him to work through were these groups where it seemed the Gospel was shared the most freely.

Near the end of the 70s, I joined a youth movement that did evangelism in schools using theater and drama. We performed for full auditoriums on many occasions. Students were deeply touched by the gospel message being presented to them in such a colorful artistic way.

Then, I signed up for a four-year program to get my Degree in Theology, which I completed successfully. I worked as a pastor for a period of eight years and as the director of a small publishing house for ten years.



In 1997, my entire world turned upside-down. I was confronted with the most difficult trial of my life: the suicide of my oldest child, my nineteen-year-old son.

His death left a huge gaping wound in my heart that was very slow to heal. I believe the scar from it is still visible today, but I am able to touch it now without it being too painful to bear.

Writing a book in which I was able to express my pain proved very beneficial for me. However, to externalize my suffering in this way was near-impossible to me. It was only through virtual "thrusters of the soul" that I was able to draw it out... often very awkwardly.

God was the chief element in my healing process.

The next thing I needed to do was to begin to take small steps in the right direction.

The intense pain of losing my beloved child, combined with all of the other repercussions that resulted from it, had trapped me in a horrible prison. My only alternative was to take hold of God's hand and to turn my focus toward others who were suffering as I was. And this is what I did.

Prior to the release of my first book, I received solid support from several public figures to whom I had sent copies of the manuscript. They are no doubt oblivious as to just how much their expressions of support gave me renewed strength.

The Honorable Lise Thibault, *Governor-General of Quebec*, offered a magnificent poem which I inserted as the forward to the book. Then I received letters of encouragement and support from the mayors of Montreal and Quebec City, as well as from well-known French-Canadian artists such as Bruno Pelletier and Laurence Jalbert.

After my first draft, I received other feedback and comments that warmed my heart as well. Among them were encouraging words from journalists such as Simon Durivage and Denise Bombardier, from popular figures such as René Angélil, and from other well-known artists such as Linda Lemay, Claude Dubois and Zachary Richard. I was amazed that these famous people, who lead such public and busy lives, would take the time to leaf through my manuscript and even send me a word of encouragement.

Rather than place my book on the shelves of bookstores, I felt a pressing need to clamber out of my "black hole" and reach out to others. In spite of my own pain, I was determined to get personally involved in this fight for life.

One by one, I visited more than one hundred and twenty cities in Quebec to offer my book and to comfort those who have been somehow affected in their own lives by the suicide of a friend or family member.

Day after day, town after town, I was able to see the good I could bring to these people simply by relating to them and sharing in their suffering. In the end, my unusual approach proved to be very beneficial for many, as well as for myself. I also know that the message of my book comforted many grieving families and strengthened those who were in despair.

After accepting many invitations to speak at conferences, and having met countless young people, parents, social workers and school principals, I have concluded that the demands for

suicide intervention in our society are very pressing, and call for a dramatic increase in efforts to reach out and offer more means of support.

With the collaboration of four doctors, I produced a video entitled "VieRage". This documentary video offers a message of hope to anyone who has lost interest in life. A second cinematographic production called "Amour Libre" (Free Love) followed.

It touched on the subject of suicide but also explored the values found in the youth of Quebec. It presented very moving personal testimonies of people whose worlds had fallen apart as a result of abuse or heartbreak, but who eventually found healing and were able to recover and move beyond those things.

After having had my first book "Micah" translated into English a few months later, I hit the road again; this time on a 16-month tour across Canada. I visited more than three hundred cities in our great country to bring comfort to thousands of people who have been wounded and scarred by the difficulties of life.

Over the course of my travels, I discovered that in spite of the fact that we live in one of the world's most beautiful countries, the rates of depression and suicide are constantly on the rise. This prompted me to write a second book entitled "The Traveler", in which I share the most moving and significant moments of my cross-Canada tour.



Times have changed considerably since my parents' time. But the greatest tragedy here is that, bit by bit, we are becoming accustomed to living in a society that has lost all its moral bearings. Could it be that through our pursuit of individualism we have grown insensitive, or have we perhaps even lost hope of any change for the better? Have we lost all faith?

In my first documentary, psychiatrist Dr. Nathalie Beaudet states that "our society no longer has any moral boundaries, no bearings which confirm to us that life is sacred, that it is a gift from God, and that we do not have the authority to end our own lives, nor that of another person." In her opinion, these "Christian bearings" are what may have saved thousands of lives in generations gone by.

Some will say that the new, modern framework of society is what makes life difficult for today's youth. This may be true, but we must admit that life wasn't easy during our parents' or our grandparents' day either, and yet in spite of the hardships back then, suicides were nearly unheard of. The reason is very simply that people had faith in God and believed in prayer.

I have visited developing countries where people live in extreme poverty. They would have good reason to end their lives! But there again, their faith is what sustains them and gives them the courage to live on, in spite of such extreme difficulty.

In turning the pages of our history, it is impossible to overlook the fundamental role Christianity has played in the founding of our nation. Here are a few examples: the first school was founded by two courageous young widows who came and settled in Quebec City, at a time when there were only a few dozen inhabitants living there. Both Marie-Madeleine de Chauvigny and Marie Guyart de l'Incarnation maintained that God had told them in a dream to come and settle in New France.

In her dream, Marie Guyart maintains she saw a large country, as though in a fog. She saw mountains and valleys, all of which were unfamiliar to her, and she knew she was being called to live there.

The first hospital was founded in Montreal in 1645 by yet another courageous woman, a nurse by the name of Jeanne Mance. In spite of the extreme danger posed by frequent attacks by the Iroquois, this pioneer woman remained faithful and steadfast in her service to others. She provided medical assistance to members of the colony, as well as to Amerindians, and took in several orphans. She was given the title "the Angel of Ville-Marie". In one of her letters, she wrote "There is no length I will not go to in order to see the fulfillment of this divine and most Holy Will. This is the sole desire and passion of my heart. That is where my passion lies, where all of my affections rest, it is my one true love."

So many memorable individuals such as these have left their mark in our history. All these pioneers of the faith were the very ones who built this country, the home we so dearly love. They honored God with their lives; and their life's work, which bears fruit to this very day.

It is startling to consider that in most schools today, it is forbidden to hang a crucifix on the wall, or to pray the Lord's Prayer publicly. What has become of our Christian roots? Are we burning the bridges of our past, without stopping to consider that the faith of our fathers has proven greatly beneficial to our nation?

In the process of breaking the silence with regards to certain reprehensible acts committed by members of the clergy, have we mistakenly "thrown out the baby with the bathwater"? Are there not timeless treasures in these ancient teachings which we should seek to preserve?



In spite of all this, the current "spiritual climate" gives us reason to believe in the possibility of a reawakening to Christianity. A surprising and very interesting indication of this has come through a survey conducted by Ipsos-Reid. According to the data they collected, 44 per cent of Canadians will identify themselves with the following statement: "I have given my life to Christ and consider myself a converted Christian." What's more, 67 per cent believe that "through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God offers forgiveness for our sins."

It is likely, however, that these "developing Christians", many of whom have undoubtedly experienced the forgiveness and presence of God, have not yet grasped the importance of applying the teachings of Christ to their everyday lives. The vast majority of Canadians who call themselves believers still fail to recognize the bible as the infallible revelation of the will of God. Instead, we seek to create some sort of amalgamated belief system from a collection of notions we have randomly gleaned from the vast sea of spiritual ideas and philosophies that are floating about. With this approach, the confusion can only but increase. Jesus said "If any man loves me, he will keep my word."

On another note, the attendance of religious services is on the decline. Since the middle of the 1940s, people are taking part in religious services less and less. A 1946 Gallup poll revealed that 67% of adult Canadians had attended a religious service in the week preceding the survey.

In 1996, only 20% of the adult population of Canada attended religious services on a weekly basis.

The greatest decline in weekly attendance has been among Roman Catholics, falling from 37% in 1986 to 24% in 1996. Corresponding to the decline in weekly attendance has been an increase in the number of people who did not attend religious services during the year. While in 1986 only one in seven Roman Catholics did not attend church, by 1996 nearly one in three did not. Over the same time period, weekly attendance of mainline Protestants has declined from 17% to 14% of adults, while conservative Protestants have maintained weekly attendance figures in the 50% to 60% range.

In 1996, many adults (32%) who said they were affiliated with a religion did not attend religious services at all. Another significant minority (10%) said they only attended once or twice a year. This suggests either that people are less committed to their religion or that religion has become more a personal commitment than communal worship.

Although attendance at religious services has declined substantially in Canada over the last 20 years, in 1995, Reginald Bibby's Project Canada survey indicated that the vast majority (81%) of Canadians still believed in God. This compares with 89% in 1975, implying that although attendance has declined sharply, most people have retained their belief in God.

Here in Quebec, the statistics particularly stand out, since we count the highest rate of believers per capita (85%), yet the lowest rate of church attendance." (Canadian Social Trends- Automne 1998 Statistics Canada - Catalogue No 11-008-XPE)

It appears that it is not the person of Jesus that people have lost faith in, but rather the Church as an institution. What a dilemma: thousands of people interested in the pursuit of God, but who flee from churches. Beautiful steepled structures, architectural masterpieces, resting between the high-rises of our cities, as though they were in a cemetery!

Other more modern churches, more "evangelical", have known periods of growth, but are also emptying out little by little. Only a very small minority of churches today are experiencing any sort of growth.

How can this be explained? What is the true role of Christianity in today's society? The Church exists to represent Christ and bear the Good News, it is commissioned to provide shelter to the downtrodden and afflicted, and its role is to teach us to pray and to love God and our neighbor... So how could it no longer appeal to anyone at all?

In a day where public interest in spirituality is on the rise, it is crucial to find the answers to these questions. As I traveled this great country, I visited many, many churches, and in the process tried to identify some of the causes of this decline. Having set out with a fairly good understanding of both the Catholic and Protestant cultures to begin with, I think I may have been able to put my finger on a few contributing factors causing this gradual erosion.



The truth is hard to accept, but it seems that the Church of today is not succeeding to live and communicate authentic Christianity.

I have visited churches that are very active, where nearly all of their members are involved in some way in their many different programs. These Christians are acting in good faith and with sincerity but without understanding just how much God loves people. They are

therefore acting with false motives that become evident sooner or later. I don't know of anyone who likes to be treated like a fish trying to be reeled in.

It is important to remember that having a precise, elaborate knowledge of biblical truths but without being loving, always results in legalistic behavior which produces death, not life. In the same way, being loving while disregarding the criteria established by God can lead to humanistic thinking, denying the necessity of biblical revelation.

It's important then to always remember the advice of the Apostle Paul when he suggested that we must attach ourselves firmly to each word of the bible and to also put these words into practice through concrete action.

Mother Teresa once said 'Without faith, there is no life. For our work to bear fruit, for it to be beautiful and completely dedicated to God, everything must be centered on the words of Christ who said "I was hungry, I was naked, sick and without shelter, and you looked after me." Everything we do stems from these words.'

The problem in our western world is that we have lost the notion of helping one another and our sense of compassion has withered away. We no longer hear the cry of God's heart. We are too preoccupied with our own comfort. Africa suffers from poverty, but we suffer from wealth and affluence.

Our individualism may trap us in greater misery than that of under-developed countries.

I also realize that for to many people, Jesus is synonymous of church: a Church that has lost its credibility. It has lost credibility because of the persistence of Christians seeking only to get people into their buildings rather than to show them an authentic love, free of all ties.

My trip across Canada confirmed what I already suspected. For many believers, Christian compassion is often limited to coming to church one hour a week, where everyone puts on their "Sunday mask".

It is urgent for us to grasp that the structure of the Church can be flexible and adapt to the society in which we live without compromising the Gospel.

Jesus was born to the Jews but his goal was not to establish a new religion to compete with Judaism.

When the Christian faith spread to different cultures, the gospel message remained intact and complete, but its outer appearance had changed.

Jewish Christians continued to meet in the temple as their ancestors had done for centuries, but the Christians in Ephesus and Corinth preferred to meet in homes or in public non-religious locations.

If that was appropriate and suitable in the early days of Christianity, then why should we insist, in our day, on preserving certain forms of Church that our present generation finds outdated and difficult to relate to?

I am not suggesting that we rise up against traditional churches, but we must cease to think of the structures themselves as sacred. I know that in certain contexts, a more traditional church structure can meet the needs of a community, but its relevance will depend on its members living the Gospel outside of its four walls.

I want to be clear on this matter: it is not good to reject all traditions under the pretext that they belong to the past. On the opposite, we must draw from them in order to exert better judgment.

That being said, revering to our traditions can also be a trap. Jesus addressed the religious leaders of his day in this way: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men. You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men. You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!" (Mark 7: 6-9)

We must be vigilant to discern the Word of God from that which is added by man. If we hold on to traditions that are no longer pertinent or useful to the spreading of the faith, they can easily become an obstacle.



Canadians are less and less interested in the institutional Church and the form of Christianity it conveys. It would then be important to take into consideration the preferences of people, and ask the Lord to inspire us with his creativity.

Many resources are published each year which offer alternatives to the more traditional forms of Christianity. I was particularly impressed with the book by Tom Sine that invites us to live a higher level of commitment in our faith. According to him, this is not an option but a necessity. He writes "For six years, I have given many conferences in protestant churches, both traditional and evangelical. I was shocked to discover the chronic state of passivity found in these circles. There is but a small minority of churches or Christian organizations that show any evidence of a divine calling or specific vision for the task that God has set before them for the sake of his kingdom in their community and in the world. I believe the Church risks perishing because of lack of vision. And what's even more tragic is that the

people that the Church is called to serve will surely perish if it doesn't regain its reason for existence."

According to this author, the solution is much simpler than we think. We don't need big structures to live out authentic Christianity. "A pulling together of ordinary people", as Sine puts it, can make a significant difference within a society.

At the moment, many churches who are experiencing a significant rate of increase assign a high level of importance to the forming of small groups of believers who meet each week in a home or public place. This format facilitates a more flexible structure that enables participants to help one another and build each other up in the faith. Many of these groups get involved in different ways in their community. There we have a good example of healthy Christianity.

Jesus never called us to live our faith off by ourselves, each in our own little corner. In general, Christians who stay by themselves gradually grow further away from the Gospel. They overlook the fact that God indicates all through the New Testament that he desires that we live our faith in company of other believers. God wants us to pray together, to share with one another, and to love each other.

If what Jesus said is not enough to convince all passive Christians to leave the comfort of their church pew to demonstrate the love of God in their community, I strongly doubt that any sermon or book will succeed in making them more aware of the reality of the needs of others.

Fortunately, thousands of believers have caught on to this fact and we are witnessing a Christian renewal like never before in many countries of the world. The small group movement is spreading everywhere.

I once attended a conference where one of the guest speakers was the pastor of an African church of 10 000 members. He spoke extensively on the success of their small group system. In this church even the children, many of whom are orphans, have their own small groups. There are in fact 18 million orphans in Africa; children who have lost their parents either to war or to the AIDS epidemic. And the numbers are still climbing.

These young people find means to serve the community, either by cleaning up a neighborhood in town by collecting any garbage they can find in the parks and city streets... and of course they pray for people and tell them the good news about the love of Jesus!

After having visited nearly all the cities in my province on more than one occasion, and after having spoken to thousands of people, I know for certain that they are not "closed" to God. The letters I receive following my tour visits confirm that. Christianity is far from

dead, it simply needs a new form of expression that better corresponds with the needs of today's society.

For many years I took part in weekly small group meetings and I am convinced of the benefits they give their participants as well as their surroundings. On top of deepening our knowledge of the bible through mutual sharing, we develop new friendships which become a precious means of support in times of difficulty.

I cannot tell you how much I appreciated the love and prayers from the members of our small group immediately after the death of my son! On other occasions, it was I who was able to provide support to a friend in need. Nothing can replace this kind of interaction. At first, it may require a certain amount of determination to fit weekly meetings into a busy schedule, but it is well worth the effort. What's more, these small groups provide an excellent avenue for putting our Christian faith into action to meet some needs in our community.



I know of a couple who have been involved in small groups for a number of years. It all began when Susan ended up in the hospital for a few days after contracting a virus. She suddenly became aware of how many patients don't receive any visitors. Some of them had been hospitalized for a long time. After her recovery, she started a small group of friends who would pray and visit sick peoples regularly. What evidence of love in action!

Later on, her husband, who is a painter, would meet in his studio each week with a number of artists who shared the same passion. In this way, they overcame the solitude some of them were living, and prayed for each other.

I have known of small groups of students that gather together for prayer on a regular basis on university campuses, and find ways to help meet the needs of other students.

Other small groups visit prisoners. Besides meeting the material needs of inmates, they help them discover Christ's forgiveness and rebuild their lives on a new foundation.

I have also known groups of businessmen who meet each week to share, pray, and find ways to help finance humanitarian aid projects, as well as groups of young people who get together in small groups to plan trips to underdeveloped countries for the period of their summer breaks.

Some of them are musicians who tour Canadian cities telling about Jesus through their songs and earn the necessary funds to finance their plans and projects through their concerts.

There are countless possibilities for the involvement of small groups in our communities such as: suicide prevention, support for the grieving, for those who are depressed, for the sick, for those who are dying, and support for single-parent families, immigrants and the elderly; to name only a few. Some small groups prefer to concentrate on organizing conferences or Christian events; others will put more emphasis on prayer or evangelism. Some other groups will simply organize massive distribution of the bible or the New Testament in their city. The ways to get involve are unlimited, and God will guide us if we will take the time to listen and hear what is on his heart.

It is important to bear in mind that it isn't the structure itself of the small group that matters most. Its more the fact of inviting Jesus in that will make all the difference. It is astonishing to see how Jesus can guide us when we take time to listen.

So many people need to experience God in a tangible way. There are so many discouraged people, so many broken families, so many youth looking for the meaning of life.

The Lord passionately loves every person in our great country. He called us to share the greatness of his forgiveness to all, and to concretely demonstrate his love to others.



# Introduction

*A*ccording to Jesus, all the commandments can be resumed into one: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.

This verse is often quoted in relation to loving our neighbor, while we forget what is most important: loving God. But how can we love someone we don't know? And how can we love our neighbor as ourselves if we don't love ourselves in the first place?

According to Jesus, our love for others should be the fruit of our love for God. Our discovery of the love of God undeniably causes us to love ourselves as he has loved us, and to love others.

This book is written for those who wish to know God better and learn to apply these principles to their everyday lives. The book can be used for your own spiritual growth or to help a friend along his or her spiritual journey. It is designed to facilitate interaction in small group meetings, and to prompt enthusiasm for generosity.

This book is also an excellent tool for those who may like to form a small care group. It's as simple as bringing together a few friends, neighbors, work mates or family members who wish to learn to love God and love their neighbor.

Each chapter is designed to motivate discussion on the essentials of Christianity and to activate your faith as a group.

Most importantly, this book will help you to learn hearing the voice of God. You will learn how to trust God and see how he can meet your needs. Finally, you will see your talents develop and blossom as you use them to serve others.

## **Simple and Flexible**

Small care groups can or cannot be affiliated with one particular religion. They can be useful to regular churchgoers as to those who do not attend church. What's more, their flexible structure makes them easily accessible to all age groups and can be quickly adapted to meet different needs.

Their ultimate goal is to enable you to discover the benefits of an authentic faith which is shown through concrete action.

## **Who will lead?**

Is it really essential to have a leader for each small group? Not necessarily! Jesus never placed any particular emphasis on establishing leadership within his own small group of disciples. He never sought to assign titles or to establish any sort of authority structure. On the contrary, he disapproved of his disciples when they sought to know which of them ought to be the "leader" of the rest.

The model Jesus taught us was more centered on the dynamic of interpersonal relationships, where each person must consider the interests of the other as much as his own. In this way, the gifts God has given to each person come out naturally. Those who have a natural ability to lead and organize will humbly use their gift to serve others, while ensuring that no one feels left out, or be placed on a pedestal.

## **A weekly meeting**

Interaction within a community is a fundamental need for every human being. In days gone by, family circles were inherently close and family ties solid enough to meet the emotional needs of all its members.

But nowadays, what with the widespread breakdown of the family and society's increasingly individualistic mindset, we can no longer fully depend on this type of support, even in times of crisis. Worse still, for certain people, crisis virtually becomes a part of their daily lives.

They do not receive sufficient support from their family members, who are often too distant, nor from their friends who are often too busy to help.

Small care groups are a means to rediscover, or preserve, this treasure of sharing and faith. All over the world, thousands of people choose to take part in weekly gatherings of small groups of different types. Besides the positive impact they have in their community, these small groups enable members to form new friendships which become invaluable means of support in times of difficulty.

At first, this requires some determination and stick-to-itiveness to fit these weekly meetings into a busy schedule, but it is well worth the effort. The place or style of meeting may vary. Some people have chosen to combine purpose with pleasure by sharing a meal together, which facilitates conversation and interaction.

## **A Common Project**

Small care groups are founded on two simple but definite objectives: to love God and to love our neighbor. We live in a society of high technology that makes life easier in many ways and makes us more autonomous on the whole. Of course it provides many advantages, but this lifestyle can also bring us towards an individualism in which each person is living only for his or herself. We know that happiness cannot be found solely through the accumulation of wealth or an egocentric quest for self-fulfillment. We must leave room for sharing and generosity.

Belonging to a small care group offers you the possibility of nourishing your faith and expressing it through concrete actions. It gives you the opportunity to develop good friendships, without forgetting to lend a hand to those who don't have the same privilege. It helps you get to know God better and invites you to make him known as well.

For this purpose, each small group participant will learn to hear the voice of God to discover their "mission", both individual and collective.

It is clear that certain small groups won't have the resources to accomplish big projects, while other groups may provide help on a larger scale. Regardless, we all have something to offer in one way or another. Only God knows the measure. Helping others is often more a question of the heart than of actual resources.

A small group that is faithful in prayer and visits the sick is just as important in the eyes of the Lord as the next group that organizes regional evangelism conferences. The essential part is to be disposed to hearing from and obeying God.

There are countless ways of getting involved in our communities. God knows how to guide us when our hearts are open to listen.

## **Multiplication**

One significant advantage, when it comes to the structure of these small groups, is their flexibility. Because of the limited number of participants, small care groups are not under the authority of any heavy bureaucracy, which means they can rapidly change their approach or direction. In order to maintain the intimacy of a small group setting, each small group should anticipate multiplying when the group reaches approximately fifteen regular members.

There are a number of other good reasons for dividing small groups. If there are two or more directions developing within one group, it is better to either focus on one common vision

or to part ways, enabling each new group to pursue their respective goal. Another example of multiplication would be a group that chooses to branch off and form a new group in response to a need in another neighborhood or town.

Of course there can sometimes be conflicts of interest or personality conflicts.

Although we are called to live in harmony with one another, we have not all attained the same level of spirituality. And because we each come from different backgrounds, misunderstandings are almost inevitable. Wherever possible, it is best to seek to resolve conflicts and learn to persevere in the midst of more difficult times. Nevertheless, small care groups are not designed to be prison cells, and it would be unrealistic to suggest that being Christian means that we are exempt from all conflict.

Should it become impossible to grow and thrive within a small group or to feel we are contributing with our gifts and talents, it may be better to join another group or start a new one. We don't need to leave angrily or wait until bitterness has taken root. Let's not forget that the Lord calls us to love one another and to pray for each other in spite of our differences.

There were challenges in small groups in the days of the apostles and there will be challenges in our day too. Still, Christianity has not died out in spite of this, and the Holy Spirit has never ceased to move among true believers.

### **A little help!**

Besides these training modules, there are other resources available to help with the establishing of small groups. Experienced counselors are available to answer your questions. Simply call this toll-free number: **1.888.868.0404** or email: [jaspe@jaspe.org](mailto:jaspe@jaspe.org)

### **The Modules**

Each module is made up of seven sections (with the exception of the *God Within Me* series which has an additional section). We recommend that you begin with the *Between Friends* section for weekly small group meetings, then to explore the other sections as time allows. If necessary, you can complete the other sections on your own at home. It is preferable to begin a new module each week. The sections in each module are as follows:

- *Between Friends*
- *Love in Actions*
- *A Prayer*

- *Hearing from God*
- *Spiritual Vitamins*
- *Windows of the Soul*
- *In a Nutshell*

*Between Friends* offers an opportunity to share your ideas with others. The stories and testimonies in this segment are designed to facilitate conversation. One person can read aloud, or the whole group can participate by taking turns reading. This open dialogue could also take place at the end of each section in every module.

Of course, the point of the exercise is not to win an argument or debate. All of us have different ideas regarding God and spirituality.

No one but God has the whole truth, which is why it is important to use the bible to know him better and to find the answers to our questions. These friendly discussions will be a great blessing to everyone in the group.

*Love in Actions* is an essential part of each module. This segment invites you to go beyond an intellectual experience and to put what you've learned into action. It is where the "love your neighbor" principle comes in.

The sections *A Prayer* and *Hearing from God* are the most important elements of this book. The idea of forming a small group is not a new concept in and of itself because there are already many different types of support groups that exist in our communities.

What is particular to this small care group concept is the introduction of the spiritual dimension. It is the desire to combine faith and action. We must invite and welcome Jesus Christ and give him first place; that is to say, to give him the opportunity to lead and guide us by his Spirit. That will make all the difference!

As you are inspired through reading the prayer in each module, you are invited to address your own personal prayers to God. Whether by yourself or in a group, it is essential to set aside time to spend in prayer and listening for God's voice. During this exercise, it would be a good idea to turn off the television, unplug the phone and minimize all other distractions. Lighting a few candles or having some soft music playing can also help create a more comfortable atmosphere.

Keep in mind that God is not impressed by the eloquence of our words, but he does appreciate sincerity. As you go along and work through this book, it will become easier and easier to communicate with God and hear his voice more clearly.

Be patient, take small steps in the right direction, and don't let yourself be intimidated by shyness or lack of faith. God will help you if you have an earnest desire to hear from him and speak to him.

Conversing with God fills our soul with peace and joy.

It is very important to take note of the thoughts which God will bring to your spirit and the prayers he will deposit in your heart. So having a small notebook which you can write these things in is recommended.

The *Spiritual Vitamins* segment allows you to deepen your knowledge on the subject addressed in each module. The study can be done in a group or individually.

It is important to read the suggested bible references. (You can obtain a bible in a church or in most bookstores.)

*Windows of the Soul* mainly a peek into the lives of people living many centuries ago. Each character has something to teach us and helps us better understand the depth of the love of God.

*In a Nutshell* is the conclusion; the essentials of what we should retain at the end of each module.



So let's get started!

### **Between Friends**

Would you like to be part of a small care group?

In what way(s) could this small care group meet some of your own needs?

Who is God to you?

### LOVE IN ACTIONS

This week, I will talk with some friends or people close to me who I think might be interested in being a part of a small care group.

## A PRAYER

God, I believe in you and would like to know you more. I want to draw nearer to you and experience your love for me. Come live in me and guide my steps along your path.

### **Hearing from God**

Lord Jesus, in this busy, rushed, stressed-out world we live in it can be difficult to hear your voice. I must admit that I don't often take the time to stop what I'm doing and listen to you. I am turning to you now. I want to hear from you.

In this precious moment of peace and tranquility, I open my heart to you. Speak to me, Lord!

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Luke 8:1**

"After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God".

Jesus promised he would be with us every day, until his return. All over the world, there are many very good institutional churches but the presence of God is not limited to religious buildings. Jesus also promised that wherever two or three are gathered in his name, his presence would be among them!

When he was here on earth, the Lord didn't act on his own. He surrounded himself with people who loved God. His usual team was a nucleus made up of some fifteen or so men and women. After his departure, there were other similar groups formed by the apostles. This small-group model, initiated by Jesus, is still just as relevant in the 21st century.

I recently read a book written by a Korean pastor by the name of Yonggi Cho. This man is responsible for one of the largest churches in the world. His congregation is composed of more than 700,000 members.

Mister Cho never allowed himself to be bogged down by a traditionalistic vision of the church. Rather than focusing his efforts on establishing clergy, he prefers to work among the people and provide them an opportunity to live with God as an integral part of their daily lives, instead of contenting themselves with merely attending a large Sunday service. He particularly

encourages the implication of women, a factor which had been overlooked for too long in religious circles.

Thanks to their small groups, this church presently constitutes the greatest social service system in all of Asia. They also publish the fourth most important daily paper in Korea, which prints and circulates one million copies per day.

Yonggi Cho has understood that the church isn't a religion or building. The Church is simply those who believe in Jesus. It is through believers that Jesus wants to love and help people. Whether the group is made of seven people or seven hundred thousand makes no difference. The mission is the same for all: to love God and love our neighbor.

Other recommended readings: Luke 22:24-26; Acts 1:8; 2:46, 5:42; 18:7; 20:20; 28:30; Romans 16:5; Colossians 4:15; Titus 3:8,9; Philemon 1:2.

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Priscilla and Aquilla

The bible gives us many examples of men and women who loved God down through the centuries. In the book of Acts, we hear of a kind couple by the names of Priscilla and Aquilla. The passages that speak of them are brief, but the details they reveal make us think.

First of all, in certain places Priscilla's (the wife's) name precedes Aquilla's. This is rarely seen in biblical passages, and shows a bond of equality. We can also conclude from this that their involvement was considered of equal importance within the community of believers. (Acts 18:18; Romans 16:3)

Second, we learn that both of them accompanied the famous apostle Paul, the pillar of the Christian church of the first century. What a privilege! (Acts 18:18).

Third, we discern an attitude of humility and respect as they are helping a rather knowledgeable, educated person better understand God's message. (Acts 18:26)

Fourth, we find them in the company of a group of Christians, who meet where? In their house! (1 Corinthians 16:19)

## IN A NUTSHELL

- The Church is simply those who believe in Jesus.
- Jesus promised he would be with us every day, until his return. He also promised that wherever two or three are gathered in his name, his presence would be among them!
- It is through believers that Jesus wants to love and help people. Whether the group is made of seven people or seven hundred thousand makes no difference. The mission is the same for all: to love God and love our neighbor.



God of Love





JESUS AND THE LAMB

*KATHERINE BROWN*



# 1

## In A Garden

Last spring, some friends and I visited a campground situated along the Pacific Coast.

It is a magnificent spot. During the summer months, many young people occupy the little cabins scattered here and there in the woods. But on this particular day, everything was quiet and peaceful. There were only a few wild geese and ducks swimming across the water.

The sun is playing hide-and-seek behind huge fluffy clouds, and little rain showers periodically come and water the forest and the beach which is right before us.

All of a sudden, a magnificent rainbow paints itself across this picturesque landscape. It spans from one side to the other of this small bay, spreading its arc so near to our eyes that it almost feels as though we could touch it. It is right above our heads, as though it has come to crown us with the most beautiful of diadems.

Its colors are splendid. They are transformed under the magic of the sun and rain. We are simply awestruck!

The droplets of rain rest in our hair and run down our faces. We are suddenly transported into another universe. Without speaking a word, we take in the beauty of this unique moment. It is a sacred moment!

The whole beach seems to give a sudden shiver in the glorious presence of God. Like a painter, the Greatest of all painters, the Divine Master creates right before our eyes one of his magnificent masterpieces.

I feel so happy that I want to cry and laugh all at the same time. This same morning, I had doubted his love, and now he comes and delights my heart anew with his eternal goodness. I want to fall on my knees at his feet, I want to shout out his praises, but I am completely speechless before such a beautiful sight.

I had never seen a rainbow up this close before. Each of its ends are touching a hilltop on either side of the bay. Its semi-transparent colors transform the greenery of the trees into fiery bushes of blinding yellows, reds and purples.

Without a word, I remove my shoes and take a few steps into the water. I want to respond to God. I want to draw nearer to him. I want to appreciate even more his covenant of love he has made with me, a covenant that will never fail. This I know for certain!

In this moment, this beach has become the vastest, most spacious of cathedrals, and I am utterly speechless... in silent admiration.

Have you ever experienced a moment of awe like this one? Think about it! Have you ever been virtually caught up in the beauty of a landscape? Have you ever wished, down deep inside, that the magic of such a moment could last eternally?

In the beginning, God created the universe to be perfect. Life was full of splendor. Decay and death had no part in it. Perhaps this may sound like mere fiction to you, but heaven on earth truly existed.

It was the expression of God's intelligence and love. It reflected his immortality, his beauty, his love. It was a place of perfect fulfillment and growth, where God sought to be in daily communion with mankind.

Even though later on this magnificent garden was subjected to the fall, it never completely lost its original beauty.

There is a passage in the bible that says "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made..." That is why we have in our genes and in our hearts, like a sweet melody, like a distant recollection of a better world, an eternal world. Paradise has left the mark of eternity within us. Our souls yearn with a deep desire to find happiness and live in a perfect world. A desire to love and to be loved. A desire to know God and live with him.



## **Between Friends**

Have you ever dreamed of living in a world where suffering, disappointment, sickness and death did not exist?

Have you ever spoken to God? What were the circumstances?

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

This week, why not take a walk in a park, in a forest, in a field, or near a lake... and take some time to speak to God?

Or one evening, how about going out on your balcony after a hard day's work, simply to gaze at the sky and express thanks to God?

Or getting up early one morning to watch the sunrise, while remaining silent to enable God to speak to you?

## A PRAYER

God of love, Creator of heaven and earth, how great you are! None can fathom the extent of your intelligence, and your power has no limit. Each of your works reveals your splendor.

Open my eyes so that I can admire your beauty through your creation. Touch my heart so that it can say "thank you" as I gaze on a sunset coloring the horizon; or as I come upon a clearing in the woods, surrounded by ice-covered trees that become like a crystal forest under the blue moonlight; or when the spring breeze softly whispers to me "I love you!"

### **Hearing from God**

Lord, you have created all things and nothing is too difficult for you. I believe in you and know that you are God. I believe that you hear me; I believe that you see me. In this moment, I open my heart, my soul, my thoughts to you, and ask that you speak to me.

Jesus, I come before you now, in quietness, to hear from you. Speak to me, Lord!

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Genesis 1:1-25**

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."

These are the very first words of the bible.

They reveal that God is the Creator, and that creation is an expression of his personality and greatness. An interesting fact is that the bible does not seek to prove the existence of God; rather, the bible affirms it!

A term used by theologians to signify that God created the universe without the use of any outside substance or matter, is the term "ex-nihilo". Indeed, the book of Genesis attests that God created the entire universe out of nothing.

People who do not believe in miracles or the omnipotent power of God do not accept this truth. In scientific circles, there are more than twenty theories that seek to explain the origins of the cosmos. Not one of them can boast of having any sort infallible proof.

If God truly exists, would it not be possible for him to create the world out of nothing more than his will and infinite power?

It takes far more faith to believe that everything that exists is a product of mere chance!

Other passages for reading: Matthew 19:4, Romans 1:20, Isaiah 40:21-28

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### God the Creator

The Hebrew expression used in *Genesis* in reference to God the Creator, is the word "Elohiym". Interestingly, this name bears a sort of plurality to it.

This surpasses our understanding, but God revealed himself to us both as a unique being, and also as Trinitarian. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit were working in perfect unity at the time of creation.

The bible emphasizes that "...since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made..."

It would be incorrect to believe that God and creation are but one entity, a sort of impersonal cosmic energy. Quite the contrary, God is an intelligent being that is distinct from his creation. However, in the same way that we admire the talent of an artist through the works of his hands, we can perceive the beauty and science of God through all that he has made. The universe in which we live is like a gigantic panoramic scene upon which God reveals himself, and through which he repeats over and over "I love you".

## IN A NUTSHELL

- God created the heavens and the earth.
- Originally, the earth was a paradise. Suffering, sickness and death did not exist.
- In our genes and in our soul there is a deep sense that we have been created to live eternally with God, in a perfect world, to love and be loved.

## WHAT I HAVE LEARNED IN THIS CHAPTER

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## 2 Created to Love

*A* while back, I was member of a team of young choreographers originating from five different countries. We toured in many schools and universities in Quebec with a production called *Toymaker and Son*. We played for large audiences, in filled auditoriums, and many students were deeply moved by this presentation. The play was in fact an allegory of the creation of the world, expressed through modern dance and rhythm. Even as the opening scene began, the lighting effects, the accompanying music, and certain bodily movements of the dancers would literally transport me, through my imagination, back through the millenniums to the very moment where God created the stars and galaxies. Like all the other spectators, I too was completely captivated and enraptured.

Then, I would enter into my character. The role I was to play was that of the first human to ever have lived: Adam. I would lay inert and motionless until I felt Divine life rush through me. In this way, the masterpiece of creation became animate for the first time, and his eyes filled with wonder at the sight of the infinite beauty of the universe and the magnificence of this God of love.

One by one, other figures would join me in this dance, each one as radiant as the last. In doing this, we wanted to express the beauty of humanity in its pure form, so new that the warmth from the breath of the Creator was still fresh upon it.

I will never forget this tour we did, and the wonderful moments spent on the company of the other members of the team.

The bible reveals that God created man and woman in his image. In the same way that we can have a tiny glimpse of the beauty of God through nature, we can also perceive a hint of divine quality in mankind. There are therefore elements of the image of God and of his character within us. Each person living on this earth bears the image of his or her Father. If we look closely, we can detect in others that divine spark in their eyes and in their soul. Just as we contemplate and admire the beauty of a starry sky, or the tender light of daybreak, the purity of a pearl, or the sparkle of an emerald; so may we also admire the image of God in those around us. Even though the colors of the landscape may sometimes appear slightly dull or lackluster, the imprint of the God of love remains within us. We were created to live eternally with God, to love and to be loved!

## **Between Friends**

List a few qualities you possess that you particularly like.

List a few qualities that you particularly admire in others.

Take a few minutes to meditate and thank God out loud for the qualities you possess, and the qualities you find in others.

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

This week, while at home, at work, or while out running errands, look for reflections of God in those you meet. And while you're at it, why not offer a simple compliment to someone for the beautiful quality you see in them?

## A PRAYER

My God, it was you who formed my innermost being, who knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you.

*From Psalm 139*

## **Hearing from God**

Lord, you created me and you know me fully and completely. Thank you for creating me the way I am and for having placed your qualities in me.

Just as a child needs his Father, I also need you. I want to feel your presence and hear your voice.

Lord, I need to hear from you!

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Genesis 1:26-27**

"God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

This passage shows us that God created man "in his image and likeness." What an incredible privilege for our species to have been modeled after a divine model! But what does this mean? We have never seen God! The fact that Adam was made in his image does not necessarily mean that he resembled him in all things. So which areas do we have in common with God?

In order to better understand, we must consider the things God has chosen to reveal to us about his character and attributes.

There are aspects of God's character that man does not share. Take for example his essence. The existence of God is not dependent on anything and it is the primary cause of all that exists.

His *eternal nature* is also a unique aspect of God's person. It is difficult for us to grasp this notion, but God has always been and always will be. (Genesis 21:33; Exodus 3:14)

Another attribute that is unique to God is his *transcendence and supremacy*. God is not limited in any way with regards to space or time. It is quite the contrary: finite space is in fact dependent on HIM. He is both transcendent and imminent. His presence is everywhere, in essence as well as in knowledge and power. (Isaiah 66:1-2)

However, a certain measure of the moral attributes of God was placed in Adam, so that he could live in harmony on earth, and have the capacity to love. These qualities of God are not merely an ethical code, but are inherent to his very essence. They will never change because they find their source in his absolute perfection.

Here are some of them:

*Holiness*: God is distinct from all his creatures, and is elevated above them. He is exempt of all sin and evil. The holiness of God is what governs his love, his power and his will. (Isaiah 6:3, I John 1:5)

*Justice and fairness/equity*: This is the aspect of the holiness of God that we see revealed in the way he acts towards his creatures. God instituted a government on earth based on divine love, which is the only infallible authority that distinguishes between that which is good and that which is evil. (Genesis 18:25)

*Goodness:* in the broad sense of the term, the goodness of God incorporates all the qualities that would make up what we would perceive as the "ideal" person. It is because of his goodness that God chooses to make himself known, and also because of his goodness, he created beings with free will in whom he can deposit a measure of his love. (1 John 4:7, 8) The goodness and love of God produce other qualities, such as benevolence and kindness (God cares for his creatures), compassion (the goodness of God shown towards those in distress), and grace (goodness shown to those who are undeserving).

*Truth:* God is true, sincere and faithful. He is the source of all truth. His unfailing faithfulness means that he accomplishes each and every one of his promises.

However, God does not always bring his promises to pass when they are dependent on the actions of those concerned. His veracity and faithfulness are therefore irreproachable. (John 17:3)

What is foremost is that we must recognize that God is a person. Idealist philosophers are wrong in their attempt to make God out to be some sort of impersonal spirit, because the very notion of a spirit implies personhood. Besides which, the bible describes God as having all the psychological characteristics of personhood: intelligence (Genesis 1:31, Acts 15:18), sensitivity (Genesis 2:18, John 3:16), and willpower (Genesis 2:16, John 6:38). Without a doubt, we understand how Adam could have had a relationship with God.

That is also what God wants for each of us. He has deposited within us the capacity to love and to communicate. He gave us the freedom to choose whether to love or reject him. His greatest desire is to live a true friendship with each person he created. God loves us passionately.

Other recommended readings: Matthew 5:43-48; Acts 17:24-28; Colossians 3:8-10; James 3:7-9; 1 John 4:9-12.

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Adam

The name "Adam" simply means "human being".

(The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. *Genesis 2:7*).

Jesus and biblical scholars confirm that the historical account of creation and the first human being are not merely myth, and that Adam did in fact exist. The Gospel of Luke makes mention of him in the genealogy of Christ. (See *Luke 3:23-38*)

Man does not have an ape as his forefather. The bible says that God created man out of nothing, just as it was for the whole of creation.

The breath of life that God put into Adam made him a unique being. Each human being has a soul. We cannot see it, nor feel it, but when it leaves the body, the body dies. Our spirit does not die. Therein lies our true self, our personality, our life's breath. It allows us to communicate with God. We have the option whether to feed or to ignore our spirituality. Our physical senses permit us to admire the beauty of God through his creation, and our spirit enables us to hear his voice as he softly whispers "I love you".

### IN A NUTSHELL

- Mankind was created in the image and likeness of God
- It is possible to discern in ourselves and in others, certain elements of the character of God.
- God is perfect and above all. His attributes of holiness, justice, goodness and truth are perfect and remain forever unchanging.

## WHAT I HAVE LEARNED IN THIS CHAPTER

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### 3

## A Man and a Woman

The first streams of daylight timidly poke through the leaves on a great tree. Warm rays from the sun are shining through the cracks in the bamboo hut, gently caressing Adam's cheek, and he peacefully awakens from his sleep. The scents of the forest, flowers and fruit trees combined create an intoxicating perfume. The weather is not too hot, nor too dry, nor too humid... and there isn't a single mosquito in sight. It's perfect bliss!

Adam gets up slowly, and makes his way to the beach to pick a coconut and a few juicy mangos. But on this particular morning, as he eats his breakfast watching a couple of gazelles and a family of baby lions playing in the fields, he suddenly begins to feel something he finds difficult to define. Of course, he is perfectly happy in this splendid garden and has never known sadness of any kind. However, this little nagging feeling in his heart troubles him. It's difficult to describe. This thought that haunts him is like a dream that does not yet exist; or like the desire to taste a succulent fruit that has not yet been found.

In truth, this deep feeling that was in the soul of Adam stemmed from the desire he had to share all his joy and all this beauty with another person.

And this particular morning, as he walked with God in the garden, Adam shared his heart. God was very familiar with the feeling that Adam spoke of. This joy of loving and being loved, of giving and receiving, had been in God's heart forever.

The next morning, when the sun came to caress Adam's cheek, he once again rose and made his way to the beach rubbing his sleepy eyes. Suddenly, he caught sight of something, and nearly fell over! He could hardly believe his eyes. Gracefully walking along, dipping her feet in the water, was a creature whose beauty surpassed that of everything in the garden. She was more delicate than the gazelles, more beautiful than a star-filled sky, and her hair shone like the golden wheat fields.

Adam was stunned!

She walked softly, free as the wind... and she sang.



## Between Friends

Share what you see as the key similarities and differences between man and woman.

Do you feel that both men and women can experience spirituality in the same way? Explain your answer.

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

This week, I will spend some time alone with God while looking through my photo albums. I will let his Spirit of love speak to my heart as I thank him for my family and those who are dear to me.

## A PRAYER

Lord, I thank you for having made me a unique creature. Through my very own personality, you wish to manifest your love, your power and your tenderness. Thank you for filling my soul with joy, so that I might in turn bring joy to others.

## Hearing from God

My God, I believe that you love me with the compassion of a father and the tenderness of a mother. I believe that even the needs that are not met by those around me can be met by you. I invite you to show your compassion and tenderness towards me. I press into you, and curl up in your arms, oh God of love. Speak to me softly! Speak to me tenderly!

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Genesis 2:18-25**

"The Lord God said: it is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

What was this song of love that Eve was singing as she walked through the garden, before even having met her lover? For whom was she singing?

There is a book in the bible that many people are not familiar with; a book which would knock many readers off their seats were they to take the time to read it. It is called *Song of Songs*, and it is a beautiful poem of love between a man and a woman. Within its pages, we read of the beauty of erotic love within the bonds of marriage, and a multitude of other treasures. This poem reminds us, among other things, the importance of the expression of our most tender, intimate emotions. These are qualities that God has placed in the heart of every man and every woman.

The Spirit of God inspired this book to reveal the incredible value of marital union, but also to reveal to us a part of ourselves which we cannot ignore or do away with. Every human being, whether man or woman, needs to love and be loved, and to live moments of tenderness and intimacy.

In truth, we must admit that this need is not always met in our interpersonal relationships or even within a harmonious marriage. What's more, riches, material goods, popularity, or physical beauty cannot fill this deep need within us to love and be loved. From our very core comes this cry for love, and this passion can never be fully satisfied except through an intimate relationship with God.

Often we may perceive God as a distant being, impersonal and severe. Or sometimes we may see him as a bitter old man living alone. But we ought to remind ourselves that God is not only the Creator but also the very Source of love! These powerful feelings of love and tenderness within us are from him.

God is neither man nor woman, he is Spirit. He created man and woman as a reflection of himself, and he possesses all the qualities of both. Isn't God able to show both the compassion of a father, and the tenderness of a mother?

This is why we must go to him to draw from his perfect love. Only the love of God can meet all our needs.

The harmony that reigns between men and women and even humans in general begins with an intimate relationship with God.

Other recommended readings: Song of Solomon 1:4; 10-14; 8:6-7; Psalm 22: 9-11; 27:10; 131:1-3; Isaiah 66: 13; 49; 14-15; Luke 13:34; Matthew 11:28-30; Philippians 1:8.

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Eve

The name Eve simply means "life". The first woman, the wife of Adam and mother of all mankind, communicated life. Adam and Eve were both created in the image of God. There is no notion of either superiority or inferiority between the sexes. Eve was created different from Adam, but both are equal (Genesis 2:18). They each represent different aspects of the beauty, tenderness, and strength of God. Both are able to feel love, joy, and compassion. Both can converse with God and hear his voice.

Femininity and masculinity aren't roles imposed on us by our environment or society, but rather they are the reflection of the diversity found within the character of God.

Eve expresses, in her own way, the life of God living within her. She gives life, she gives love, and she is a gift of God.

### IN A NUTSHELL

- Every human being needs to live moments of intimacy and tenderness, to love and be loved.
- The spirituality of both men and women allows each of them to maintain an intimate relationship with God.
- Our need for love, intimacy and tenderness cannot be perfectly met in our interpersonal relationships. Harmony amongst humans begins with an intimate relationship with God.



MY PRAYER TO GOD

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# The Day God Wept

*D*ear God... We saw you looking for us yesterday in the garden and simply wanted to write you a little note to reassure you, so that you wouldn't be too concerned about us.

It's true that we haven't spoken to you much lately, but we were certain you would understand that Eve and I need some time to ourselves. We are very grateful of all that you do for us, and are thankful each day, but don't you think it's time you let us try handling a few things on our own?

Eve and I have had many discussions regarding the type of paternal relationship you wish to maintain with us, and together we have concluded that in the long-term this dynamic could interfere with our developing proper autonomy as individuals, and hinder our achieving our full potential. We are able to think for ourselves, and we have the capacity to invent, create and assert ourselves. I think the time has come for us to focus on a few projects of our own and pursue some of our own initiatives. After all, didn't you place a replica of your Divine Nature in us? Thanks to this extraordinary faculty, Eve was even able to hear a serpent speak our own language the other day. We are a little bit like you, you know!

With regards to the upkeep of the garden, we feel it is a rather large task that you have given us. Perhaps you don't realize just how vast and large this paradise really is, and how many hours of work are required to maintain it. On top of that, you have created so many different types of fruits and vegetables that we don't know what to do with them all. They don't all ripen at the same time, which means that it keeps us busy all year round. Perhaps you should have kept things simple and limited yourself to making only a few varieties, that way our job could have been a little easier.

As you can see, this is why we have become much less available for our regular walks in the garden with you and the long conversations we used to have on a daily basis. We barely have any time left for relaxation and a little amusement now and then.

Knowing just how sensitive and good you are, we are certain you will understand. If you like, you can still drop in to visit now and then... provided you don't stay too long.

We love you!

*Adam and Eve*

## **Between Friends**

In a few words, what do you think God must have felt when Adam and Eve turned their backs on him?

What were the effects of this choice in their own lives?

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

This week, why not try to contact a person you haven't seen in a long while? Perhaps you could call someone who had hurt you in the past, or renew a friendship that has become slightly cold after a misunderstanding. Pray that God's forgiveness be at work in the situation, and that he guide you as you take this step.

## A PRAYER

My God, I pray that you restore your love in me. Let your light shine into my spirit so that I may see you and hear your voice. I pray that I may trust you, without doubting the things you have told me. Keep me from behaving with ingratitude towards you. I pray that my soul becomes attached to you and that I may know your peace. I pray that my physical body become an instrument of your love, and that it be used it to serve you and love my neighbor.

## **Hearing from God**

Heavenly Father, even though I was not in the garden, my behavior and attitude would most likely not be any better than those of Adam and Eve. Even today, I see how often my attention is centered on myself and how easily I forget your goodness towards me.

I come before you now, in sincere repentance, and I pray that you show me if there are certain behaviors, certain things I do or choices I make that grieve your heart.

I don't want to be a source of sadness to you, but of delight. Speak to me, I pray.

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Genesis 2: 15-17**

"... but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

At creation, Adam and Eve were designed for eternal life. Suffering, illness and death did not exist, and their bodies did not age. Their soul, the place where rested the seat of their understanding, will and emotions, had never known pain or sadness. Their spirit was not familiar with evil. Their permanent, intimate contact with God nourished their entire being with divine love. Their understanding was steeped in his wisdom, their conscience and emotions were bathed in an ocean of peace and happiness that can only come from living in this perfect unity with God.

When the first parents of all humanity chose to distance themselves from God, their entire being was affected by this choice.

Without this essential contact with divine love, the human spirit withdraws and seeks to find within itself the meaning of life. The soul is deprived of the light which is so vital for making good choices and discerning right from wrong. The conscience alternates between feelings of shame and poor self-esteem. As a result, the physical needs take on an unnatural level of importance, and the body becomes the ultimate masters. Sad, isn't it?

Even though mankind did not completely lose the image of God with the fall of Adam and Eve, the effects of evil have affected the entire human race. Because of this separation with the Father, we experience confusion in our entire being. We have great difficulty distinguishing that which is good from that which is evil; and the very qualities God has given us sometimes become weapons that serve to destroy us.

Our spirit becomes proud of its power and no longer feels a need for God. We seek to control people and situations in order to elevate ourselves and embellish our image. We get lost in a whirlwind of materialism and sensual pleasures.

The day mankind chose to live separated from his Creator, God wept. He knew all too well the terrible consequences that such a choice would bring.

Other recommended readings: Genesis 4:6-12; 6:5-6; 9:19-21; 12:10-13; 14:1-2; 16:1-6; 19:1-9; 34:1-2; 37:11-28

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### God the Father

As Creator of the human race, God comes to us as a father: One who begets, provides and cares for. God is perfect in everything, and every kind of fullness is found in him.

God the Son came to earth to reveal God the Father (Hebrews 13: 1-3). As the perfect man (the Son of Man), Jesus showed us by example that God wants to have a very close relationship with us, as intimate as that of a father to a son (John 5:17-26). Due to the condition of the human race, many have not received sufficient love from their parents. This love, which is so vital to our emotional stability and to the development of our self-esteem, is found in God.

Only God can perfectly heal the wounds of the soul and fill us with a constant love. Jesus identified himself with us as humans, and showed us the incredible blessings we can experience when sharing in an intimate relationship with God.

God is our "Dad", and each day, he opens wide his arms.

### IN A NUTSHELL

- As Creator of all humanity, God wants to be as a loving parent to us; one who cares for our needs.
- God loves us and created us with the capacity to love. The capacity to love also includes, by necessity, the capacity to make choices.
- When Adam and Eve chose to turn from God, they themselves, not to mention all of creation and the entire universe, were affected. The entire human race suffers the consequences, right up to this day.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED IN THIS CHAPTER

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## 5 The Serpent

*I*n another place, in another universe, there is another kingdom, unexplored by humankind. In fact, this place is so magnificent that the most beautiful aspect of an earthly paradise is but a pale reflection of its beauty. This place is in fact the home of God.

Such is the magic of this place that there is no sun or stars in the firmament. The only light is the brilliant light emanating from the presence of God, which banishes all darkness.

There, we hear the wind speak as it caresses our hair. We see rain fall with an incredible symphony of color and sound. On the banks of a multicolored ocean, we collect little pebbles that shine like diamonds.

Unusual creatures also inhabit this place. They are spirits of inexplicable beauty, all in God's service: Angels, archangels, cherubim and seraphim, all possessing great powers. Their size and form may vary.

Certain angels, called seraphim, fly above the throne of God. They each have six wings: two for covering their faces, two for covering their feet, and two which they use for flying. Others angels are strong and brave like warriors. They fly faster than the wind.

Many other angels remain at God's side constantly. They proclaim his glory with melodious songs. Still others are sent to earth as messengers or on various missions, and also to watch over us.

The bible often mentions angels. Most people believe in them. Many claim to have seen an angel, and certain angels have been seen by more than one person at once.

I know that many may consider the following story unbelievable, but this event actually took place.

I once met a man, the director of an international organization, with whom I had the pleasure of working on a book translation project. This man had lived through an experience that was completely out of the ordinary.

He was driving along one day, crossing a bridge, when his car was suddenly struck by a large truck. The driver had lost control of the vehicle. The man's car was projected sideways, leaving most of it hanging over the side of the guardrail of the bridge.

The car was just about to fall the many meters below, when something unimaginable happened. A large hand came out of nowhere and set his car back on the road above. It was an

angel intervening to save his life. Many other drivers were witnesses to this fact. This is what was told to the police officers who arrived on the scene, and is what appears in the official report.

Every eyewitness who didn't believe in God changed their mind after this event.



### **Between Friends**

Do you believe in angels? Explain your answer.

If good angels exist, do you believe there could also be evil ones? Explain.

### LOVE IN ACTIONS

It would be important to look into whether you have items such as books, magazines, films, cd's, perhaps even a "Ouija board", or any other item that presents the forces of darkness in a favorable light. It may be wise for you to rid yourself of these things.

Ask God to give you clarity on this issue.

### A PRAYER

My God, I ask today that you grant me discernment between good and evil so that I may differentiate between the things which you are in favor of and that which is not of you. I want to remain near you and for you to light my way. I only want to heed your voice, and none other. Holy Spirit, give me wisdom and clarity, I pray.

### **Hearing from God**

Lord Jesus, I thank you for having created the angels, and for having entrusted them with the task of watching over and protecting me. I realize that there are evil angels as well, who cunningly try to trick us and drive us away from you. Lord, I want to follow only you, and listen to only your voice.

I pray that you show me if there are things I have in my possession or in my home that are not pleasing to you. Show me, Jesus, if there are areas of my life where I may have been seduced by the powers of darkness in some way, so that I can find healing and deliverance in those areas. Speak to me, Lord Jesus, I place all my trust in you.

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Genesis 3: 1-6**

"Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman: Did God really say..."

There was one angel, among the princes of angels, who was without questioning the strongest and most handsome. He had a deep intimacy with God and rejoiced at the level of trust he had. Like all other heavenly creatures, he was created to love and be loved. But this cherub, influenced by his own beauty and prestige, became proud and allowed evil to take root in his spirit.

Lucifer, as he was called, decided to rebel against God. He succeeded in influencing other angels to join him in his rebellion. The result was a terrible conflict, and all the fallen creatures were chased out of the presence of God.

Certain people believe that this is only a myth and that the devil is merely an imaginary figure representing evil. Of course, the common day-to-day bad things we do are not necessarily an indication of direct intervention on behalf of demons. However, we must understand that if good angels exist, the devil and demon spirits exist too.

Jesus did many miracles while he was among us. He healed many who were sick, but he also chased out demons that were oppressing people by seeking to destroy their lives and health in all sorts of ways.

All one needs to do is to surf the net or visit any public library to see for ourselves that it is very common for people to believe in all sorts of spirits in our day.

In the bible, we can read the writings of two prophets who give us an outlook on what this horrifying "star wars" may have looked like. This discourse was given to a tyrannical king who existed a few centuries back, but the description given here clearly goes above and beyond the situation in that day. Read for yourselves:

*This is what the Sovereign Lord says: You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you: ruby, topaz and emerald, chrysolite, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, turquoise and beryl. Your settings and mountings were made of gold; on the day you were created they were prepared. You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones. Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth; I made a spectacle of you before kings. By your many sins and dishonest trade you have desecrated your sanctuaries. So I made a fire come out from you, and it consumed you, and I reduced you to ashes on the ground, in the sight of all who were watching. All the nations who knew you are appalled at you; you have come to a horrible end and will be no more. (Ezekiel 28:12-19)*

*How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the most High." But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit. (Isaiah 14:12-15)*

This gives us a good indication of the origins of evil in the universe. Angels, like humans, have free will. God does not force anyone to love him. That would not be real love. However, every being having free will also has the liberty to choose not to love.

Which is what Lucifer and his associates chose.

Other recommended readings: Matthew 4:1-11; John 8:42-44; 1 Peter 5:8-9; Revelation 12:7-9; Matthew 8:28-33; Mark 1:32-39; Luke 10:17-20.

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### The Serpent

In the bible, the fallen angels are called demons. The serpent, in reference to the fallen cherubim, is one of the many terms used for the chief of the "bad angels". Here are a few others, along with their meanings.

Satan: adversary, enemy (Matthew 4:10)

Apollyon: destroyer (Revelation 9:11).

The Devil: slanderer (Ephesians 6:11).

Belial: evil, perverse (2 Corinthians 6:15).

The Evil One: malicious, envious, loathsome, infamous (1 Jean 2:13).

Beelzebub: lord of the flies / lord of dung (Mark 3:22).

We must bear in mind that Jesus gave to all believers complete authority over Satan and his demons.

### IN A NUTSHELL

- Angels are glorious, mighty beings with free will, which were created by God to love and serve him.
- Many people believe in angels and some have even witnessed some form of angelic intervention here on earth.
- Just as good angels exist, bad angels exist too. Jesus has cast out many demons who sought to destroy the lives and health of people.

## WHAT I HAVE LEARNED IN THIS CHAPTER

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## Adam, where are You?

"Are you sleeping / are you sleeping/  
 Brother John / Brother John  
 Morning bells are ringing / morning bells are ringing /  
 Ding! Dang! Dong! Ding! Dang! Dong!"

Round and round goes the little pink mobile hanging above my crib, playing the same tune over and over...

No! I don't want music or toys, and I don't want to sleep! I scream! I cry! Just like all the other babies lying in the cribs... all lined up in this dark room of the orphanage.

I want my daddy! I want my mommy!

But daddy isn't there, nor will he come.

Mommy doesn't have the strength to endure the consequences of this one-night adventure that resulted in nine months of nightmarish waiting and humiliation. Her heart is torn in two. She can't stop crying the moment they tear her child from her arms.

No! Mommy isn't coming either. She will never come!

I scream! I cry! My little arms outstretched in the empty air... there is no one. I drift off to sleep, exhausted. Days and nights run together... seemingly unending. Weeks pass, months pass. I have never known tenderness, affection, touch, mother's warm breath or father's rough cheek.

I feel my cold metal crib, I feel myself, I become my only reality. I don't understand, I hide, I withdraw and turn in on myself.

During the Second World War, Nazi scientists conducted an experiment on fifty newborn human babies. The babies were placed in very comfortable beds in warm, cozy houses. The women who were charged with caring for these children were instructed to provide only that which was essential to their survival. In other words, they would feed them and change their diapers, but they were not to communicate any affection whatsoever to the children, whether verbal or physical. Six months later, none of the children had passed the test, every one of them had died.

Fortunately for me, I only stayed three months in an orphanage in Chicoutimi that wasn't anything like a Nazi experiment. I was adopted by a loving and warm family that received me

into a real home. But in spite of the love I received that gave me a sense of security, I still experienced a deep feeling of abandonment in my youth and even into my adult years. A kind of identity crisis where I felt empty and worthless, and like I had no value in the eyes of others. I felt like no one really loved me. I of course relate these feelings to the early days of my existence in this world and to the long months spent in the orphanage.

You know, it is possible for this type of feeling to be manifested in our spirituality as well. The fact of being severed from a personal and intimate relationship with God for so long has greatly affected all our behavior. We become like spiritual orphans and we feel abandoned, rejected by God. We become the only reality we know.

An 'orphan spirit' is the perspective of a heart that has turned in on itself. It has not received the affection so essential to its growth and development, and has difficulty believing that such a thing is even possible. This heart doesn't believe that others can love him or her, and their need for love can never be met. Instead, they may see love as an effective manipulation tool to get what they want. To them, love can never be freely given or freely received. That type of love is foreign to them.

As a result, they will continually try to earn love, to be accepted, to convince God and others that they are worthy of love. To them, everything is conditional.

Finally, after repeated efforts and countless failed attempts, this manoeuvre drives them to close in on themselves... and the vicious circle begins all over again.



## **Between Friends**

Have you ever had feelings of abandonment or rejection? What was your reaction?

Describe a moment where you recall having tangibly felt God's love towards you.

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

This week I will set aside time when I will have no distractions. I will sit comfortably in a favorite spot and I will bring nothing with me: no music, no pen or paper, no books.

I will not give God the list of things I must do, or my list of needs, or prayer requests.

I will simply go to God as I am, just to let myself be loved by him and to enjoy his presence.

## A PRAYER

My God. I want to come home. I searched for other solutions, other shores, other horizons. But apart from you, other things are mere illusions. No one can love me as much as you and it's in you that the word "love" finds its meaning. Father, teach me about love.

### Hearing from God

Heavenly Father, I simply want to come into your arms of love. I need to feel you near. Receive me into your arms, I pray!

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Genesis 3: 8-10**

"I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

Before having disobeyed God, Adam and Eve were naked in the garden and were not ashamed. They had never felt feelings of guilt or shame. After having sinned, they sought to hide from God. They were ashamed of what they had done and this unpleasant feeling even affected their way of seeing each other. Could it be that the nakedness spoken of here is not only a physical, but also a nakedness of the soul?

Adam and Eve, who had always lived in perfect harmony with each other and who had an honest relationship with God, are suddenly tortured by their conscience. But rather than admit their mistake and come naked before God, they ran and hid instead.

Earlier, we saw that an "orphan spirit" causes us to reject God's love and to seek within ourselves the source that could meet our needs. The root of this behavior stems from the fact that we believe a lie. That is, we believe that God abandoned us when we sinned. This lie produces shame within us, and this shame causes us to believe that we have no value in the eyes of God and others. In fact, it was shame that caused Adam and Eve to want to hide from each other and from God! It is shame that makes us want to cover up or hide our failings and sins!

Shame hurts our self-esteem and our confidence, and brings us to a place of mistrust. That's when we begin to want to justify ourselves, in order to appear alright, and look for

ways to prove to others that we have importance and value. Shame is like a wall behind which we hide to avoid showing others our weakness. It damages our vulnerability. That's when it becomes difficult to live intimacy in our relationships because there is no longer any transparency, only fear and defensiveness. The opposite of intimacy is to turn in on oneself. We strive to attain auto-sufficiency.

Adam and Eve were ashamed and became unable to maintain a relationship of trust with each other. They became aware of the gap that separated them. They felt rejected by God and became like orphans. Alone in the world, they sought only to cover their own backs. Adam tried to shift all the blame onto Eve, and Eve in turn accused the serpent.

In the Gospel, Jesus tells us a little story to help us understand the purity of the love of God and also to see the devastating effect an 'orphan spirit' can have in the heart of an individual.

The parable of the prodigal son illustrates for us the life of a young man that had everything he could have needed to be happy. His needs for love and affection were always met by his loving father, and he had the privilege of growing up in a prosperous family. However, his heart was not satisfied. He left his home in search of happiness. He travelled a lot, spent a lot of money, knew many women, but still he did not find happiness.

Tired, wounded, and painfully aware of his failure, the young man recognized he had been wrong. He returned to his father's house with a sincere, repentant heart.

Back home, his father never lost hope of seeing his son again. Each day he went out to watch from his front porch, in the hopes of seeing him return. And when he saw him coming at a distance, he ran out to embrace him.

God never wanted to break his relationship with Adam and Eve even though they had disobeyed. He went looking for them in the garden. Their sin would unfortunately bring some very grave consequences, but never rejection on behalf of God.

In the parable, when the prodigal son returned, he asked that he be treated as a servant. Shame had taken root in his spirit. But his father discerned this poison, and instead held a big feast in honor of his son, and invited many guests. God is not ashamed of us. What he desires is to live an intimate relationship with us. And that will never change!

Other recommended readings: Luke 15:11-32

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Cain

The name Cain means to possess, or to acquire. He was the firstborn of Adam and Eve.

It didn't take long for evil to spread and do damage within the human race. Cain, consumed with jealousy, quarreled with his brother Able and killed him. In spite of how terrible an act this was, God did not turn away from him. He came to Cain and acted as a father to him. He spoke to him gently and expressed his desire to take care of him. He did not want to sever his relationship with Cain. He wanted to reassure and protect him.

But the 'orphan spirit' had already taken root in the heart of Cain. He was afraid. He feared what others would think of him. He could not endure this terrible feeling of shame and he couldn't look others in the eye. He refused to take the hand of God, and chose instead to run and become a wanderer. (Genesis 4:1-16)

### IN A NUTSHELL

- Because of the fall of our first parents, Adam and Eve, we are inclined to turn from God and to seek within ourselves a source of happiness.
- God never rejects us, in spite of our mistakes. What he wants is for us to be honest with regards to our failings and that we come to him. He wants to help.
- We cannot hide from God. He sees all and knows all. But we can choose to turn our backs on him and live as orphans.

# WHAT I HAVE LEARNED IN THIS CHAPTER

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## 7 Soul Akes

Over the course of my journey across Canada, during my suicide prevention campaign, I had the privilege of meeting a couple from California who have lived in Mozambique for the last twelve years. Both of them, having earned Doctorates in Theology from the University of London, have chosen to spend their lives contributing to ending human suffering, rather than living a life of ease in some wealthy town somewhere on the planet. The kindness of Rolland and Heidi Baker, their love for others and their faith in God touched me deeply. The following is an excerpt of what they shared in Toronto, before an audience of a few thousand people:

"We didn't go to Mozambique because we liked the jungle or had a taste for danger. We went because a million people had been killed by war, because hundreds of others are left handicapped because of land mines, because half of all children die before the age of five, and thousands of others are orphaned.

When we arrived there, the majority of children we looked after weren't even able to speak because they had suffered such deep trauma.

We saw hundreds of children living in buildings that were in ruins, without water or electricity, and no hygiene. The sewers were blocked with carcasses of dead rats. The smell was nauseating. The children were defecating anywhere in the house. They slept on a cement floor without a mattress or blanket. Injured ones were lying in a corner without any medical care or pain relief, bleeding to death.

That's why we went to Mozambique. And we are only beginning to learn what it means to love God with all our hearts."

What distress! How can such horrid conditions be in this day and age? How could our earthly paradise have degenerated to this degree? How could we possibly remain insensitive upon hearing facts such as these? And how can we say that we love God, without feeling any concern for the misery all around us?

It is very difficult to understand why there is such suffering on earth, particularly if we accept the fact that the universe was created by a God of love. Does God take pleasure in seeing men suffer? Why doesn't he change all this? Why is there such misery in Mozambique? Why didn't God stop the Tsunami in December of 2004 from flooding so many Asian villages, tragically claiming the lives of thousands upon thousands of innocent victims?

It would be easy to do just like Adam and try and place the blame on God, and to accuse him of causing so much human suffering. Is God ultimately some sort of Supreme Being who is insensitive and unkind? I don't believe so!

The truth is that the fall of man and the presence of evil in the world have brought terrible consequences which greatly affected God's perfect creation. Suffering, poverty, sickness and death were not part of God's plan. They are the diabolical effects of the evil that penetrated our hearts and our universe.

Even today, the earth produces sufficient crops to feed all of its inhabitants. But as a result of our selfishness and lack of sensitivity millions of people are dying of hunger. We have the necessary resources to meet the needs of all the needy ones on the planet, but instead we do nothing. Only love could change our world, but that kind of love is rather rare down here. The only antidote to our planetary selfishness would be to allow God's love to penetrate each of our hearts. Jesus was a perfect example of such divine love, and he came to us to teach us to love! If we are honest, we will admit that we need his help to be transformed from within in order to become his ambassadors, his arms, his hands, his heart... to a suffering humanity that has turned from him.



### **Between Friends**

In your opinion, why is there such suffering on the earth?

Why doesn't God do something to correct this problem?

### LOVE IN ACTIONS

There are many reliable humanitarian aid organizations through which we can contribute to helping the poor and needy in our world. For a number of years now, I have fostered a child through an organization called World Vision. It costs me less than the price of one cup of coffee a day, and has never impoverished me in the least.

I invite you to consider this possibility which would help feed and provide for a needy child. This would certainly be a small step in the right direction. What do you think?

## A PRAYER

God of Love,

I am so sad to see just how much suffering there is in our world. I am certain it must make your heart grieve too. I ask that you simply fill me with your compassion so that my heart does not become hard and insensitive to the sufferings of others.

### **Hearing from God**

Father, I wish to hear from you. Show me, I pray, what I can do to ease the suffering of my neighbor. No effort is too small, no gesture too insignificant when it stems from your will to show love to others through me. I choose this day to concretely make small loving gestures to help my fellow man.

Speak to me, Lord and show me what I am to do.

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Genesis 4:9**

"...am I my brother's keeper?"

As a result of the fall of our first parents, evil is intrinsically related to life on earth. In order to do away with it completely, God would have to completely annihilate this creation and start over.

Through the great flood, he made an attempt to restore integrity to the human race, but it didn't work. Evil is in our genes. We like to do that which is good, because the image of God remains within us still, but in spite of this, evil wins out all too often.

Because of God's perfect nature, his holiness, his eternal existence exempt of any form of evil, it is understandable that the arrival of sin in the universe produced a multitude of consequences and chain reactions that have perpetrated degeneration of all sorts, right up to this day.

It is important, however, to make a distinction between the consequences of the fall of man and the active will of God. The Creator of the Universe is not some sort of merciless

executioner, seated in heaven, shooting arrows of poverty, suffering and sickness on the human race.

A health professional was recently quoted as saying that over half of the illnesses suffered by North Americans are a result of poor eating habits. A third of those remaining are a result of either pollution in the environment, stress, or inadequate work conditions. We could say that God created the human being with freedom of choice, but we still need his help to point our will in the right direction.

A university professor once challenged his students by asking this question: "Did God create all that exists?" One of the students bravely answered "Yes, he made everything."

The professor asked again "He created everything?"

"Yes, sir," answered the pupil.

Then the professor went on to say "If God created all things, then did he create evil as well, since evil exists? And if we apply the principle that our actions define us, do we then conclude that God is evil?"

The student was silent.

The teacher, feeling rather proud of himself, boasted of having proved that the Christian faith is nothing but a myth.

A second student raised his hand and said "May I ask you a question, Sir?"

"Certainly", the teacher answered.

"Professor, does cold exist?"

"What kind of question is that? Of course it exists. Haven't you ever felt cold?"

The young man answered "Actually, cold does not exist. According to the laws of physics, what we consider to be "cold" in reality is the absence of heat. Every individual and every object either possesses or transmits energy. Heat is produced by a mass or matter that transmits energy. "Absolute zero" (-460°F) is the total absence of heat. Everything becomes inept and incapable of reacting in such a temperature. Cold does not exist. We invented this word to describe what we feel when we are without heat."

The student went on.

"Professor, does darkness exist?"

The professor answered "Of course it does!"

"I'm afraid you are wrong again, said the student, darkness does not exist either. Darkness is merely the absence of light. We can study light, but not darkness. In fact, we

can use Newton's prism to fragment white light into many different colors, and then study the variety of wave lengths of each color. Darkness cannot be measured. A simple ray of light can irrupt in a world of darkness and illuminate it. How do we define the space darkness occupies? By measuring the quantity of light that is present. Isn't that correct? Darkness is a term used by man to describe what takes place in the absence of light."

Lastly, the young man asked the professor, "Sir, does evil exist?" With a hint of uncertainty in his voice, the professor answered "Of course! I already said that! We see it the countless daily examples of inhumanity, in the actions of one man against another, in all the crime and violence that happens all over the world. These manifestations are clearly nothing other than evil!"

To which the student replied "Evil does not exist, Sir, or at the very least, it does not exist in and of itself. Evil is simply the absence of God. It is like darkness and cold: just a word that man created to describe the absence of God. God did not create evil. Evil does not exist like faith and love do, much like light and heat. Evil is what takes place when man does not have the love of God in his heart. It is like the cold that comes when there is no heat, or the darkness that sets in when all light is gone."

The professor sat down without saying anything further.

The young man's name was Albert Einstein!

Other recommended readings: Luke 13:1-5, James 1:13-27

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Job

When everything crumbles, when everything is going wrong, when sickness is eating away at us and pain is breaking us down, what is God's reaction? Is he watching from on high, with his arms crossed, saying "Didn't I warn you? All you had to do was shape up and do what's right!"

The book of Job is one of the oldest books in the bible. Job's name means "hated, enemy", meaning "treated as an enemy". Job was a good man who lived many trials. Certain of his friends "Job's comforters", would tell him that God was punishing him because of his sins; that he was treating him as an enemy. Job, confused, tried to defend himself by explaining that trials can befall anyone here below, both the good and the wicked. The conclusion of this book reveals

that God was present and concerned during the entire duration of Job's afflictions, even though he often felt abandoned. Job also learned that no one can call himself "just" before God. The story ends with Job healthy and prosperous, having been restored - the perfect image of the heavenly kingdom that is to come. (Job, chapters 3, 6, 7, 9, 10, 23, 24)

## IN A NUTSHELL

- God is not the author of evil. He is not responsible for suffering, sickness or death.
- Even before the fall of Adam and Eve, God had given us the responsibility to care for the planet and to take care of one another.
- The only way to change the world is to recognize our need for God and to invite him to come live in us to teach us to love.



## MY PRAYER TO GOD

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## 8 God the Son

The trials we face by times can help us come to know another side of God, in a way that was yet unknown to us. God is often the target of many unfair accusations, as though he were somehow to blame for all our human struggles, yet nevertheless, to many he is the Source of support and comfort needed when they find themselves at a place where their own strength just isn't sufficient.

A few years ago, I was faced with an event that showed me how deeply I needed the support and help of God. It was the death of my 19-year-old son. In my opinion, that was the most terrible trial ever, which no parent should ever have to face. The pain was so intense, so deep, that I saw myself sinking under waves of sadness that nearly consumed me. I felt a deep need to be surrounded by those who love me, those in whom I could confide.

I often felt like a stranger, wandering all by himself, carrying his load of grief without knowing who to turn to. It appeared as though no one on my path could fully understand the depth of my suffering, my feelings of lost love, and the tragedy that brought such an abrupt end to my relationship with my son. Like a lonesome stranger, I had to continue to plod along, in spite of how painful each step had become. I felt as a traveler wandering in the desert, just as fragile as all the other travelers; all the other ones who travel alone.

I often wondered whether God even cared about my suffering. I wondered why he had done nothing to prevent the death of my son. Why hadn't he stretched out his hand and rescued him, just at the right moment?

Honestly, I must admit that I don't understand why God doesn't always intervene in the midst of our times of distress. However, I am convinced that God is good and that he is a loving God.

He proved this love by leaving his heavenly kingdom in order to come live on earth among us. He even chose to be born into a nation that was weak and conquered, and to be born in a stable. He came among the poor, the lowly... the rejected ones. He would often send his messengers to us, but he took on a human form himself in order to convince us that he really loves us.

In actual fact, we may see the face of God in the face of Jesus. A dark face, tanned by the sun, covered in dust from the country roads he walked upon, as he brought bread of life to the people... words of eternity.

The face of *God* is wrinkled and worn, and we can read in those wrinkles the hours he has spent listening to and healing those who are downhearted, those who are poor, the orphans, and those who are alone.

His face shows a gentle smile. A smile like that of a child; like the smiles of the children who ran dancing and singing to meet him as he would enter villages. Jesus would join them in their song and dance, as well.

His face also expresses tenderness. Simon Peter saw this very clearly. After Peter had publicly denied him three times, Jesus looked at him with a look of affection.

We see his face, broken and bruised, as he hangs on the cross in agony. As the tears roll down his cheeks, he cries out with all his might "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

This same face shone with an incomparable light, brighter than the sun in its entire splendor, when glory lit up the tomb on that Easter morning, where neither death nor the powers of darkness had been able to conquer him.

Even though our problems are not all settled down here, *God* is with us through our suffering and in our difficulties, because he too suffered as we do. That's for certain! He also promised us that if we put our faith in him, we will one day look upon his glorious face.



## **Between Friends**

What are ways in which *God* intervenes in our world today?

Why did *God* become incarnate?

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

This week, I will make a list of the trials and difficulties I have faced in my life. For each one of them, I will write a prayer to *God* to express my pain, and ask him to heal any emotions, thoughts or memories within me relating to these painful events.

## A PRAYER

Dear God, I have often sought to have you wear masks; masks that I myself fabricated, in my ignorance. Masks of indifference, hardness, weakness, masks of religiosity. I sought to create a little god for myself, "in my own image", because I did not really know you. Jesus, I pray that you remove these masks from my spirit and reveal yourself to me.

### Hearing from God

Jesus, I want to see you, to look into your face, to see your smile. In this moment of peace and tranquility, I come to admire your beauty. Open the eyes of my heart, Lord, I want to see you, I want to hear your voice.

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

### Scripture Reading: **Genesis 3:15**

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

Each Christmas, during a joyful time of sharing, we celebrate the coming of Jesus into this world. There, in a manger, lies the newborn child, the object of his parents' admiration.

But have we ever taken a moment to consider who this child really was? Have we concluded that he was just another human being, or rather that he truly was God incarnate, who was worshiped by the shepherds and wise men? Was he really the Messiah, as prophesied by the prophets?

Many say this is merely a legend. Others don't think it possible that God might come to earth in human form.

What should we then believe?

Let us mention that most of the information we have on Jesus comes from the bible. Even so, how can we be certain that the stories in it are true, and that they were correctly passed down to us? Let us try to shed some light on this.

First of all, we know that many of the New Testament writers, such as Peter, James and John were eyewitnesses to the events they write of. In other words, they really lived with Jesus. That being said, what could they have gained from lying or concocting all their stories,

knowing that the first Christians were persecuted and killed for their writings? Would they have been so foolish as to die to conserve their lies?

Down through history, these evangelical texts, which were considered sacred, were recopied with the greatest of care. The scribes would count all the letters in both manuscripts to ensure that the new text conformed to the original. This allows us to assert, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that the bible is the historical document passed down through history with the most precision and accuracy.

Another interesting fact: in the bible there are many prophecies written about Jesus which can be verified as to their fulfillment.

For example, in the Old Testament, there are over sixty very specific prophecies in relation to God coming to earth.

A math professor from a University in California one day asked his students to conduct a research and calculate the probability of error that Jesus be the fulfillment of even only eight of these prophecies. Their conclusion revealed that Jesus was indeed the Messiah that had been foretold, and that the margin of error that this hypothesis be inaccurate is one in one hundred million billion. This number is a 1 followed by 17 zeros. When they then calculated the probability of error when considering just 48 out of 60 prophecies, the number then climbed to 1 followed by 157 zeros.

Here is another example that makes us reflect on the veracity of biblical texts.

The name of Sir Lionel Luckhoo appears in the Guinness World Book of Records as one of the best lawyers of all time. He won 245 consecutive cases, all of which were murder trials. On two separate occasions, he was honored by the Queen of England, and he served as a diplomat for his country.

Then one day, this atheist decided to reconstruct Jesus' trial. He spent many years, applying himself to researching facts in historical documents and reconstructing the life and trial of Christ.

Following all his effort and hard work, here is the conclusion he drew: "I affirm, without question, that the evidence relating to the existence, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is so convincing that it lead us to accept these facts as proven beyond all shadow of doubt."

Subsequently, Sir Luckhoo became a Christian!

Another eminent lawyer wrote the following: "Jesus was killed by crucifixion and experts confirmed his death. He was placed in a tomb, sealed shut by an enormous stone and guarded by roman soldiers. On Easter morning, he was no longer there. He appeared, alive, to more than 515 people in the days that followed. If we were to try this case in court, and brought all the

eyewitnesses to the stand, it would be impossible to deny the evidence that Jesus Christ existed, and that he did in fact die and resurrect from the dead."

If God so loved us 2000 years ago, to the point of becoming incarnate in order to live among us, would it not lead us to safely believe that he loves us with the same passion today?

Other recommended readings: Isaiah 7:14; 9:5; 53:1-12; Micah 5:2; Zachariah 9:9; 12:10; Psalm 16:10; 22:1-19, Luke 1:1 to 2:40, John 1:1-18; 1 Corinthians 15:1-9; 1 John 1:1-4; 2 Peter 1:16-21

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Jesus

Jesus is the second person in the Divine Trinity. He is the incarnation of God on earth. His name means "Savior" or "Yahweh is salvation". He is also called by many other names in the bible:

The Christ (Luke 9:20)

The Almighty (Rev 1:8)

Everlasting Father (Isaiah 9:6)

Son of God (Matt 2:15)

Son of Man (Matt 8:20)

God (John 20:28)

The One and Only (John 1:14)

The Lord of Glory (1 Cor 2:8)

The Savior (Luke 2:11)

The Redeemer (Job 19:25)

Lamb of God (John 1:29)

The King eternal (1 Timothy 1:17)

Have faith in Jesus Christ. He is truly God, and his compassion towards us is authentic. In our moments of joy as well as moments of sadness, Jesus is there. His love abounds towards each and every person he created.

## IN A NUTSHELL

- The coming of Jesus on earth is not a myth. Many historical documents, including the bible, prove he did exist.
- The bible is one of the most reliable of all the ancient documents we have today. Many of the biblical scholars not only lived in Jesus' day, but actually fraternized and spent time with him.
- What's more, the versions of the bible which we have today have been proven reliable when measured against the originals that were passed down to us, transcribed with the utmost care and attention to detail.
- If what the bible says is true, Jesus is more than a mere human being like the rest of us. He is the fulfillment of the prophecies that foretold that God, the one and only Creator of the Universe, would one day take on a human form and would come live among men.

## WHAT I HAVE LEARNED IN THIS CHAPTER

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## 9

# True Love

In the preceding module, we sought to understand why God became incarnate in the person of Jesus. We learned that God the Son came to earth in order to identify with us, and to reveal the character of God.

In this module, we will see that there was yet another reason for which the Messiah needed to come down to us here below. Let us reflect on this together.

First, we learned that all of humanity has been affected by the consequences of the fall of our first parents. Evil entered the world, contaminating God's creation and our entire being. We understood that our conscience seeks to justify itself to counter the effects of our wrongdoings, and to silence our recurring feelings of shame. Even more, we continually do good deeds in order to try to compensate the wrongs we have done.

To be honest, how many good deeds are required to make up for the bad ones? Can good deeds really cancel out the consequences of evil?

We all agree that it would be absurd to stand before a tribunal, having robbed our neighbor's house, and ask the judge to acquit us on the basis of the number of good deeds we have done for other neighbors in the same neighborhood. This would be simply unjust.

God is a God of love, but he is also a God of justice. He cannot tolerate evil. It goes contrary to his very nature. That is why sin always generates devastating consequences. Sin and evil are directly opposed to the nature of God.

In general, people do not like to associate God with the image of a judge. It is a somewhat frightening thought. However, if any of us are subjected to a severe injustice of some sort, we don't think twice about taking our cause to court. Consider for a moment what our world would look like without a judicial system! Even though things are far from perfect here below, we all have a certain sense of justice. If someone hurts me, if he destroys my property, if he strikes me or my children, I want this person to be stopped and sanctioned. Should I feel guilty because I want to see justice done? I don't believe so!

Secondly, let us affirm that God is a just judge. He is a judge full of compassion. That is why his heart weeps when we commit wrong. If God were an unloving judge, he would have destroyed the world long ago, and with good reason. However, because of his goodness, he wishes to pardon the guilty.

But how can God possibly remain just while pardoning us?

In order to grasp the magnitude of this dilemma, we must understand that God and evil cannot live together. Lucifer had been a beautiful archangel, but when he became proud and arrogant he was no longer able to remain within God's presence in paradise. Adam and Eve lived in a perfect world, but one single act of disobedience affected all of heaven and the entire human race. Unfortunately, we are all under the influence of our first parent's sin, and each of us has also sinned. As a result, our nature has become hostile towards God. Instinctively, we turn from God. We refuse to know his love, and we turn our backs on him. We behave like an egocentric child. We take full advantage of all of God's benefits without ever stopping to thank him. We disregard his advice and loving counsel, and refuse to allow him any say as to the way we behave in the universe he created. We prefer to establish our own criteria and principles rather than listen to the words Jesus taught. These are the effects of shame, brought on by the evil that imprisons us and hardens our hearts.

Thirdly, another unavoidable defining characteristic of justice demands that no one can accept the consequences of the wrong we have committed on our behalf. Not our parents, nor our spouse, nor our best friend, not even an angel can answer in our place, or take upon himself the responsibility of our acquittal. Each individual is responsible for his or her own actions. The only one who can decide not to sanction our destructive actions is the person against whom the offenses are committed, in this case, God himself.

And because of his love for us, that is exactly what he has done.

Since perfect divine justice could not be done away with, God decided to take upon himself the terrible consequences of our human degeneration.

It is thus that God the Son came to earth to reveal himself to us, and to draw nearer to us than anyone could have imagined. Out of love, he came to pay the price of our debt towards him. He subjected himself to the judgment demanded by his perfect justice, in order for us to be forgiven and reconciled to him forever.

That is why no one can justify him or herself before God by presenting him with excuses or compensatory good deeds. The work of atonement of Jesus on the cross cannot be replaced. It is perfect!

No religion or belief in reincarnation or purgatory could earn us divine forgiveness. Neither is there a punishment of some sort God could inflict upon us which would make up for our mistakes. That would be denying the sufferings of Jesus and affirming that his sacrifice was not sufficient for our pardon.

The death of Jesus on the cross was an atoning death. He took upon himself the sins of all of humanity. God was crucified by his own creatures, and went right to the end to buy them back. We are all responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus. It was not only the Romans who planted the nails in his hands and feet; it was our sin that held him on the cross.



### **Between Friends**

God is perfect love and perfect justice. Explain in your own words how God's justice works.

Why couldn't God have sent an angel or archangel to become incarnate and die on the cross in Jesus' place?

### LOVE IN ACTIONS

This week, I will share with someone what I have learned in this module. I will help them understand why Jesus died on the cross in order for us to be completely pardoned from all wrong and reconciled to him for eternity. What good news!

### A PRAYER

Lord Jesus, For too long I have remained in disbelief and far from you.

I have not sought to know you and have paid no interest to your Word. I have acted against your will and have committed all sorts of sin. I want to change, Lord, and this day I ask your forgiveness. I ask you to come live within me and to write my name in your book of life. I ask that you deliver me from evil, that you heal me and fill me with your Holy Spirit this very moment. I give you my life, Lord. I believe that you died for me on the cross.

Give me the strength to follow you. Restore joy and peace in my soul.

Take my hand and lead me in your will each day, right into eternity.

Thank you, Lord! Amen.

## Hearing from God

Lord Jesus, You have loved us so much, and I want to share with all my friends the greatness of your love.

Show me those who are near me with whom you would have me share what you have done for me. I want them to know that it is possible to know with certainty that we are going to be in heaven with you one day, for all of eternity.

I want to be a spokesperson for you, Lord. It's the least I can do to express my gratitude.

Speak to me, Lord!

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: *Genesis 6:5-6*

"The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time."

Do people truly express an interest in Christianity?

Who has not heard of Mel Gibson's film "The Passion of the Christ"? And who could possibly remain insensitive as they view these images which represent all that Jesus suffered for our sake? As soon as it hit the big screen, this production instantly ranked among one of the greatest film successes of all time. In only one month, more than 400,000 people visited the film's official website which gave additional information, explaining why Jesus needed to die on the cross. This indicates that many thirst for God in spite of false religious debates and of the extreme confusion which is so common in our day and age.

It is true that it's not easy nowadays to distinguish between what we should believe, and what we should cast aside. For example, two months before the movie premiere of Gibson's film, the front page of Time Magazine offered its readers, in huge letters, an article bearing the title "The Lost Gospels". The article was written on the subject of certain texts written by writers from the first centuries, which contradict other biblical texts we presently have.

After that, following the release of the film, I heard a theologian commenting, on the six o'clock news in front of thousands of viewers, that Jesus' death had nothing to do with the pardon of sins, and that this was an outdated concept that is only found in the Old Testament. I thought to myself that this man had surely never read through the entire bible!

Then, two months later, Time Magazine published another conflicting cover-page article on the significance of life and the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Have you ever wondered why so many people try to convince us that what Jesus clearly stated about his own self is untrue? Why do we have this need to uncover some sort of "hidden revelation" that would disprove the words of the only person having walked this earth who was able to assert "I am the Truth"?

As early as *Genesis*, and all through history, God foretold that he would one day come and live among men. Jesus came, and confirms all the prophets have told.

There have never been any lost or hidden gospels. Yes, there have been many writings about Jesus, as early as the first centuries, and the Christians of that day either retained or rejected them, judging in accordance with the truth that had been taught them by the Lord.

There is therefore no hidden revelation that exists to access to the truth. God has nothing to hide, and what he has to say is accessible to all.

What's more, it is not necessary to have a great education to understand God's message. Jesus came among the humble and lowly for God considers every man equal, and his Word is written to all.

Do you believe in the Son of God?

Other recommended readings: *Genesis* 22:18; *Ps* 118:17-26; *Isaiah* 9:5; 53:1-12; *Jer* 23:5-6; *Micah* 5:1-2; *Zechariah* 9:9, 12:10

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Hagar

This young woman certainly did not have an easy life. Her troubles began when Sarai, Abram's wife, who was barren, suggested to her husband that he sleep with his Egyptian servant girl. Abram accepted, and Hagar became pregnant.

But the relationship between the two women became bitter and Sarai mistreated Hagar, who in turn ran away. The Angel of Yahweh found her in the middle of the desert, and urged her to humble herself and return to her mistress. He also gave her a promise that her son would be blessed, and that he would be father to a great nation. The angel even instructed her as to the name she should give the child. Hagar followed God's instructions, but a few years later, Sarai chased her away once again.

Discouraged, she ran into the desert with her child. After a few days, the two of them had come to the end of their strength and were without water. Hagar wept, and her son also, and she offered one last prayer to the Lord, thinking this was the end. But God had compassion on this single mother. He directed her to a well where she could fill her goatskin and give drink to her son.

The name Hagar means "flight" or "escape", but her story reveals just how much God loves each person on this earth. His greatest desire is to reveal himself to us, and to pardon and help us.

## IN A NUTSHELL

- God is love but he is also justice. He cannot accept evil. It goes contrary to his nature.
- The only way God could remain just towards us and yet pardon us was to take upon himself the consequences of the wrong we have committed.
- That is why Jesus came down to earth and paid our debt by dying on a cross.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED IN THIS CHAPTER

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## 10 Abba

Our consumer-minded society teaches us that a person's worth is determined in relation to their level of usefulness. Perhaps you have noticed that often when we use the word "love", we mean that the object of this love gives us something we want. For example, if I say "I love my car", I am most likely thinking of all the benefits the car gives me. Perhaps the car improves my image, or simply serves me well without any hassle. However, when I say "I love my wife", does that mean that she does what I want most of the time? Does that mean that as long as she makes me happy and comfortable she will continue to have value to me, which I will then express by means of the term "love"?

Clearly, the whole concept of love is centered on what I can get or use. Contrarily, love according to God is based on the act of giving and serving.

I was very touched recently as I read an article written by the father of a little girl who has Downs Syndrome. What he shared caused me to truly reflect on the definition of love. Of course I love my work, my house, my car, my hobbies and a million other things, but when it comes to people, do I love them with no more love I have for my dog? And do I have the courage to ask this even deeper question: do I love God merely for what I am able to get from him? Does his goodness, his love, his forgiveness leave me indifferent?

When it comes to love, my actions and reactions to those of others reveal my deeper motives.

I discovered that if I have difficulty loving, it is often the result of a certain "orphan attitude" or a "spoiled-child attitude" manifesting itself in me. I expect others to satisfy all my needs and wants when I see fit. I instinctively seek to use people to obtain the things or situations that best suit my plans. As is often the fruit of this concept of love, I will only find frustration and dissatisfaction.

This form of so-called love goes contrary to the love of God because it calls attention to what I can get rather than what I can give.

If my relationship with God were built on this foundation, I would be convinced that God exists to satisfy my needs, right when I want and in the way that I want. God would therefore have to make me happy and comfortable. And if that didn't happen, I would quickly lose interest in him. I would have no desire to ask that his love be manifested through me so that my life could reflect his goodness to others.

It is comforting to know that *God* does not condemn us for our weaknesses and that he wishes in fact to help us. Even our failings provide an opportunity for *God the Father* to show us his love; a pure and lavish love.

If you are under the impression that you are unable to love, that you suffer from a severe and incurable form of egocentricity, do not let yourself be discouraged or overwhelmed by what you see within yourself. Instead, know that *God* works in mysterious ways and that he does miracles. Our weaknesses allow the Holy Spirit to show us the Father's love in our favor. He wants to enable us to recognize these orphan or spoiled-child attitudes so that he can then direct us to the Source of real love.



### **Between Friends**

What is your definition of love?

What type of relationship do you have with *God*, and how often do you earnestly desire to talk with him?

Is it possible that my prayers could sometimes be motivated by a desire to live a more comfortable life, centered on my own happiness?

### LOVE IN ACTIONS

This week, I will make a point of doing simple loving gestures towards others, without seeking anything in return. I will love simply for the sake of loving. At the end of each day, I will reflect on how it felt to do so.

### A PRAYER

Heavenly Father, Source of all love, enable me to receive in simplicity and without restraint the love that emanates from you. May your Spirit grant me the power to love.

I recognize my failures and my need of your help in order to be able to love you, to love myself and to love others. Take my hand in yours and teach me to love. May your love within me bring forth your forgiveness, your peace, your joy.

## Hearing from God

Heavenly Father, I want to dialogue with you. I open my heart to you so that you can help me discern whether my way of loving corresponds to yours. Reveal to me areas where my motives are selfish and show me ways in which I can change.

I know that without your help the task is an impossible one. So I come to you, to rest in your arms that your love can be made known in me and through me. I am attentive to you.

I love you Father!

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Genesis 22:1-14**

"And the two walked together as one."

A few years ago, I translated and published a beautiful book called *Windows of the Soul*. I would like to share this short portion of one of it's chapters with you.

You may find it moving.

The story begins with the marriage of Allan and Patsy. As with all newlyweds, their eyes sparkled and their hearts were full of happy dreams. Allan was in the Air Force and was working towards becoming an expert in American/Soviet relations.

After having obtained a Masters Degree in Russian politics, he decided to work towards a PhD which would then enable him to represent his country overseas. Patsy shared his goal, and worked hard to learn the language. She cherished the dream of one day living in a beautiful home and having many children.

Three years later, their dreams began to crumble.

Allan was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. This disease destroys the protective layer around human nerve tissue. It acts like little mice that eat away at the covering of the electrical wiring within the walls of a house.

One after another, the circuits of the nervous system break down and extinguish themselves.

In the nine years that followed, Allan's health deteriorated. He who had been a cross-country skiing champion could no longer walk without the use of a cane. This man who had secured such a promising career now found himself empty-handed.

The following year, it was Patsy's turn to sink into the quick sands of illness. Her metabolism began to show a number of different symptoms, none of which appeared related to the other, but all of which weakened her more and more.

Then the diagnosis came: disseminated lupus erythematosus, a progressive and incurable disease which attacks the immune system. In the next twelve months, she suffered from thirteen different types of infections, everything from sinus infections to infection of the lymph nodes. The pain was constant in her muscles and her joints deteriorated due to arthritis. Each morning she felt like the tin man in the Wizard of Oz whose arms and legs wouldn't do what they ought. But in her case, no amount of help or oil could make things right again.

Allan and Patsy often wept over their misfortunes. Their dreams, their health, their promising career, their hopes of starting a family... all were lost. They were paralyzed with fear at the thought of what the future had in store: loss of autonomy, loss of memory, loss of their spouse, and who knows what else.

However, they somehow managed to remain clear-headed with regards to their situation and did not allow themselves to become bitter. On the contrary, they remained some of the nicest people to be near and spend time with.

One of the reasons for this was their faith in the sovereignty of God. They often prayed that God would intervene and that he would heal them, that the pain would cease, that the mental effects of their sickness would disappear, and that even the sickness itself would be gone. But no change occurred.

Their prayers for this cup to be taken from them transformed into an attitude of abandon. It was a bitter cup, but they resigned themselves to it, believing that it was given them by the hand of the Father; a loving hand that must have a clear purpose for bringing this trial about. Their distress grew as Allan's condition worsened to the point that he had to cease work.

During the time his sickness was flaring up, he happened to read the story of the prodigal son one day. He knew it well, but this time it took on a whole new meaning as he read it. He shared with Patsy how deeply this story was speaking to his heart, and how the mercy of the father was touching him: the tears he shed, his loving embrace, how he wrapped his loving arms around his son, how he restored him into the family, offering him new clothes, new shoes, a ring of gold. How he held a feast in his honor.

It was the mercy of God in the story that truly touched Allan. The son had come home only in the hopes of avoiding famine and starvation. But what was waiting for him was far

more than just "servant status", in fact, it was even more than he could have imagined in his wildest dreams. As he meditated on this passage, he saw that the son would reap a life full of hope and a rich future simply because of the immense mercy his father had for him.

Even though he wasn't a prodigal son, Allan was experiencing tremendous fears in relation to his future and that of Patsy. How would they possibly survive now that neither of them was able to work? How would they provide for themselves? How would they pay the bills? How would they make ends meet?

There simply weren't any answers to these questions. Except for the growing certainty that the answers could only be found in the One who has all the solutions. It made sense that the only way to face each day and the years ahead would be to run into the arms of this merciful God.

The image of the father's embrace was so moving... that's what Allan wished for more than anything. He had never doubted the existence of God, but now he longed to see him, to hear him speak, to taste his mercy, to feel his touch. He wanted it desperately.

For a whole month he and Patsy prayed together, asking their heavenly Father for the privilege of seeing his beauty. They prayed for some sort of sign of approval from him, a look, a smile, anything. There were times when Patsy would cry for half an hour before she was even able to utter a single word. "God help us! Have mercy on us!"

The Christmas season was approaching. This had always been Patsy's favorite time of year, but this year neither of them even had the strength to dig the boxes of decorations out of the closet.

A few of their friends, knowing that this occasion held a particular significance to them, offered them a little Christmas tree decorated with red bows all over it, each one enveloping a 20 dollar bill. Patsy cried.

Some other friends phoned and kindly offered them two airline tickets, inviting them to join them for Christmas in Monterey Bay, near Pebble Beach in California. Allan and Patsy accepted the offer, taking with them the dollar bills from the little tree as their spending money. They were treated like royalty and felt loved and appreciated.

One day as they were strolling along a boardwalk by the shore, one of their hosts suggested that they visit a nearby art gallery.

Once inside, Allan and Patsy's attention was immediately drawn to a sculpture in the very centre of the room. It was illuminated by a tiny ceiling light directly above it, which cast a soft cone of light all around it.

They both stepped towards it, completely awestruck. It was a sculpture of the prodigal son in the arms of his father. He was clinging to his father's robes and weeping with deepest emotion. This image spoke the soul language of Patsy and Allan. God used it to communicate to them what they so desperately needed.

"Yes, I hear your prayers, he said through this sculpture. Yes, I am a God of mercy."

"And yes, I love you dearly."

They stayed gazing on this sculpture for a very long time, silent and utterly speechless. They were "clinging to his robes, weeping with deepest emotion."

Other recommended readings: John 14:1-18; Romans 8:14-39; Philippians 2:1-16.

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Abraham

Abraham is known as the father of the Jewish nation. His name literally means: "father of a multitude".

God promised him on a number of occasions that all the nations would be blessed through him, and that his descendants would number as the stars. It was through Abraham's line that Jesus was born.

Abraham's life was not always exemplary, but Abraham loved God and had a deep and intimate relationship with him. God also loved Abraham, and because of the strong bond of confidence which reigned between them, he was able to share some of his deep sentiments with him. God even tried to share with Abraham the pain he knew he would experience, looking ahead to the days where his father's heart would be crushed at the inevitable death of his only son on the cross. (Genesis 22)

The older Abraham became, the more his faith in God became like that of a child. He is, in a matter of speaking, the father of all believers.

Abraham knew the love and faithfulness of God the Father and he became more and more like him. His life was transformed.

## IN A NUTSHELL

- *God created us to love and be loved but it's possible that our definition of love may be false.*
- *Human love often constitutes selfish motives. Divine love is a generous love, free, and directed outward.*
- *If we suffer from a severe form of egocentricity, we must not get discouraged. God moves in mysterious ways and he does miracles. Our weaknesses give the Holy Spirit an opportunity to show us the Father's love in our favor.*



# MY PRAYER TO GOD

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# 11

## Forgiveness

A few years back, the headlines of the newspaper read STOP SIGN IGNORED, TEEN HIT AND KILLED. DRINKING AND DRIVING IS DEADLY! Next to the article was a large picture of Mylène, full of life, with her beautiful smile and bright eyes casting a final farewell to all those who loved her.

Fifteen years of happy days... only to come to a sudden halt. A drunk driver, by breaking the law and ignoring a compulsory stop sign, had struck Mylène and projected her into to the air like a leaf of paper blown by the wind.

Never could her parents, Gilles and Manon Carignan, or her two sisters, Anissa and Noémie, have imagined that Mylène would leave them in such an unexpected and tragic way.

I have known the Carignan family for years. They are friends of mine. Mylène was my friend as well, and her death broke my heart. A few hours after the accident, I joined them at Mylène's bedside. She was lying motionless in a hospital bed, and was difficult to recognize because of the swelling in her face. She had already stopped breathing.

For fifteen years, Mylène had been loved and cared for in one of the most loving families I know. Theirs was, without exaggeration, a model family in all respects.

I rubbed shoulders with the Carignan family for many years, and still do. My children played with theirs, including Mylène. To find her photograph next to that of a drunk driver on the front page of a newspaper filled me with indignation, disgust, and anger. This man had no right to take a life because of his alcohol problem. He certainly had no right to take Mylène's life; a life so unique, so irreplaceable. At school they called her "Sunshine" because her love for others, her love of life and overall optimism shone so brightly on those around her. She was an artist, full of all sorts of talent. She was a confidant who always listened, and was always there for her friends.

Mylène knew God's love, just as her parents and sisters did. In spite of the pain and emptiness they felt at the loss of their dearly-loved Mylène, they turned their eyes towards the Source of all comfort for help in crossing this time of mourning. It was God who brought healing and forgiveness.

Gilles and Manon are good friends of mine. I can still see them standing alongside their daughter's casket, with a sword of pain piercing through their hearts. But in spite of the uncontrollable flood of grief that was upon them, they allowed the flame that was within them

to burn and shine all the brighter. I just knew in my heart that, as we have often seen happen, the Carignan family would become a safe place of refuge for the suffering, the hurting... and those in mourning.

And that didn't take long to become a reality. In an article published in *Dernière heure* magazine, Gilles shared these thoughts about the person who was responsible for the death of his daughter:

"When it first happens, what parent would not be angry at the person who had done harm to their child? But as we take a step back, we ask ourselves: how can we blame one person when society as a whole is responsible for these types of events? How many people around us have driven after having had too much to drink? This person needs to be helped, not condemned.

To forgive this man does not mean that we don't wish that justice be served! God does not remove the weight of the consequences of our actions. Instead, he does offer us freedom from the weight of condemnation.

Forgiveness is not a feeling, it is a choice. In my heart, I know that this man did not want to hurt Mylène. But even though his actions were involuntary, he will always be a human being who unfortunately made a very bad judgment call.

In our family, we separate the offense from the offender. But at the same time, we don't turn a blind eye; this man does deserve to be punished.

This sad event must lead him to make a change in his life, but we don't believe that human justice is what will bring that about.

In the USA, one of the states has a law that stipulates that in the case of an accident due to drunken driving, there is a severe punishment for the bar owner who allowed the patron to leave his establishment and take the wheel in an inebriated state. You know, I am the son of an alcoholic. My father would beat my mother and me regularly, and he poisoned the lives of all of our neighbors. He was later placed in a psychiatric hospital for 25 years. But my mother taught us to forgive him. Toward the end of his life, he realized the wrong he had done, and he began to change radically.

It was unbelievable to see how my father was transformed by realizing and facing his mistakes. We would like to meet the person who killed our daughter outside of the whole investigation and court procedure that will follow. We would really like to help him. If this man was in distress and he had crossed paths with Mylène, she would have helped him, as she had always done. So it's also for her sake that we take this step of forgiveness."

Gilles' testimony stirs up all my loving feelings towards him and his family. If Mylène had always sought to help and forgive, it's because she inherited these qualities from her parents,

who had received them from God. Forgiveness is like a gift that God tenderly deposits in the bottom of our hearts. It is like a river that gradually transforms the rough stones of bitterness into small, smooth pebbles.

Forgiveness does not depend solely on our own strength and human capacity to forgive. Without God's help, all our efforts prove useless.

Forgiveness is a gift we must ask for and receive from God. A gift we in turn offer to others, perhaps even to those who don't deserve it.

Forgiveness cannot be merited, it is received. It is not a burden someone places on us or that we place on ourselves.

In order to forgive others when they have wronged us, we must choose daily to walk in forgiveness. It is a perilous path where our traveling companions are often bitterness, anger and hatred.

But regardless of our circumstances, we must keep walking, taking small steps and placing our confidence in God: "Lord, I am unable to forgive this person, but I allow your love and forgiveness to enter my heart."

Over time, God's forgiveness begins to act in our hearts, and his forgiveness becomes our forgiveness. It is the nicest gift that could be offered to us and that we can offer to others. Forgiving is... "for giving!"

A few months following the accident, Gilles and Manon met with the man who was responsible for the death of their daughter, and they expressed their sincere forgiveness. This gesture on their part may very well produce a radical transformation in the life of this man and those around him.

The light I see shining in the eyes of Gilles, Manon and their children is a reflection of the love of God. It is a love that is not of this world, but that is offered to all those who love him and turn to him. This love will never fade, whether in this world... or the next!



## **Between Friends**

What does forgiveness mean to you?

Share a situation where you acted badly and received the forgiveness of the person you had offended.

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

This week, I will make a list of people who have hurt me in the past and who I would like to extend forgiveness to. I will then pray that God would deposit his forgiveness in me. In God's time, I will let them know, either by telling them personally or in a letter, that I wish to offer them a beautiful gift: forgiveness!

## A PRAYER

God of love,

I thank you once again for having loved me enough to give your life on a cross in order for me to be forgiven. Your forgiveness is so precious, so real. In this moment, I receive your gift of forgiveness, Lord. Let it come soften the rough edges of my soul. I forgive myself for my own failings, just as you forgive me. In the same way, I forgive those who have done me wrong. I extend to them this invaluable gift of forgiveness.

Help me Lord, to allow your forgiveness to flood all areas of my life each day.

## Hearing from God

God of love,

I am unable, by my own strength, to forgive myself or extend forgiveness to others. This is why I ask for your forgiveness to make its home in my heart.

I remain peacefully in your presence and I ask your Holy Spirit to come uproot any traces of bitterness in my heart and to pour your divine forgiveness in instead.

Here I am Lord, and I open my heart to you!

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Genesis 50:17**

"Joseph wept as he heard these words."

It is important here to make a few specifications about forgiveness. The reason for this is that certain people who have been subjected to serious abuse find it difficult to forgive their aggressors and often feel guilty over their incapacity to forgive. Biblical passages that refer to

forgiveness then become heavy burdens that increase their suffering. What's more, they will often cross paths with a few "well meaning Christians" who will call their spirituality into question by accusing them of being disobedient to God in their refusal to forgive. What a mess!

We must first understand, as we read the bible that we must take into consideration the context in which things are written. Some verses could potentially become very heavy if they were to be taken out of context and used in a wrong way against people.

Let's have a look at a few comments on a very well-known passage, which are taken from a book that I translated into French and published a few years ago, called *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse*.

"Wrong interpretations of Matthew 18:21-35 may vary. They include such things as "Do not take account any wrongdoings." "What's the matter with you?" "You should forgive!" "You are merciless and bitter." These passages have also been used to cause people to behave as though they had forgiven their aggressor, when true forgiveness had not yet taken place. When such a thing happens, the person wrestles non-stop in an effort to forgive, but is often accused of not being willing to let go of their spite. But it is impossible for them to let it go, because the wrong that was done has never been corrected.

Once more, the context of what was written will prove revelatory. This passage is part of a chapter which begins with a question being thrown out by the disciples "Who of us is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" The chapter ends with the story of a servant who lacks mercy and a king that is angry with him, who in the end "turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed." The very last verse in the chapter contains this warning from Jesus "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart." We see here that the focus is placed on the integrity and purity of the heart, rather than on outward appearances.

What's more, in the preceding verses (Matt 18:15-17) Jesus declares in verse 17 "if he (the unrepentant one) refuses to listen, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector."

First of all, for a Jew, it was preferable for him to remain distant from pagans for fear of ritual contamination. Secondly, in a sense, tax collectors were even worse. A tax collector was a Jew who worked collecting taxes for the Romans, in other words, someone who "should have been on our side but worked for the enemy".

So keep far away from them! Jesus didn't say "Attack them!" He said "Let them go!" Your choice of distancing yourself does not become an attack on your part. Their own bad actions and refusal to repent is what causes others to need to keep their distance.

You are merely recognizing the state of the situation.

In spite of it all, Jesus proposes that there be at least three confrontations before the choice is made to leave the person who committed the offense aside. The Jewish tradition operates this way: make three attempts before giving up, and you will have done your duty.

That's how we can better understand Peter's question: "How many times must I forgive my brother?"

Inside, he was probably saying to himself "Well, if three times is good, seven would be even better." Perhaps Peter was looking for the best way he could become the greatest, since that issue was being discussed in the beginning of the same chapter. In this light, Peter may have been attempting to uncover a way to obtain justice, based on the capacity to forgive.

Jesus gives this answer "Seventy times seven." Four hundred and ninety times! Was this the magic number for attaining the proper level of justice?

But what might the answer have been if the question had been "How many times must I forgive my brother, 490 times?" I believe Jesus would have answered "No, seventy times seventy times seven."

His goal was not to give an exact number, especially where it is a question of forgiveness. He wished instead to push the number above all human capacity.

A proper response to Jesus' answer is not to try and forgive more times, but rather to ask the question: "Where can such incredible forgiveness be found?" Even if I tried my utmost, I could never make it. I give up!

Do you recall the warning of Jesus? The one who does not forgive with his whole heart will be turned over for torture. Jesus teaches us many things in this little story.

Firstly, that one sincere act of forgiveness coming from the heart is better than forgiving 490 times in vain, or pretending to.

In other words, forgiveness is so important that it must be real.

Secondly, it shows us where true forgiveness comes from. It is not the fruit of our own efforts in the hopes of attaining a certain level or magic number.

It comes from the recognizing of our own desperate state, coupled with the hope we can place in the mercy and forgiveness of God, which would enable us to then let those things flow in our own hearts.

Which points to the very problem we see in the man who owed much money to the king in the parable of the unmerciful servant. When he was asked to repay his debt, he was unable to. However, his answer was not that of a broken man; he did not beg for mercy. He said "Be patient with me and I will pay back everything."

So it isn't surprising that he was unable to forgive his fellow servant who only owed him a small amount. He had never himself accepted the great forgiveness that had been offered to him.

Lastly, this teaching follows up the statement of Jesus about the offender who refuses to repent: "Treat him as you would a tax collector."

I believe this means that it is possible to forgive someone while remaining distant from them. To forgive means that you free the person from any debt they have toward you. This does not mean that you will have complete confidence in the person again or that a close relationship will be reestablished. It says in Luke 17:3 "So watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him." It is obvious in this passage that our forgiveness towards a person is based on their repentance. Conditional forgiveness, you ask?

Well, does God forgive those who do not repent? And would God expect us to do something he himself does not do? What we do know is that we must forgive, but with a sincere heart. This stems from our own recognition of our need to be forgiven, when we allow God's mercy and forgiveness to enter in. It is not necessary to hide our hurts, or to seek to match a certain number of vain efforts to forgive".

Other recommended readings: Psalms 86:5; 103:3; 2Chronicles 7:14; Matthew 6:9-15; Luke 7:36-47

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Joseph

The story of Joseph is one of the most moving stories of the Old Testament.

His name means "The Lord adds". And it does appear as though the Lord added to Joseph's life, first there came many trials, then he added great blessings.

Betrayed by his brothers who were jealous of him, Joseph ended up in Egypt where he was first a slave, then a prisoner, then raised up to the highest governmental rank in the country.

His reunion with his family is one of the most beautiful images of the love and forgiveness of God.

In spite of all his trials, Joseph did not give in to the bitterness caused by rejection. The orphan spirit that sought to find root within him gave way to the love of the Father.

It is a story that everyone should read. (Genesis, chapters 37 to 50)

## IN A NUTSHELL

- Forgiveness is like a gift which God tenderly deposits in the bottom of our hearts. It is like a river which, little by little, transforms the rough stones of bitterness into tiny, smooth pebbles.
- Forgiveness must not rest only on our own capacities and human ability to forgive. Without God's help, all our efforts in that line will be in vain. Forgiveness is a gift we must ask for and receive from God. It is a gift we in turn offer to others; others who often don't deserve our forgiveness.
- Forgiveness is not a burden imposed on us or that we impose on ourselves. God does not inflict on victims of abuse an obligation to humiliate themselves before their persecutors. In order to forgive others for the wrong they have done to us, we must choose to walk daily in forgiveness. It is a perilous road where our traveling companions are often bitterness, anger, and hate. Over time, the forgiveness of God can work in us, and his forgiveness then becomes our forgiveness.



MY PRAYER TO GOD

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## 12

### Sweet home

*A* few years ago, I watched a documentary aired on television that deeply affected my daily life and my understanding of the hereafter.

The documentary was composed of six real-life testimonies of people who had at one point in time been pronounced clinically dead and had had after-death experiences. Not only had these people seen the "bright light at the end of the tunnel", as countless people have already attested to having seen, but they actually found themselves beyond this light, within the splendor of the kingdom of God.

The bible says that all our actions will one day be brought into a divine light, and that God resides in a light that is inaccessible to man. The only way to penetrate this light is by clothing ourselves in a robe of light; a mantle which God wraps around each person who receives the forgiveness offered by Jesus on the cross.

Otherwise, it is impossible for a sinful soul to have access to the kingdom of God. One single stain, a small lie or wrong thought, and access to paradise is unattainable.

In this place, evil cannot withstand such perfect light. One of the six people who appeared in this documentary was a doctor from Quebec, who is a teacher at Dallas University. He had died suddenly following a heart attack. He entered the "tunnel of death" and crossed into the divine light.

This doctor found himself among other believers, in the joy and perfect happiness of the eternal kingdom of God. He spoke to Jesus and discovered his great love. Then, the Lord explained to him that he had to return to the world below because his journey was not yet done. His spirit then returned to his body, like a letter being slipped into an envelope. He felt no pain, and there were no signs of damage to his heart, it was "like new". The results of his medical examination attest to this miracle.

This doctor, who was a believer but who had been rather timid before, was now changed forever. After this event, he could not keep himself from sharing the greatness of Jesus' love with everyone he met, and telling others that everything that is written in the Gospel is true.

Each of us has the choice as to whether to accept or ignore the words of the Lord. However, it is here below that we decide whether we want to live with Jesus for all of eternity. Each person is free to choose, and there is no lack of evidence that Jesus is alive and at work in the world today.

God needs not add anything further. He concretely manifested his love towards us by leaving heaven and coming into our world. Through him, our history was affected in a way that no one else has done. He opens his arms today in the same manner as he did two thousand years ago on a cross.

One single condition could prevent us from knowing his eternal presence and forgiveness: our refusal to acknowledge and accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

There are literally thousands of religions and philosophies in the world, and most of them can boast of having good elements and values at their core. But in regards to death and eternity, they are often contradictory. When truth contradicts itself, it is no longer truth. At best, it is truth only for the one who chooses it. It would be absurd to suggest that two truths that contradict one another are still both true. One of the beliefs simply has to be false.

Jesus told Pontius Pilate that he was the truth. Pilate then exclaimed "What is truth?" Jesus declared that he was the way the truth and the life, and that no one can have access to the kingdom of heaven without having turned to him.

Sometimes, one must first consider the subject of death before they can discover real life.

During my travels over the course of my Canada-wide suicide prevention campaign, I traveled thousands of kilometers, visited hundred of cities, and met a multitude of people who were scraped and scarred by the tragedies of their existence, living each day with the presence of raw wounds. I have seen the devastating ravages of death, and have looked death in the face.

For many, this same distress, this wound, this loss of a loved one, is what drove them to fiercely pursue life. They cried out from the depth of their weakness, they dragged themselves to the True Source, and their thirst was quenched. Their soul was purified, made clean and clothed in a mantel of brilliant light which will be revealed one day when they leave this earthly home. They defeated death by clinging to the Prince of Life, the only God incarnate and risen Savior, the only Way, the only Truth. Jesus the Christ!



For me, the death of my son was like a sword through my heart.

My only consolation is found in the fact that I believe that in heaven we will be reunited with all those who loved God and received his forgiveness. It will be the most beautiful celebration ever. I will once again see that handsome young man who now is living in the new paradise. He is waiting for me over there, and I believe that at my arrival, we will spend a long time in each others arms without speaking a word... simply savoring the pleasure of being together

again. God lent him to me for a short time so that I could know the joy and honor of being a father... then he flew away. But I will be with him in eternity, forever. As for me, I hope to live a long life on this earth. But I know that if I were to die tomorrow, I would be received by God without condition. He established the terms 2000 years ago on Mount Calvary. All he asks of me is that I admit my inability to save myself and that I turn to him.

I have accepted with my whole heart what Jesus has done for me on the cross and I am committed to following him by heeding his Word. I am certain of one thing: that Jesus was crucified in order to purchase me back and that's why I am forgiven and happy. Because of his promise, I know I will live with God for eternity.



### **Between Friends**

If you were to die tomorrow, and upon your arrival in heaven God were to ask you "Why should I allow you to enter my heavenly kingdom", what would your answer be?

Without any false pretenses, is it possible in this life here below to receive the assurance of being forgiven and saved? How?

### LOVE IN ACTIONS

This week, I will bring up the subject of the afterlife with people around me. I can use this booklet to help them understand that it is possible to receive God's peace here below, and the assurance of being forgiven and saved through believing in Jesus.

### A PRAYER

Dear Lord,

When I stop to think about how brief this life on earth is and when I think of eternity, my eyes turn to you. As Henri Nouwen so aptly put it, I too feel within me "a persistent yearning for definitive rest, a need for security and permanence that doesn't go away." You alone, Father, can give me this peace, this assurance that if I were to die tomorrow, I would be immediately received into your presence because of my faith in Jesus.

## Hearing from God

Once again, Father, I come to you. Each day I need to feel your embrace, your arms of love surrounding me.

Teach me how to show those around me, those I love, that their life on earth will one day come to an end and that they will suddenly find themselves in eternity.

How can I help them understand that their salvation is found only in you, as well as the peace and security that their soul so desperately needs? How can I convince them of your love for them?

In this moment of tranquility, I open my heart to you so that you can place in it a love for others so great that I can never again be indifferent with regards to their eternal destiny.

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Genesis 5:24**

"Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away."

Henri Nouwen was a Catholic priest and professor at Harvard University. He worked for many years with people who suffered from mental health problems.

He tells the story of how he was deeply moved at the sight of a painting by Rembrandt called, "The Return of the Prodigal Son".

"This painting became like a mysterious window through which I could enter the Kingdom of God", said Nouwen.

Having been so deeply moved at the sight of a mere reproduction of this painting, he then decided to go to Saint Petersburg to view the original.

Once there, he remained for four hours before this "mysterious window". In his book entitled "The Return of the Prodigal Son", he describes his experience:

"There I was, standing at last before the painting that had never left my heart or spirit for nearly three years. I was speechless at its majestic beauty: first its actual size (it is larger than life), then the abundance of browns and yellows, the shadowy backgrounds and the bright foreground so full of light, but most of all the illuminated embrace of the father and son, surrounded by four mysterious figures looking on. All of this gripped me with a force that exceeded my expectations. At certain times I had wondered whether seeing the

real painting might leave me disappointed. On the contrary, the splendor and greatness of it now had me utterly transfixed.

Rembrandt's embrace was graven in my soul, much deeper than a simple sign of encouragement would have been. It had helped me to discover something within me that had been in waiting, a distant call which lay buried in the vagaries of a busy life: a constant yearning for definitive rest, a deep need for security and permanence that doesn't go away.

I continued to see many people, work on important cases, and the demand for my public appearances was ever-increasing. Yet this image of "The Return of the Prodigal Son" would not leave me, and was claiming an ever-growing place of importance in my spiritual life. Rembrandt's piece had awakened in me the longing of a permanent home, a longing which only grew stronger and stronger and deeper and deeper."

For those who believe in Jesus, this revelation is essential. A true Christian does not perceive this life to be a painful waiting period, full of insecurity, until the final day when he stands before the supreme court of heaven to plead his case before God. If that were the case, no one would ever win because no one could ever become good enough, by their own strength, to gain their access to paradise. No one on earth can "earn their way to heaven"; the price is far too great. Only God can grant us the privilege of living with him forever. And he has already done this by coming to live among us in order to take on the guilt for all our wrongdoings, and to free us from our condemnation.

Jesus died on the cross to show us just how far the wickedness of man is able to go, and just how far the goodness and forgiveness of God goes. Heaven begins here on earth, when we establish a bond of friendship with God. It is this friendship, and not merely some level of proficiency in spiritual matters, that will continue throughout all eternity, even after death. Doesn't the bible tell us that the person who loves Jesus in this life will be loved by him in the life yet to come? Now that's heaven! A love story that even death cannot destroy. The choice is ours to take the time to consider the words of Christ and to invite him to be our friend. He will never turn down this kind of invitation.

Other recommended readings: Psalm 103; Romans 3:23; Acts 2:21; 2 Peter 1:11; 1 Timothy 2:4; John 3:18; 5:24

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Enoch

It is shocking to realize that in many verses of the bible, there are little details that we miss or don't pay attention to which can reveal great truths.

This is the case for this particular character mentioned briefly in *Genesis*. His name means "dedicated, consecrated". His is of the line of Adam. This list gives details on the life and death of many individuals, but it only says this with regards to Enoch: "Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away." Enoch never actually died like everyone else, he was simply taken up to be with God in heaven.

Even at the very origins of humanity, God wanted all to know that there is life after death. He wanted to tell us that those who love him will live with him one day. Isn't that wonderful?

Heaven is a real place, just as God is real. Jesus showed us the way there. He is "the way the truth and the life".

### IN A NUTSHELL

- A true Christian does not perceive this life to be a painful waiting period, full of fear and insecurity, until the final day when he stands before the supreme court of heaven to plead his case before God.
- No one on earth can "earn their way to heaven"; the price is far too great. Only God can grant us the privilege of living with him forever. And he has already done this by coming to live among us in order to take on the guilt for all our wrongdoings, and to free us from our condemnation.
- Because of what God has accomplished to save us, anyone who believes can experience a true peace while still on this earth, and an assurance of the eternal salvation of their soul.





God Within Me





JARS OF CLAY  
*RIK BERRY*



# Introduction

In the previous section, we covered subjects such as the creation of the world, man having been made in the image of God, the effects of evil on the earth, and the forgiveness of God. We also looked at certain text from the book of Genesis.

This next section focuses on the personal application of our faith. If God lives within me by his Spirit, what are the effects of it? How is this new life manifested in my soul, in my mind, in my way of perceiving myself? What does daily life look like under the instruction and care of the Holy Spirit, and how can I experience the peace, joy, freedom and power of God?

At the beginning of each module, we have enriched the *group discussion* segment with the personal testimonies of believers from many different area of life. They are excerpts from interviews that we have previously produced, either in book form or DVD production.

The *spiritual growth* segment of this module will guide us through an overview of the Epistle to the Romans. An unforgettable experience indeed!

For everyone to enjoy the wonderful treasures written by the apostle Paul in this great book, we created an additional segment titled *A Closer Look* that will help you to focus on it's main teachings.



## 13

### Good and Evil

I have given more than 2,500 live stage performances and have appeared in 11 films, as well as many television shows and commercials. I studied at the *Claude St-Denis School of Mime* in Montreal, the *National Circus School* of Montreal, the *Cirque du Soleil*, as well as training with *Les Ballets Jazz de Montreal*.

My father was a trapeze artist in the circus, but I never knew him. My mother told me about him. She traveled with him from one circus to another, and I was born in that context.

I grew up with a deep confusion with regards to my identity. My stepfather was absorbed in pornography and left his magazines all over the house. I began practicing homosexuality at the age of 13. That was when I had my first experience. I was a practising homosexual until I reached 23 years old, and was also involved in prostitution. At one point I was a transvestite and worked as a nude dancer in Montreal's night club scene. I did that to help pay for my studies and to make some quick money. I made many choices throughout my life that destroyed things inside me and I grew more and more confused. All these things eventually drove me to the point of attempting to take my own life.

Even though I accepted my homosexuality, I was never fully comfortable with it; which was a very strange feeling. I have spoken to many people faced with this same problem, and have yet to meet anyone living in that lifestyle who is fully at peace with themselves and their choice. For myself, I know I was not born that way, but that my behaviour was a result of the instability in my home life during my childhood. I was in need of a male role model, the father I never had. To this day, when people talk to me about their father, it remains a bit of a foreign concept to me. I never knew what it was to have a dad who would take me in his arms or play ball with me. I therefore sought to find this identity in other men; to be affirmed in my emotions and discover who I was. The further I went along this road, and the more things I learned and experienced, the more confused I became.

But one day I made a right decision. I chose God. I let him transform me and show me who I really am. I am now free from homosexuality. From that moment onwards I have discovered a peace I had never known.

*Daniel Julien*

## Between Friends

How do I respond when I discover passages of the bible that contradict some of my opinions or certain values that are accepted by most of society?

Is it easy or difficult for me to accept that my opinions may need some adjusting?  
What are the conditions?

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

This week I will be compassionate towards someone who I know has had a difficult past. I will offer a little gift to someone who doesn't have many friends, someone who may feel deeply rejected.

## A PRAYER

Today, Lord Jesus, I ask that you clothe me in humility. Not a false humility that is nothing but outer appearances, but a deep humility of the heart. Make it the kind of humility that will help me to see that I'm not always right, and that I need to read your Word to learn to discern right from wrong. Help me Lord!

## Hearing from God

Heavenly Father, I need for your Spirit to grant me discernment. I live in a society where the values and morals are often opposed to what you say in your Word.

I want to stay near you, on your lap, and I ask that you grant me your Light, and show me which of my values and morals don't correspond with your will. I'm listening, Father!

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Epistle to the Romans, chapter 1**

"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile."

As you can see, this chapter touches on many different subjects. That is why it may be useful to give a certain "structure" to our reading by choosing a key verse that resumes the main idea within that chapter. I proposed verse 16 which affirms that God, in the Gospel (The Good News), explains to us how we must be saved. Saved from whom? Saved from what? We will see.

The ideas in this chapter revolve around this notion of salvation. In verses 1 to 17, we learn that:

- God had promised this Good News, foretold by the prophets in the Old Testament, referred to here as the Holy Scriptures.

- Jesus did become incarnate in human flesh on this earth, taking on the title "the Son of God", and was resurrected from the dead.

- We are told of the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

- We see that the salvation of God is given only to those who have faith in Jesus.

Verses 18 to 32 explain why we need to be saved:

God is feeling certain emotions, one being displeasure with regards to the behavior of humankind:

- Firstly, when people do not recognize him as the Creator, even though nature reveals so clearly his perfections, his power and his divinity.

- Secondly, when people drown out the voice of their conscience and refuse to give glory to God and thank him.

- The result of man's selfish behavior without God produces bad fruit such as materialism, sexual perversions and the breakdown of human relationships.

- Lastly, we see that God is love, and that he is just. He cannot accept such behavior, and he must intervene by means of judgment. Yet in spite of this, people still pay no heed.

There, we have finished the overview of our first chapter. Nothing overly complicated, right? Without going too far in depth, I would like to make a few side notes here.

The bible uses a very ancient type of language. We must be aware of that in order to discern the spirit in which the letter was written. This chapter uses terms such as "the wrath of God" and "judgment". In order to better understand, let's try applying the principle communicated to us here to other situations that are more familiar to us. For example, those of you who are parents will sometimes see bad behavior in your children. Are you not then inclined to

reprimand, and perhaps even punish them? So then why should God bring shame upon himself when the beings he created behave in an incorrect manner?

Another difficulty we must face when reading the bible is that of interpretation.

In order to interpret a text correctly, we must first pay attention to the context and the current culture in the day in which the text was written.

Certain passages of the Old Testament will appear very rough to us if we forget that they were written during a time of constant military conflicts and barbaric practices. What we must retain is that God was present among these people and sought to come to their aid, just as he does today in our world devastated by wars, genocides and abuse of power.

I propose that we do a little exercise of interpretation.

An appropriate passage for this would be the eleventh chapter of the epistle to the Corinthians, where the Apostle Paul asks that women be submitted to the custom that insisted on the wearing of a veil. As you know, this custom still exists in certain countries in the Middle East.

Now, should we conclude that Canadian women in the 21st century must wear a veil because it is mentioned somewhere in the bible? Certainly not! This only applied to a certain situation in a particular historical context.

Some women who had worn the traditional veil all their lives no longer wanted to wear it, since it was a symbol of an unhealthy form of submission within an abusive system. But it was preferable for them to keep the veil in order to avoid serious complications.

Imagine a situation similar to our day, regarding the Afghani women trapped within the Taliban regime. Would it be wise to advise them to cease to wear their veils from one day to the next under the pretext of their conversion to Christianity?

They would certainly be killed.

What's more, in Paul's day, only prostitutes did not wear the traditional veil. Obviously, it would not be good for these newly converted women to be mistaken for prostitutes. Don't you agree?

It is therefore clear that these texts written to the Corinthians applied to a specific culture and specific situation. However, it does show to what degree the effects of the Gospel, as preached by Paul, had been liberating for these first few Christian women.

As you can see here, it is important to consider the particularities of the society in biblical times in order to define the applications that relate to our modern-day society.

Let's come back to the book of Romans.

Our chapter makes mention of the issue of sexual deviancies. According to our text, homosexuality was not created by God; it is the result of a society that has turned from him.

At the moment, when it comes to debates as controversial as this one, many say that the bible is outdated and that it must adjust to the morality of our times. Others get angry and openly mock God. Others use the argument that everyone is right, and we must respect everyone's choices because our opinion depends on our personal concept of God and how each of us interprets the Scriptures. What a dilemma!

We must therefore be vigilant and apply ourselves to better understanding what we read.

Here, our text reveals that homosexuality existed in Paul's day. In fact, it was openly accepted and practiced in the Roman Empire. By this, we can deduce that the mentality of the general public in that day was totally open to this phenomenon.

Because of this, it would be unfair to accuse Paul (or God, for that matter) of being narrow-minded and say that the bible is "outdated". That would be false interpretation.

In truth, if God was not in favor of a phenomenon as widely accepted and common as this one was in Paul's day, then why would he have changed his mind 2000 years later?

Having said that, this statement does not give anyone the right to look down on homosexuals, even if it is important to know what the bible says on the subject. I must add that homosexuality is not a worse sin than other behaviors God does not approve of. Those who practice homosexuality were created by God.

I have good friends who have been homosexuals in the past, but left that lifestyle after their conversion to Christ. Some of them married, had beautiful children, and now have exemplary families.

I have another friend who was once a member of a biker gang heavily involved in crime. He has never been a practicing homosexual, but he did practice all sorts of other illicit sex. He considered women to be mere pleasure objects. Following his conversion to Christ, he turned from his past and this depraved form of sexuality.

In the gospels, Jesus saved the life of an adulterous woman that the religious leaders wanted to stone to death. He forgave her, but told her "go and sin no more!"

It is the forgiveness of God that brings us to no longer search elsewhere for the love that we can obtain from having an intimate relationship with him. Adultery, pornography, homosexuality, sexual relations out of wedlock, these are not things God would have for us.

These are the outcome of a broken relationship with God. God created us to live precious moments of intimacy with him in an eternal relationship. When this need is not met, people then

turn to sexuality in their thirst for love and intimacy. But this does not satisfy and that is why they increase their efforts by seeking out all sorts of different sexual experiences. That is also why many go from one partner to the next. Their thirst for an intimate love is never satisfied.

It is no easy thing to transform our lifestyle and way of thinking when we are living in a society such as ours, which does not understand the love of God. It doesn't help when certain legalistic Christians take it upon themselves to shamefully expose the sins of others, missing the fact that to God there is no sin in a class by itself. The heart of God breaks over the sin of sexual deviation in the same way as it does over lies, hypocrisy and religious formality. God does not wish for us to have behaviors that go contrary to all that he would have for us, and that, because he loves us. It is evil that destroys mankind, not God!

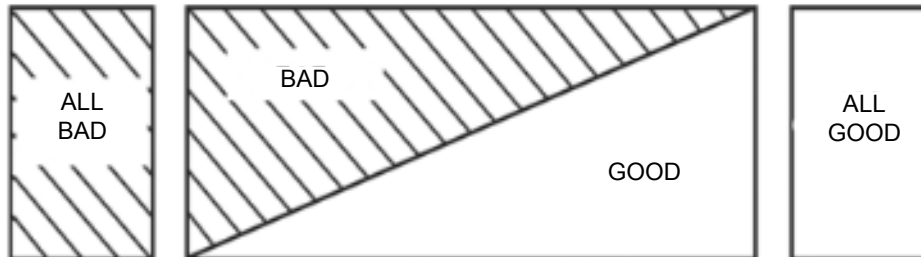
As you can see, it is interesting to open the bible and hear what it teaches us. The subjects it deals with are very up-to-date.

However, our studies of the subsequent chapters will be somewhat briefer.

Other recommended readings: Genesis 18:20 to 19:28; Ezekiel chapter 18

## A CLOSER LOOK

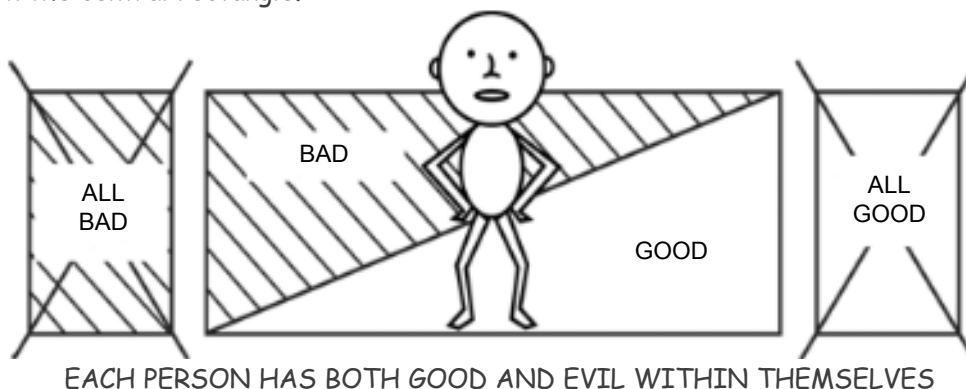
The Epistle to the Romans contains the most systematic description of the Christian faith in the bible. To fully appreciate what it contains and to help us retain it, I offer a few simple illustrations. Let's begin with three rectangles that represent all of humanity, from the creation of the world up to today.



The rectangle on the left represents those who are living in total depravity and have never done one single good deed in their lifetime. The rectangle on the right represents

those who are perfect and have never done any evil deeds whatsoever. The rectangle in the centre represents those who have elements of both good and bad at the same time. It is quite obvious that no human being could appear in either the left or the right rectangles. We could then safely say that each of us must appear somewhere in the centre rectangle, perhaps slightly to the left or more to the right depending on our deeds, whether they be good or bad.

The first chapter of Romans is written especially to those who have rejected God. They are all in the central rectangle.



## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Mary-Magdalene

Marie-Madeleine Mary Magdalene, whose name means literally "rebellion, obstinacy", was certainly not a woman with very good morals. Here is how Luke the evangelist first speaks of her "After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out..." (Luke 8:1-2)

Mary is a woman whose life was transformed after having met Jesus. She saw the compassion of God in the person of Jesus, and followed him wherever he went. She no longer needed to look to sexuality as a way to meet her need for love.

Jesus was not ashamed to surround himself with people who had had a troubled past. He received them graciously, not so that they could occupy the last ranks on his team, but to make them his friends... his good friends. In fact, Mary Magdalene was the first person Jesus appeared to after his resurrection. How much clearer can you get than that? (Mark 16:1-14)

## IN A NUTSHELL

- The choices we make can stem from values that were instilled in us in our childhood, from our education, or from the values reflected in the society we live in.
- It becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish good from evil in a pluralistic society where everyone advocates the legitimacy of his or her own convictions. With this mindset, what is wrong to one is not necessarily wrong to the next person.
- The Epistle to the Romans declares that there is such a thing as absolute truth in matters of morals and faith, and that each human being has the responsibility of listening to what God has revealed in his Word.

## WHAT I HAVE LEARNED IN THIS CHAPTER

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## Jugement vs. Compassion

A doctor is often perceived to be intelligent and socially successful. However, as the saying goes, "Clothes do not make the man". A person is always more than the social image they project. A doctor is more than a professional, and more than the father or mother image he or she represents to many. They bring comfort and precious help to the afflicted in their time of weakness, yet a doctor is also a person with emotions of his or her own. A doctor is, first of all, a person with a story and a history, someone who has had their share of successes and failures.

We were preparing to leave on vacation. While I was putting the last suitcase in the car, an extremely strong pain gripped my back. I yelled and hung onto the car, incapable of walking or moving.

During the next four months, I was forced to take tranquillizers to be able to sleep. About ten muscles in my left leg atrophied following a paralysis caused by the compression of the S1 root in my spinal cord. Tests showed two herniated discs. I also lost all sensitivity in this area for six months. I lost weight and experienced pain in my left knee because I had to sleep with my legs elevated on pillows. For months I suffered from insomnia due to the pain. My concentration and memory were affected as well. I felt pain in my neck, shoulders, and sternum, pain that was associated with a general deterioration of my condition. A long convalescence lay ahead. I had to visit various specialists, undergo tests on uncomfortable tables, wait in hospitals, and participate in many physiotherapy sessions. For several months, I was totally incapable of working, and my return to work was very gradual.

This injury allowed me to better understand and talk about human suffering. It gave me time to read and write. I now offer you some of the reflections I had during my illness.

On my back, my legs elevated on pillows several hours per day, I had nothing to do but read. At the start of my disability, I read a book recommended to me in my first year of medicine: *The Doctor, his Patient and the Illness* by Michael Balint. Like most students, I never had time to read it while in school. Facing my first serious illness and reading this book gave me an opportunity to reflect on my role as a doctor and on current medical practice in the Province of Quebec.

My Christianity and interest in the psychological aspect of illness had made me sensitive to the experiences of patients well before I experienced suffering myself. For example, I

was shocked to observe the aggressiveness some emergency room nurses felt towards people who had attempted to commit suicide. Of course, it isn't pleasant to watch people vomiting their medication and yelling about their misfortunes, but it seems to me that, as health professionals, we should be able to imagine the family and social tragedies that led a person to this situation. We should be capable of showing compassion. If not, why did we choose this profession?

Personally, I tried to avoid this attitude and, instead, made a point of helping my patients understand the social and psychological dimensions of their physical problems. For example, one woman's endless examinations regarding abdominal pains stopped when she admitted her marital difficulties. A man's hypertension was controlled when he spoke of his aggressiveness concerning his workplace. A young secretary's asthma, which had resulted in an investigation into the air quality in her workplace, cleared up after she cried and said she was not given the promotion she deserved. There are a lot more besides!

I listened as well to a dying man without any family tell me about life in his native country, a woman affected all her life by incest, and a young girl deeply hurt by her brother's suicide.

I encouraged a psychotic who is now delivering newspapers, a mother who decided to take care of her child, a person with a mental deficiency, and a man on the brink of bankruptcy. Medicine is all of this.

One thing was not very clear to me before I became ill, and that is the idea that society requires a doctor to be a judge and to take sides. When we take the Hippocratic Oath, we are stating our desire to devote our energy to caring for the sick. In the last half-century, society has demanded that doctors accomplish more and more medico-administrative tasks for the benefit of social institutions. Employer, employment insurance, automobile insurance, worker's compensation, private insurance—all hope the doctor is in a position to determine if the patient is really sick or hurt! What is there to say? As a doctor, I am placed in a situation where I must judge my patient. That is role conflict. The way I should behave in this system was not always clear to me. The other problem I experienced and still experience is the impoverishment of the health system. Budget cuts in the hospitals make practising medicine more and more difficult. My salary is reduced from year to year. It is therefore harder to achieve my objectives of listening and showing compassion to my patients.

Being ill and reading Balint gave me the chance to reflect on the social aspect of illness. Balint is an English psychiatrist. He brought together a number of family doctors to discuss doctor-patient relationships. Together they discovered and described many problems that hinder their clients' healing. I find the problems listed in this book are still relevant, even

though the book was published in 1957. Balint's group was especially interested in psychosomatic illnesses, which account for around 25% of visits to general practitioners' offices. They were also interested in the psychic and social repercussions of physical illnesses. The participants observed that many physical illnesses are a manifestation of the patient's deeper suffering.

Balint suggests that illness allows certain individuals to avoid having to face difficult problems in their lives.

Reading Balint's book allowed me to reflect on things. How do I behave as a doctor and now as a patient? As a new patient, I could also ask myself about my reactions to my own doctor. How did my family and friends react to my illness? How were my relationships with colleagues affected? How was the communication with my insurers handled? All these questions led to a certain number of additional observations. I observed three periods in an illness: the initial crisis, the organization phase, and the chronic phase. I noticed that my entourage understood the illness poorly during the acute crisis and the chronic phase. The middle period was best accepted.

During the acute crisis, the loss of autonomy is so fast that others don't have time to understand what is happening. They expect the patient to continue to accomplish a certain number of tasks that he or she is no longer in a position to carry out. Also, others cannot sympathize with the patient in his or her suffering since they have never experienced the intensity of the pain or its physical and psychological consequences. The patient therefore feels alone, misunderstood, and poorly supported. He or she is too affected by the situation to manage alone, though. This is a very distressing moment. The following period is easier. Care is organized. The diagnosis brings reassurance in that it offers a mental image of the suffering. It also allows one to consider paths to solutions and to grasp a concept of the future, even though it may not always be rosy.

Over the long term, the physical suffering diminishes gradually but the illness leaves its mark. From then on, the patient must find a new balance based on residual capacities. The patient has less energy, and certain parts of the body or spirit do not respond as they did in the past. The patient may have also modified his or her perception of life. At the same time, the social support is drying up. Others expect the patient to become productive once again, and neither the patient nor his or her entourage foresee that the return to work will require certain adjustments. Both parties hope for a total healing without after-effects. This phase is difficult for the patient. Each simple task demands a lot of calculating, and rare are those who understand this.

Rare also are the workplaces that permit the worker to start again at his or her own rhythm. Rehabilitation is demanding and exhausting. Partners are impatient, conflicts common. The sick employee has been replaced at the office, and his or her job is threatened. Colleagues' broad smiles and health questions leave nothing to the imagination about what is going on behind the patient's back!

I was astonished at the inability of my brothers and sisters in the faith to live with the idea that my convalescence could be long. "We are praying for you," they said. Very good. But the more I repeated I was not going to get better quickly, the more their faces fell. Why? Does it seem impossible that God would allow this illness to last for some time?

To tell the truth, I do not believe this is the main problem. The real risk involves going further in this conversation. When the answer is, "No, I'm not feeling better," the person addressing the patient must face the idea of suffering. The suffering soul issues an invitation to a deeper conversation and to sharing wounds. Many people we meet, even in churches, do not share with us a degree of intimacy that would allow them to confide in us. There's more. The patient mirrors suffering; he or she reflects an image that frightens, the image of our own vulnerability. To engage in dialogue with the patient opens the door to a world nobody wishes to enter. Yet the patient is also the bearer of healing. By this stage, he or she often exhibits a certain degree of resignation and wisdom, which in turn gives pause to others who, while claiming good health, are plunging into multiple pursuits at a frenetic pace. What vain frenzy, centred on doing and having!

The attitude of our patient, on the other hand, revolves around the idea of being. His same eye contemplates life and death, like a still monument in the middle of two infinities. That is why it is so difficult to bear the gaze of a dying man, to listen or keep silent at his side. The patient sends a message to our conscience. People in good health have a tendency to repress the idea that one day they could be ill. Death is a taboo subject. The supreme fear is fear of death. The patient is in the heart of the abyss, in the cave of the beast. The patient demonstrates that the health of well people is but temporary. Why not face it and come to terms with the reality of suffering? Is this not also the best way to approach the reality of the kingdom of God?

Over the course of my illness, I had the opportunity to observe doctor-patient relationships from the inside. They follow the larger reality described above: lack of understanding about the acute phase and chronic phase. When my illness started and I went to an emergency room, the staff told me to go home and inject myself with narcotics, without giving me any diagnostic test or future appointment. However, that emergency room was not at all

busy. I was the only patient there in the middle of the night. They kept me only after I insisted. There was no relief two hours after the first injection. To get help, I had to escape from the stretcher which imprisoned me at the opposite end of a long, empty corridor. I could hear the faraway laughing of a doctor and some nurses as they chatted while waiting for more patients. I slowly entered their area. The doctor, visibly annoyed that I had interrupted him, indicated to me, without getting up from his chair, that my problem was without doubt psychological in origin.

I never saw this doctor again. One week later, I was paralyzed. And even if this time I was taken seriously, my pain was certainly not over. They asked me to lie still on an X-ray table which was as hard as a rock so I could undergo an axial tomography. The radiologist did not prescribe any painkillers! Fortunately, I had some with me. Then, I was able to establish a deeper relationship with the doctor who took my case. A long game of supply and demand followed. How can I express in twenty minutes the experiences of a month? How can I give the true picture, being honest with myself and describing reality? What am I capable of doing and not doing?

In the absence of any objective sign, the patient's symptom is pure subjectivism. Here one asks a moral question: "Should I give the benefit of the doubt to a patient who claims to have pain?" The experts' reports required by insurance companies and employers quickly settle the question. No! It is true some patients heal magically following such a verdict, but most find themselves on the street. Why? Because they really are sick! I would like to say parenthetically that fifty years ago many diseases were unknown. Even today, we continue to define syndromes where the aetiology remains a mystery. We regularly discover causal agents that have been unknown or ignored but relate to known diseases. The lack of understanding about an illness or the inability to diagnose it is not synonymous with the absence of illness. How can we so easily disqualify the subjective information about an illness and refuse to take it into account? It seems to me we should give the patient the benefit of the doubt and continue on with them in the healing process. Actually, this is exactly what the doctor in charge of the patient has the opportunity to do in many cases, after the experts have rejected the patient. Unfortunately, the situation often ends up much more complicated. To illness are added financial problems, depression, and sometimes divorce.

The doctor is in a better position than anyone else to realize that society often refuses to look at its own problems. It sends to doctors the people who are "damaged and in the garage", and it certainly doesn't want to know why they are in that condition. If repairs are possible, society will take the material back. If not, the whole thing is ready for the scrap

heap! This is often the impression one has. The system is tougher and tougher on people. No dialogue is entered into between the working world and the health system with the goal of foreseeing structural flaws that lead directly to illness. And these are numerous: overwork, poor supervision of employees, demanding schedules, etc

Society no longer seems moved by the links established between the types of stress a family undergoes and the overall health of an individual: transfers, unsynchronized schedules and vacations, children spending long hours in childcare centers, guilt put on mothers, repercussions of an illness on a whole family, etc.

We content ourselves with compiling statistics that show an increase in suicide rates, depression, asthma, drug addiction, and learning disabilities-and we ask doctors to manage it all!

I mustn't sound too optimistic. But just the same, I made a choice, that of Hippocrates. I will defend the patient and I will give the patient the benefit of the doubt. I will avoid ordering tests just to get rid of a client. I will not fall into the trap of stopping the healing process at the moment the diagnosis is made. I will try to cooperate in a work team with specialists and other health workers. I will accompany the suffering soul on the road to healing.

*Dr Michel Robillard*



## **Between Friends**

Take a moment to think about this question before answering. Are you in the habit of judging others scornfully when they show signs of weakness? Explain your reaction.

How can this story from Dr Robillard cause us to be more sensitive and aware of the suffering of others?

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

This week, I will contact, either by phone or in writing, someone I have offended in the past. I will not seek to justify my actions, but rather to recognize with humility where I was wrong. And why not go visit someone who is sick?

## A PRAYER

My God, I pray that you help me to show compassion towards others. Help me not to think of myself as better because I attend church or practice religion. Help me to be humble enough to recognize my need of you.

### Hearing from God

Show me Lord, if I sometimes have a religious spirit. Have I wounded people by acting with a haughty attitude and believing myself to be superior to them because I go to church or don't commit the same sins as they do? Show me which of my actions may be more motivated by a desire to look good than a sincere compassion of the heart.

I trust in you, heavenly Father. I know that you don't condemn me but that you seek to deposit your love in me. I am listening, Father. Please speak to me!

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

### Scripture Reading: **Epistle to the Romans, chapter 2**

"For God does not show favoritism."

The first chapter speaks mainly about the Romans, and this one refers mainly to the Jews.

Jesus was born in the Jewish people and all of his disciples were Jewish. However, the majority of the Jews failed to recognize him as the Messiah, and rejected him. This is what we see in the four gospels.

These Jews were convinced that just the fact that they were Jewish assured them salvation for their soul. They knew God had made a covenant with their ancestor Abraham and had promised to bless his posterity. As a sign of this covenant, and to mark their separation from the "pagans" of that day, each man had to be circumcised.

Admittedly, this was a very unusual sign. But it certainly was relating to that which was most intimate!

These Jews believed that to submit themselves to the rules and laws of their religion would guarantee them a ticket to heaven. But this is not the case. God is a God of intimacy, and of relationship, not of rules. This is what Jesus told them. Those who love God will live eternally with him.

In this chapter of the epistle to the Romans, Paul expresses this same thought. He remains faithful to the teachings of Jesus. Not the Jews or anyone else can be justified on the basis of his religion or his nationality. When it comes to the necessity of receiving personal salvation, God considers all men equal.

Religiosity cannot replace the honesty of the heart which leads us to admit our need of God. Religion can't save anyone. There are good churches that truly reflect the character of Jesus, but it is not whether or not we go to church that will win us God's favor.

What the Lord wishes is to live fully in us and to bring about a deep renewal of the heart. No religion can replace his divine intervention. It is unacceptable to call ourselves "saved" and treat others as inferior, and refuse to admit that the "holy people" we have become also do wrong. We are called to love and discern that which pleases God, not to judge others in a haughty fashion. Unfortunately, this is the way many believers behave and often times this is the image that the Church gives off.

The outcome is disastrous.

Other recommended readings: Acts 17, Galatians 2:11-16

## A CLOSER LOOK

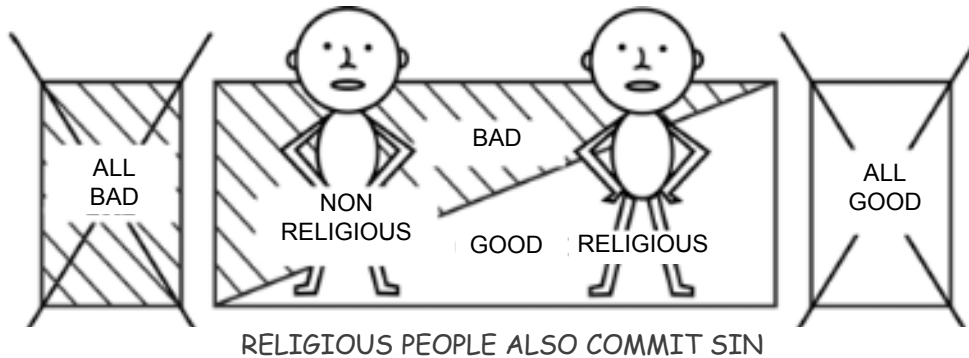
In the last chapter, we discussed how all of humanity finds itself somewhere within the three rectangles. We established that no one could be entirely in the left or right triangles because everyone has elements of both good and evil within them. Since the first chapter was referring mostly to those who are "non-religious", we placed them in the center rectangle.

In the second chapter, we learned an important truth.

Even though there are thousands of different religions in the world, Paul says that no one can earn the favor of God by his or her good works or through any number of religious practices.

To believe that would be the equivalent of saying that mankind is able to save himself through his good deeds and rituals. Worse still, Paul writes that if, because of their great knowledge of the bible (or other books on spirituality), people who practice religion become proud to the point of scorning others, then they themselves are worse sinners. It is therefore clear that it is not a person's religion that will assure them a ticket to heaven.

"Religious people" also appear in the center rectangle.



## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

Paul

The apostle Paul is a good example of a man who understood that religion itself could not save anyone. Here is what he has to say about his own religious practices:

"If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ" (Phil. 3:4-7).

After his conversion, he traveled the world to share the gospel everywhere. His message was strongly opposed by the religious leaders of the day.

Nevertheless, he persevered for the rest of his life, seeking to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and to bring one and all into reconciliation with the Father's love.

Paul was one of the greatest apostles. His humility testifies to his deep understanding of the greatness and mercy of God. The significance of his name illustrates it well too, it means "small, feeble".

He wrote many of the books in the New Testament.

## IN A NUTSHELL

- To look upon others with scorn does not help anyone. Sin is like an illness that affects all of humanity. Only the love of *God* can provide its healing.
- A false sense of "religiosity" cannot replace an honesty of heart, which brings us to admit our need for *God*.

## WHAT I HAVE LEARNED IN THIS CHAPTER

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## 15

# Fallen Mankind

*A* psychiatrist must remain neutral and empathetic. He mustn't impose his philosophy or beliefs on anyone. In society, the current popular belief is that life is in our hands, it belongs to us. We can shorten it if we are suffering too much; we can abort it in the beginning; and we even have the right to cease to live if we so choose. There aren't any moral standards that tell us life is sacred. Be it our life or that of our neighbor, life is not our own. It is both given and taken away by God.

I resisted God for a very long time. I knew that if I were to admit that he existed, I would have to submit to him. As you can see, it was a question of pride. I wanted to live my life my way. But one day I came face to face with him.

One of the first things I remember feeling in the deepest place in my heart was that the more I submitted my life to him, rather than become a slave, or deprived or impoverished, restricted by rules and laws, instead he was setting me free from my negative instincts, reactions and preoccupations. He changed my very nature!

*Dr Nathalie Beaudet*



### **Between Friends**

How would you explain Dr. Beaudet's statement: "He changed my nature"?

In your opinion, are human beings good or evil? Explain your answer.

### LOVE IN ACTIONS

This week, I will take the time to pray for one of the present political leaders in my city, province or country. If possible, I will send them a little word of encouragement.

## A PRAYER

Lord, I pray that you would show mercy on our country and forgive us for having strayed. We have turned from you and have despised you. We have established our own law; we have banished you from our institutions, from our schools and our homes. We are sorry, Father! I beg you to forgive us our sin and call us near to yourself once again.

### **Hearing from God**

Father, I ask that you show me ways that I can help bring about positive changes in my society and my neighborhood. There are small things that I can do as part of my daily life, and there are even bigger things too. I ask that you guide me, and that you speak to me.

I'm listening!

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Epistle to the Romans, chapter 3**

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

A little while ago I visited Ottawa, our nation's capital. After a long walk through the city streets and a lovely bike ride along the Rideau Canal, I made my way to Parliament Hill to admire the impressive architecture of the buildings there.

Inside the Parliament building, I admired the many paintings and murals, and all the beautiful sculpted woodwork. I contemplated the portraits of the long line of prime ministers gone before. I felt a wave of pride come over me as I stood looking upon the images of these great people who had played such a key role in leading Canada to becoming the strong, prosperous nation it is today.

Just as I had done in Charlottetown when visiting the Province House, the very place where Canadian Confederation was born, I said a prayer in the Parliament Building. I asked that God make himself known to the existing members of parliament, the men and women we have elected to watch over the reign of justice in our land and to protect our rights. I asked the Lord to give them the wisdom to not turn away from the Christian principles on which this nation was founded by our forefathers.

In fact, even our national motto "from sea to sea" (a mari usque ad mare) was taken directly from a passage in the bible; as was the inscription found on the Peace Tower which reminds us that "without vision, the people perish".

There is a saying that goes "The spoken word may fly away, but the written word remains for aye". Hence, our predecessors wanted to ensure that future generations would not fail to recognize the sovereignty of God over mankind. They knew that if leaders were to stray from this divine vision, the people would ultimately suffer.

In turning the pages of our history, it is impossible to overlook the fundamental role the Christian faith played in the founding of our nation. Allow me to give but a few examples. I have mentioned earlier that our first school was founded by two courageous young widows who came and settled in Quebec City, at a time when there were only a few dozen inhabitants living there. Both Marie-Madeleine de Chauvigny and Marie Guyart de l'Incarnation asserted that God had told them in a dream to come and settle in New France.

The first hospital was founded in Montreal in 1645 by yet another courageous woman, a nurse by the name of Jeanne Mance.

Much can also be said of Jean de Brébeuf, a missionary to the Great Lakes region who gave his life for the love of the Huron people. He was captured and savagely tortured by the Iroquois. His desire was to serve Christ, whether in life or in death.

So many memorable individuals such as these have made their mark in our history.

All these pioneers of the faith were the very ones who built this country, the home we so dearly love. They honored God with their lives; and their life's work, which bears fruit to this very day, was built upon solid Christian foundations.

"O Canada, land of our forefathers, bearing the cross!" (Translated from the French lyrics of the Canadian national anthem.)

In our present-day pluralistic society, everyone swears by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. However, in all truth, democracy is constantly swinging this way and that, and does not reflect any sort of "neutrality" or objectivity at all. Quite contrarily, it appears that Christianity itself has in fact been sentenced to the lowest ranks.

Here are a few examples.

During the memorial service held on Parliament Hill in honor of the families who lost loved ones in the September 11th terrorist attacks, the Canadian government forbid there to be any form of prayer. Addressing his caucus, the Prime Minister later called it "the best decision I ever made".

In 1997, at a similar event held at Peggy's Cove in memory of the victims of the Swissair tragedy, the government forbade the officiating pastor and priest to mention the name of Jesus or even to read a passage from the bible during the ceremony. Is this the way rights and freedoms are to be honored?

How can we explain this discriminatory attitude towards Christianity? How can we reject so incoherently the Christian foundations that made Canada so strong a nation?

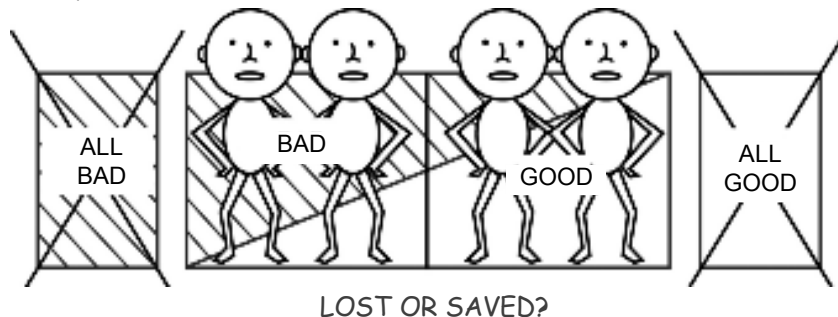
The third chapter of Romans is like a summary of the two preceding chapters. It teaches us that God is just and does not show favoritism due to race or creed. In this chapter, God is depicted as a judge. Generally speaking, people do not like to think of God as a judge. Admittedly, that is a bit of a scary image. However, God is a just judge.

The goal of this chapter is to help us better understand that every human being is guilty of wrongdoing. In the same way that the poor decisions of a government will affect the daily lives of every citizen in a given nation, the consequences of the sins of our first parents are widespread throughout the entire human race. We see their effects all around us.

Other recommended readings: 2 Chronicles 7:14; Psalms 2 and 22; Revelation 3:15-22

## A CLOSER LOOK

We have seen that there is good and evil in each and every individual. How then can God apply a just measure to determine those who deserve access to heaven and those who do not? Should he simply accept all the evildoers into his kingdom along with those who are good? Should he draw some sort of line between the good and evil deeds a person does in order to judge whether they are saved or lost?



If God used this method, he could be accused of acting impartially. For one thing, it would not be right for him to not sanction evil. Also, if this were so, two separate individuals could find themselves one on either side of the central division line, with their levels of "goodness" only differing by a mere sin or two, and yet one would be saved and the other condemned.

That is why God cannot judge the world on the basis of human justice. Besides, it is virtually impossible for even one tiny sin to be overlooked by God or slip by unnoticed. There is not one sinner who can have access to the kingdom of heaven where all is pure and perfect. Which is why God is just by placing everyone at the same level: all have sinned and all are lost.

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Pontius Pilate

Pontius Pilate was a Roman governor who was in power in the days when Jesus walked the earth. The Lord appeared before him prior to his sentencing. His name means "armed with a lance".

This man had a good heart and was reluctant to turn Jesus over for crucifixion.

During the trial, even his wife advised him not to condemn Jesus because of a dream she had (Matt 27:19). But in spite of this, he gave in to the wishes of the people and had him put to death.

Even though Pontius Pilate may have appeared to be a good man, more sensible and a better leader than the tyrannical King Herod, both of them still found themselves in the same position regarding God the Son: both were responsible for his crucifixion. (John 18:28 to 19:26; Luke 23:6-12; Acts 4:27)

## IN A NUTSHELL

- The notions of "sin" and "evil" have become taboo in our society.
- There is not one sinner who can have access to the kingdom of heaven where all is pure and perfect. Which is why God is just by placing everyone at the same level: all have sinned and all are lost.
- To admit that God exist is also to admit that I have to submit to him.

## WHAT I HAVE LEARNED IN THIS CHAPTER

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## 16

# Faith and Freedom

The following are the testimonies of two brothers: Paul and Pascal Hardy, World Champions in snowboard and surf.

*Paul* - I left my home in Quebec at the age of 19 and moved out West. Three years later, after having learned snowboarding and surfing, I began to be contacted by sponsors. I began to travel and compete. People would say I had a "dream life". Everything was free, I got to see the world and even appear in magazines.

*Pascal* - I was always in sports since I was very young. At the age of 18, I left Quebec by bus and headed to the West Coast to do "extreme skiing" on the mountains of Whistler, B.C. One day I decided to head down to the canyons of Oregon to try out sailboarding. My mother had taught me this sport. At 19 years of age, I had enough talent to be sponsored.

At 25, I began to see more serious income and to travel the world circuit. I had become a world champion.

*Paul* - To me, love simply meant to sleep with someone. All of my relationships were centered on sex.

*Pascal* - At this stage of my life, I had reached the pinnacle of my sailboarding ability and in my physical performance, but it was also the place where I experienced the deepest void in my heart because there was nothing concrete or satisfying in my emotional life.

After several girlfriends and sexual relationships, you begin to feel shaken in the deepest part of your soul. You don't know where to turn, you have no clue of what type of woman you are looking for, and you cease to know what is true. A feeling of solitude haunts you. Even though my outer world may have appeared wonderful and perfect, I felt very alone inside. I had a great longing for that solid, secure relationship which man so desperately seeks.

*Paul* - I understood that the only freedom we have in life is the freedom to make decisions.

True freedom is when your buddy is having a drink with all your friends, and you don't have to go along. True freedom is when your friends are all smoking drugs and you are free to choose not to. Or when you are surfing the net and you don't have to go to the pornographic sites. That's true freedom... when you are completely free to say "no".

*Pascal and Paul Hardy*

## Between Friends

Is there any relation between faith and freedom? Explain your answer.

Is there a difference between having faith in God and having faith in ourselves?

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

Faith is synonymous for confidence. I know my faith in God is growing when I can truly place my trust in him. This week, I will team up with God by undertaking things that I normally would avoid for lack of confidence. For example, I will offer a gift to a sick neighbor, or some flowers to an elderly person who I know gets very few visitors. With God, all things are possible.

## A PRAYER

Jesus, my prayer today is short and simple. It is the same prayer your disciples once prayed: "Lord, increase my faith."

## Hearing from God

Dear Lord, there are things you would like to accomplish through me which I have never prayed for because of lack of confidence. There are things that have never even entered my mind because I was already convinced that you would not respond or help me. You likely wouldn't help me win the lottery, even if I was to ask. But there may be other things that you would like me to ask for and for which I should pray.

I am listening, Lord. Please show me!

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Epistle to the Romans, chapter 4**

"Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace" (a free gift of God).

I remember a fellow I met on a ferry; a Dutchman visiting Canada with his girlfriend. We were in line awaiting the arrival of the boat which was over an hour late. I was reading my

newspaper quietly, sitting at the wheel of my car, when I noticed this tall blond man awkwardly jumping out of his van and making gestures to call for help. He was choking on some food he had swallowed which was obstructing his breathing passages. Folks came running from everywhere as he began to suffocate.

His girlfriend had the presence of mind to grab him from behind, her arms around his body, and to apply pressure to his abdomen. She saved his life in freeing his airways of the obstruction. The fellow began breathing without difficulty and got back into his vehicle. He could have died!

A few hours later I was at the cafeteria on the boat, having my dinner, when this tall Dutchman came back to my mind. What would have happened if his girlfriend had not succeeded in helping him? If he had died, what would have become of his soul, of his eternal destiny?

I told myself that it was important that I find this man on the boat and have a few words with him.

I had not even finished my meal when I saw this blond man and his girlfriend come into the cafeteria and come to sit at the table beside mine. No doubt about it, this was certainly a sign from God.

I politely engage in a conversation with them and they invite me to come and sit at their table.

We have a nice exchange and it was quite pleasant. Their names were Mike and Cathy. I shared with Mike the teaching of Christ on death and the hereafter. I was careful to point out that I was not trying to get them into a sect, or even to draw them into a church. As a Christian I was simply concerned by what could have taken place in his life today if he had gone into eternity.

I spoke to him of the love of Jesus and the reason for his incarnation and his death on the cross. I quoted a few words from the Gospel to help him to understand the importance of caring about what Jesus said regarding life after death and the fact that it was of primary importance to be reconciled to God before crossing into eternity.

I spoke to him of the importance of receiving God's forgiveness for all of the wrongs we have committed here below. I told him that God never refuses his friendship and his pardon to those who take the trouble to ask him. I gave him a number of examples from my own life and other examples as well to show him that Jesus really exists, that he is not a religion, a philosophy or a myth. In spite of all of my efforts to ignite a small flame of faith in him and to bring him to the realization that today could have been his last day on earth, Mike remained insensitive to the message of the Gospel. He did not believe in God!

In this chapter, it talks of Abraham the patriarch, to whom God had promised to bless his descendants. We can read this in the Old Testament. This promise was fulfilled partly due to the fact that Abraham became the father of the Jewish nation from which was to be born the Messiah. In other words, it is through the birth of the Messiah that this promise would ultimately be accomplished. But here, the example of Abraham is used in order to show us the way in which he inherited this promise. It was through faith. God knew that Abraham was not able to understand the whole scope of his plan for redemption. However, God expected Abraham to trust him. Faith in some ways is a response of the heart, which says "I can't perfectly understand it all, but if God said it then I know it is truth, so I choose to believe!" That's faith.

Faith is not a virtue in and of itself. It is not a question of Buddhist faith, Islamic faith, Hindu faith, or faith in a sort of "cosmic energy", nor in a god "as I perceive him". True faith is built on what God has said. It is not always determined by what we see or feel.

For example, the forgiveness of God is not true simply because I feel forgiven; it is true because God said it and I believe it. My emotions should respond according to my faith, and not the other way around. When I pray, I don't always feel basked in the presence of God, and I don't always feel as though God will answer my prayer. But I persevere because Jesus taught us to pray, and also because the bible affirms that God listens when we pray.

Faith does not require simply an "intellectual adherence". It involves a heart to heart with God. It is fed by his Word.

In short, the epistle to the Romans insists on the fact that we are all sinners. It doesn't take a large amount of faith to believe that. What's more, it is very clear that we cannot replace the essential forgiveness of God by our good works and deeds. Saint Paul tells us very clearly that the good things we do can in no way compensate or make up for the evil deeds we have done. If that were so, that would place the responsibility of our salvation on our own shoulders. We would spend our entire lives worrying about whether or not we had done enough good deeds to cancel out the evil ones. Besides which, the "elite" group who would actually succeed at this would have no need for faith in God. All they would need is a good moral code.

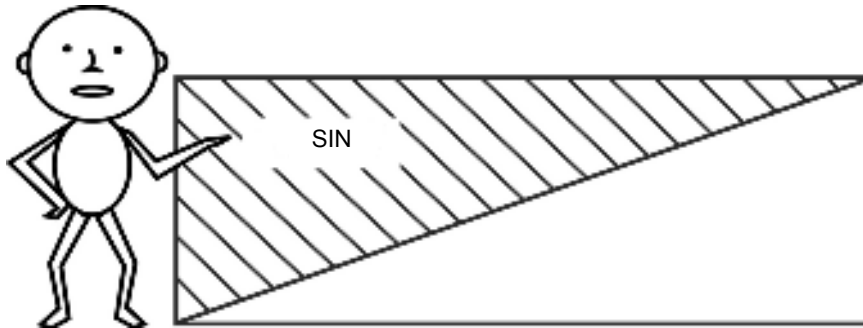
But God did not want his love and forgiveness to become a recompense that he would dole out in accordance with the measure of human effort we put forth. Instead, he had another plan. A plan no one could have possibly imagined!

Other recommended readings: Matthew 6:25-34; Mark 2:1-12; Hebrews 11; 1 Peter 1:1-9

## A CLOSER LOOK

We have come to a turning point in our study of the book of Romans. Let's review what we've learned:

1. There hasn't been a single human being on earth, from the beginning of time up until today that has not committed sin in some way.
2. God cannot judge justly on the basis of the human justice system, in other words on the merit of our good and evil actions.
3. Even though we accomplish good and evil deeds on all sorts of levels, we are nevertheless all equals as we stand before the perfection of God: we are all sinners.
4. There is no other way here below by which we can rid ourselves of our sins, nor be rescued from our "sinner" state.
5. No one has ever or will ever attain the perfection of God or gain access to heaven by his or her own efforts and means.
6. Only one other alternative is offered: to believe in what God said and to accept the solution he proposes. That's what faith is.



LET'S ADMIT THE TRUTH,  
WE CANNOT SAVE OURSELVES.

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Thomas

Thomas was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. His name means "twin". We often think of Thomas in relation to faith, more specifically the lack of faith. Yes, Thomas was someone who had difficulty believing. You could say he was rather skeptical. This did not stop Jesus from choosing him as a disciple just the same.

Even though Jesus had, on many occasions, spoken to his disciples about his death and resurrection, Thomas still could not believe... or else he simply couldn't understand!

On Easter morning, after seeing the risen Lord, Mary Magdalene ran to tell the disciples. That same evening, Jesus appeared to them, but Thomas was missing. In spite of the accounts the others gave him, Thomas refused to believe. He said "I won't believe it until I see the nail wounds in his hands - and put my fingers into them - and place my hand in his side." You can read for yourself what happened next. (John 20:18-29)

History tells us that Thomas became a great evangelist for the cause of Christ. He traveled all the way to India and after 20 years of missionary work the apostle was martyred (killed by a lance) in a mountain cave where he had been praying.

## IN A NUTSHELL

- In life, motivation, discipline, and believing in one's self can take us to great heights of success. But having a faith in God, even as small as a mustard seed, can move mountains.
- Faith to some is considered a spiritual quality, "awareness" or a virtue. We can use the term "faith" in regards to the Catholic, Protestant or Buddhist faiths. All of us believe in someone or something. But this type of faith, be it small or great, weak or strong, cannot necessarily deliver us from our state of sinfulness. No more than all the other human virtues could, such as goodness, patience, and respect.
- To trust in what God has said is the only way we can be saved from our sin. It's the only genuine definition of faith.





## 17

# To Live Again

I have my case of beer at my feet, my mescaline, my cigarettes... it's just another night. But inside, I'm sick and tired; I just can't take it anymore. I have no reason for living, I have no goals in life, I'm fed up, and this is it... tonight I leave this world for good. Who cares what happens next, I've had enough. I don't have any strength left. I'm outta here!

I went home, said goodnight to my parents and went into the basement. Sitting on my bed, I thought back on all the disappointments in my life and took a serious look at what I had become: a drug dealer who takes advantage of others.

Realizing this is all my life amounted to, I decided I wanted to leave, and be gone for good. I took off my belt, tied it up in my closet and slipped it around my neck. Then, without too much thought, I let myself fall.

I was clinically dead and my organs emptied themselves. My parents heard some noise and they came down. My door was locked, and there was no answer when they called in to me. They unlocked the door only to come face to face with death and with the pain their son had been living without having told them or letting anyone see.

My father tried to take me down and administer mouth to mouth resuscitation. My mother went upstairs to phone 9-1-1. Next, she immediately notified a prayer chain.

And I survived!

When I was 15 years old, my mother decided to follow the Lord. At first, she was the only one in the family. We thought she had gone crazy. But instead, throughout the years, we began to see that she had a peace and an assurance that was not there before.

Then one day, my father also made the decision to follow Christ. My sister and I, however, continued to drink and take drugs and live the same old life as we had been living for a number of years.

One evening, I went with my mother to a prayer meeting, and that night someone asked me this question: "When you die, Jonathan, do you know where you will go?"

I had already considered this question, but I had told myself that there was nothing after death. But now I was faced with the question, and I had to seriously ask myself what would happen if I was to die.

That person then explained to me that Jesus had died and risen again to forgive me of my sins and that if I asked him to come make his home in me, I would inherit eternal life with him.

I couldn't resist such an offer. However, I didn't pray my prayer sincerely. My motives weren't pure and the commitment I made to Jesus had been taken very lightly.

As a result, nothing changed in my life, and that same night I was back with my friends partying and getting high.

I was aware that God was alive and that he had done miracles in the lives of my parents; a work that no one else could have done, making positive changes that they had not been able to make on their own even after 30 years of marriage.

But I didn't want to let God in because I was too preoccupied with the things I liked to do. I was not sincere with him.

*Jonathan Simard*



## **Between Friends**

In your opinion, why do so many people not take the time to seriously consider what Jesus accomplished through his death on the cross?

Do you have an absolute certainty that God will welcome you into heaven at the end of your life? Explain.

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

God, in his love, wishes for me to be delivered from the effects of evil and reconciled with him forever. He paid my debt. He traded my sin-stained life for a robe of white. All that he asks is that I believe in what he has done for me.

Out of thankfulness, I want to become his spokesperson. It is worth my effort because the stakes are eternal. This week, I will simply share my faith with one or more people around me.

## A PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you gave your life to buy me back. You took on a human form to get closer to me, so that I might come to know your forgiveness and your love.

I accept, Lord, to recognize my need for you. I receive in this very moment, the precious gift of your salvation. Dress my soul in a robe of white. Lord Jesus, come and make your home in me.

### **Hearing from God**

God of love,  
I stand before you in silence.  
I stand before you without pretence, just as I am, without any masks, and without excuses.  
God of love,  
I stand before you to hear from you, having faith that you see me and love me.  
God of love,  
I come to you out of sincerity, I want to know you, I want to listen to you.  
Lord Jesus, I invite you to speak to me freely!

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

### **Scripture Reading: Epistle to the Romans, chapter 5**

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

As we talked about in the previous section, God created humanity and the entire universe according to his standard of perfection. He created man and woman perfect, in his image and likeness. That's why we are able to love and be loved. However, a being that has the capacity to love also has the ability to make choices.

God didn't want to create "robots" unable to respond freely to his love. He wanted beings with which he could exchange and share his attributes, his plans, his kingdom.

But true freedom always comes with a risk: that of making the wrong choice. The decision Adam and Eve made to disobey God was more than poor judgment. It was an action that said that their intelligence was superior to his divine wisdom and perfection. Just like Lucifer, they wanted to elevate themselves above God. The result was catastrophic for them and for all of creation. The whole universe and the entire human race suffered the consequences of the choices of our first parents.

That's what the fifth chapter of Romans tells us. In some way, all of us have done just like Adam: we all have sinned. What's more, our sinful nature continues to cause us to seek other solutions other than the ones God offers for our redemption.

Here, the apostle Paul presents Jesus as the "second Adam", in reference to the coming of God on earth in human form. He came to buy back all of humanity from the terrible consequences of Adam and Eve's choices. He lived a perfect life as a man and he took upon himself the judgment that our sins demanded.

Jesus' death on the cross was a death of atonement. He bore the sins of all of humanity. God was crucified by his own creatures, going right to the end to buy them back.

We noted in the preceding chapters of our study that all humans, without exception, are sinners. Therefore, all need the forgiveness of God. We are all guilty of having transgressed the law of God; whether or not we are willing to admit it. We also learned that it is impossible to receive the forgiveness of God on the basis of our own merit, doing good deeds to make up for the bad ones we have done. The only way to be forgiven is to admit our need of God and to accept what he offers as a solution: the atoning death of Jesus on the cross.

Salvation can only be obtained through faith. Faith is to believe in what God has said. Let's not make the same mistake as Adam and Eve, by choosing to believe in our own power of reasoning rather than accept what God offers us.

The book of Romans is a treasure that reveals incomparable riches that Jesus obtained for us through his death and resurrection. The fifth chapter begins by offering this first jewel: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ".

The jewel of receiving inner peace from God is a priceless treasure in and of itself. Jesus said in the gospels that his peace passes all understanding. Why is that? Because it does not depend on our own capacities, but on God.

It is written: "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." He didn't wait for us to become good enough or pure enough to communicate his love to us. The verse says that God proved his love for us by giving his life for us. What more could we possibly need in order to put our trust in him? It is the knowledge of this truth that gives us peace. A deep peace that comes from knowing that God loves us, that he proved his love for us, and that he cannot lie. It is the peace of knowing that our eternal salvation does not come from human effort but from the promise of God.

Verse 16 says that salvation through Jesus is a gift. God offers us his forgiveness as a gift. He offers to share his kingdom with us for all of eternity. We don't deserve this gift; all we

can do is receive it. The peace of God produces within us a flood of gratefulness and adoration. We want to live for the one who gave his life for us, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Other recommended readings: Hebrews chapters 4, 8 and 9.

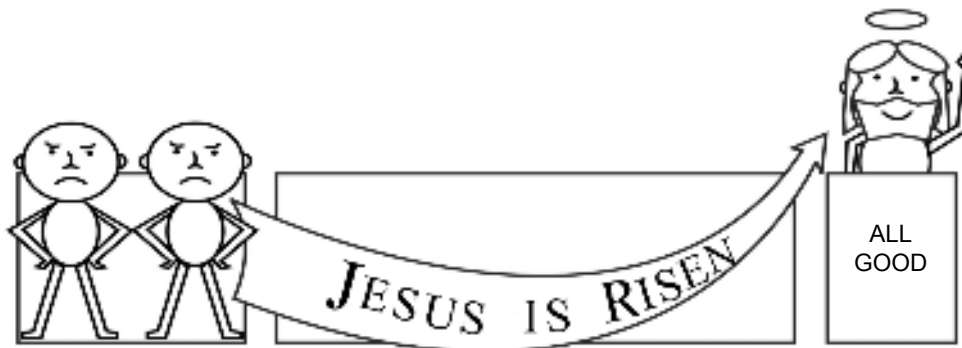
## A CLOSER LOOK

We have examined the question, and seen that it is futile for us to believe that we can better our sinful nature to the point that it becomes acceptable to God. It is impossible, and no human on earth has ever succeeded in accomplishing this feat.

What's more, this sinful nature remains with us for the duration of our lives. There is no hope of ridding ourselves of it.

If Christ's goal had been to come show us how to correct our sinful nature, all he had to do was come and be a perfect example (which he did) and leave us with a list of things to do and not do. Then he could have returned to heaven on a cloud, and hoped that all would fair well with us. But that's not what this epistle tells us. Jesus came as a substitute, in order to die in our place. The bible says "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23), and that's what we all deserve. Jesus does not ask us to correct our sinful nature, he wants us to understand that it leads to death. And that's exactly why he was crucified; He, the one who had never sinned.

He wants us to consider everything that has to do with our sinful nature settled once and for all. He paid the price, and God sees our sinful nature as completely dead and gone. God now sees us as though we had never sinned. Isn't it wonderful?



EACH INDIVIDUAL HAS A MEASURE OF GOOD AND EVIL WITHIN THEMSELVES.

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Zacchaeus

The name Zacchaeus literally meant "pure". What a contradiction when it came to this miserly little man who spent his life swindling people out of their money! Zacchaeus was an Israelite who worked for the Romans as a tax collector. He was well known for his crookedness, and his fellow countrymen despised him.

Then one day he heard the news that Jesus was coming to his town. Curious, he went looking for him. He climbed up into a tree in order to gain a better view of Jesus as he passed by without having to mingle in with the crowd too much.

Imagine his surprise when the Lord came near him and invited him to have supper with him!

He joyfully accepted, and this meeting with Jesus proved to literally transform his life and behavior.

Without Jesus reproaching him for anything at all, Zacchaeus decided to reimburse the surplus of money he had taken from people, and even returned more than he had stolen.

Jesus sees beyond appearances, and his love is that which transforms hearts. (Luke 19:1-10)

### IN A NUTSHELL

- When there is no longer any hope, and life no longer makes sense, when our burden is too heavy... Jesus is there, right beside us. He died in our place to set us free.
- Jesus does not demand that we improve our lives or cleanse our souls before we come to him. He knows we are unable to. He always welcomes us just the way we are.
- Rather than urging us to improve our sinful nature on our own, Jesus seeks to make his home in us. He offers us a new nature that enables us to rise above our sin.

## WHAT I HAVE LEARNED IN THIS CHAPTER

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MY PRAYER TO GOD

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## 18

### A New Me

All of my brothers were involved in street gangs. I too ended up one of the youngest members of a very violent street gang. Because of this, I often wound up in prison. From youth detention centers all the way up to the highest level maximum security prisons in Canada. I was involved in a number of armed robberies, bank robberies, violent crimes and drug trafficking, and I wasted many years of my life.

Today, my desire is to help, even one person, to avoid making the mistakes I have made. I give conferences in high schools in Quebec and I have become a resource person for moral and religious education departments in schools. My multi-media conferences touch on many subjects such as: suicide prevention, violence prevention, negative social influences, drug use, and also faith in God.

This is going very well, and this type of work has kept me busy for the last four years. I have visited approximately 75 high schools. My conferences have a strong impact on youth because young people hunger for truth. I often have teens come talk to me with tears in their eyes afterwards.

It is a pleasure for me to be able to help young people.

*Randy Johnston*



#### **Between Friends**

Give your definition of freedom.

How can we find deliverance from bad habits and actions that have ruled our lives for years?

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

The bible says that the words of my mouth have a strong impact. They have the power to build up or to tear down. This week, rather than see the bad side of people, I will look for their qualities and compliment them on them.

## A PRAYER

My God, I thank you because your love is a force that sets us free. Step by step, you are leading me towards success and not failure, towards growth and not depression, toward freedom and not slavery.

I want to learn to see my life situations the way you see them. I want to see others and myself in the same way you do. Open my eyes, Lord!

## Hearing from God

Jesus, you ask me to see myself as "dead to sin". That's not always easy, especially when I act against your will. I feel like a hypocrite because I can see that sin still lives in me.

Just the same, I believe what you say and that a change will take place in me. So rather than live in shame, with my eyes fixed on my shortcomings and failures, I want to believe this truth: that through you I am a new creature.

With your help, Lord, I will draw up a list today of the negative sides to my character, and right alongside it, a list of ways in which I will be transformed thanks to your presence in my life.

As I go along, help me to discern why these negative behaviors are rooted in my life. I am listening, waiting to hear from you.

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Epistle to the Romans, chapter 6**

"In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus".

Randy's testimony at the beginning of this module illustrates well the truths in Romans 6. They are very important truths that we must grasp on a deep level. The first truth is that sin

leads to death: "for the wages of sin is death" (v.23). Sin is a destructive force. In the days of the Roman Empire, to punish a murderer they would bind the victim's body to him until the putrefaction and decaying of the body began to spread to his own flesh.

The first three chapters helped us to see the devastating effects of evil.

The Apostle Paul illustrates it well when he says "Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey-whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?" (v.16) Whether it be under the Old Covenant or the new one, the sins we commit will always have their harmful effect that even risk causing spiritual blindness and make us insensitive to God.

The bible never hid the sins of man. Moses, Abraham, David, Peter all made some very serious mistakes. Human beings are incapable of overcoming sin by their own strength. The harder they try, the more they see their inability. How frustrating!

Paul clearly explains, in many places, that even the perfect law of God does not have the power to free us from sin. In fact, it shows us our weakness and produces anger: "law brings wrath" (Romans 4:15). Let's use the example of a few people who are trying to lose weight. They all have an understanding of how it is done and have the means to do it, but in spite of their efforts and good intentions they still don't succeed. Often, disappointment and anger make them eat even more, and in the end they are worse off than when they had begun. This same dynamic shows up in many other areas of our lives, which is why it is so important to grasp what this chapter is saying.

The Apostle is showing us that the only way to overcome sin is to identify ourselves totally with Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection. Jesus died in our place. He died so that sin could be dead in us: "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death..." (v.3, 4) Paul adds "We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" (v.2)

This identifying of ourselves with Christ is not a mere mental exercise. We don't identify ourselves with him in the same way we would a movie star or sports champion. What Jesus accomplished to overcome sin, God himself did. To say that sin has been conquered is not simply a hypothesis, but a fact!

The second truth revealed in this chapter flows from the first. Since Jesus' death did away with sin once and for all, we are no longer obliged to stay slaves to sin. There is a way to be released from our captivity and to truly experience freedom. That doesn't mean that we will never sin again but that there is a way out. True freedom is available to all! In the past, sin ruled over me. But now I can rule over sin because of my new nature. Before, I had no choice but to

sin. But now, I can choose. The secret is found in the fact that my relationship with God has been perfectly restored. I can now experience a real intimacy with him. I have the privilege of living a friendship with God like the one Adam and Eve had in the garden.

I am no longer an orphan.

I no longer live in shame.

I no longer need to prove anything to anyone to earn their love, not even to God. There is no way that I could please him more, through improving my sinful state anything else. There is no point. God loves me as I am.

I don't have to hide anymore, or to invent all sorts of strategies to be accepted, or compare myself to others, or improve my self-image. I am loved of God. I am his child, and nothing can separate me from his love. I can speak to him at all times. I can tell him everything without fear of rejection. I can live "above" the bondage in which sin had kept me.

I am truly free!

Other recommended readings: 1 Corinthians 1:30

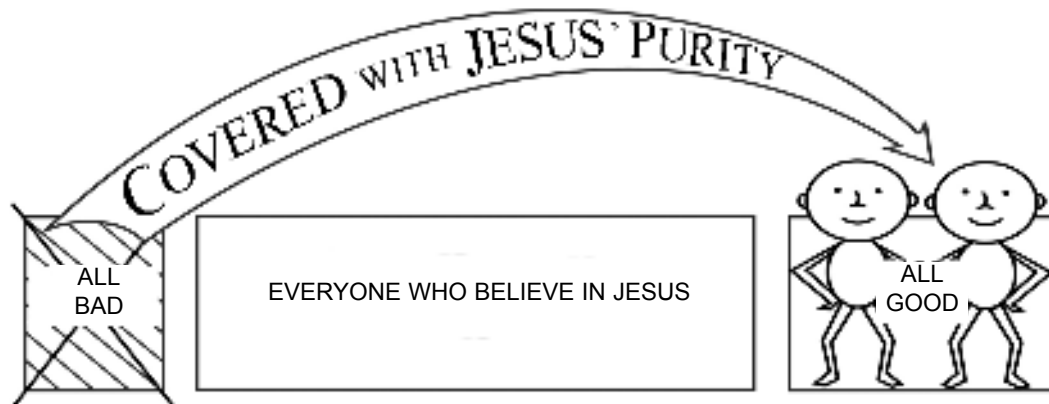
## A CLOSER LOOK

The first five chapters of this epistle reveal that God perfectly accomplished all that is necessary in order for us to be justified and reconciled to him. Chapters six to eight show us that God not only justified those who believe in Jesus, but he also sanctified them.

Sanctification is the transition from our "sinner" state to a state of holiness. It is the work of the Spirit within us that progressively makes us more like Jesus. The Apostle Paul tries to help us understand that if the work of Jesus on the cross was sufficient to save us perfectly, then it is also sufficient to make us perfectly holy.«There is nothing we can do, regardless of the circumstance, except to believe.

To God, I am every bit as holy as I am saved. The white robe he clothed me with at my conversion covers me permanently, in spite of my flaws and the daily process of transformation that is still going on.

There is nothing I can do to render myself more "pure" or to earn God's favor. Everything has been accomplished through Jesus. I no longer need to live in fear of judgment, I have been cleared and cleansed. All that is left is to thank God and appreciate what he has done for me. It is this liberating love that transforms me day by day.



THROUGH JESUS, GOD SEES US AS THOUGH WE HAVE NEVER DONE ANY WRONG

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Simon Peter

Simon passionately loved the Lord. His name meant "one who listens, who hears". Since he had a rather impulsive personality, he often wanted to be first among the disciples who were accomplishing great things in order to please Jesus. However, his bravery was often short-lived; a "flash in the pan", so to speak. The Lord did not want Simon's faith to be built on his mediocre self-image and his instability, so he gave him a new name: "Peter", which means "a rock" (John 1:42).

In spite of his flaws, Jesus loved Simon Peter. He saw beyond his weaknesses. It's as though he saw in advance the transformation he would bring about in him. He looked beyond his sinful nature and saw the new nature that would be given him once the Holy Spirit came to live in him.

Before his crucifixion, Jesus knew that Simon would deny him. In spite of that, he speaks these words of encouragement, as though he saw beyond his error: "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers". But he replied, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death". Jesus answered, "I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me". (Luke 22:31-34)

Many years later, Simon Peter died a martyr, crucified because of his faith in Jesus.

## IN A NUTSHELL

- The love of *God* is a liberating force.
- *God* wants to make an exchange with us. He wants us to give him our soiled robes so that he can clothe us in a garment of white, as clean and pure as the life of *Jesus*.
- Then, he asks us to stop seeing ourselves as though we were still wearing our old filthy garments, and to daily see ourselves as he sees us.



MY PRAYER TO GOD

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## The Little Voice Inside

*We* arrive in Peru at 6:30 A.M. after a twelve-hour delay, sporting dark circles around our eyes.

The medical team I am traveling with is made up of people from many countries. My brother and I are the only two from Canada. There is a dermatologist from Rome, a surgeon from Georgia, and other doctors from different parts of the world. They are all specialists who have chosen to participate in a humanitarian aid project in Peru. The trip is sponsored by an organization in San Diego, which my brother Luc knows of through a paediatrician he has worked with. The relations among the members of the group are very warm.

So, here I am in Peru. The team starts the day with a prayer meeting, which I decide not to attend.

The second morning I do go, but only as an observer; out of simple curiosity.

After planning our schedules, we take a brief tour of the site where we will be working. As a matter of fact, the clinic is a square building without walls or partitions, and only a cement floor. Curtains have been installed. One has to make do with whatever he can find! The dentist chair is a desk. Patients sit on top of the desk and place their feet on a chair.

Later on, we fashioned a dentist chair out of an armchair we remodelled with boards, adding a cushion as a head-rest for the patients. They were rather rough tools to work with, but they worked. I do not know of many dentists who would enjoy working under such conditions.

Whew! I had seen quite a bit for my first day.

I must say I am enjoying the exotic side of this country, its palm trees and warm climate. I also appreciate the fact that I am among people who speak another language, a language I can speak fairly well myself. I am very happy to be here and moreover, I am on holiday.

I have come here of my own accord to help these people. I am greatly motivated to do so, especially since the services we offer are absolutely free.

Another reason I looked forward to this trip was that it provided a terrific, unique opportunity to work side by side with my brother Luc. We had played together so much during our childhood, but about fifteen years ago we lost sight of each other.

The opportunity to work together in that project was like a dream and I was deeply moved at the thought of it.

Even more so since the purpose of the trip was to come help these people who do not have a cent to their name. Even the most destitute among our poor would be considered rich over here. These Peruvians live in such extreme poverty that it is difficult to stand the sight of such misery.

The site where we set up the clinic makes me think of an abandoned quarry. Suppose that one day our government said to all the people receiving social assistance benefits in Montreal, "We cannot give you any more money. We are offering you the Miron Quarry. Each of you may choose a lot for yourselves and lodge your family on it". That is exactly what is happening in this region. The Peruvian government has given these people a small piece of land at Iquitos, on the shores of the Amazon. This region is flooded for six months out of the year. It is simply dreadful. All the houses are built on piles around thirty feet (9 metres) high. These people live thirty feet above the ground! All houses are built either on piles or in the form of rafts. That means the houses rise when the rains come and go down during the dry season. There is no sewage system or any other waste removal system. Space is left between the houses so that the rubbish can be thrown down between them. The monsoon is responsible for cleaning once a year. When the water rises, it brings everything out to sea. During the dry season, the refuse accumulates.

A nauseating stench emanating from the piles of waste pollutes the air.

Another team from California is also here. They came to build a school. It is in this building, currently under construction, that we set up our clinic.

Most of the poor are receiving medical care for the first time. Imagine their reaction! Thirty-year-olds are going to a dentist or a doctor for the first time ever. The average life expectancy is only thirty-five years. Young girls are often pregnant at thirteen. Many suffer from AIDS, hepatitis, and worms. They all suffer from nutritional deficiency, and the state of their mouths is deplorable. Many are very ill. When they learned that there was a medical team coming, they spent months preparing for our arrival.

People line up, even at night. Others sleep on the road or on the bare ground, to be in line early in the morning. They have no clothes except an old pair of pants with holes and a torn sweater—the extent of their possessions. Between 600 and 1000 people line up every day. The most we can attend to in one day is around 700. This is an enormous workload. No breaks to go to the beach, even though the heat is enough to knock you out. When I go to work at 7 a.m., the temperature is already 40 degrees. The heat is extreme. There is even a team which accompanies us whose only duty is to remind us to drink water, because we often forget to drink. I wear a headband to stop sweat from running down into my eyes and preventing

me from seeing what I am doing. I look more like a hippie from the seventies than a dentist. I feel a little bit like a farmer who works in his field all day.

We take half an hour for lunch. I am tired and wiped out but I have no desire whatsoever to complain. It helps me, at least, to appreciate how easy Canadians have it. We often complain that life is tough, but we cash our big pay cheques and we own two cars and four television sets.

I just can't keep myself from making comparisons like this. Looking outside, I see a little boy playing on his balcony, thirty feet above the ground. He is dancing naked and having a grand old time. I use my binoculars to get a better look "You are having fun and laughing! How can you smile in such a dump?!"

How is it possible for a young boy to laugh and dance in that quarry full of human excrement with the terrible smell that makes you feel like vomiting? I cannot believe my eyes. I promise myself never to complain again back home. I will stop complaining about anything and everything, including the weather.

These people live in another world, we say. When I think about it, I believe we are the ones who live in another world: a world of selfishness and insensitivity.

We do not often experience this kind of suffering. We also suffer, but in different ways; for them there is no way out. They suffer in every sense of the word. We see very young mothers coming to the clinic with their five children. At the age of 22, they already have five children, which mean they will be grandmothers at 30. Keep in mind their life expectancy is around 35 years.

Like us, they suffer heartache. If a woman's husband is unfaithful, it hurts her as much as it does a woman of our world. The problem of suffering is real and nobody can escape from it. All human beings are subject to suffering and pain.

I, like many others, have had my periods of suffering. Although I cannot compare myself to the Peruvians, some life events have hurt me as well.

My private life has been very tumultuous. I lived through two separations and the latter caused me great sorrow. During that time, my brother, Luc, did not stop talking to me about God, and I found him very tiresome. So I cut all ties with him. I was a bit like everyone else: I would pray when things were going wrong, but quickly forget God when things were fine. That's the type of relationship I had with him.

But now, what is really touching me here, however, is my contact with the Peruvian poor. Every evening when I am alone in my room, I cry. And yet, I had been in this type of underprivileged milieu before. For example, once I had visited the Dominican Republic. But, since I

had been rolling along at 100 km/hour on my motorcycle, I guess I was going too fast to notice the little cabins made of corrugated iron. My pockets were full of money and I was drinking as much rum as I pleased. I was acting like most tourists who go over there on holiday. I may have seen some poor people, but I never felt their suffering.

So what is happening to me here in Peru? There really is something going on inside of me. This feeling pushes me to examine my conscience.

The Peruvian reality stands before me like a mirror, a mirror in which I see myself exactly as I am. I dislike what I see. Although I came here to bring something, to offer my services, in reality it is I who am poor and in need. I cannot explain it, but during this whole week, my life is being projected in front of me. I watch all the crazy things I have done and all my failures. My small world is starting to crumble.

How can this be when just a few days ago everything was fine and dandy? I was a good ol' Quebecer drinking his beer and having fun telling jokes, and showing off to everybody that everything in my life was just great.

But there, standing in front of my mirror, everything is coming crashing down. God wants to show me who I really am: a being living only for myself, devoid of true kindness and love.

There I am, standing in the shower, crying and distressed. My whole self-centered life is revealed before my eyes. And there, alone, with the water falling on me, I met God. No human being on earth could have produced this kind of awakening in my conscience. Without a word, without saying a thing, in a sort of exchange deep within me I feel God forgiving me. I dissolve into tears again; this is how it took place. It was as if God was piercing my shell and breaking the wall I had built around me to ignore the reality of good and evil. I came into contact with my Creator, who made me see that my way of life is leading me straight to ruin and downfall. Something definitely happened between God and me.

I never used to take time to listen to him or have a personal relationship with him, but now I am falling in love with God. I can feel God loves me and is with me. From this point onwards, my whole life is open before him.

Upon my return to Canada, Diane is waiting for me at the airport. As soon as our eyes meet, she realizes that something has changed in me. I try to explain in a few words what I have experienced but find that it is impossible to hold back my tears.

I have barely been gone a week, but I feel like a prisoner who has just been released after twenty years in jail. As I look at the people around me, I realize that most of them have never had the chance to see what I have seen. I feel different indeed.

Some months later, Diane gives birth to a wonderful boy who fills us with joy.

We get married. This marks a great change for me since I used to believe that marriage was merely a human invention.

We get married at Fort de l'Assomption. Our wedding is superb. All the invited guests wear costumes from the medieval era. We will never forget that beautiful day.

I find it interesting to realize that my relationship with God started to grow at the same time as my youngest child did. I was spiritually born around the same time my son was physically born. And, just like him, I have everything to learn. I want to teach my child how to lead a good life, but I also want him to understand that I will never abandon him. I do not want him to have to go through the same suffering I did in trying to live on my own strength for forty years. I am so eager to protect him, although I do know he will stumble and trip from time to time. He is a human being just like I am. However, God my Father is there. Today, I can walk with confidence since I know my Father is with me and wants to guide me.

God is my Father. I do not think that he will beat me up if I do something wrong. On the contrary, I believe he will cry. He will be sad over the fix I got myself into. He will not say, "I told you so. Tough luck! Next time, you'll just have to listen to me." Only our earthly fathers think that way. In my opinion, God is different.

The encounter I had with God in Peru gave me a second chance. God simply told me that I could start over, and that he was accepting me at the place I was at. He had been grieved by my way of life but the past did not matter anymore. From that point on, I could consider my past - whether positive or negative - as baggage, and simply as something that could help me to better understand life. Today, with God as my partner in life, I can talk about the past and I can better grasp what God can do. I now know that God can transform even the worst individual on earth, even the vilest one. A person only has to slightly open the door of his heart.

For me, it was a long process. God wanted to talk to me but I put my fingers in my ears and ran in the opposite direction.

Today, I deeply believe that anyone who wants to listen to God and let him speak will experience his presence. It is not difficult and costs nothing. And it produces unbelievable benefits. I went to Peru hoping to offer something to others, and I came back filled with new life myself. There is not one single human on earth who can give us all that...

...only God.

*Dr Serge Chaussé*

## **Between Friends**

We read that Dr. Chaussé had already been among the poor before having gone to Peru, but that he had remained completely insensitive to the suffering of the people. Is it possible that our conscience may sometimes play tricks on us, and that it allows us to justify our unacceptable behaviour? Give reasons for your answer.

Is there a difference between the voice of our conscience and the voice of the Spirit?

If so, how can we distinguish which messages come from which?

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

This week, I will make a donation to a charity or humanitarian aid organization.

## A PRAYER

Heavenly Father, your Word makes mention of individuals whose conscience was marked by evil. I am not immune to that. I can easily become selfish, egocentric and insensitive to the needs of others. I can easily seek to justify my bad behaviour.

I ask that your Holy Spirit renews my conscience. Open my eyes on your Word, not so that it can serve to accuse me, but so that it can become alive in me.

Holy Spirit rid my conscience of the influences of evil and restore it to integrity.

## **Hearing from God**

Lord Jesus, I want to experience something very special with you. I would like for you to come and talk to me, and show me areas in my life where my conscience has given me bad counsel. I also ask that you help me discern the different types of condemning accusations that stem from my conscience.

I want to lay before you every single wrong action I have committed in the past that continue to keep me a slave to my thoughts. You gave your life; you spilled your blood to cleanse my spirit, my soul, my mind.

Here I am, waiting still and silent before you. Lord Jesus, please speak to me!

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

### Scripture Reading: **Epistle to the Romans, chapter 7**

"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do."

The seventh chapter of Romans brings us to a dilemma which every believer is faced with. It refers to this paradox, this inner struggle of the human mind where good and evil meet.

As we saw in the preceding module, reconciliation with God regenerates our inner being and makes us able to triumph over evil.

Many people, however, experience only briefly this moment of freedom that comes with new birth. We know that the Spirit of God is what brings us to spontaneously turn from many of the sins that held us long in slavery, and it's the perfect light of God that illuminates our mind to bring us instinctively to the foot of the cross where there is an overabundance of grace, forgiveness and peace!

Unfortunately, this heavenly experience of conversion quickly becomes a battle field where the tormented soul forgets the joy of his salvation. Who is to blame for this? Our fallen conscience! Let me explain.

First off, let's understand that the surges and strong feelings generated from our mind vary according to the standards that were imposed on it or demanded of it. Of course, God can use our conscience to speak to us, just as we saw with the testimony of Dr. Chaussé. However, one's mind can easily become a destructive element if we don't understand how it works and what its role is. The bible says that we can have a good conscience. It also says that we can ignore our conscience, silence it completely, or make it accept different standards.

Before sin sullied the human race, the minds of our first parents were in perfect harmony with God's. You could say that before evil entered the world, the human conscience had never known guilt. After the fall, Adam and Eve felt for the first time the side of their mind that produces negative feelings, which came in the form of shame.

As soon as they did, they sought to get rid of this feeling of guilt by accusing each other and rationalizing their bad behaviour. Thousands of years later, we are still floundering about with the same problem.

As much as our minds have been, our conscience itself was affected by the fall of our first parents too. Therefore, our conscience (which some call our "inner light") does not provide a reliable way to give direction to our lives.

For example, a murderer may have difficulty sleeping the night after he had committed his first murder, but by the time he were on his tenth victim, he could probably rest his head and have a snooze right then and there!

In short, the instincts of guilt in our conscience may fluctuate according to the norms we have set.

When we become Christians, the bible becomes the new standard to which our conscience should refer. We all know that it constitutes the perfect standard. Our mind will feed itself on the words of God, and our conscience will refer to it to establish whether our behavior is good or bad. In this way, when we act in accordance to the bible our conscience will allow us to be happy and at peace. But when we are unable to line up our lives with what God asks, we will feel guilty. It can become nearly intolerable to live according to the "highs and lows" of our conscience, tortured by the alternating senses of approval or guilt. How then can we appease our conscience?

Sooner or later, we understand that it is impossible to live according to the standards set in the bible. At this stage, many will abandon the Christian faith, believing that obedience to God is an impossible thing.

Others will increase their efforts to improve their sinful nature, hoping to gain God's approval. But most will try to establish a "more acceptable" Christian standard. They will turn to the community of believers to find a more moderate standards model, one that is nearer to the sinful reality of the human being.

In this case, the bible is still viewed as the infallible Word of God, but its content is interpreted in such a way that justifies a common application that is less demanding. At this point, the mechanism of the conscience will produce good feelings or guilty ones according to the "biblical" standard which was recreated, based on the life experiences of the group we belong to, or according to whatever elements of the Christian doctrine the Church chooses to emphasize.

In this manner, when believers are able to live according to the accepted standard within their group, their conscience will be at peace.

The lives of the religious leaders in the time of Christ offer us many examples of this way of easing one's conscience by the strict observance of religion.

It's the same standard that establishes the criteria separating the "good Christians from the bad ones". For example, if a church establishes that all of its members should stop smoking, those who do not submit to this rule will be perceived as "bad Christians". On the other hand, if

drinking excessive amounts of coffee or eating a lot of sweets or fried foods are things accepted by the majority as the norm, then the "common conscience" will not be affected. We all know that it is best for a person, whether Christian or not, to stop smoking for the sake of their health. However, it would be unjust for believers to discriminate against smokers when the majority of the members of the congregation suffer from weight problems. In this type of group, a person who struggles with tobacco addiction will perpetually feel accused by their conscience, whereas the caffeine addicts will feel no guilt whatsoever.

The fact is, just as it is impossible to obey the bible perfectly, we are on the wrong track if we try to adhere to a less demanding standard. Sooner or later, we will arrive at the same dead end.

We must understand that the bible is not a law manual. It reveals our incapacity to attain God's standard of perfection and offers us only one alternative: an intimate life with the risen Christ. It is through this relationship with God that our guilt is wiped away by his redeeming love. Our conscience will drive us first to the cross where Jesus paid for all our faults, then into the arms of God our Father. As we are wrapped in his love, directed by his Spirit, we are able to overcome evil in order to live free and happy.

Let's look at all this from another angle.

We asked six automobile drivers why they made their compulsory stop at the intersection, in order to find out what it was that motivated them to respect this rule. Here are the answers they gave:

1. Because the police could give me a ticket if I don't.
2. Because I wouldn't want another car to hit me.
3. Because I don't want others to say that I'm not careful.
4. Because it is a rule in society.
5. Because safety is something I value.
6. Because it is my personal way of doing things and the safety of others is just as important as my own.

All six people had the same behavior: all of them made their stop. However, there was a difference in what motivated them. Consider for a moment that our mind and conscience could experience some sort of progression, or that it matures in "stages". These stages generally go according to the age of the person. At first, a child learns that he mustn't hit his friend because mom or dad will reprimand him. Later on, he will learn that if he strikes his friend, he

may get the same treatment back! As a teen, he won't hit his friends because he doesn't want others to avoid him or stay away because he has a reputation for violence. Also, he will figure out that it is much more pleasant to live together if we don't go around hitting one another. As a young adult he will likely adopt the non-violent approach to conflict resolution. And lastly, when he reaches maturity, let's hope he will have adopted love as the only true means of self-fulfillment and as the best way to live with others.

However, an adult can have a moral conscience that is operating in "adolescent" mode.

Let's suppose that you are afraid that God will be upset if your faith does not develop fast enough. We could say that at least you have begun on the road towards knowing the love of God, and hopefully toward leaving this wrongful image of God. Even though feelings of guilt can drive us to truly repent, does a Christian always need to be under guilt in order to grow in his or her faith?

Surely God does not want us to live as dependant on the pangs of guilt from our conscience, and in a guilt-filled state of mind?

Let's clarify this. If I find myself committing a sin after my conversion, how will I react? What will my deep motivation for turning from evil be: the fear of the judgment of God? The fear of being abandoned by him? The fear of being judged by the other members of the church? The uncomfortable feeling of being in conflict with my own values? Or instead, will I find myself face to face with a God who loves me and wants to help?

God is the same towards everyone, but depending on the maturity of our conscience, we may feel different things. I could be afraid, blame myself and languish and worry, whereas another person could get through the same mistake, the same sin, while still feeling the love of God and they will continue along the road towards gaining better self-control, a personal victory, or receiving an inner healing.

The only way to enter into this dynamic of a mature conscience is to truly know the love of God: his love that forgives, without our deserving his forgiveness. It's not enough just to know bible verses that speak of the grace of God, but we must experience his love in our lives and understand that God welcomes us entirely. It's like living continuously in this "state of grace" that I experienced at my conversion. In God's eyes, we are perfect. That is, perfection is found within the love God has for us.

Because of our faith in Jesus, we inherit salvation, but also his perfection. That's what we must constantly remember, and feed our minds on. In the words of John, God frees us from our "bad conscience" at the time of our conversion: "There is no fear in love. But perfect love

drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love." (1 John 4:18)

The author of the book of Hebrews adds: "by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: 'This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.' Then he adds: 'Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.' And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin. Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water". (Hebrews 10:14-22)

God wants to touch us with his love; he wants to set our minds free, regardless of their stage of development. To the child in the faith, he says: I am your Father, and the Spirit within you cries *Abba!* Do not be afraid of me when you sin, I am tenderly holding you. I want to renew your mind with my love. To the "adolescent" in the faith, he says: Do not let yourself be affected by the judgment of your own conscience and that of others, the only one who has the power to judge you is your God. And I have decided to give you grace. To the "adult", he says: Do not despair when you fall. It is through your weakness that my strength is best revealed. Even if you are unfaithful, I will always remain faithful to my covenant with you. I have written my law on your heart. Do not rely on your conscience to justify or condemn you. Let my Word reach into the deepest part of your mind. There is no longer an offering needed for sin. Nothing other than my grace can give you a permanent "clean" and renewed conscience.

In the epistle to the Romans, Paul said that our efforts to clear ourselves of guilt are in vain. We can never attain perfection by accomplishing this or that commandment. He had understood that under the new covenant, the most effective way to make humans better is first to transport them, in love, in God's grace... to a place high above the laws of what to do or not do. This is so that the individual will seek his sanctification on his own, in the liberty of being one of God's children. Not through his own "personal awareness" of good and evil, which could make him feel worthy or worthless depending on the state his soul is in right then.

Lastly, let us add that our minds are linked to our intelligence, which, according to the bible, is fallible and needs to be renewed (Romans 12:2). It is the Holy Spirit who does this work of regeneration. Which is why, when we act wrongly, it is fully legitimate, in fact healthy, to feel a

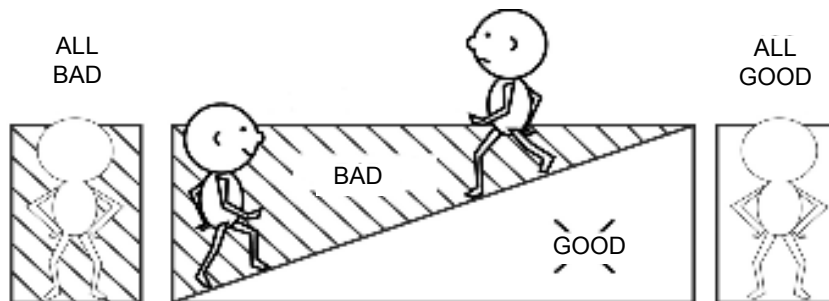
deep sadness. This is what the bible refers to as a "Godly sorrow". (2 Corinthians 7:10) But it is our reaction to this Godly sorrow that will indicate whether we have a proper understanding of the grace and love of God toward us.

Other recommended readings: Romans 2:14-15, 1 Timothy 1:18-19; 4:1-2; Titus 1:15; Hebrews 9:8-15.

## A CLOSER LOOK

A guilty conscience will always produce a sense of shame. It drives us to want to accomplish good things to compensate or to gain God's approval by what we have done for him. If God does not respond favorably to our endeavors, or if we feel that we have not done enough to earn his love (or his forgiveness), then we get angry. This anger is expressed in different ways depending on the person, but often a person will withdraw into themselves, or develop resentment towards God. We will view God as demanding and hard to please. He will become a Being who is cold-hearted and distant; someone it is best not to approach. Some people will choose to turn their backs on him, whereas others will redouble their efforts and try again. But God cannot answer favorably to this approach, because he wants to treat us like daughters and sons, not as slaves. He cannot encourage the efforts of our old nature that seeks to earn his love. On the contrary, he seeks to deliver us from that.

Our conscience can create a shame within us that produces an inner struggle between our new nature and the part of our being that is still in the process of regeneration.



THERE IS A PERPETUAL CONFLICT WITHIN US  
BETWEEN OUR OLD AND NEW NATURES

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Martha

The story of Martha offers us a very good example to help us understand the effect of a guilty conscience in the life of a person who loves God. Her name means "mistress".

Martha, her sister Mary and her brother Lazarus were good friends of Jesus. In the book of Luke, we find ourselves in their home and we see Mary listening to Jesus peacefully, while Martha is in the kitchen preparing a meal. Up until this point, everything is fine.

But all of a sudden, Martha gets upset because things aren't quite going the way she would like. She believes that what she is doing is much more important than sitting around chatting with Jesus.

She stands up angrily and comes in to the room where Jesus and her sister are talking, and voices her discontentment. She even has a reproach for Jesus, who in turn corrects her with a gentle tone.

A bad conscience causes our old nature to want to take over again. It seeks unscrupulously to impose its laws on us and tries to force our new nature to submit to its requirements. It seeks to establish our relationship with God on a "when you give, I'll give back" basis.

Our conscience can become a good servant, but it certainly doesn't make a very good master (or "mistress")! Luke 10:38-42

## IN A NUTSHELL

- The human mind is not infallible. We must understand that its strong feelings, or the "surges" of our conscience, vary according to the way it has been "programmed", or that which has been required of it.
- God can use our conscience to speak to us, but our conscience on its own can also become a destructive element if we do not have a proper understanding of how it works and what its role is.
- Nothing can better provide us with a good, clear conscience than the love and grace of God.



## MY PRAYER TO GOD

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## 20 Adoption

I began to be sexually active at the age of fourteen. My first time wasn't exactly the greatest love story; it happened in a park. Following that, I had many other sexual partners. Later on, as a result of a troubled adolescence and growing up in foster homes, I felt emptiness inside.

I began going to bars and nightclubs. I quit school and wasn't working. I began to live on social assistance. I met a guy and went to live with him in a motel on Berri Street in Montreal. One day as I was taking the bus, I met up with a girl I had known in one of the foster homes. She told me she had become a nude dancer. She said it was an easy job and that it paid good money. So I began to work in strip clubs too. The first time I did it, I was by myself, and it was in a bar. I took off my clothes, and got up on the stage. From that point on everything was easy, and I continued to do this for ten years.

But today, things are different. I feel good because I have met Jesus.

I have an eight year old daughter who has lived through many things. She has seen her mother completely drunk. She has seen her mother high on drugs. She has found her mother in bed with strangers, sometimes as many as three or four different men a week. I know my daughter suffers from these things. But she is on the road to healing now. Today, the Lord is at work in my daughter's life too.

You know, we can't give to others what we have not received ourselves. I was unable to give my daughter the love I had never known. I didn't know what real love was. To me, love meant sex.

But now, the love God has given me I can give to my daughter. Even if it isn't always easy and sometimes I still get angry and yell at her, I know the Lord is with me and I can go to him for strength.

I no longer need to go to a bar to get drunk, to drown my sorrows, to drown my frustration and anger, to drown my problems and everything that I am unable to cope with.

Now I can go to the Lord for advice. I can find refuge in him and cry on his shoulder. He is so good to me. His peace fills my heart, and I can pass that same peace on to my daughter... and its wonderful!

*Isabelle Leblanc*

## **Between Friends**

We often hear talk about self-esteem. Do you consider that you have good self-esteem? Explain your answer.

Do you feel more able to love others when you are feeling loved yourself than when you are feeling rejection?

Do you experience this kind of love in your relationship with God?

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

This week and in the weeks to come, I will spend time alone with God on a daily basis. I will drink in his love every day. I will set aside a specific time for this; I will make an appointment with God each day in a quiet place where I can listen to him and talk to him. I need to fill up on God's love every day.

Then I will be able to pour it into the lives of others too.

## A PRAYER

Dear Father, You love me and you are always with me.

In moments of solitude, of difficulty, when I don't feel your presence, help me to run into your arms.

In every circumstance, I want to remain near you.

## **Hearing from God**

Today, heavenly Father, I am coming to bathe in the ocean of your love. I feel secure when I am near you because your love is constant. You love me and you will never abandon me.

I rest in you. I don't need to make great efforts or climb to high places to reach you, because you came to me instead. You are so good.

I rest my head on your shoulder, and I shut my eyes. I want to hear what your heart is saying to me.

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

### Scripture Reading: **Epistle to the Romans, chapter 8**

"For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry *Abba Father*."

Isabelle Leblanc's story deeply moves me. It helps me learn to understand others rather than to judge them.

It places me before this duality, this eternal paradox of love and suffering that is central to the human adventure. This search for well-being, of pleasure, of love, that so often is leads to deception, pain and hatred instead.

It is the tragedy of divorce or heartbreak, when after having given the very best of ourselves to another person, we find ourselves hurt and rejected within the relationship.

It is the very negation of love. It is the heart cry of an entire generation that has witnessed and suffered the failure of their parents' love story. It is the cry of a generation that has sought in vain, through all sorts of experiences, to either ease or regenerate its capacity to love and be loved.

It is the sad result of the relationships and amorous experiences of this generation, which in essence were nothing more than their attempt to silence their childhood dreams for love and acceptance; dreams that were crushed under the weight of deception and disappointment. In an attempt to deny this shocking paradox that "true love" does not exist, they offer humanity that which is most intimate: their sexuality.

However, what these young people obtain in return is often a far cry from the tenderness and authenticity they are longing for. Their identity suffers and their self-esteem must submit to what society suggests as being the image of true happiness. A happiness that they know to be artificial, modeled after a Hollywood-type perception of life that at certain times may resemble the reality of their daily lives, and other times reflects their most inaccessible fantasies.

There again, the duality tears up the soul. The noblest sentiments of beauty and greatness they have within themselves are constantly conflicting with the dissatisfaction of a lifestyle centered on self-gratification. The truth is that true happiness is not found in the pursuit of pleasure, or else the rich, beautiful young men and women; the sensual celebrities that have become idols to the younger generation, would be the happiest people on earth. But that is obviously not the case.

The story is told of a woman who gave birth to a little girl at a time when she was having marital problems and going through a depression that lasted several months. She did not have the strength to look after her child as she would have liked, or her husband either, who was often away from home.

After a few years, the situation improved and harmony returned to their home. The couple tried desperately to provide their little princess with an overabundance of attention, but she remained cold and unresponsive to all forms of affection.

As early as preschool, she showed behavioral problems and began hitting other children. Her problems and violent behavior grew worse and worse, spanning right into adolescence. In spite of her parents' efforts, this young girl still remained insensitive to all forms of affection.

In despair, the mother and father cried out to God and asked the help of the Holy Spirit.

Very unexpectedly, all three found themselves enveloped in the love of God. It was a very moving experience, and the Holy Spirit brought deep inner healing into their souls. The young girl, who had long suffered a subconscious sense of rejection as a result of the difficulties her parents were living at the time of her birth, wept and wept. She was radically changed.

The young woman who always fled her parents' loving embrace; the one who was incapable of developing any deep, genuine friendships, and who always refused all forms of love, was now being transformed like a blossoming flower. What a beautiful miracle!

In the preceding section, we spoke of the devastating effects the orphan spirit can have on us. In the spiritual sense, we suffer from the consequences of the fall of our first parents and have become insensitive to the love of God. We have difficulty believing that God loves us and we prefer to turn our backs on him. We are incapable of living an intimate relationship with him.

There is only one way to free our souls from this prison and that is to allow God to adopt us as his son or daughter. Only his love can bring about deep healings within us, which is why we need outside help from the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is not only the force that helps us conquer evil, but also the One who constantly reminds us that God loves us. He reminds us of what Jesus has done for us. The Holy Spirit is not merely an "impersonal force"; he is a member of the Divine Trinity, in the same capacity as God the Father and God the Son. He acts out of the same kindness, the same gentleness, the same love.

The Holy Spirit comes to abide in us at the moment of our second birth. He introduces us to a supernatural power that we have never known, and wishes to accomplish great miracles in us and through us.

By our own strength, we are unable to conquer our weaknesses or even receive the love of God. We must simply ask the Holy Spirit to come live in us and remind us that God loves us and has adopted us as his sons and daughters.

Other recommended readings: John 8:30-36; 14: 16-20

## A CLOSER LOOK

This chapter is without a doubt the one that best sums up the New Testament. It reaffirms that it is impossible for us to save ourselves and that it is impossible for us to effectively transform our lives by our own means. It is even impossible for us to experience God's love without the help of the Holy Spirit.

God wants to adopt us as his sons and daughters, and for this purpose he makes his home in us by his Spirit. Little by little, his love transforms us and teaches us to walk with him rather than follow the tendencies of our old nature.

Verse 5 tells us: "Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires."

Then verse 15 adds: "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry 'Abba, Father!'"

There is the greatest mystery revealed right in front of us. God the Creator, the Almighty, the Savior of the World, the Father full of love chose to come make his home in the heart of each man and woman that turns to him.

What more could we possibly want?



## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### John

The Apostle John was a man who experienced a deep transformation. When Jesus called him to follow him, he had a false image of God. He saw him as a harsh, distant being. He did not know the love of God (Luke 9:51-56; Mark 3:17). The orphan spirit in him caused him to seek to dominate others and be seen as an important figure (Mark 10:35-45).

But as his name indicates so nicely (John means "God is gracious"), God had compassion on him.

He became a man with a tender heart and full of affection (John 13:23, 25)

He is often called the "disciple of love". He is the author of one of the gospels, three epistles and of the book of Revelation. He was the only disciple to be at the foot of the cross at Jesus' crucifixion. He saw in Jesus the love of the Father. An unending love, a love that gives all.

Through the presence of the Holy Spirit in him, John accomplished many miracles and received the great revelations found in the book of Revelation. But the greatest miracle was without a doubt God's love working in him.

"Do not love the world, or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world - the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does - comes not from the Father but from the world." (1 John 2:15, 16)

## IN A NUTSHELL

- The only way to become free from an orphan spirit is to be adopted by God.
- We are incapable of overcoming our weaknesses on our own, or even to receive the unconditional love of God. We need outside help from the Holy Spirit.
- The Holy Spirit is a person of the Divine Trinity in the same capacity as God the Father and God the Son. He acts out of the same kindness, the same gentleness, the same love.

## WHAT I HAVE LEARNED IN THIS CHAPTER

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## 21 Unbelief

Many do not understand why a person would choose to reveal his or her private life.

More often than not, they would consider the revealing of difficult moments and situations something, which a person's dignity and pride should not allow him or her to discuss. A friend recently told me that the word "pure" in the Beatitudes of Matthew 5 originally meant "transparent". "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God" (Matthew 5:8). In these next few lines, I hope to express this transparency of heart in a way that will be a source of encouragement to you.

I was born in Grand-Mère, Quebec, into a family of believers who attended church regularly. After the death of my three-month-old brother, Michel, I became an only child and the focus of all my parents' attention. I benefited from many extra privileges including classical studies and a university education.

At the age of 20, I rejected religion-I was afraid that it was real-and put God on a shelf. I reasoned that it was impossible for me to meet his standards of holiness. To tell the truth, I wanted to give free rein to pride and all of its accompanying passions. However, God was waiting for me at the turn in the road, and spiritual questions become the only ones that really mattered.

In January 1982, my wife and I attended a conference on nutrition in New Orleans. One night as we were celebrating with some friends in a very fancy restaurant, Madeleine, a woman from the group who was seated near us at the end of the table, began a discussion about Jesus. She said he was waiting for us to ask him for gifts while we were here on earth. "God wants to give us good things because he loves us," she told us with conviction.

The next day we returned to the restaurant and Madeleine insisted on praying for my wife who was suffering with terrible pains in her legs. Praying in a restaurant, out loud! Madeleine closed her eyes and held my wife's hands. I could not believe this was happening. Eyes open and red-faced, I desperately hoped nobody was paying any attention to this childish act. But you know, uncomfortable as I was, there was no earthquake, and no one stepped in and tried to stop us, but my wife began to cry softly. And God answered that prayer... all the pain in her legs completely disappeared. Before the end of the convention, we had promised our new friends we would go to a Christian businessmen's breakfast in Montreal. We were on the brink of a very significant turning point in our lives.

True to our word, we attended the breakfast hosted by the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International (FGBMFI) on March 6, 1982. The guest speaker shared the touching testimony of his life, and his transparency was incredible. I saw myself in so many of the things he said, that at times I even wondered if he was telling the story of my life. Like him, I had been unfaithful to my wife and my life consisted of constant partying. I drank a lot. I was full of myself, seeking only to enhance my esteem and make myself look good. Also like the speaker, when I drank too much every other word was a foul one.

But now he was different. He seemed to enjoy life; he was happy and loved other people. He concluded by saying Jesus had set him free. This perplexed me, and though I could hardly believe what he was saying, at the same time I appreciated his candour. After all, he had openly admitted his pride, his verbal abuse and his mistakes before an audience of 160 people! His public confession made a deep impression on me, especially with regards to my hidden conduct.

Something was not right in our marriage: I was leading a double life, which produced in me the unpleasant feelings that come with lying and hypocrisy. I drowned out these thoughts in a multitude of activities and distractions: work, studies, sports, social events, and so on. I even worked in three different dental clinics at the same time. I became a workaholic, seeking recognition from those around me and building up my reputation. Despite all my ambition I still experienced feelings of extreme emptiness and dissatisfaction.

I had to excel at work, at the Optimist Club, on the golf course, and on the tennis court, to name only a few. What a pitiful situation for somebody who had the means to succeed and be happy! I was not looking for God at all and had no desire for him.

I couldn't provide any other explanation for the healing of my wife's legs, other than that it was the result of a simple prayer to Jesus. Without realizing it, we had received our first gift (as Madeleine had told us): the revelation that Jesus was alive, that he could heal, and that he knew who we were. Jesus was truly present and he loved us!

My wife's healing was certainly the event that pushed us to attend that first breakfast, and many more since then. My wife enjoyed them immensely. They benefited her and she began to change. I also began to change and to see her in a new light.

One of the things that struck me about the different speakers at these events was the common thread in each of their situations: there was an obvious improvement and progress after they had given their lives to Jesus.

I eventually realized that I was a sinner who needed to turn to Jesus for forgiveness and salvation. I understood all the love he had for me and became aware of the importance of asking him to live in my heart and take over my life. He heard my cry and from that day on, every-

thing changed for me. He gave me new love and incredible strength without asking for anything of me in return. Joy, peace, and trust filled me. I felt God's presence with me everywhere I went. His Holy Spirit became my counsellor, my comforter, and my advocate. I just couldn't do without his presence.

Those around me were surprised at the change. My children knew they had a different father; they didn't have to worry about me leaving the family anymore. I fell in love with my wife all over again and cherished my three daughters more than ever. And I even began to hunger for God's Word, which also was a miracle for me.

Some friends were enjoying watching the effects of our rebirth, and their "well-meaning" advice was that we make the most of the euphoria-as we'd be back to normal again in six months. Fortunately for us, this passionate love we have for God, for each other, and for our children has not stopped, but has just kept growing and spreading, touching all our friendships and relationships.

I remember how selective and restricted my love had been before the Lord touched me. I had no concern whatsoever neither for Christians from other churches nor for English people. That surely explains why, one day at a Christian meeting the Lord sent an English Canadian to me, asking permission to pray for me. God honoured his prayer to the point that my whole being began overflowing with the presence of the Holy Spirit. My wife, who was at the other side of the room, also experienced the same flood of joy and fullness.

Next, along came George, a member of a charismatic movement, who put his arms around me and gave me a great big hug. I could usually not tolerate that type of thing, even though it was a simple and innocent gesture, but at that precise moment it was liberating for me instead. Huge walls inside me crumbled, and overnight I became able to tell my own father I loved him and to take him in my arms. What an intense moment when we freely expressed our love for each other!

God became involved in my professional and financial affairs. During my postgraduate studies in orthodontics, I was invited to attend courses at the Myofacial Pain Center in Washington, D.C. I hesitated to make my decision because of the expensive tuition and travel costs, but after praying and seeking God's will, I felt a peace and assurance that this opportunity was a gift from him. I signed up. To this day, I still feel a deep sense of gratitude to God, since the knowledge I acquired there has served me well in the treatment of problems relating to the articulation of the jaw.

God also wanted me to prosper financially. The bible says, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6: 33)

In October 1988, the Stock Market dropped drastically and many investors lost their fortunes. I had invested \$125,000 prior to this drop, a return of 18% and higher, from high-risk companies, was attracting me, and I was thinking about transferring my money there. Each Monday morning, a group of members and friends of the FGBMFI gathered to pray, and in August 1988, at an early-morning prayer meeting held at my home, a woman in her fifties had a word from the Lord for me. She said the Lord told her I was to do what I had in my heart to do. You see, just that weekend I had discussed with my wife the idea of pulling out all of the money I had in the Stock Market. Surprised at this message from God, I decided to pray and ask him to confirm it. At ten o'clock that very morning, my broker phoned unexpectedly and suggested I sell everything, given the risks of the market. I did so, on the spot. In his goodness, the Lord had saved my investments. And the Lord also helped me to put my affairs in order.

I also took a decision to concentrate my efforts on my main dental clinic. At the end of the first year my net residual income was higher, plus I had more time to devote to my family and to my activities within FGBMFI. The following year my testimony appeared in "Voice", the bimonthly periodical which FGBMFI publishes in 30 languages and 150 countries. The article was called "A Big Success." Compared to some of the other Canadian and foreign businessmen I knew, I did not consider myself to be such a big success, but I had something to be proud of nonetheless.

A little while later, the Canadian president of FGBMFI stepped down. FGBMFI brings together thousands of Christian businessmen throughout the world and unites their efforts and financial means to spread God's love and salvation in concrete ways all over the planet. As first vice-president, I had to replace him at a moment's notice. I was surprised at the speed God's word came to pass. In November 1998 the Canadian directors made me president. God is precise when it comes to accomplishing the things he has ordained. He knows what is best for us. He knows everything. I am so happy I gave myself to him.

Dear reader, do you now understand why it is wise to trust in God? This omnipresent, omnipotent God loved us to the point of giving himself for us by dying on a cross. He took upon himself the punishment we deserved. Because of this, no sin can separate us any longer from this merciful God except our own decision to refuse to enter into a relationship with him. I can only encourage you to ask him to come and live in your heart and become your Saviour. Why not ask him now; you have everything to gain and nothing to lose.

*Dr Jacques Philibert*

## Between Friends

Do you sometimes feel ashamed to talk about Jesus or pray in public?

Do you believe that God wishes to be involved in all aspects of your life? List a few examples.

Do you know how to overcome unbelief? Explain your answer.

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

This week, I will take note of every passage in the bible that I have difficulty believing. With the help of a concordance, a bible commentary, or by seeking the help of Christian friends, I will study these verses in more depth, and ask the Holy Spirit to help make things clear to me.

## A PRAYER

Lord Jesus, I know that unbelief is like a cancer that wishes to attach itself to my soul in order to destroy any truth there. I ask that you shed your light in the grey areas of my faith and to firmly attach my heart to your Word. Heaven and earth may pass away, but your Word remains forever.

## Hearing from God

Heavenly Father, I want to have a "heart to heart" talk with you. I ask that you show me the damage that unbelief has caused in my life. Help me to recall the times in my life where I chose to believe a lie rather than believe in you. Show me also the times where I believed the bad things people said about me. Show me the places in me where unbelief hides. In this quiet moment, you have my full attention and I wish to hear from you.

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Epistle to the Romans, chapters 9-10-11**

"And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again."

These three chapters touch on the subject of the Jewish people. At first glance, we may not think that this subject is of particular concern to us, but if we read carefully we learn important truths about the character of God and about faith. In this systematic teaching that is the Epistle to the Romans, it is essential that Paul should assign a place of importance to the Jewish people in relation to the New Covenant.

All through history, God has sought to enter in to relationship with mankind in the hopes of sharing his heart and his plan. Abraham, an ancestor of the Jewish nation, was nicknamed "the friend of God". The bible speaks of him as a man of faith who shared a very deep, intimate relationship with God.

God richly blessed Abraham and promised to bless his descendants as well. Not only did Abraham become father of the Jewish nation, but it was also through his line that Jesus chose to be born.

In these three chapters, Paul explains that God always keeps his promises. The long-awaited Messiah came, just as he promised. He came as Savior of the Jews, and of the whole world. But in spite of the promises and of all the prophecies that were accomplished, many chose not to believe in him.

This is why Paul states that God's faithfulness towards Israel does not automatically imply that all Jews will be saved. In fact, he explains that the Jews who remain in disbelief will lose their souls.

Unbelief is the worst of all wrongs. It wears many masks and disguises itself in many different ways. Disbelief is the worst attack we can make on God. It is as though we were calling him a liar.

Unbelief is often hidden behind a religious appearance.

During a visit to Canada, the Dali Lama, a Tibetan monk well loved by the media, declared loud and clear that Jesus was an "illuminated human", and that he had been the reincarnation of a Buddhist monk. However, this pious opinion contradicts that which Jesus said of himself. Jesus had said he was the incarnation of God in human flesh.

So who are we to believe?

Unbelief was also hidden in the theological debates of the Pharisees in Jesus' day.

They believed they would earn their salvation by means of their religion and by the fact that they were descendants of Abraham. The Lord strongly rebuked them for this.

Unbelief was also lurking among the inhabitants of Nazareth, the village where Jesus was raised as a boy. They did not believe in him, and as a result Jesus was able to perform very few miracles among them.

Unbelief was also hidden in the higher levels of government of the Roman Empire, who wanted to establish the "Pax Romana", a pluralist philosophy that accepted all religions but that rejected Christ and his teachings.

In our day, unbelief takes on a very "spiritual" appearance when it takes on trendy, popular beliefs based on the New Age movement. It is even subtler when it talks about love, respect, humanism, generosity... while rejecting the bible and all that it contains.

True faith is easy to recognize all the same. As it says in the book of Romans: "...If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord', and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (10 v. 9)

True faith is not ashamed to confess that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, and that he is the only way to heaven. This small seed of faith, when planted in the good soil of the love of God, will always continue to grow. Watered regularly with the Word of God and the water of the Holy Spirit, it will become a tree that bears good fruit.

Finally, these three chapters show us that God has free will too, just like us. For example, being the Creator and owner of the universe, God has already declared a day when he will judge the world. Whether we like it or not, that's what will happen. He promised it.

Throughout the course of history, God intervened on a number of occasions among different nations to give warnings or declare judgment. As we see in chapter nine regarding Pharaoh, King of Egypt, God needed to teach him who the real Master was.

It is interesting to note however, as we read this passage in Exodus, that God began to harden Pharaoh's heart once he had chosen not to heed the warnings God was sending him through the mouth of Moses. He had remained unbelieving.

God respects the choices we make. He invites us to come to him to be saved and share in a relationship with him. He's not asking us to be perfect, he knows we are unable to be. He wants to make his home in us and transform us on the inside by his love.

Nevertheless, he still respects our choices and will respect our unbelief as well. The consequences will be eternal. The choice is ours to make!

Other recommended readings: Matthew 13:53-58; Mark 16:9-14; Hebrews 3:7-19

## A CLOSER LOOK

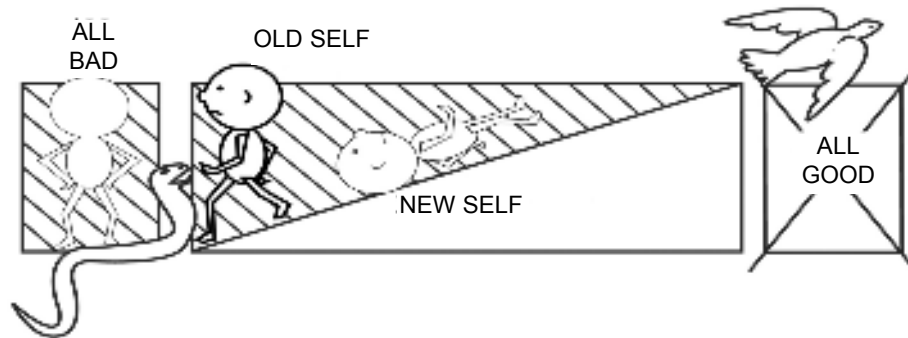
Through his death on the cross and resurrection, Jesus tore down all barriers between God and mankind. He may freely come and live in the hearts of anyone who invites him, regardless of

their race or religion. Today there are Christians among all ethnic groups and in every country of the world.

These chapters show that the Jewish people have a particular privilege in having Jesus as part of their history, and that God kept his promise of salvation towards them. But just like the rest of us, they must turn to him first in order to receive it.

The only obstacle that could keep God from acting on our behalf and coming to live within us is unbelief. Even once he lives in us, the Holy Spirit will continue to respect our free will. The fact that our sinful first nature is incapable of not sinning does not take away the choices we must make, to overcome by yielding to the Spirit.

All that God expects of us is for us to believe in his love and find refuge in his arms, regardless of our struggles and circumstances. If we allow unbelief to find its way between God, and ourselves we are lost.



UNBELIEF IS THE ONLY OBSTACLE THAT CAN LIMIT GOD'S ACTION

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Judas

Judas Iscariot was also a disciple of Jesus. Even though his name means "praise", Judas was not a person who displayed much gratitude. He had a very negative attitude and was constantly suspicious of others. This type of behavior is often an indication of a troubled conscience. This was the case with Judas who was lacking in honesty, and hid his bad actions (John 12:1-6). This pattern of behavior can unfortunately create very fertile ground for unbelief.

Jesus never rejected Judas, even in spite of his dishonesty. On the contrary, knowing that Judas was going to betray him, Jesus proved his love by washing his feet at the last supper. He wanted to remind Judas' that his forgiveness was available to him still. But the roots of unbelief had already taken root in Judas' heart, and rather than believe in Jesus' forgiveness, he chose to hang himself. How sad!

## IN A NUTSHELL

- God is faithful to keep his promises. Everything he said is true and his Word is spiritual food for our faith.
- Our faith may be small, but if it is rooted in God it will bear good fruit.
- Unbelief is the only obstacle that can hinder God from moving in our lives.



## MY PRAYER TO GOD

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## Spirit and Life

I once had a patient who was in my care for four years, a patient like any other whom I would see for annual checkups or for the usual health problems. When people come into my office they are free to tell me whatever they like regarding what is ailing them, and most of the time what they share is very impersonal and brief.

But one year ago a patient came to me, completely broken - and I listened to her. The woman had a gambling addiction. Two weeks prior, her life had fallen apart. She had debts amounting to over \$20,000. She was so hooked on this gambling habit that she had eventually committed fraud and was caught. She had to come out and admit her guilt, and now her whole universe was crumbling around her. She had even admitted her problem to her husband and to her employer.

She knew that as a doctor I could understand and help her. But she also knew that I was a believer, so she shared with me that only God had sustained her when all of this happened. True, I used pills to help her regain lost sleep, but I was also witness to the fact that her surrendering to God is what helped her through. She allowed God to convince her and change her on the inside, and the results were incredible!

It has now been a year since she last gambled, and today she says that through this difficult trial she has grown as a person. She was able to re-learn how to center her life on true values, and states consistently that it was God who helped her and who gave her the strength to hang on to life and to her family.

Unfortunately, she lost a lot of money, her job and many relationships that were dear to her. But in spite of everything, she has peace in her heart. She is able to say with a smile that she gained far more than she lost. She is happy. She lives in peace with herself and her past.

I wish that everyone had this inner peace that only God can give, this certainty that he is looking after us.

I would like to share a very personal example from my own life.

Seven years ago, I discovered a lump on my breast. I underwent a biopsy and the usual tests, and the diagnosis revealed that I had breast cancer.

Being a doctor myself made this even harder to accept. I knew that this particular form of cancer, in a 33-year-old woman, meant that I had only about a year to live, as it is often very aggressive.

Even I, though a doctor and a Christian, when suddenly faced with suffering and imminent death... I panicked! It was as though I descended into a deep hole. My husband and I cried like never before.

I understood on a very deep level the meaning of suffering and despair. Since that time, my approach to cancer patients has never been the same. We sometimes have to experience things ourselves in order to better understand others.

That period of my life was very intense.

Each day, God comforted me in a way that my husband, medicine, nor science, could. Each day God would assure me, saying "I am with you, don't be afraid... you are in my hand and I am looking after you."

I know now that the peace of God is real, even in the most painful, difficult moments. Nothing can take this peace away.

*Dr. Suzie Benoit*



## **Between Friends**

Have there been moments in your life where you have felt God's peace?

Have you ever witnessed a miracle?

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

This week I will review my notes from previous modules to see how I have progressed in my capacity to hear from God.

## A PRAYER

Father, you live within me by your Spirit. You impart to me your love, your peace, your joy and your strength. Teach me to depend on you and to include you in all of my choices so that I will see real miracles. I offer myself to you so that you can live through me. My greatest desire is to remain close to you.

## Hearing from God

Lord Jesus, you opened the eyes of the blind. You healed the deaf.

I must confess that I sometimes feel like a blind man who doesn't see your works, and like a deaf man who doesn't hear your voice. Perhaps I am not attentive enough to you? Perhaps I don't take the time to hear from you? Perhaps my heart is cold, closed... or wounded?

In this moment, I want to offer up to you my unseeing eyes, my deaf ears, and my heart...  
Here I am Lord!

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

### Scripture Reading: **Epistle to the Romans, chapter 12**

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

Je remercie I would like to thank Dr. Suzie Benoit for having shared these two very touching accounts of how God touched her life and that of one of her patient. These are beautiful examples of the way God works in each believer who surrenders to him. That's what the first verse of this chapter speaks of: offering our whole being to God.

But what does that mean, exactly? Why would the Almighty God, who created the universe out of nothing, ever need me?

In order to better understand why, let's retrace our steps and return to the garden where we find Adam and Eve. We see that it was God who created man and woman. He created them in his own image, able to love and be loved. God's desire is to have an intimate relationship with each one of us. He wants us to be a part of his life.

He then entrusted Adam and Eve with the responsibility of overseeing his creation.

Next we learn that the fallen angel, Lucifer, interfered and succeeded in encroaching upon Adam and Eve's authority; which is why the bible refers to him as the prince of this world and the god of this age.

Then Jesus, God the Son, came to the earth. He came to save us and restore the integrity of his kingdom. He lived on the earth as a mere man, without having recourse to his divine nature even for a moment. This is why the Gospels refer to him as the Son of Man. He lived as a real man, while remaining in communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He wanted to demon-

strate that each human being who remains intimately linked to the Father and who allows himself to be led by the Holy Spirit has access to God's love, wisdom and strength. This is why Jesus said "anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these". (John 14:12)

That's exactly what happened in the life of the disciples and the first Christians. The New Testament is full of examples of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers, and the miracles they witnessed. In other words, God wants our lives here on earth to be modeled after that of Jesus. That is potentially possible, depending on our cooperation with the Holy Spirit.

Allowing God to live in us implies that we give him access to our entire being, including our abilities and talents, and even our inabilities and problems. Since his love gives freedom, our actions should no longer be motivated by obligation or a desire to earn his approval, or the approval of others.

All that is required is that we be attentive to what God tells us.

In the case of Dr. Suzie Benoit, God surpassed medicine and all human ability, in order to comfort and sustain her.

With regards to the woman with the gambling problem, God personally touched her heart, and afterwards he helped her through other believers who were there to support her.

Allowing God to live within us does not necessarily mean that all will become easy, and that our obedience to the Spirit will require no effort on our part. On the contrary, in some countries believers have literally given up their lives as a result of their conversion to Christ.

If we wish to live under the instruction of the Spirit, we learn very quickly that life with God can take us much further than our human capacities. Chapters 12 to 14 of the book of First Corinthians list some of the gifts that the Holy Spirit channels through believers. The book of Acts also gives us a number of examples.

In the same way as the Spirit works to transform our character to the image of Jesus, he also wishes to manifest his gifts in us, and he is able to do this according to our degree of surrender and cooperation.

That being said, the supernatural aspect of the Spirit and his practical aspect go hand in hand, as we see in this 12th chapter of the book of Romans. Everything flows out of the tangible manifestation of God's love for us.

It is this same love that we must then share with those around us. The Christian life cannot be lived alone. Love always involves the giving of ourselves, both to God and to others.

This is the precise reason for the existence of small care groups! Living out our faith together is learning to love God. It is to receive his love, and then to share it.

That's what makes it so vital that we learn to hear God's voice through the bible and in the quiet times we spend with him.

It would be all too easy to do good deeds for God based on our own wisdom or on selfish motives. We need to learn to listen to his voice and be led by the Spirit. It's so much better that way!

Our bible reading also says that we each have different gifts. So why compete with others? Why become proud? Instead, the love of God wants to unite our strengths so that we can better love and serve one another.

Other recommended readings: Matthew 10:19-20; Mark 12:36; Luke 2:26; 4:14; 11:13; John 14:23-26; Acts 2:1-13; Acts 11:28; 16:6-7; Galatians 5:16-25.

## A CLOSER LOOK

This chapter invites us to offer up to God all that we are. To put behind us those days of battling against God, against our sinful nature, against our conscience and against others.

The Holy Spirit has come to live in us, and wishes to reign over all aspects of our lives.

He wants to strengthen our faith.

He wants to lead us into a place of intimacy with the Father.

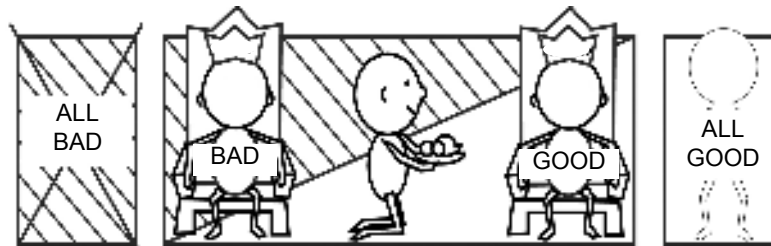
He wants to constantly remind us of the love of Jesus and all that he has done for us.

He wants to manifest his character and gifts through us, so that the love of God will be made known through us. There is no more glorious destiny than to daily experience this friendship with God.

The power of the Holy Spirit blends perfectly with his kindness and humility. He never forces us to comply or obey. He invites us, speaks to us, and even whispers by times. Whenever we stumble, he helps us to get up again. Whenever we do wrong, he is saddened and gently leads us to repentance.

If we learn to trust him, he fills us with peace, even in the midst of the worst circumstances. He enables us to serve God joyfully, not out of fear or obligation.

He leads us to new heights we never knew we could reach, and his miracles surpass our understanding. And above all, as it says so well in First Corinthians 13, he teaches us to love.



THE HOLY SPIRIT WANTS TO REIGN  
OVER BOTH THE "GOOD" AND "BAD" SIDES OF OUR BEING

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Mary

No one on earth has ever been physically closer to Jesus or the Holy Spirit than Mary. She literally carried the Son of God in her womb for the nine months of her pregnancy and had the closest relationship humanly possible with Jesus. Filled with the Spirit, she joyfully sang "from now on all generations will call me blessed". (Luke 1:48)

Mary and Joseph led lives that reflected the presence of the Spirit. Before and after the birth of Jesus, they both experienced the Holy Spirit's presence and learned to listen to God and follow his directions. Mary, along with the disciples, followed in Jesus' footsteps.

It was she who encouraged him to perform his first public miracle at the wedding in Cana. Afterwards, she witnessed him healing many diseases and infirmities, casting out demons and teaching large crowds. She was there, at the foot of the cross, agonizing over the death of her crucified Son. Then, we find her in the company of many other believers gathered in a house on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit descended upon them in power.

Mary is a model of faith for us.

Tradition tells us that she ascended to heaven, in the same manner as Enoch and Elijah.

So you see, nothing is impossible to the Holy Spirit!

## IN A NUTSHELL

- *God wishes for our earthly lives to be modeled after Jesus. This is possible, and depends on our cooperation with the Holy Spirit.*
- *The Holy Spirit is humble. He never forces us to obey him. He speaks to us, invites us, even whispers to us by times. Whenever we stumble, he is saddened and he helps us to get up again.*
- *The supernatural character of the Spirit within us, and his more practical character, is inseparable. Both flow from the love of God to us and to our fellow man.*

## WHAT I HAVE LEARNED IN THIS CHAPTER

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## The Law of Love

I earned a Bachelor's degree in Biochemistry and Physiology, a Master's degree in Pharmacology, as well as completing studies in Family Medicine. Only later did I develop a particular interest in psychiatry and drug addiction and I now work in the Sherbrooke prison.

It is terrible to see people in prison, lacking a place or a standing in society and literally drowning in their problems. Their families do not want to see them anymore and they do not have a single friend left. I tell myself that if I am to be a witness for Christ anywhere, there is no better place for me than here among these people.

Christ came for the destitute and for those who have been rejected by society. They are the ones we must reach. We must go to these unfortunate people and help them discover that there is always a solution.

God is not the one who causes suffering and hardship; they are inherent in human beings and a result of freedom of choice. When a man goes through difficult circumstances, he cries out to God and asks, even begs, for help.

And therein lays the solution. It is not a magic solution, however. And a believer does not suffer any less than the non-believer. The difference between the two is the desperation factor. Hope is always there for the believer - he perceives the infinite dimension stretching way beyond life on this earth.

Honestly and humanly speaking, I could not do what I am presently doing if I were alone in this venture. It would be impossible for me. That is where the community makes sense to me. I have the privilege of living side by side with people who share the same vision and the same values as I have and who believe in God as I do. We often pray together.

When people ask us why we pray, we answer: "It is because of our faith in God. We believe God is able to act and we want to witness what he does." Gradually some come to the point of asking, "May I pray, too?" They start asking questions about God and begin walking with him. They find new strength to solve their problems or at least to surmount them.

The objective is not to solve every problem; that would not be the miracle. Christ did not come to resolve all problems for us, but rather to bring us a new perception of life, one that will help us overcome the problems.

I have met people for whom it seemed there was nothing I could do except to pray for them. And when I did, God answered! Prayer is a genuine resource for the sick. It develops his

or her communion with God, and that communion engenders confidence, and that confidence establishes hope.

When I cannot see any other solution, I pray, "Please, Lord, help me to listen to these people. Give me the ability to listen so that these people can feel that they are understood." In reality, what can we say or do when confronted with intense suffering?

For example, when I see a man who has just lost his wife and two children in an accident, there is nothing words can do! Or when another has found his daughter who has just hung herself, what can I possibly say?

As a doctor or a psychiatrist, it is possible to stay aloof and listen to the person, while thinking that he will soon leave your office. It is different when you are a believer however. I find myself asking the Lord, "How would you listen to him? Please come and touch him." In such painful circumstances, no one but the Lord is able to do anything truly worthwhile.

People know I am a believer and they respect me, even though I sometimes take the brunt of jokes and sarcasm about religion. If I make the smallest misstep or any error whatsoever, some say, "How can you act that way if you are a believer? Aren't you a Christian?" One is not a Christian because he is perfect, and one is not perfect because he is a Christian.

Unfortunately, spirituality has been removed from science and medicine. It was removed because it cannot be explained. Although it cannot be described scientifically, in my opinion it is a serious mistake to pretend it does not exist.

Psychiatry offers some interesting tools to help us understand the emotions and the human psyche. As for emotional wounds, practically all are related to love. If anything can heal an emotional wound, it has to be love itself. As we have already seen, in a purely human context people who have access to a group where they are loved, accepted, and not judged will experience healing. God is love.

If these people begin to open up, they gradually discover the hand of God in their lives. Many are not cured and will remain schizophrenic or have other mental disorders, but their behaviour will change and so will their perception of life. They no longer want to die and instead are quite eager to live. Their misery ceases to be the final state or the handicap that hinders their progress.

Unfortunately it often seems that we have to travel down a dead-end street and come to the end of ourselves before we finally turn to God.

I am not only referring to people who live in poverty, though for some, it is their "simple pleasures" that serve as a barrier. They have their little home and their little plot of land, and these have become their limit. I know of others who are materially rich, but who suddenly open

up and enlarge their field of vision. They seem almost to sprout wings, and energy seems to come out of their every pore! They stop focusing solely on their personal and family concerns, and begin to branch out and see about improving the condition of others. They get on the move. The greatest message of Christ is summed up in looking beyond ourselves, our own comfort, our own welfare and our own survival. His message is that we consider others! And whatever good we do to others can become contagious!

What God desires most is that we become his children. He wants us to be free. If I want to be free, I must disengage myself from what controls me. Among other things, certain social values divert me from the real essence of my nature, which is to love and be loved: the true essence of man.

I need to be loved and I also need to love. Anything keeping me from that is an obstacle to my freedom. The freer I become, the more I disentangle myself from hindrances. I will never be able to achieve this in my own strength - the only person who can help me do it is the Loving God of the Universe.

From the moment I recognize that God is love - that he exists, that he wants me to be free, and that he wants the best for me provided that I keep on believing. My calling, or my mission, will define itself from within me, based on who I am. There are as many callings as there are human beings. It becomes the testimony of what God has done in one's life. That is how the kingdom of God is established.

The first thing to do is to enter into contact with God. I often say to people, "Try to imagine just for a moment how your life would change if you simply realized that God exists and that he loves you. Your perception of life, suffering, good and evil, love, and everything else would become totally different."

With God, everything takes on another dimension. Nothing is the same. God fills all things, without crowding us out. This is what makes me want to adjust my life to the values of the Gospel. God has given his life for us.

I know that I am saved. I also know that whether or not I perform a multitude of good deeds or works I will not become "more saved". Jesus gave his life for me and that undeniable truth lives in me. It explains why my perspectives are becoming broader. This new way of thinking is thoroughly changing my life.

Now I know I can contribute to the kingdom of God.

*Dr Alain Bérubé*

## Between Friends

Love is more than a word, more than a feeling, it is an action. In what ways does this truth affect my daily life?

What does having a sense of responsibility mean to me?

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

This week I will look for ways to lend a hand to people in my surroundings at home, at school and at work. If possible, I will get involve in some ways with evangelisation team who ministers in detention center.

## A PRAYER

Heavenly Father, through the bible you provide me with good advice and teach me how to love. I am very thankful to you for that. I want to co-operate with your Holy Spirit within me, to establish your kingdom of love in this world. I need your help because my indifference and complacency often want to take over. Help me to make a difference in my society, and to be a part of the solution.

Help me, Father!

## Hearing from God

Father, I ask that you give me light regarding those who have been in authority in my life. Were my parents, my teachers and other leaders, good, loving role models to me? Does authority represent help and support to me, or rather fear and compliance?

Father, has my life been scarred in some way by too much severity and lack of concern? Am I hard, intolerant towards others? I want to understand. Speak to me, Father!

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Epistle to the Romans, chapters 13 and 14**

"Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters."

Chapters 13 and 14 deal with two main subjects: obedience to our governing authorities, and acceptance of others. In the first part of this module, Dr. Alain Bérubé gave us a good example of accepting others.

The subject of obedience to governing authorities was especially pertinent in the day when this book was written. The Roman Empire had a tight grip on the population and the Christians were in constant danger for their lives. Christians were subject to intense persecution under this Regime. The Apostle Paul encouraged them to respect Roman authority in spite of their cruelty.

The matter of submission to authority is one we must carefully understand in order to avoid all sorts of exaggeration. The Church was not exempt from its share of abuse of power. We are saddened when we read the pages of history where Church authorities dominated and persecuted people in the name of God.

Unfortunately, spiritual abuse still exists today, in different forms. Some church leaders apply this chapter to themselves in order to oblige their members to obey them. What blindness!

I was raised a Catholic, but later studied theology for five years, then served as a protestant pastor for eight years. I have visited hundreds of different parishes and congregations.

A few years ago I translated and published a book written by two American pastors who had noticed innumerable forms of abuse within protestant churches. The title of their book was "The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse" and it made me realize to what degree I myself had unknowingly taken advantage of my own congregation. I had used my power and status to manipulate and control the freedom of others. It deeply saddened me to realize what I had done.

But what a surprise it was to me to receive such contradictory reactions following the release of this book. On the one hand, I received many letters from church members or former church members who appreciated the book immensely. Many of the stories they shared were very moving. They told of being victims of serious abuse at the hands of church leaders. Then, I had to deal with the flood of negative feedback I received from infuriated pastors who were angry that I had published this book. According to them, no spiritual abuse is committed in churches.

Many pastors even forbade their congregations to read the book. I had thought that such a book, written by internationally-renowned pastors, would in fact help the church by raising awareness, and that it would help bring about positive changes. But it wasn't the case.

My trip across Canada as a travelling author revealed to me the true face of the institutional church. I was stunned to see how many churches there were with signs out on the street. There are literally thousands! Many of them have large billboards out front, inviting people to come inside. Often, we find bible verses on them that speak of the love of God. But as I knocked on their doors, I often found that I was met by cold indifferent faces. While most non-religious people I encountered showed me warmth and openness, many church people were insensitive and cold. What a contradiction to the message I read on their sign!

In each province I met people, clergymen or churchgoers, to whom the Christian life simply amounted to recruiting new converts to fill their pews. Generally speaking, they were not very interested in the people themselves, but more in the increase in numbers and the success of their various programs.

The worst of it is that many sincere people end up in this trap. And unfortunately, when they become aware of the hypocrisy, they leave the church for good, closing their heart's door on God in the process. Canadians are not interested in this type of religion, and with good reason! Jesus would never have wanted his representatives to act in this way.

Others left the mainline churches to form what they call "home churches". Occasionally members of these small groups still carry bitterness towards the "big churches" they have left. As a result, they develop an unhealthy attitude towards other Christians who are still attending traditional church, and those people in turn reject them, claiming that the "true" church cannot exist outside of their large organizations.

Unfortunately, these "home churches" soon reproduce the exact same model as the larger church they have come out of, only on a smaller scale. They establish pastors, evangelists and various leadership positions within a group of twenty or so. I don't believe that our society will be any more interested in this "smaller" form of church either. For most people, just the mention of the word "church" is enough to keep them at a distance.

The truth is hard to accept, but it appears that the present-day church is failing to live up to and communicate authentic Christianity.

I visited a very active church that had many outreach programs: feeding the hungry, handing out Gospel tracts on street corners, television and radio programs, and evangelistic rallies in public parks. Almost everyone in the church was involved in one way or another. I often found that these Christians were acting out of good faith and sincerity but without a very full understanding of just how much God loves people. They are therefore acting with false motives that become known sooner or later. I don't know of anyone who likes to feel like a fish that is being reeled in.

Sad to say I am not the only one to have been a victim of, or witness to, abuse in a religious context. It would be easy to fill a book with such accounts. The authors of the book I translated were right. These problems are far more prevalent than church people like to admit. In many churches, if you dare to question certain practices that you consider inappropriate, or simply want to discuss a point that contradicts the opinion of the majority, you are treated as an undesirable.

"In an abusive system, the fear of being shamed, humiliated in public or expelled, is the basis of your faithfulness, while at the same time it protects those who are in authority. They can humiliate you because you ask too many questions, because you don't abide by the accepted rules, or because you disagree with them. They will use you as a public example to warn the other members of the group. In some cases, telephone campaigns are carried out to warn your friends about you because you have become 'dangerous.' (...) In abusive settings, power is placed on a pedestal, and the authority is the law. Obedience and submission are important words and are used often". (David Johnson and Jeff Van Vonderen: *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse*. Bethany House Publishers, Minneapolis, Minn., 1991)

Now you see why I stress the importance of discerning unhealthy attitudes and practices. To be honest, I often hesitate to suggest that people join a church unless I personally know the pastor, the priest, or the people in charge. There are some excellent Catholic and Protestant churches but it's important to be careful because there are also some that must be avoided. There are good humble leaders who share the love of God, but there are others who are full of themselves and whom we should avoid at all costs.

Other recommended readings: Mark 9:33-37; John 13:12-17

## A CLOSER LOOK

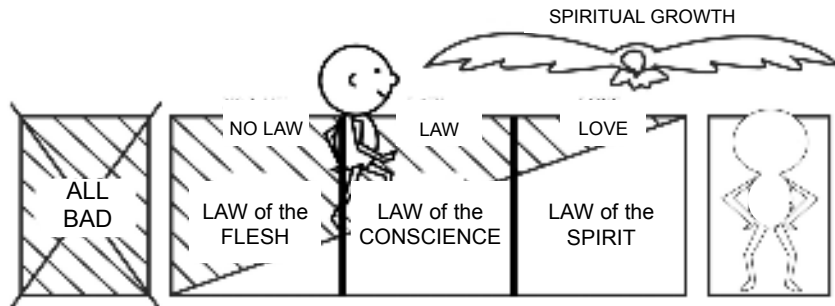
Without calling into question the "justified" status that Jesus has provided for us nor the Father's unconditional love for us, it would be good to illustrate what our spiritual growth in the Christian life could look like.

First, let's take a look at spiritual infancy.

A child, as we know, doesn't understand law or reason. He simply obeys his urges. He gives in to anger, jealousy and selfishness easily and without restraint.

An adolescent begins to have a certain understanding of the law. Those who teach him begin to demonstrate reasoning, and how to control his urges with the help of the established laws. He would no doubt like to do away with the laws, but he is afraid of disobeying them.

The "adult" in the Christian faith is able to make good decisions. He doesn't require supervision and is not motivated by fear. He no longer lives for his own needs only, but he is concerned for others as well. He has an intimate relationship with God and his actions are inspired by love.



LOVE IS AN INDICATION OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Timothy

Born to a Greek father and a Jewish mother, Timothy was one of the Apostle Paul's co-workers. His name means "one who honors God". He was to Paul a good friend and often accompanied him on his voyages.

Although he had a rather timid temperament, he nevertheless played a dominant role in establishing the first Christian communities in the Roman Empire.

Timothy is a model of dedication to God, of love and of modesty. In spite of difficulties, imprisonment, persecutions and tensions within the groups of new believers, he maintained a servant attitude and spirit of gentleness.

This is no doubt why Paul wrote these words to him in one of his letters: "Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also." (2 Timothy 1:4,5)

Without question, Timothy was a great example to us as a Christian leader, filled with love and the Holy Spirit.

## IN A NUTSHELL

- The essence of *Christ's* message is that we are to be concerned with more than just ourselves, our own comforts, well-being and survival, but also with the needs of others.
- The good we do to others can become contagious.
- The issue of submission to authority is something that must be well understood in order to avoid all sorts of exaggerations. The Church is not exempt from its own form of abuse of power.

## WHAT I HAVE LEARNED IN THIS CHAPTER

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## The Family of God

I come from a good Quebec family. My father and mother are believers and practising Roman Catholics. I was brought up according to the moral principles of honesty, love, respect, and forgiveness. I practised my religion like most children did in those days. I believed in a God who was the author of creation, who made me, and who gave us a law and expected us to follow it without assistance. A distant God. I knew what I had to do and I felt I must do it on my own, managing as best I could. I did not believe he could intervene in the lives of ordinary people. As well, I feared punishment if I should disobey.

During my teenage years, life's pleasures made my fears vanish. Life was so good. While attending high school at Collège de l'Assomption I met the girl who would later become my wife. As we both were passionately fond of adventure, we registered at the University of Ottawa. At 17, I found myself in the faculty of sciences.

I was thriving on knowledge and exhilarating in all the new philosophical trends presented to me. I was also starting to question my religious beliefs. "Live your life to the fullest" was the most interesting concept someone could offer me at the time. I was conducting my life at the expense of other principles gained during my youth, such as respect for others. I was picking up momentum on the road to success. My friends had a good opinion of me and thought I was "cool". I had good marks, was self-confident, and I was accepted in medicine. There I was, in control of everything. My dreams of accomplishment and success were becoming possible.

Shortly afterwards, I finished my term as a resident doctor. My wife and I had accepted a position in Amqui in the beautiful Matapédia Valley of the Gaspé.

I didn't tell anyone I was reading the bible because I was afraid to be judged.

We happened to meet a super couple called Marc and Lucie, who owned a milk farm. A deep friendship which still exists was starting to grow between us. I never thought that one simple sentence spoken in jest by our friend Marc at a supper would change all our plans. "Hey, Luc! Why don't we put a guitar on top of your old '71 Chevrolet and go south?" I must admit that on a winter's day that idea seemed quite attractive to me. We continued to laugh, but, the more we laughed, the more it became serious. We thought to ourselves, "What's keeping us from doing this?" By the end of the evening, we decided to take a year to prepare for an adventure in an old school bus which we would customize as a camper. With the help of

Lise, I had to transfer my medical practice to others and leave my patients in good hands. Marc and Lucie had to sell their milk farm.

Our plan was to head towards Tierra del Fuego by crossing the United States, Mexico, Central America, and South America. I did not know at the time that God had a plan in store for us.

One year and a few months after our crazy decision, we were ready to leave in our bus which we named "Bobépine", and which Marc, Lucie, and Lise had impressively transformed into our trailer.

The cross-Canada trip was a wonderful one. We were comfortable enough in our bus, but Marc and Lucie decided not to make the trip as originally planned so, considering the scope of the trip, we decided to buy a pick-up truck and camper and continue on with just our family.

After having our fill of the delicious fruit of the Okanagan Valley, we set out on our journey south. In three months we crossed the United States going through Washington, Oregon, and California.

By that time, I had started to come out of my shell spiritually. Ever since our departure from the Matapédia Valley, I was reading my bible without locking myself in my room.

What a shock it was crossing the border, to see the stark difference between the wealth of the United States and the poverty of Mexico. No more green spaces. We saw houses half falling apart but still inhabited, and other houses constructed with sheet metal or a few pieces of wood. All around us were barefoot children shabbily dressed. It is difficult to describe the sights.

Coming into contact with this kind of situation, everyone has a different reaction. Either you deny reality or you try to discover why these people live in such circumstances. You may tell yourself that you can't do anything about it, and you try to put it out of your mind. Then you try to find the guilty party. When you cannot label anyone as responsible, you blame it on God.

After a few days on the road, we ended up at a splendid beach in Lower California called Baja Conception. How could I imagine that I was about to reach a major turning point in my life?

Dick and Weezy Bundy, a retired couple from the United States, set up on the lot beside ours for a week of holidays. They were working for a mission. For the first time in my life I sensed a sort of peace I had never known before. Although I couldn't describe it, they had an air of serenity about them which I had also never felt in my life. They would speak about

biblical characters with such conviction. The day after their arrival they were together on the seashore reading the bible. They also talked to us about the Mission they helped. It was an orphanage with all kinds of services to help the poor of the region. They mentioned that the doctor who had practised there for one year had to leave in May, which meant in three months, and a relief doctor would surely be appreciated.

At first sight, the idea of working in an orphanage seemed very interesting to Lise and me, especially for our children. A great experience! We agreed to write a letter to the Mission offering our services.

The answer could be mailed to my in-laws, who arranged the follow-up of our mail from town to town according to the itinerary we communicated to them.

We took the road to Guadalajara, stopping for a week at Tepic. When we arrived in Guadalajara, we had been travelling for three months since our meeting with the missionaries in Lower California.

Our first goal in Guadalajara was to go to the post office.

Amongst the pile of letters to savour was, to our great surprise, an answer from the Mission. We had already abandoned the idea of the Mission since there had been no answer at Mazatlan. That letter, written two months previously, said they were interested in my services as a doctor at the Mission.

After five days of camping, faxing applications, and doing telephone interviews, we finally received a positive response. They would expect us within a maximum of 5 days. They were hoping we would arrive before the departure of the doctor on hand.

We were greeted with much love. We were told where to put our camper until a more comfortable one became available. I was slowly learning to get to know people, with caution and hesitation at first. I could sense in most of the people the same peace that I had felt with the missionaries on the beach.

The people at the Mission would get together to pray, sing, and study the bible, although none of it seemed "religious". To my great surprise, these people all had a personal relationship with God like the one I had discovered a few years earlier.

Love and forgiveness were integral parts of daily life. Each person was not living for self but for others. Each had the Mexican people at heart.

The Mexican people live in incredible poverty. Families with 10 to 12 children are crammed into houses of cardboard nailed to tree branches, on soil which transforms itself into mud during the rainy season. The majority of them are native people who came down from the mountains in the south of the country to find work.

Unfortunately, it often happens that they find themselves in worse conditions than they experienced in their own villages.

The Mission helps these people by giving them food, clothing, and tarpaulins to protect their houses. They offer comfort, relief, and love. A nursery takes care of native children whose mothers must work because of an absent father. Other missionaries give courses in reading and writing to those who want to learn. The Bible School offers courses to those who seek to know their Creator better.

This Mission is primarily an orphanage, housing 80 children in groups of 12, and several buildings. Couples are responsible for each home and create a family atmosphere for the children as much as possible.

Finally, in addition to a variety of other services, there is a clinic, or rather a few rooms in a former chapel where free medical care is provided to all the poor of the region. Free medication is supplied by different organizations.

Since the doctor was leaving the orphanage in two days, the "welcome tour and debriefing" were short.

Two days later I was responsible for the clinic, which was quite different from the clinics I had worked in Canada. I was surprised and even amazed to see the work accomplished by all these people. And, I felt the weight of responsibility which had just been handed over to me. Were we ever thankful we learned Spanish during the preceding five months of exploration.

We gradually became involved in that fantastic work which had been founded 25 years before. We realized there were hundreds and thousands of missions like this Mexican one, operating in many places all over the world.

These missions were directed by people who trusted God. Our mission accepted volunteers who came alone or in groups of 2 to 50 and who came from just about anywhere in the United States, Canada, and even Europe. They came for a week or more to help build, clean, etc. They all had something in common-their faith in Jesus.

Interestingly, these people did not necessarily all belong to the same type of Christian church. Their churches were Roman Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, and Charismatic.

Others came from non-denominational Christian groups. In short, this army of people who committed themselves to God were not only Christian in name but in heart.

These people loved God and they loved others, whether rich or poor, black or white, and without regard to social status, health condition, or any other factor. This was a complete new world to discover.

A few months after our arrival, I realized I had learned more about God and human beings in that place than during the eight years between becoming a resident doctor and my arrival at the Mission.

My desire to work at the clinic and help people was growing. Lise was an enormous help to me as she assisted me with minor surgeries, delivering babies, secretarial work, and unpacking and sorting the incredible number of gifts of medications, instruments, and medical supplies.

The fact that I was working with Lise and surrounded by our three children fulfilled my deepest wishes far beyond what I could have asked or imagined. But God had not finished surprising us.

Two years after our arrival at the Mission, a man donated \$100,000 to buy the materials for the construction of a new clinic. The people from the Mission had been praying a long time for this. We needed someone to design the clinic, supervise its construction, and start up the professional health activities.

We accepted to stay three more years to take on that new challenge. Thanks to dozens of volunteers from all over and donations ranging from toothbrushes to sophisticated radiology and dentistry equipment, the clinic was completed in two and a half years. It has been running for nearly three and a half years with two Mexican doctors and one Alaskan doctor, some nurses, one dentist, and a chiropractor. These professionals are full-time volunteers. In addition, visiting health professionals also help to relieve the pain of those who are suffering and have no other recourse.

The five years we spent at the Mission are the five most beautiful years of our family's life. We are happy to be home and I am happy practising medicine here again. I can help them with their ailments as a doctor and I can help them with their heart, too, knowing that Jesus is able to transform their lives. He can bring them eternal joy. He can make them happy despite difficult circumstances and even change those circumstances. I believe the Quebec people are a fantastic people. My desire is to continue fighting for their good.

*Dr. Luc Chaussé*



## **Between Friends**

What type of relationship do you have with other believers?

What does the word "church" mean to you?

In what ways does your faith in God influence your involvement in society?

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

This week, if I haven't already done this, I will consider joining starting or joining a small care group.

## A PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I wish to share your love with other believers. I want to live out this unity to which Jesus called us so that all may see that we are your children. I want to join them in prayer and efforts in order to see "Your kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven".

## **Hearing from God**

Loving God, The Book of Romans ends off with a word of encouragement and salutations. Loving God, I come to rest in your arms and listen to the beating of your heart. I want my heart to beat as one with yours, and that it may overflow with the same love for all of humanity as you have. I want to peacefully listen to you. My desire is to learn how I can follow your will more closely.

Speak to me, heavenly Father!

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Epistle to the Romans, chapters 15 and 16**

"I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another."

The Book of Romans ends off with a word of encouragement and salutations. What simplicity! The apostle Paul reminds us in this way that the Church, or "family of God", is none other than all those who believe in Jesus Christ.

God calls each of his children to receive his love and to share it with others. That's the purpose of the Church!

Without love, there are no friendships and without friendships, there is no Church. In fact, those who are living true faith are not dependent on a structure of any kind for the love of God to bear fruit. As we mentioned in the previous module, the Church isn't a structure or a religious system.

Rather it is the manifestation of the Spirit acting in the lives of believers. We therefore need not fear the extinction of Christianity in spite of the lack of interest in the observation of Sunday practices.

I would like to emphasize, however, that all those who are members of a traditional church group are not necessarily "outdated". In fact, all over Canada I met believers, both Catholic and Protestant, who attend church regularly and who tangibly show the love of God being very involved in their communities. There are many churches where the presence of God is manifested in a tangible way when the faithfuls gather to worship the Lord.

These are churches where people flourish in their faith and the joy of God enlivens the soul. You can truly sense the presence of the risen Christ. The overall format of the meeting may vary, when it comes to elements such as musical style varying from more solemn or more contemporary, to the liturgy or perhaps the absence thereof, and the way in which the Gospel is presented, but when the Spirit of God is there, it makes all the difference. It is like a foretaste of heaven. These are indescribable moments that one must absolutely experience to understand.

In each province, I was received, given lodging, cared for and loved by believers, members of the traditional church, who treated me as though I were a member of their own family. I was convinced once and for all that the barriers between French and English, as well as prejudices between whites, blacks, Asians or First Nations people can be completely abolished when we put into practice the teachings of Jesus.

In Quebec, I feasted in the home of a First Nations family, savouring their excellent beaver and moose stew. Then we shared a time of prayer together. In Halifax, I met a believer whose name appears in the Guinness World Book of Records for having walked across Canada in order to raise funds to dig wells for drinking water in Haiti. He and his wife received me with such

kindness, and we have become very good friends. In Saint-John, for the first time in my life I celebrated Canada Day with an English protestant family. In Toronto, a Korean family invited me into their home to share a delicious meal with them. One of their daughters, a concert pianist, charmed our souls with beautiful melodies she played for us. Then, altogether, we joyfully sang praises to the Lord.

In Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, everywhere I went, from one ocean to the other, I witnessed the beauty of the Canadian people and benefited from the love and hospitality of my Christian brothers and sisters.

In British Columbia, I assisted a missionsqz festival which lasted three days and receives, each year, more than twenty thousand visitors. Approximately two hundred booths are set up, bringing together various organizations working throughout Canada and all over the world. Each one of them seeks to meet the many needs of our society and is a testimony of the love of Jesus.

Beyond all doubt, Christianity is still doing a lot of good to people all over the planet. It will never be restricted or confined to the four walls of a church.

Most of the believers who have understood this truth devoted themselves to meeting the needs of people in their city. The Church then becomes a place to "renewal", and a place of joyous celebration.

They have understood that it isn't necessary to multiply their efforts to convince everyone to come and join their group. That no longer matters since they have decided to live out the Gospel wherever they are. Isn't that what Jesus did?

The harvest is plenty but the workers are few, Jesus said. How can we convince believers to get more involved in meeting the needs of those in their town or city? How can we make them understand that Christianity does not amount to mere "recruitment" campaigns to bring up the number of members in their church?

I pray and hope that we are about to see a new generation of Christians rise up whose lives are touched by the love of God. Christians who will cease to live only for themselves or to promote their churches, but who will become the hands, eyes, and very heart of Jesus Christ towards their fellow man.

Other recommended readings: Mark 16:15; John 17; Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31.

## A CLOSER LOOK

Let's resume:

- When it comes to divine justice, we are all guilty because we have all sinned. Because of his love, God became incarnate in order to pay our debt.

- The salvation God offers us is perfect. There is nothing to add to it, and we cannot earn it by our good deeds. We must simply accept it with gratitude. God then sees us as though we had never committed anything wrong and he asks us to see ourselves as he does: totally pure because of what Jesus has done for us at the cross.

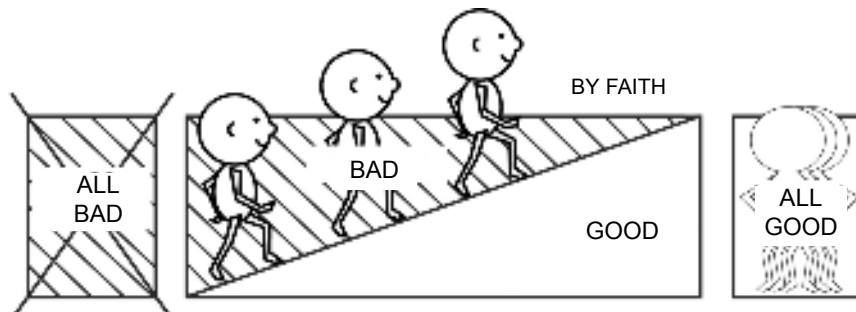
- That is why our conscience ceases to trouble or "accuse" us.

- God has adopted us as his sons and daughters. We can live a daily, intimate relationship with him because he lives in us by his Spirit.

- The only way to conquer our old nature is not to attempt to improve it, but it is to consider it dead. Instead of giving obedience to our sinful nature we now have a choice to go find refuge in the arms of our heavenly Father. This is how we can overcome every sin by choosing to be by the Holy Spirit.

- The only thing that can hinder God to work in our life is unbelief. However, if we believe, then we can experience the fullness of life in the Spirit, his gifts and fruit in us.

- We can then make manifest the love of God towards all, and proclaim his Gospel to everywhere.



WE HAVE BECOME  
THE AMBASSADORS OF GOD ON EARTH

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### A Young Boy

The bible mentions many stories of people who teach us great lessons, without always mentioning their names.

One day, Jesus found himself surrounded by a crowd of several thousand people, who had come to hear him teach, and for healing. Near the end of the day the disciples were beginning to worry, wondering how they were to feed all these people who had not eaten all day.

There was a young boy among them who had with him five loaves of bread and two fish. He was no doubt enraptured with all the things Jesus was saying and with the numerous miracles he was doing. With much generosity and faith, he offered his little meal to Jesus. It was quite a small meal in comparison to such great need!

But Jesus received it with joy. He prayed, multiplied the food and fed the whole crowd. When the people were all full, there were even twelve basketfuls of food remaining. What a great lesson!

The Lord does not ask that we find the solutions to all problems ourselves, nor does he expect us to meet all the needs around us. That is impossible because there are too many and our resources are insufficient. But why don't we offer to Jesus, with simple faith, our little "loaves and fishes"? What Jesus could accomplish through us could surpass all our expectations.

### IN A NUTSHELL

- The Church or "the Family of God" is not represented by a building or particular Christian denomination. It is the manifestation of the Spirit of God acting in the lives of believers.
- Without love, relationships cannot exist, and without relationships, there is no Church.
- Jesus said "The harvest is plenty but the workers are few." Each believer, filled with the love of God, is called to become the hands, eyes and heart of Jesus Christ all over this world.

## WHAT I HAVE LEARNED IN THIS CHAPTER

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Heart to Heart with God





ESTHER  
*BERNARD RACICOT*



# Introduction

This section is designed to help us develop an intimate relationship with God. It deals with the subject of prayer or, if you will, conversation with God. It offers a better understanding of prayer, and provides good tools to enable our prayer life to bear fruit.

In today's rational, automated society, it is sometimes difficult to develop the attitude of faith which renders prayer to be more than empty words. The supernatural is not part of our daily lives. In order to get away from this iron-and-concrete universe, we must develop the more "mystical" aspect of our relationship with God, without which our faith is likely to remain sterile when we pray.

Diligent reading of the bible is always the main element that will open our spirit to the dimension of the "invisible" and the "impossible". The bible recounts a multitude of astounding events and miraculous acts of God throughout human history. These are not myths or science-fiction. God really did create the world out of nothing; he created the angels; he divided the Red Sea before the eyes of an entire nation; and even caused food to rain down from heaven (manna) in the middle of the desert. Jesus really walked on a lake, commanded the wind to cease, changed the water into wine, healed thousands of sick folks, and raised the dead. It is this attribute of God, his miraculous side, that we sometimes have difficulty in understanding. But for God, it is totally natural to live in the realm of the supernatural.

So, to become God's friend, to have an intimate relationship with him, to love God passionately, leads inevitably to the discovery of various aspects of his personality, including his great power. God desires the supernatural to become natural for us as well.

In addition to this fact, the bible is an indispensable tool to help us with discernment. The believer should learn to tell the difference between Christian spirituality and all other types of spirituality. The more we enlarge our horizons to the innumerable possibilities of life in the Spirit, the more we should use the bible as our compass and roadmap, to help us reach the high summits of the mountains of the Lord. As we remain attentive to the instructions of our Guide, the Holly Spirit, the climb becomes more and more pleasing, and even dizzying by times. It is well worth the effort, however. Once the summit is reached, the view is so magnificent that you feel like you have reached the footstool of heaven.



## Joy Unspeakable

Last night I had a dream. I was in a huge gathering. People came from everywhere. They were smiling, happy, some dancing for joy, and all were praising God. There was a lot of light in the place, and semblance of smoke. It was as if a white cloud was in the place, and the people were in the cloud with lots of light.

There was also a stage with musicians on stage, and they also were enveloped in this illuminated cloud. And I was asked to go up to say a few words to the crowd. I had hardly set foot on the stage when I was enveloped in a shining light, clear as transparent gold and which seemed to come from everywhere.

The musicians could no longer play and I was unable to speak, neither to walk nor even to stand. I lay prostrate on the platform, my spirit totally swallowed up by the light. I understood that God dwelled in this light.

His presence was so intense that everyone's attention was on him. For a short instant, a thought troubled my mind.

I knew that God the Father was present, in all his glory, but he seemed unaware of my presence.

He was not concerned about me. His attention was not on me. Instead, he was completely focused on the person of Jesus. It was as though he only had eyes for him as he thought of what his Son had accomplished in dying on the cross. He was totally absorbed in the presence of his Son and gave him his complete attention. I must admit that this bothered me somewhat as I wished God would notice ME. It was then that the Holy Spirit gently breathed an important revelation into my spirit.

He showed me that it was right for God the Father to be so totally absorbed in the presence of God the Son. This is the mystery of the unity and intimacy which makes up the divine Trinity.

He told me that if I turned toward Jesus, the center of all of the Father's affection, that I, too, would be absorbed in his divine presence and would enter into intimacy with the Father and with the Son. The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross would become the ultimate object of my attention and I would thus experience intimate communion with the Father.

Far from feeling abandoned or ignored by God, I would be in perfect harmony with his heart and his thoughts.

It was then that I gave myself up completely to God, and I immediately felt his love and his joy surrounding me.

Even though this was but a dream, I held on to the important lesson I learned from it. If I benefit daily here on earth from the love, care and goodness of the Father, his ultimate goal is not to make me happy or comfortable here below. The ultimate desire of the Father is that his Son be manifested to all and receives all the glory.



### **Between Friends**

What is your understanding of this dream?

Is it possible to sometimes feel tangibly God's presence?

### LOVE IN ACTIONS

Conversation with God makes your soul happy. Prayer should never be burdensome. It is a joy to cultivate the habit of passing time with God daily.

If this is not done already, I am going to make it a daily priority to set time aside for intimacy with God, apart from all of my other activities.

### A PRAYER

Keep me safe, O God,  
For in you I take refuge.  
I said to the Lord, "You are my Lord;  
Apart from you I have no good thing."  
As for the saints who are in the land,  
They are the glorious ones in whom is all my delight.  
The sorrows of those will increase who run after other gods.  
I will not pour out their libations of blood  
Or take up their names on my lips.  
Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup;

You have made my lot secure.  
The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;  
Surely I have a delightful inheritance.  
I will praise the Lord, who counsels me;  
Even at night my heart instructs me.  
I have set the Lord always before me.  
Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.  
Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;  
My body also will rest secure,  
Because you will not abandon me to the grave,  
Nor will you let your Holy One see decay.  
You have made known to me the path of life;  
You will fill me with joy in your presence,  
With eternal pleasures at your right hand.

*Psalm 16*

### **Hearing from God**

Father, as I undertake these chapters on prayer, I stand in silence before you. I desire above all else to hear from you.

Open my ears so that I can hear your voice.  
Open my understanding so that I can understand your will.  
Open my heart so that you can share your heart with me.

### SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Luke 3:21-22**

"...Jesus was baptized... and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

Would you have liked to be present when Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River? To hear, along with all of those witnesses, the voice of the Father from heaven, affirming his

love for his Son, while the Spirit appears, in the form of a dove? What a powerful manifestation of the Trinity. What love! What harmony!

Even when Jesus was on this earth in a human body, the fullness of the Godhead was present in him. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, forming one triune being. This concept of the triune God completely surpasses our understanding.

Even though this truth is clearly revealed to us in the bible, we will only completely understand its import in eternity. The Father is the only God, self-sufficient, manifested in the Person of his Son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the express image of the Father. He is the incarnation of the Father. And the Spirit is the express image of the Son, Jesus, who works in us and through us.

We could compare God the Father to a spring of living water. He is that spring of life. In a cold climate water is transformed into ice. The river thus becomes a bridge capable of supporting us if we desire to cross.

When the river is subjected to sufficient heat, the water becomes a vapour. The vapour is almost invisible as it rises toward the sky. Under pressure, water becomes a force capable of moving enormous ocean liners.

The bible attributes these same qualities to the divine persons of the Father, Son and Spirit. Each one possesses a unique personality but they are perfectly united in all things and are mutually interdependent.

The bible teaches us also that they communicate to each other, that the Father always wants to give us good things (Luke 11:9-13), that Jesus the Son prays for us (Luke 22:31-32; Romans 8:34) and that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express (Romans 8:26-27).

Therefore conversation takes place in the Trinity concerning us, our experiences and the things we are praying for. In effect, the Father, the Son and the Spirit talk about us and take decisions which affect our lives. Isn't this interesting?

The reason many of our prayers remain sterile is that we do not take the time to ask God about his will in the matter. Jesus taught us to pray by requesting that "(God's) will be done in earth as it is in heaven".

Before seeing God work in our daily lives we should first listen to hear what his thoughts are. We should enter into intimacy with the Trinity and sit down at their table. Isn't that what God desires above all else? (Read John 17)

This passage from the Gospel of Luke teaches us another truth: Jesus wanted to identify himself with the human race when he was baptized by John.

God the Son descended to earth to become the "Son of Man". He set aside his heavenly glory and lived on earth as true man. Like us, he experienced fear, sadness, and joy. As with us, he was tempted by evil, yet without sinning.

Also like us, he had to pray and be taught by the Holy Spirit. Jesus taught us that we can all have a personal relationship with God, a relationship as intimate as that of a father with his son. This is the key element in our life of prayer.

God does not want us to spend our time reading off our needs as though he were obliged to answer or to become our servant. Our Father desires to shower us with his blessings, but first and foremost he wants us to remain intimate with him.

It is then that we can hear his voice as seen in this example in the life of Jesus. It is only then that the heavens will open before our eyes and the supernatural will become natural on a daily basis.

Other recommended readings: Matthew 14:22-23; Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12.

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### David

David is one of the most heroic characters of the Old Testament. He lived about a thousand years before Jesus Christ. The youngest son in a shepherd's family, he spent his youth pasturing his father's flocks.

In the evening, sitting by the fire, he would sing to God with passion. He wrote many songs and poems which are found in the book of Psalms. His love for God, his simple faith and his courage enabled him to accomplish many acts of bravery. David became a great military leader, then he became king. He was a king with a tender heart who found his joy in God, and who worshipped him, even exuberantly by times (2 Sam 6:14-21).

Throughout his life, David maintained this sensitivity of heart and childlike humility which pushed him to constant dependence upon God.

His writings reveal the beauty of his intimacy with God and at certain times share the prophetic revelations he received in the Spirit.

David knew how to touch the heart of God and he also knew how to listen to God's voice. In many occasions, God's words literally saved his life.

The name, David, means "beloved".

## IN A NUTSHELL

- The supernatural is not part of our day-to-day existence. Diligent bible reading is the essential element that will open our spirit to the dimension of the "invisible" and the "impossible."
- Conversation with *God* brings joy to our soul. Prayer should never be a heavy burden. It is a joy to cultivate the habit of spending time with *God* daily.
- Conversation takes place within the Trinity concerning our life situations and our prayer requests to *God*. The reason why many of our prayers remain unanswered is that we don't take time to listen to *God* and find his will in the matter.





## 26 Turbulence

Who hasn't heard of the film production *The Lord of the Rings*, based on J. R. R. Tolkien's excellent work?

According to many, Tolkien was a committed Christian. An Oxford professor, renowned specialist in English medieval literature, he rekindled interest in the positive spiritual dimension by use of the imaginary. We can compare his work to the parables used by Jesus in communicating his message; parables which he himself had to explain. The fact that some people do not perceive the source of the truths Tolkien presents, or that they twist the meaning to the point of portraying him as a New Age guru (associating him with the occult practices promoted by the Harry Potter phenomenon), has nothing to do with the spirituality that flows from his work. Saint Augustine once said: "Abuse doesn't preclude use."

Tolkien's goal was to re-evangelize the imagination. To him, it wasn't just false ideas that led man from the truth. There was also a perverted, profane and twisted imagination. Father Louis Bouyer wrote: "Tolkien created his legends and his myths from very elementary themes which were common to all ancient civilizations, Scandinavian and Celtic in particular. It is very striking to see in the boys and girls of today, that modern civilization is disgusted with its rationalism and has managed to evoke sympathy for a vision of the world and of basic Christian life. And that was the vision of the world that he expressed indirectly, but very effectively, in his work."

"The Fellowship of the Ring" is the first of the three films inspired by the work of Tolkien and produced by Peter Jackson.

The action takes place in a world called "Middle Earth" and depicts a battle of cosmic proportions between the forces of good and evil. In this imaginary place, characters of various species live together, humans and other creatures such as hobbits (resembling humans but smaller in stature), elves, dwarfs, magicians, and the ogres. The hobbits live in small houses, holes in the ground, safe and cozy, where behind a well-locked door they are sheltered from danger and from attacks from the outside world. This was the case with the young hobbit named Frodo Baggins, at least until Gandalf the magician came into his life.

A long time ago, the powerful evil Sauron (Greek name meaning "reptile", as in "dinosaur") had a ring forged which would give unlimited powers to the person who wore it.

Lost for three thousand years, the ring is rediscovered by Bilbo Baggins, Frodo's uncle, who offers it to him as an inheritance. To prevent this magical object from falling into the

wrong hands, Gandalf explains to Frodo that it must be taken back to Mordor, the only place where the ring can be destroyed. That is where the pit of fire is located, the place where it had been forged long ago.

Frodo, meek and fragile, along with a few loyal friends, accepts to run the risk and to confront the armies of Sauron.

The Lord of the Rings is the story of a war involving everyone, even the most docile like Frodo, who wished that "all of this had not happened in our time". The characters in the film have their faults, their temperaments, and their difficulties advancing, and that is what brings them eminently close to us.

The presence of evil cannot reduce the choice in life to one of simple neutrality. Evil does not engender resistance or domination. The hobbits' resigned commitment to war is the only plausible solution. "There is only one thing to do, to resist, with or without hope" says Tolkien's elf, Elrond. This freedom of choice generates a sense of responsibility which demands a lot of courage.

Tolkien's entire story is based on the principal that fundamental values are worth sacrificing your life for.

In The Lord of the Rings, good must oppose evil. The small and the insignificant one, if he is determined, can really make a difference in a world beset with innumerable terrors. Courage and self-sacrifice can inspire devotion and heroism which would otherwise be inconceivable.

Sauron is ready to do whatever it takes to recover the "ring of power" which is engraved with the inscription: *A single ring to rule them all, a single ring to find them, a single ring to bring them all and in the shadows bind them.*

He knows that without this ring, he certainly cannot reign over Middle Earth.

There are other rings forged by Sauron, but he has given them to the kings of men, the elves and dwarfs who have become spectres, totally submitted.

Besides, all who approach Sauron are unable to resist him and they fall under his spell. They all lose their individuality. Even Sarumane, chief of the magicians whose mission was to protect Middle Earth, was bewitched.

Evil is manifested in those who join Sauron and excessive pride eats at their spirit and their being until they are but shadows of themselves, disembodied, unnatural: in short, monsters.

It really seems like all of the actors in this saga are irresistibly drawn by the power of the ring. The most powerful beings which inhabit Middle Earth must fight a relentless battle against their own wills to resist the temptation to possess the *One and Only*. Gandalf

trembles in fear at the thought of what he could do with it when Bilbo the Hobbit offers to give him the Ring of Power. The wise and majestic Galadriel trembles before this power which would make her the queen of the universe. Without a doubt, this evil power casts spells on all creatures, even on Frodo. How could he succeed in his mission?

The diabolical Sauron is counting on the destructive power of the ring. No being has ever been able to resist it. How could a simple hobbit defeat this evil plan?



### **Between Friends**

Give some examples of the influence of evil in society.

What can you do to bring about change?

### LOVE IN ACTIONS

This week I will pray every day with determination, in faith, that God will intervene in a single specific situation where I know that the forces of evil have done a lot of damage.

### A PRAYER

I lift up my eyes to the hills-  
Where does my help come from?  
My help comes from the Lord,  
The Maker of heaven and earth.  
He will not let your foot slip -  
He who watches over you will not slumber;  
Indeed, He who watches over Israel  
Will neither slumber nor sleep.  
The Lord watches over you -  
The Lord is your shade at your right hand;  
The sun will not harm you by day,  
Nor the moon by night.

The Lord will keep you from all harm -  
He will watch over your life;  
The Lord will watch over your coming and going  
Both now and forevermore.

*Psalm 121*

## **Hearing from God**

Almighty God, I know that I have nothing to fear from the forces of evil because I am staying close to you. I do not want to hide, but to fight. And I do not want to fight in my own strength but in the strength of your Spirit in me.

I ask of you, Father, to grant me the gift of discernment of spirits as mentioned in your Word (I Corinthians 12:10).

I wait calmly in your presence and receive this gift.

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Luke 4:1-13**

"Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil."

Nous In the previous section we saw that the rule of primary importance to experience a fruitful prayer life is to maintain an intimate relationship with God and listen to his voice.

The second rule is without a doubt that we should be aware of the forces of evil and of their action in the world.

I am not referring here to evil in a general sense. Demons really do exist! After Jesus was baptized and endued with the power of the Spirit, after the voice of the Father was heard from heaven, it is written that Jesus "was led of the Spirit into the desert where he was tempted by the devil." Even before he began accomplishing miracles and healings, Jesus had an important appointment to keep.

As we stressed in the preceding module, there are angelic beings in the spirit world, but there are also evil creatures. We spoke of that being which the bible refers to as "the prince

of this world" who was in some way the main entity responsible for the fall of our first parents. In effect, the "serpent" was a cherub who had rebelled against God.

Along with a multitude of other fallen angels, he continued to work against good on this earth, and is still active today. I know that some will smile when they read these lines and will choose to remain sceptical. I would answer that even if it seems mythical to you, one must consider that for Jesus the presence of the devil and his demons on this earth was not science-fiction. This was a concrete reality, so much so that Jesus confronted Satan face to face, before turning his attention to anything else. The reason for this is that the Lord wanted to prove to the serpent that he had come to re-establish the authority that God had given to the human race in the Garden of Eden. He had come to crush the head of this usurper and to break the power of his reign. The Old Testament does not contain very many direct references to Satan and to demons. We only see the fruit of their influences on man. But when Jesus came to earth, it was as though all hell broke loose. Jesus came to illuminate the darkness, the enemy's refuge, with his light. From the first chapters of the New Testament, references to unclean spirits abound and we see Jesus continually confronting the kingdom of darkness and casting out demons.

Why was it necessary for these powers to be exposed in this way? Why not be more discreet about it?

Simply so that we would understand the extent of their importance in the spiritual world, and that we should be aware of them.

This does not mean that we would see demons everywhere around us but rather that we must learn to exercise discernment in this area.

We need to discern the underlying causes in certain situations and learn how to intervene in prayer. We must listen to what our heavenly Father wants to reveal to us in each situation.

We will not all become exorcists but it is obvious that Jesus wants us to participate in the victory which he acquired over the world of darkness. That is what Peter said: "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith" (I Peter 5:8-9).

The essential part of prayer is that we remain intimate with God, nourished by his love. Prayer is the way to build, to change situations which appear unchangeable. But it is also a strong weapon which will cause the forces of evil to dread. God has a plan for this universe and he offers us a part in it. He does not oblige us, but for those who want to participate in the advancement of the kingdom of God in this world, it all begins with prayer. We must learn to listen to what God wants to tell us and then pray until it comes to pass. This is the way that our

partnership unfolds. This is the way God has chosen to work, in order that his love and power are manifested through us, fragile human beings such as we are.

Other recommended readings: Matthew 12:24-29; Mark 1:21-27; Luke 8:12; John 8:44; Acts 10:38, 16:16; 2 Timothy 2:26; Jude 1:19; Revelations 20:10.

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Saul

The name Saul means "desired, to inquire". The meaning of his name tells us a lot about his history. We are at a point where the nation of Israel must defend itself against its oppressive neighbours. They are in the Promised Land but all isn't as easy as they expected it to be.

Many generations turned away from God because of spiritual weakness and their inability to conquer their enemies. And now they request Samuel to establish a king over them. Like it or not Samuel complies with their request and crowns the tall handsome Saul as king over them.

God helps Saul and allows him to triumph over his enemies, but pride takes root in him and he no longer heeds the counsel God gives him. Little by little, because of his disobedience, Saul no longer hears the voice of God. The leaders at this point in history knew that it was crucial to hear from God about the affairs of the country. Among other things, the success of their military endeavours totally depended on it. Rather than repent, Saul preferred to persist in his disobedience, to the point where he consulted mediums and fortune tellers. These occult powers quickly took over in his life and turned him half-mad. He ended up taking his own life. (I Samuel 9 to 31)

## IN A NUTSHELL

- The presence of the devil and demons on the earth is not a myth. Jesus always considered it a reality.
- We must ask God for the gift of the discernment of spirits.
- Prayer is a way to build, to change situations which seem unchangeable to us. But it is also a powerful weapon against the forces of evil.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED IN THIS CHAPTER

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## The Incarnate Word

*A*lbert Einstein once said: "I want to know God's thoughts; everything else is just detail".

I recently attended a youth meeting where someone asked: How can we hear the voice of God? There were several good answers: God speaks to us through our dreams, through our "inner voice", through our circumstances, and through the folks that we rub shoulders with. It surprised me that not one of the participants mentioned that God speaks through the bible.

Jesus, the incarnate Word, said: "heaven and earth shall pass away but my words will never pass away." Would it not be important to consider the bible as the primary source of divine revelation?

Someone may well ask: Why is the bible so essential? Let's just say that without the bible, people simply create their own concepts of spirituality, and they are often erroneous.

Before ever reading the bible, I believed in reincarnation rather than in resurrection, in evolution rather than creation, in universal salvation rather than faith in Jesus. But since I didn't want to remain in uncertainty all my life, I began to believe in what God has said. I became attached to the bible because I didn't want to spend my life concocting ideas about God or following some religion or another.

When I understood that God really communicated with me through his holy Word, I also understood that he was inviting me to leave my own philosophies, my own plans, my own reasoning based on my understanding of God and the universe. He wanted me to leave my way of thinking and to become a new person in a veritable relationship with him. I understood that I could not earn God's love by trying in my own strength to implement his perfect standard for life on earth; but I also understood that to live for God required total commitment, on my part, to every Word he has spoken.

Every word in the bible is an invitation to get to know the Author better. Not only know him better intellectually, but know him better-him! Not to know him through my preconceived ideas, according to my limited perception of who he is, but to know him, heart to heart, where God manifests himself. Heart to heart, where I want to be transformed by his love.

This love that caused him to visit "my planet", to come to speak to me through "the sermon on the Mount", to reveal to me that God is my Father, to come and love me to the point of giving his life for me on a cross.

This revelation of God, 2000 years later, touched me deeply. It kindled a flame which could not be extinguished, a passion like that of the fiancé in the Song of Solomon who searches everywhere for her beloved. Every word of hers stirs up this flame in me and I can no longer live without the hope of one day meeting him. Not only meet him when I cross the veil to eternity, but I want to live with him in the present, I want to live with him forever.



### **Between Friends**

Why is the bible undeniably the most reliable means to help us hear the voice of God?

How can the bible make my prayer life more effective?

### LOVE IN ACTIONS

This week, I will search my bible for those passages that really touch me, and those through which God has spoken to me about specific situations. I will meditate on these verses and transform them into prayer.

And I will recite these prayers regularly, weighing each word that I offer to God.

### A PRAYER

Father,

I seek you with all my heart. Do not let me stray from your commands.

I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth.

I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches.

I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways.

Your statutes are my delight; they are my counsellors.

I will speak of your statutes before kings and will not be put to shame,

For I delight in your commands because I love them.

My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life.

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

Your faithfulness continues through all generations;  
You established the earth, and it endures.  
Your laws endure to this day, for all things serve you.  
Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.  
The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.  
I open my mouth and pant, longing for your commands.  
Turn to me and have mercy on me, as you always do to those who love your name!  
Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me.

*From Psalm 119*

### **Hearing from God**

Father, I want to listen to you. I know that I will be blessed if I am attentive to your words. Help me to listen to your instructions in order that I might become wise. Help me not to ignore them.

I want to hear your voice each day; I know that I find life in you. I want to receive your favour. (From Proverbs 8:32-35)

### SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Luke 4:16-21**

"And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him."

Jesus had returned from the desert after having affirmed his authority over the forces of evil. He had spent 40 intimate days in the Father's presence, receiving his counsel and listening to his voice.

In the Gospel of John it is written: "I tell you the truth, 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" (Jean 5:19).

So then Jesus goes to the synagogue in Nazareth, the town where he had been brought up and where he was known by everyone. He then does something very important. Having found the passage in the book of Isaiah where the coming of the Messiah is foretold, he reads it aloud and declares before everyone present that this prophecy applies to him. Evidently, all

were amazed since they knew his parents, and Jesus had grown up in this town. How could they accept the carpenter's son as the promised Messiah? The only way they could believe was to examine the sacred writings to see if this declaration could be true.

This is our responsibility as well. We must listen to what God says when we pray to him and then check in his Word to see if we heard correctly. Jesus, the incarnate Word, is the fulfillment of this Scripture. It is impossible for God to speak to us about one thing or another and for it to contradict his written Word, the bible.

Furthermore, as we see in this example from the life of Jesus, God often uses biblical texts to show us his will. That is why it is important for us to read the bible regularly and diligently in order to understand God's thoughts better and be able to pray, having a basic understanding of his will already.

Jesus said: "If you remain in me, and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you." (John 15:7)

Isn't that a wonderful promise? It is clear that simple intellectual knowledge of the biblical texts cannot take the place of an intimate relationship with God; but it would be difficult to enter into an intimate relationship with God without developing a genuine interest in his written word.

Jesus remained 40 days in the desert in his Father's presence, and he received knowledge of his Father's will. And he used the bible effectively to support what the Father told him. Even when he was tempted by the devil, he countered the devil's attacks by quoting passages from the bible and telling Satan: "It is written...".

We need to follow his example.

When we pray, desiring to hear from God and to know his will, very often the Holy Spirit will whisper a passage of Scripture into our understanding to confirm what God wants to tell us. In fact, that is one of the things he enjoys doing: "The Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26).

In the same way, we can also use the bible in our conversation with God. We can literally "pray the bible".

When we have taken time to listen carefully to what God is saying to us, and are convinced that he has spoken, we can then ask him to confirm his will by a passage from the bible. Then, it is important to take note of everything and to read the passage regularly as a prayer to God until we see the fulfillment of it. We can even compose our own written prayer

using these biblical passages. A good example of this practice is seen in the prayer of Mary (Luke 1:45-55). She prayed audibly what she felt in her heart, and included numerous quotations from Scripture which she knew well.

To add the words of the bible to our prayer strengthens our faith and gives it wings.

Specially if these words were given to us by the Holy Spirit to confirm what God has revealed to us as his will for certain precise situations.

Other recommended readings: Luke 1:-57-79; 2:25-38; Acts 4:24-31; Ephesians 3:14-19; 2 Peter 1:19-21.

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Nehemiah

The book of Nehemiah begins on this somewhat distressing note: "Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish exile, and also about Jerusalem. They said to me, 'Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire'."

Nehemiah sits down and weeps when he hears this sad news and turns to God in prayer and fasting. And he remembers the words from the Holy Writings where God foretold this very situation and by the mouth of Moses, gave the means for deliverance. That is when Nehemiah intermingled the promises of God with his own prayer. This resulted in a powerful plea, capable of reversing the terrible situation (v. 8-9)

From this point on Nehemiah's faith no longer rested in his own strength, and he began to see beyond the ruined city.

The book of Nehemiah ends on a note of victory and joy. This man succeeded in accomplishing the impossible by "praying the Word."

Nehemiah's name means "Yahveh has comforted."

## IN A NUTSHELL

- Jesus, the incarnate Word, said: "Heaven and earth shall pass away but my words shall never pass away." Should it not be important to consider the bible as the primary source of divine revelation?
- It is impossible for God to speak to us about something or another and for what he says to contradict his written Word, the bible. We must listen to what God says when we pray and then check it out in his Word to make sure we have heard it right.
- It is important to read the bible regularly and diligently in order to better understand God's thoughts, and then to pray, having a certain understanding of his will. We can also quote the Scriptures in our conversation with God and literally "pray the bible."

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED IN THIS CHAPTER

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## Holy Anointing

The phenomenon of healing through prayer is increasingly evident in our day. This is another aspect of Christianity that we can be proud of. The Gospels show us that in his time, Jesus healed many sick people. Happily they reveal that this spiritual gifting (charisma) is also accessible to believers. The magazine entitled "L'Actualité médicale" (medical news), in one of its editions, published a number of articles from doctors attesting to the benefits of prayer in the health of their patients.

Furthermore, they quote an article from the "Archives of Internal Medicine" from October 1999 which relates the following experience:

"Is intercessory prayer, from a distance, beneficial? Yes. It appears that it has had favourable effects on the evolution of the state of health of patients admitted to the coronary health unit of a hospital in Kansas City. The study compares two groups treated in the same department of the hospital, two very compatible groups in terms of clinical state and age-sex grouping. One of the groups consisted of 484 coronary patients who were prayed for during a period of 28 days after their admission to hospital. The other group consisted of 529 coronary patients who were not exposed to any prayer. The controlled random trial produced the following results: The patients from the first group fared better clinically than those from the second group. Significant statistics, the study confirmed, with the rate of chance probability at one in 25. As for the persons who prayed for the sick, they were "anonymous intercessors" as there was to be no particular link with the patients for whom they were praying." (L'actualité médicale, volume 21, no 44. Décembre 2000 p. 8)

Without denying the excellent work of health specialists, is it fair to say that Jesus is the greatest of all physicians and psychologists? You know, times have not changed much since the days of the first apostles! Jesus had promised his disciples that his Holy Spirit would act wherever two or three "are gathered in his name".

These promises of the Lord have not disappeared over the years. The bible says that "Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever". He is faithful to his Word.

I, myself, had the privilege of seeing the Lord work on many occasions in answer to prayer. For example, I received this letter from an Ontario teenager for whom I had prayer during a conference I attended.

I would like to share it with you.

"Dear Claude: Just a note to give you the news of my healing. You know, God really healed my knee. Since that evening in November when you prayed for me, I have had no more pain. Even my doctor was very impressed with the results. He compared the first X-rays with those taken after you prayed for me. The first one showed the torn cartilage and the others showed the cartilage in perfect condition. He was astounded."

I thank the Lord for what he did. Not only was it a great kindness to the young girl, but it strengthened my faith as well. I do not consider myself to be a better believer than others. On the contrary I am far from living an exemplary Christian life in all points. I pray God for his help continually and that he will continue to transform my life.

When he works through me, I am very conscious of the fact that it is the fruit of his grace and his love.

I have also prayed often for people without seeing any immediate results. I do not know why we do not always receive according to our requests, but I do know that faith has its complexities and that God sometimes works in ways that we do not understand.

I have nevertheless accepted the reality that if I do not maintain an intimate relationship with God, I will not understand his thoughts either.

He will quickly become a stranger to me, a master who must be obeyed. On the other hand, when I remain close to him, I feel loved as a son. I can approach him as my "daddy" and my faith is rejuvenated.

There are other people I prayed for and who were healed of back problems, stomach ulcers and even a case of pancreatic cancer where the healing was confirmed by medical tests.

How wonderful! What joy!

I could tell of many testimonies of folks who were healed through the prayers of other believers or simply in answer to their own prayers. There is nothing impossible with the Lord!

But this power to heal is not the fruit of our own abilities.

It is the direct action of Jesus Christ through those who love him and believe in him.

Christian faith has nothing to do with the current popular philosophies of "cosmic power" or an impersonal "universal force" as some New Agers believes. The Lord is not a "universal force" that we can name according to our whims: Jesus, for the Christians, Krishna for the Hindus, and "a force" for those who try to remain neutral.

God has said in the bible that he "will not give his glory to another", not to a man nor to any false gods. Jesus is the only God, the Almighty. He is not a simple "electric current".

And even if some mediums and gurus succeed in accomplishing great unusual feats in the name of God, the source of their power is not that of Christ. Jesus warned us of these miracle-workers

who are not real Christians (Matthew 7:21-23). The bible contains all of the information necessary to help us discern what is false and what is true. This applies to all of the areas of life and of spirituality.

The bible also teaches us that we should only pray to God.

Jesus said: "Whatsoever you ask in my name, I will give it to you." For that matter, there are examples of people, in the Gospel, who wanted to accomplish miracles of healings or simply to pray without addressing Jesus and they met with disapproval. And here is yet another unchanging truth. It is so easy for us to stray far from what God has said.

He must constantly bring us back to his Word.

God does not allow us to pray to the dead, the saints, the angles or anyone else. He is not too busy to answer our prayers and he does not need mediators. His intelligence is infinite to the point that it is impossible to grasp its import. He can have a personal relationship with each one of us simultaneously.

With this in mind, let us recognize also that God is almighty, and he is still able to heal the sick today. What good news!



### **Between Friends**

Have you ever personally experienced a healing following prayer? Have you spoken about it?

Have you ever prayed for a sick person? What were the circumstances?

Would you like to be used of God as a channel for miracles of healing? Why?

### LOVE IN ACTIONS

This week, I will ask God for guidance to pray for a sick person.

The Lord may ask me to pray in the presence of this person, or he could ask me to become involved with other believers in praying regularly for him or her. It may be that the Holy Spirit desires to use me to bring about a miracle of healing.

I say "yes" to you Lord!

## A PRAYER

(A writing of Hezekiah king of Judah after his illness and recovery.)

I said, "In the prime of my life must I go through the gates of death  
And be robbed of the rest of my years?"  
I said, "I will not again see the Lord, the Lord, in the land of the living;  
No longer will I look on mankind, or be with those who now dwell in this world.  
Like a shepherd's tent my house has been pulled down and taken from me.  
Like a weaver I have rolled up my life, and he has cut me off from the loom;  
I cried like a swift or thrush, I moaned like a mourning dove.  
My eyes grew weak as I looked to the heavens. I am troubled;  
O Lord, come to my aid!"  
But what can I say? He has spoken to me, and he himself has done this.  
I will walk humbly all my years because of this anguish of my soul.  
Lord, by such things men live; and my spirit finds life in them too.  
You restored me to health and let me live.  
Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish.  
In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction;  
You have put all my sins behind your back.  
For the grave cannot praise you, death cannot sing your praise;  
Those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness.  
The living, the living-they praise you, as I am doing today;  
Fathers tell their children about your faithfulness.  
The Lord will save me, and we will sing with stringed instruments  
All the days of our lives in the temple of the Lord.

*Isaiah 38:9-20*

### **Hearing from God**

Loving Father, you have said that you do not refuse the Spirit when we ask of you. I ask you for the gift of healings that your Spirit gives to those who believe in you. I stand in your presence and receive from you that which you desire to give me. Thank you Father!

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Luke 4:38-41**

"When the sun was setting, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them."

One of the Lord's most important activities while he was on earth was to heal the sick. In fact, the Gospels relate numerous instances where Jesus accomplished miracles of healing. We see this in the text.

God is not the author of sickness; it is part of the terrible consequences of the fall of the human race.

There are some sicknesses that are directly related to demon activity. Others are passed down to us through genetics or by contamination. Still others are the result of our lifestyle, of our bad eating habits, of stress. We live in a rich country but our hospitals are filled to capacity.

There were doctors in Jesus' day.

Luke, the author of this gospel and of the Acts of the Apostles was a doctor. We clearly understand that the Gospel is not anti-medicine. Sickness is such a terrible scourge that all efforts must be encouraged to fight it.

However, our faith must always be in God. Divine healing is one of the jewels of Christianity. God asks us to pray for the sick and believe in miracles as much as he calls us to care for the suffering and to build hospitals.

In the bible, there are no "particular methods" to follow when we want to pray for the sick. It is written here that Jesus laid his hands on all who were sick and healed them all. In other instances, he only prayed for them by speaking directly to the sickness. In another place, he expelled a demon and the person was healed.

What we must retain is that Jesus was in close fellowship with his Father and was sensitive to the Holy Spirit.

I read a testimony recently of a man who was healed of a brain tumour. When they became aware of his condition, all the church gathered for prayer. Some prayed one way, some another, without too much concern neither about faith nor for listening to what God had to say. Finally, a small group decided to continue praying and suggested to John, the sick man, that he invite them to his home.

The next evening, they were there, about thirty of them. But instead of praying for John's healing, they were led of the Spirit in praise to God. For over two hours, they sang joyfully, offering thanks and praise to God. The atmosphere of sadness which had been in the house changed radically.

The next day, they were all back.

They sang again for an hour and then spent time listening to God. They then shared what many of them had heard. They realized that the majority of them had heard the same thing. They got together again, this time to draw up a written prayer based on what God had said to the group as a whole.

They got together one more time; each one read his prayer and they agreed to formulate a group prayer from the common elements which kept coming up in their individual prayers. The inspiration was felt as was the joy in their hearts.

It was clear to all, including John, that God was present in it all.

Now that they were convinced that they had been inspired by God as to how to pray, they agreed to gather as many times as it would take until their prayer was answered. They met 73 times for prayer in John's home in the five months that followed. The day he was scheduled for surgery, they suggested to John that he ask the doctors to take more X-rays before operating.

After much hesitation, the doctors agreed.

When they examined the results, the tumour was no longer there. They sent John to have the test done at another hospital, thinking that their own machine had malfunctioned. But the tumour had disappeared.

They wrote on the medical report, "We know that John is part of a very dedicated prayer group and we conclude that his healing is a miracle of God."

It is true that not everyone we pray for will be healed, but if we don't pray, we will never see any healings occur. On the contrary, if we take the time to listen to God, to believe in miracles and to pray with perseverance, we will see extraordinary things happen before our very eyes.

Other recommended readings: Luke 6:17-19; 8:43-48; 17:12-19; Mark 8:23-25; 16:17-18; Acts 3:1-9; 6:8; 8:6-8.

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Hezekiah

Hezekiah was a great king of antiquity. Thanks to him the entire nation of Israel came back to God. In effect, his father Ahaz had been a very evil king. He had led the whole country away from God. Hezekiah had succeeded in restoring the faith of the people and "there was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the days of Solomon son of David king of Israel there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem. The priests and the Levites stood to bless the people, and God heard them, for their prayer reached heaven, his holy dwelling place." (2 Chronicles 30:26-27).

In spite of all of this, Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. He turned his face to the wall and prayed with all his heart...and God answered. He sent Isaiah to tell him that he was adding 15 years to his life. Hezekiah's faith wavered, however, and he asked God to confirm his will with a sign. And what a sign! God showed Hezekiah that the length of a day, and even time itself, were in his hand. "He caused the shadow on the palace clock to go backwards ten degrees (see II Kings 20:1-10).

Hezekiah's name means "Jehovah is my strength."

### IN A NUTSHELL

- God is not the author of sickness; it is part of the terrible consequences of the fall of man. One of the most important activities the Lord was engaged in during his stay here on earth was healing the sick.
- Besides calling us to the care of the suffering and the building of hospitals, God also asks us to pray for the sick and to believe him for miracles.
- It is true that not all of the sick people we pray for will be healed, but if we do not pray for them, we will never witness healings. On the contrary, if we take time to listen to the voice of God, to believe in miracles and to pray with perseverance, we will see extraordinary things happen before our very eyes.

## WHAT I HAVE LEARNED IN THIS CHAPTER

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## Ultimate Passion

The bible confirms that God "wants all men to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men" (1Timothy 2:4-6).

The Lord Jesus loved us so much that he gave his life for us. Then he asked us to go all over the world to proclaim his love and forgiveness. If we truly love Jesus, we can't remain insensitive towards his request. We must love people like Jesus love them. We must pray for them and share the Gospel with them.

It is clear that prayer plays an essential role in the accomplishment of the will of God for the salvation of each individual as the Apostle Paul says: "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened ..."

A believer who is completely consumed with love for God cannot remain indifferent to the eternal destiny of the people he encounters. History tells of individuals who prayed fervently and were witness to thousands turning to God.

The Lord tells us in his word: "If my people who are called by my name humble themselves and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

This promise is still true today.

History relates examples of individuals who prayed with fervour and perseverance and who witnessed powerful spiritual revivals where thousands of individuals turned to God.

Here are some examples of what God is accomplishing today in various countries as a result of prayer.

First of all let us consider Uganda, a country in Africa presently experiencing a great spiritual revival. In this country, there were so many conversions to Christ in the past ten years that during the national festivities on December 31, 1999, when celebrations were taking place to mark the beginning of the new millennium, the government authorities publicly dedicated the country to Jesus Christ. In effect, the president and his wife invited the pastors to lead in a prayer of repentance and consecration to God before the thousands of people who filled the biggest football stadium in the capital for the occasion.

Uganda, devastated by war, had been a nation devoted to the worship of their ancestors and to occult practices. But the fervent and persevering prayers of a minority of believers overturned the negative effects of these evil practices.

The country was also strongly affected by the terrible ravages of AIDS which affected a large percentage of the population. Neither medicine nor the government could come up with an effective solution to this plague.

Following the Christian renewal, the percentage of the population affected by AIDS diminished considerably. This was unheard of! Research conducted by international health organizations to determine the cause of this change came to this same conclusion: These changes are a result of the beneficial effects of Christianity in the country.

Let us travel now to South America, to Colombia, and the city of Cali where Christian faith is presently experiencing unprecedented revival.

According to the US Drug Enforcement Agency, this city is a center for the largest, richest and most highly organized criminal gang in all of America. Cocaine smuggling brings in millions of dollars for the Mafia, which also controls the politics and economics of the city.

For the believers in this city, there was nothing they could do other than pray.

They prayed fervently.

Churches from various Christian denominations began to band together to beseech God to intervene. Little by little these people realized the importance of their involvement. The number of participants increased gradually until it reached record crowds of 75,000 people. Following one of these gatherings where the people had filled one of the largest stadiums in the country, God began to move.

During this same week end, not one murder was reported in the entire city. This had not been witnessed in many years. Ten days later, the drug cartel was dismantled following the arrest of its leaders.

According to Hector Torres, Minister of Internal Affairs, "God has chosen Cali to show to the entire world and to the city authorities, that he is able to intervene when people humble themselves and acknowledge their need of him".

These reports are available on Video and DVD. (Transformations I and II. The Sentinel Group. Video. 2001.)

These same reports also testify to the mighty intervention of God, much closer to home, here in Canada. It is becoming more and more apparent that God loves to work among people who believe in his Word and who are humble enough to recognize their need of him.

The small Inuit villages in Ungava Bay, in northern Quebec, had one of the highest suicide rate in the world among their young people. In 1991, the CBC was on hand, and their 20-minute coverage, which was broadcast country-wide, aimed at raising public awareness about this serious problem. And yet, the suicide rates continued to climb.

During an interview filmed in 1996, James Arreak, Director of Fiscal Politics in the Nunavut government, tells of the small village of Pond Inlet and a number of other villages in that territory that experienced an unprecedented Christian revival. In response to the fervent prayers of a handful of the members of these communities, God began to work in an extraordinary way.

A group of believers, gathered in a small protestant church, experienced an incredible move of the Holy Spirit. Just like it had happened in the second chapter of the book of the Acts of the Apostles, they all heard the sound of a very strong wind. According to some eye witnesses, it was a deafening sound like that of a Boeing 747. The building and all of the furniture in it began to shake. People laughed, cried, and were mightily touched by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

And God continued to move in this town and in the surrounding villages.

Many experienced such conviction and repentance that they decided to light a bonfire just outside of the village and burn their drugs, their "heavy metal" music CD's and their pornographic magazines. The value of what was burned on that memorable day was estimated at \$100,000.

Following this, their crime and suicide rates totally plummeted. This had never before been seen. The members of the government of Nunavut recognized the hand of God and began to hold Christian prayer meetings in the government buildings. Prayer was also offered in the schools and even in the City Hall before council meetings.

I sincerely hope that this short virtual intercontinental "voyage" will cause you to reflect seriously on the amazing effects of genuine fervent Christian faith.

Personally, I pray unceasingly for a great revival throughout our country. Am I an idealist to believe that Canadians could one day sincerely turn to Jesus Christ and his Word? I don't know, but I continue to believe that it is possible.

Should we then remain timid with regard to the faith because we still don't see great miracles in our Godless society? Must we hide our Bibles and stop talking about Jesus under the pretext that we will be ridiculed by some?

I don't think so!

Canadians don't yet recognize their need of the Lord and of his intervention in our country, and we must continue to pray. We must persevere in love and proclaim the Gospel in all circumstances. This will produce fruit - for God said so!



## **Between Friends**

What is your reaction to what you have just read?

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

I cannot remain insensitive to the eternal destiny of those around me. I will draw up a list of the people the Spirit lays on my heart. I will take the time to listen to God, asking him to reveal those he wants me to pray for. I will then compose a prayer for each individual according to the revelations God gives me and also use passages from the bible. Then I will pray these prayers with perseverance until I see God intervention.

## A PRAYER

Comme As the deer pants for streams of water,  
So my soul pants for you, O God.  
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.  
When can I go and meet with God?  
My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long,  
"Where is your God?"  
These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude,  
Leading the procession to the house of God,  
With shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.  
Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?  
Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.  
My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan,  
The heights of Mount Hermon - from Mount Mizar.  
Deep calls to deep in the road of your waterfalls;

All your waves and breakers have swept over me.  
By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me;  
A prayer to the God of my life.  
I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me?  
Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?"  
My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long,  
"Where is your God?"  
Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?  
Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.

*Psalm 42*

## **Hearing from God**

Father, I sincerely want to see every one I meet come to love you and know you. I don't always know what to ask of you when I pray for them.

I now ask you to tell me how to pray. Show me the precise aspects of their lives where you want to intervene. I want to pray according to your will.

Teach me, Lord! I am listening.

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Luke 4:42 to 5:11**

"Don't be afraid. From now on, you will catch men".

In the previous section, we followed Jesus to the house of Simon Peter where he healed Peter's mother-in-law and a multitude of other people afterward. And once again we see him withdrawing to pray. What did Jesus talk to his Father about during these precious intimate times? The text goes on to tell us: "At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. But he said, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also".

Jesus passionately loved people to the point of spending a lot of time with them, listening to them, and healing them; but the Father had put something of utmost importance on his heart.

He needed to go from town to town preaching everywhere the good news of the kingdom of God. He knew that miracles alone were not enough to bring people to the knowledge of God. He needed to show them the way to heaven. He needed to teach them how to love the Father and how to love his Word.

Jesus wept when he saw the multitudes.

He saw their suffering and compared them to a flock of sheep, lost without a shepherd. "The harvest is great but the labourers are few" He said, comparing people to a large field of wheat needing to be harvested or it would be lost.

This was the ultimate passion that controlled God the Son during his time on earth. Jesus knew that he would die on the cross for the salvation of humanity, but this salvation needed to be preached everywhere.

This tells us how important it is for us to pray without ceasing for the salvation of the people around us and for all of the inhabitants of the earth. We must pray that God will send forth labourers into the harvest, and we must be ready, ourselves, to become harvesters right where we are, and wherever else God sends us.

This is not just an option; it is what is dearest to the heart of God. We cannot claim to be intimate with the Father unless our heart beats in sync with his.

God gave his all in order that man might be saved.

He gave himself.

How can we hope to become friends of God and remain insensitive to the salvation of others? Impossible! He who loves God also loves others. And he who loves others cannot remain passive, tolerant of the fact that multitudes who have not received God's forgiveness will remain separated from him for eternity.

Peter had been witness to the miracles of Jesus but he went back to his fishing boat. He had not understood the importance and the urgency of Christ's mission on earth. He did not know that Jesus carried the burden of the salvation of mankind on himself, to the point of praying for people, often through the entire night.

Jesus had to get right into Peter's boat to bring him to the understanding that human lives were more important than fish.

At last Peter and his friends made the right choice:

"Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men'. So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him."

Other recommended readings: Luke 8:1-8; 13:22-30.

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Philip

These were the days of the apostles. Jesus has risen and gone into heaven but the presence of his Spirit is manifested through believers. Everywhere they have spread the Gospel, God confirming his Word by accomplishing many miracles. As a result, thousands have become Christians.

The apostles find it necessary to ask a few men, and Philip is one of them, to manage the distribution of food among this new community of believers. It is a heavy task.

However, Philip cannot limit himself to providing the necessary food for their physical bodies; he also wants to feed the souls of those who do not know God. This is why we encounter him (two chapters further on) proclaiming the Gospel: "Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed. So there was great joy in that city." (Acts 8:5-8)

Then verses 26 to 40 show how God gave precise instructions to Philip as to how to bring an important statesman to him.

In short, the example of Philip teaches us that if we dare to proclaim Christ, God will dare to manifest his power through us.

## IN A NUTSHELL

- The bible says that God "wills that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth".
- A believer consumed with love for God cannot remain indifferent to the eternal destiny of those around him.
- History relates examples of individuals who prayed with fervour and perseverance and who witnessed powerful spiritual revivals where thousands of individuals turned to God.



## MY PRAYER TO GOD

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## 30

# Eternal Wisdom

*L*earning to pray, to listen to the voice of God, to be led of the Spirit, takes a whole life. Sometimes God speaks in one way, and sometimes in another, and he doesn't have a magic formula that will enable us to graduate quickly in that school. The only way to progress is to remain close to him and to listen to carefully to his voice. He is the eternal source of wisdom, as it says in Proverbs: "My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding." (Proverbs 2:1-6).

In this module, we will complete an overview of the Book of Acts to discover how the first Christians listened to God's voice. We will draw out numerous lessons which we will then be able to apply in our daily lives.

### 1. The Sovereignty and goodness of God (Read: Acts 1:14-26)

"Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails" (Proverbs 19:21).

There are two aspects to the personality of God that we must understand when we seek to understand his guidance. Firstly, God is sovereign and master of the universe. Because of his love, he has chosen to allow us to participate with him in his works. In this way, our part is often crucial and our prayers essential. Nevertheless, God reserves the right to intervene as he wills. When we pray, he often answers "yes"; at times he tells us to wait; and again he sometimes says "no". We must accept his will as above our prayers. God always knows what is best. Secondly, we must understand that in many cases, he acts in our favour because of his compassion for us. He does not answer affirmatively because he is impressed with our wisdom but rather because of his goodness to us.

This is what we see in the example we have read. The Lord had just left this earth and the disciples had an important decision to make. It was a good thing that they had prayed, but do you believe that their action in "casting lots" was a method we need to retain? I am not quite sure! I believe, rather, that this passage shows us God's goodness and his sover-

eighty in spite of our immaturity. It is comforting to know that he does not always depend on our wisdom. His will can make up for our inadequacies.

## 2. The Community of Believers (Read: Acts 6:1-6)

"Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed" (Proverbs 15:22).

Here the disciples find themselves in a situation very similar to what we saw previously. This time however, instead of casting lots, they acted with more wisdom. Once again they prayed, but they chose candidates following certain spiritual criteria. In the end, they submitted their decision to the Christian community. This is a principle to retain.

However, God's directives are not always revealed through individual opinions nor those of the majority, even if, in most cases, the advice of Spirit-filled Christians is a resource he uses to help us make the right decisions.

## 3. The bible (Read: Acts 15:12-19).

"Every word of God is flawless" (Proverbs 30:5).

The bible is the only infallible source revealing the instructions, the wisdom and the will of God. It is through the bible that we can discern if what we hear when we are praying or which comes from other sources is in accordance with the will of God. In spite of the difficulties of interpretation, we can accept the infallibility of every word of the Holy Scriptures. The bible itself claims to be the only document on earth which was totally inspired by God. On several occasions, Jesus attested to the inspiration and infallibility of the bible. We can therefore refer to it in all confidence. God often uses his Word to communicate his instructions to us when we pray. The Holy Spirit breathes biblical passages into our intelligence in answer to our prayers to show us the will of God. A good example of this is shown in the verses we have just read.

## 4. The Gifts of the Spirit (Read: Acts 11:27-29)

"If you had responded to my rebuke, I would have poured out my heart to you and made my thoughts known to you" (Proverbs 1:23).

There are different supernatural gifts which the Holy Spirit gives to believers (see I Corinthians 12-14). They are an efficient means through which God can show us his will. We will study them further in the 9th module. We must understand that people who manifest these gifts are not infallible. It is therefore necessary to exercise discernment in the light of the Scriptures. Having said this, the gifts which the Holy Spirit gives us can have a very

powerful impact in our lives and in the circumstances we encounter. This was the case in the passage which we have just read, where the prophet Agabus revealed very important information which only God could have shown him. The gift of prophecy, as with all of the other gifts, still exists today, available to believers.

#### 5. Circumstances (Read: Acts 11:19-20).

"In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps" (Proverbs 16:9).

It is obvious that we cannot consider every circumstance which we encounter as God's will for us. This would lead us to utter confusion and would we would become ill. Our life is not a kind of pendulum where each movement is pre-planned to the second. We are not "God's puppets". There is dynamic interaction in our relationship with God. Sometimes it can lead God to change the circumstances and turn a situation in our favour. That is one of the reasons why we pray, for that matter. We believe that prayer can bring about changes on this earth. All is not at the mercy of circumstance. It is in this sense that God can use circumstances to accomplish his will and see that all things work together for our good.

With reference to our text, Jesus had commissioned his disciples to spread the Gospel throughout the world. After he had left them, the Christian community in Jerusalem had greatly increased and had neglected to obey the Lord's command. He therefore permitted persecution and political conflicts to disperse them, away from the large centers. Through this circumstance, the Gospel was spread throughout the country and beyond.

#### 6. Visions, Dreams, Angels (Read: Acts 16:5-10; 27:21-26).

"For God does speak - now one way, now another - though man may not perceive it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men as they slumber in their beds, he may speak in their ears and terrify them with warnings..." (Job 33:14-16).

The bible gives a multitude of examples where God speaks through visions, dreams, or angels, as shown here in these two passages.

Try to imagine the scenario: Paul is responsible for an evangelistic team which has been traveling for weeks, in peril of their lives, and are now facing numerous obstacles.

Twice already they have had to change their travel plans. Things are quite tense and some members of the team are starting to doubt Paul's ability to hear from God. But he rises early this particular morning, happy, and tells them all that he knows exactly the direction they should take. How can he know this? He had a dream!!!

What would you have done in that case?

Well, they packed their bags (after they had prayed, of course) and they believed that God was leading them in this way.

They finally arrived at the right place!

7. Heart and Reason (Read: Acts 21:10-14).

"Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (Proverbs 4:23).

There are many ways then that God uses to show us his will. Living in intimate relationship with him is a daily adventure where we learn, little by little, to discern the voice of his Spirit. But it must be reiterated: hearing the voice of God will never become a mechanical routine. Our heart must remain vibrant with love for him; otherwise our reasoning will become faulty. Many have fallen into this trap - mistaking their own will for the will of God.

There are other hindrances to hearing the voice of God clearly, and we will deal with them at the end of this module. God loves us as a Father, and it is very important that we keep our hearts in communion with him.

In our text, we see that the Spirit of God communicates an important revelation through the voice of a prophet. But we also see the reaction of the Apostle Paul, his heart broken because of the people of Jerusalem, ignoring the warning of the danger that is ahead.

Was Agabus a false prophet? Did Paul disobey God?

Not really! His desire to see his own people come to salvation was so intense that he was simply unable to resist going to see them. In effect, Paul had acquired enough wisdom to know that this warning was not God's forbiddance but rather that God was warning him of the danger that awaited him if he chose to go to Jerusalem. He could have chosen to stay, but he decided otherwise. His heart was consumed with love for them.

The story is told of a man who worked for a train company, in charge of operating a lift-bridge. One day when his son had come along with him to his work, he heard the young boy crying. He had gotten his foot caught in the gears of the bridge while playing. At that very moment, the father heard the train whistle as it was approaching at great speed. He had to choose between activating the bridge lever and seeing his son die before his eyes or saving the child and sacrificing the lives of hundreds of passengers traveling on the train.

What would you have done in his place?

God chose to sacrifice his only Son to save us!



## Between Friends

What lessons did you learn in this module?

How does God communicate with you the most?

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

I will make a short and a long-range list of decisions I have to take, and I will record what God tells me in each case. I will then write out my prayers concerning each of these decisions and recite them to God regularly, keeping my ears open.

## A PRAYER

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of Heaven's Armies.  
I long, yes, I faint with longing to enter the courts of the Lord.  
With my whole being, body and soul,  
I will shout joyfully to the living God.  
Even the sparrow finds a home,  
And the swallow builds her nest and raises her young  
At a place near your altar,  
O Lord of Heaven's Armies, my King and my God!  
What joy for those who can live in your house, always singing your praises.  
What joy for those whose strength comes from the Lord,  
Who have set their minds on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.  
When they walk through the Valley of Weeping,  
It will become a place of refreshing springs.  
The autumn rains will clothe it with blessings.  
They will continue to grow stronger,  
And each of them will appear before God in Jerusalem.  
O Lord God of Heaven's Armies, hear my prayer.  
Listen, O God of Jacob.  
O God, look with favor upon the king, our shield!  
Show favor to the one you have anointed.

A single day in your courts,  
Is better than a thousand anywhere else!  
I would rather be a gatekeeper in the house of my God  
Than live the good life in the homes of the wicked.  
For the Lord God is our sun and our shield.  
He gives us grace and glory.  
The Lord will withhold no good thing  
From those who do what is right.  
O Lord of Heaven's Armies,  
What joy for those who trust in you.

*Psalm 84*

### **Hearing from God**

Lord, I ask you to shed light on the choices I desire to make for today and for my future. Help me to know which projects I should keep and which ones I should put aside. I want to make good decisions and I need your help and your counsel. Show me also if there are obstacles hindering me from hearing from you. I know that you love me and I stand before you with assurance. Speak to me, Lord!

### SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

#### Scripture Reading: **Luke 6:12-13**

"One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles".

Once again Jesus spent a lot of time talking with the Father. He had an important decision to make and considered it essential not to rely on his abilities as "Son of Man" only. I believe that he also wanted to teach us that God takes pleasure in giving us good advice when we ask him. Jesus said: "The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him" (John 8:29).

We know that Jesus, in his humanity, lived a perfect life on earth, loving God the Father.

Even though his fellowship with the Him was uninterrupted, he still had to take time to listen carefully and to pray.

We know that God is good, that he lives in us even when we do wrong (Psalm 103). He is not the one who severs communication; it is we who sometimes have difficulty hearing him. In fact, the bible teaches that there can be obstacles that hinder us from hearing God's voice. Here are a few of them. I invite you to read each one of these passages carefully.

Other recommended readings:

1. Taking God lightly (I Samuel 3:19; Psalm 32:8-9)
2. Unbelief (Mark 6:4-6)
3. Ignorance of what the bible says (Isaiah 48:17-18; Joshua 1:8; Jean 5:39)
4. Praying with wrong motives (Luke 18:9-14; James 4:3)
5. Perseverance in wrong-doing (Isaiah 59:1,2; Jeremiah 18:7-10)
6. Neglecting prayer (Ezekiel 22:30)
7. Hardness of heart (Malachi 2:17; Matthew 5:13-16)

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Daniel

The name Daniel means "God is my judge". Indeed, Daniel needed to rely on God from a tender age. As an adolescent he was taken hostage during the first deportation of the Hebrew people to Babylon. Because of his integrity and his God-given gift to interpret dreams, he became the second in importance in the empire. His wisdom surpassed that of all of the king's counsellors.

His prophecies and his visions are still used today as keys to the interpretation of end-time events. Even though he held a high position, Daniel loved to spend time praying to God. On several occasions he saw angels and Jesus himself appeared to him to save him from a blazing furnace.

Daniel was very attached to the written Word of God. It is without doubt following his intercession, described in the book of the prophet Jeremiah and the words of Moses, that his people were delivered out of exile (Daniel 9:1-23).

A simple reading of the book of Daniel brings us to another dimension of faith. The lessons that we can draw from his life and his piety are numerous. His commitment and his love for God are exemplary.

## IN A NUTSHELL

- *God is sovereign and master of the universe. Because of his love he chose to have us participate with him in his works. In this way, our role is often crucial and our prayers essential.*
- *God speaks to us sometimes one way, sometimes another, and there is no magic formula to enable us to graduate rapidly to this school. The only way to progress is to maintain our intimate relationship with God and to listen carefully to his voice. He is the eternal source of wisdom.*
- *We know that God is good and that he dwells in us, even when we do wrong. However, the bible teaches that obstacles do exist that can hinder us from hearing the voice of God distinctly.*

## WHAT I HAVE LEARNED IN THIS CHAPTER

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## Heaven's Resources

*Who* else, other than Jesus, can teach us how to pray?

We all have preconceived ideas about *God* or about Christianity. That is why we need to listen carefully to each of the words of the Lord and search our hearts when we pray.

*God* does not answer prayers with selfish motives. I come from a Catholic background. Early in life I learned to recite the rosary by continually repeating the "Hail Mary's". As a young adult I turned towards Hinduism and the New Age Movement to try and fill the void within me. At that time I learned to meditate by reciting "mantras" on the Hindu beads. Many years later, I decided to read the bible and, following the teaching of the Lord, I stopped praying repetitive prayers: "And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Matthew 6:7-8). Thus I began to address *God* in my own words and to converse with him. I immediately saw a distinct difference. Many of my prayers were answered.

But I had not yet understood that *God* desired a more intimate relationship with me. Instead I saw him as a "Master" I had to obey and who would reward me. In spite of the fact that I had stopped praying repetitive prayers, my "conversational" prayers often seemed empty. This concept of a "God who rewards" also gave way to an orphan attitude within me. In effect, a person with an orphan spirit is constantly preoccupied with what he or she can obtain to meet his or her own needs. If they discover something valuable, they will immediately covet it, grab it, hide it, and keep it for them. I often prayed with this attitude. I prayed well-worded prayers, as eloquent as a good sermon, but they did not succeed in convincing *God*.

Jesus taught us how to pray. And the first words he used in his prayer were "Our Father...". *God* wants to be as close to us as a father with his son or daughter. He does not want us to act as servants or orphans but as sons and daughters who love their father. He wants us to become like him. Whenever the son or daughter of a generous man discovers something of value, he or she wants to share it with others. They have learned this from their father and they know that they will never lack for anything because he will provide everything they need.

There are no "winning formulas" for answered prayers, but there is certainly a winning way; that of love for *God* and for others.

I invite you to meditate on this marvellous passage from the book of the prophet Isaiah:

"Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins.

For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them.

'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?'

Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarrelling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.

Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter - when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.

Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: here am I.

If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk,

And if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.

The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings" (Isaiah 58: 1-12).

## **Between Friends**

Why does a person with an "orphan" spirit have such difficulty being generous?

What important truths can we retain from this quote by the prophet Isaiah?

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

Today I will share with others the resources that God gives me. I want to become a generous person. I will develop the habit of giving regularly to the underprivileged (perhaps by sponsoring a child through a recognized organization) and by giving regularly to the support of causes promoting the spread of the Gospel.

## A PRAYER

Praise awaits you, O God, in Zion; to you our vows will be fulfilled.  
O you who hear prayer, to you all men will come  
When we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions.  
You answer us with awesome deeds of righteousness, O God our Saviour,  
Who formed the mountains by your power, having armed yourself with strength,  
Who stilled the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves,  
And the turmoil of the nations.  
You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly.  
The streams of God are filled with water to provide the people with grain,  
For so you have ordained it.  
You drench its furrows and level its ridges;  
You soften it with showers and bless its crops.  
You crown the year with your bounty, and your carts overflow with abundance.  
The grasslands of the desert overflow; the hills are clothed with gladness.  
The meadows are covered with flocks and the valleys are mantled with grain;  
They shout for joy and sing.

*From Psalm 65*

## Hearing from God

Father, I would like to talk to you about my finances and my possessions... I should say, rather, the things which you have loaned me during my sojourn on earth. Show me if there are roots of greed and selfishness in my heart. Show me how to become generous like you.

I am listening to you.

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Luke 9:10-17**

"Jesus, taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke them. Then he gave them to the disciples to set before the people."

In this passage we see how concerned Jesus is with the physical needs of the people. He wants to teach us that the Father not only desires to meet spiritual needs, but also to meet material needs.

God is faithful. I could quote hundreds of examples where God answered my prayers by meeting needs in many different ways.

All things belong to God and he asks us not to worry about "our daily bread". He wants to demonstrate his generosity to us so that we can become like him and be generous to others. Canadians are known as passive people. In a CBC documentary, the director of a humanitarian aid group mentioned that governments often do not keep their promises. She mentioned that following a severe earthquake a few years ago, a number of countries promised financial aid totalling over \$1 billion.

Six years later, only 10% of that amount had come in.

In this same documentary, it was mentioned that, per capita, Canada was one of least generous among industrialized countries. And, unfortunately, the province of Quebec often rates lowest in this area.

I am saddened a lot by this. And more so when I hear people complaining angrily, from radio pulpits, about the efforts which are made to raise funds for victims of tragedies, stating that we have too many needs in Quebec to be wasting our money elsewhere. It moves me to tears when I hear such comments.

A few years ago, I had the privilege of publishing the French version of a book entitled "Prosperity and the coming Apocalypse". The author, Jim Bakker, was one of the American television evangelists who taught that the more you gave to religious causes, the richer you would become. Unfortunately, this man ended up in prison, accused of fraud.

Then, he experienced genuine repentance, and God transformed his heart. He later became involved in working with "skid row" people.

Jim writes in his book: "In many churches we still teach people how to be successful, how to become rich, how to use their talents; and all of this, not for the Lord, but for themselves."

Jesus spoke severely against associating material gain with religion. He warned us: "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money" (Matthew 6:24). The word "money" signifies more than dollars and cents. It includes all designations of material wealth - prosperity personified, and glorified greed. In the original Greek, Mammon is a word designating "all types of material wealth, revenue and profit"; in other words, riches. In trying to serve God while coveting material prosperity, many will lose both.

Obviously there is nothing wrong with aiming to be successful, to develop our talents and to prosper financially, provided that our motives are not selfish. We must not give to receive in return. A lack of generosity can become a hindrance to having our prayers answered.

Other recommended readings: Malachi 3:7-16; Luke 12:15-34; 6:19-31; 18:18-30; James 2:1-18.

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Haggai

Haggai is the first prophet to speak to the Hebrew people after their return from exile. In effect, a remnant of the people was allowed to return to the Promised Land to rebuild their city and temple. They became lax in their efforts, however, and rather than do what God had commanded, each one worked for his own interests only.

Haggai's task was not an easy one as he had to convince his contemporaries that they were wrong in acting this way. Here is a summary of his message:

"This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'These people say, the time has not yet come for the Lord's house to be built.' Is it time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin? Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it. You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?" declares the Lord Almighty. "Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house."

What can we conclude from this?

Simply that God does not approve of greed or selfishness; he wants us to become like him, to become a generous people.

## IN A NUTSHELL

- God possesses all things, and he tells us not to worry about "our daily bread". He wants to prove his generosity to us so that we in turn become like him, generous toward others.
- An orphan spirit is constantly preoccupied with what it can obtain to meet its own needs. If the person with an orphan spirit discovers something of value, he will immediately covet it, grab it, hide it, and keep it for himself.
- A lack of generosity can hinder our prayers.



MY PRAYER TO GOD

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## Transfiguration

It is said that God in his wisdom permits what he could easily prevent by his power.

We know that each trial we encounter can bring us closer to God and change us. On the other hand, how difficult it is to let go when we are torn by a multitude of choices which all seem pointless. How difficult it is to find peace in our soul in the midst of the storm! How difficult to believe in divine intervention when we have been praying for days and nothing has changed. Does God, who loves us, take pleasure in seeing us suffer?

As we have seen in the preceding modules, the fall of our first parents caused terrible consequences for the entire human race. It is therefore not God who is shooting darts of woe at us from his perch on a cloud. On the contrary, he desires that all of the most difficult circumstances of our lives work together for our good. We need simply to submit them to him.

Jesus, God the Son, also knew suffering. It is written in the epistle to the Hebrews that "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death". Jesus suffered and he invites us, by his example, to endure our suffering in communion with God. He showed us that it is possible to have peace in our heart in spite of difficult circumstances. He has shown that in union with God there is a place of refuge, a fortress where no harm can reach us. There is a place, like an oasis in the desert, where our soul can rest.

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you", the Lord tells us. Jesus cannot lie! He even promised that our prayers would be answered!

And there again, it is difficult for us to accept that God does not always answer the way we would like him to! That he answers in a way we don't comprehend. That perhaps we will only understand much later - maybe only in eternity.

If we are not convinced that God really loves us and that he always works for our good, then we will never experience his peace.

I recall an incident in my life when I was at a dead end. For several weeks, maybe even months, I asked God to intervene. I could not understand why I was in such difficulty and my negative emotions ruled my spirit. I pitied myself and tried to convince God to act. And I got angry because he refused to do what I was asking of him. It was therefore impossible for me to hear his voice.

Then, one morning, I came before God in total abandonment, at the end of my tether. I had nothing more to say to him and my spirit was broken. It was then that I heard God speak to me in

a soft whisper: "I love you and I am with you". He said nothing more. The trial I was going through stayed with me for an entire year. Nevertheless my attitude had changed. My sadness was replaced by joy and I was able to thank God for his love and his presence. In spite of the difficult circumstances, I knew that I was safe because God was with me. My soul was at peace.

Prayer is not a mystical exercise for spiritual gurus. It is the language of the heart in speaking to God. Prayer is the honest expression of our feelings. It is the inexpressible sigh of the soul in search of rest, this painful plea which is transformed into a melody of love to God. Prayer is also an act of abandonment, a leap of faith which hopes in the goodness of God. In this way we are changed, transfigured into the image of Christ.



### **Between Friends**

Have you ever experienced "the secret place", this refuge where the peace of God is found in trouble times?

Are there passages in the bible through which God has strengthened you in your trying times and which have become for you the key to entering into the secret place of his peace?

### LOVE IN ACTIONS

This week I will visit someone who is going through difficult times. Without bringing along any "pat solutions" I will ask the Lord to give me a passage from the bible to share with him or her. (Not forgetting that flowers or a small gift can bring a bit of joy to the distressed heart).

### A PRAYER

Le Seigneur The Lord is my light and my salvation - whom shall I fear?  
The Lord is the stronghold of my life - of whom shall I be afraid?  
When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh,  
When my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall.  
Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear;  
Though war break out against me, even then will I be confident.

One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek:  
That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,  
To gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.  
For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling;  
He will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock.  
Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me;  
At his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy;  
I will sing and make music to the Lord.  
Hear my voice when I call, O Lord; be merciful to me and answer me.  
My heart says of you "Seek his face!" Your face, Lord, I will seek.  
Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger;  
You have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, O God my Saviour.  
Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me.  
Teach me your way, O Lord; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors.  
Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes,  
For false witnesses rise up against me, breathing out violence.  
I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.  
Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.

*Psalm 27*

## **Hearing from God**

Dear Father in heaven,

I simply want to tell you that I love you and that I believe in your goodness even when I don't feel your presence. I know that you are with me regardless of my circumstances.

Here I am again, in our "secret place" where no harm can reach me. I lean my head on your shoulder; I rest in your presence. I love you!

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Luke 9:28-35**

"Jesus took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning."

It is surprising to see how many passages in the *Gospels* make reference to the prayer

A short time after performing outstanding miracles, Elijah experiences a state of depression and withdraws to a cave, hidden in the mountains. In spite of his great faith, he sees no hope in his circumstances and wants to die.

But deep in this dark cave, *God* was present. He speaks to Elijah with tenderness. He helps him to see his situation in the proper perspective. He strengthens his faith and gives him instruction. *God* did not change Elijah's circumstances, but he did change the attitude of his heart.

This is what happens when we discover the "secret place" of intimacy with *God*. It is then that our dark cave is transformed into a palace of radiant light.

## IN A NUTSHELL

- Prayer is the honest expression of our feelings. It is the unutterable sigh of the soul in need of rest.
- Praying is often climbing "the Mount of Transfiguration". The climb can be long or difficult, the obstacles numerous, but it is on this mountain that we enter a new dimension of spirituality. It is here that we see our earthly experiences in a new light.
- In union with *God*, there is refuge, a fortress where nothing can harm us.

## WHAT I HAVE LEARNED IN THIS CHAPTER

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## MY PRAYER TO GOD

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## The River of God

It is impossible for us to explain a miracle. No other human being can explain the miraculous healing of a blind person, nor the resurrection of someone from the dead - no more than we can explain the mystery of the Holy Trinity. By faith we accept these truths as they are revealed in the bible.

To believe in the bible and not believe in miracles would be to reduce the omnipotence of God to the scale of human logic.

As strange as it may seem, some believers (even theologians, pastors and priests) do not believe that God can still manifest his power and his gifts in our day. According to them, miracles were valid only in the time of Jesus and the first Christians. It seems that they want to put God in a little theological box so that he will remain quiet, like a "genie in a bottle".

The story is told of a young eagle that had lived in a chicken house from birth. For many years he remained in a closed-in pen with the chickens, pecking in the ground. When the farmer decided to let him go, instead of taking flight, he continued to walk and look down at the ground.

God calls us to take flight and to believe in the supernatural. The bible contains numerous examples of miracles and gifts that the Holy Spirit desires to operate through believers.

Jesus said that we can accomplish the miracles which he did during his stay on earth. Obviously, this is impossible in our own strength. The only One who can enable us is God. We do not have any alternative other than to believe in him if we desire to accomplish the impossible. We must believe what he teaches us in his Word and pray in faith.

The Holy Spirit desires to manifest his supernatural qualities through us.

His gifts vary. There are not two identical, a bit like snowflakes. There are no limitations with God - the Creator genius and innovator. There can be similarities as well as differences among the gifts, depending on the purposes of God.

But there is one absolute truth which we must remember: no gift nor manifestation coming from God can conflict with what he has already said in the bible. In the early Church there were different groups or sects who claimed to have received revelations from God that went beyond the Scriptures. Times have not changed very much. We must therefore remain vigilant. We must also remember that the gifts are not given to believers to boost their "egos". On the

contrary, in the kingdom of God, genuine spirituality is always measured by the humility and love we have for others.

Lastly, we must know that no spiritual gift is earned. If this were the case, they would not be, by definition, gifts. Instead they would be rewards given to those who had put forth the effort to obtain them.

God prefers to give his blessings because of his goodness, his generosity.



### **Between Friends**

Do you know anyone who operates in any of the gifts of the Spirit, and do you yourself have any? Give examples.

How do you discern whether a supernatural manifestation is really from God?

### LOVE IN ACTIONS

I will attempt to make contact with or attend conferences given by Christians with experience in the operation of the gifts of the Spirit, so that they can help me to better understand this aspect of the Christian faith.

### A PRAYER

When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed.  
Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy.  
Then it was said among the nations, 'The Lord has done great things for them.'  
The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.  
Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the Negev.  
Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy.  
He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow,  
Will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.

*Psalm 126*

## Hearing from God

Lord Jesus, I had not really paid attention to the fact that during your stay on earth you experienced these joyous times of ecstasy in the Spirit. I love you Lord and I want to bring joy to your heart. I open myself to you right now so that you can pour the torrent of your Spirit into me and bless me with the Holy Spirit's gifts. Go ahead, Lord, and let it flow into me. I open my mouth to drink in your water of life.

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Luke 10:8-24**

"At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children'."

Some time before speaking these words, Jesus had sent his 12 apostles into the towns and villages with the power to accomplish many miracles. Afterward he sent out 70 other disciples with the same mandate and clothed them with the same power of the Spirit. When they returned, they were full of joy and recounted to the Lord how the supernatural power of the Spirit had been manifested through them. Filled with gratitude, Jesus "full of joy through the Holy Spirit" spontaneously shouts praises to God.

Have you ever pictured Jesus expressing such joy in this way? Why was he so joyful? Simply because he saw the power of the Holy Spirit manifested in fullness through believers, with signs, wonders and miracles.

Do we not want to please the Lord? Well then, let us examine together a few of the gifts that the Holy Spirit wants to give us. (The text is found in I Corinthians 12:1-11).

1. The gift of wisdom (Luke 21:12-15; Acts 6:9-60; 16:6-7; 1 Corinthians 2:10-13).

Firstly, it must be said that the ability to hear the voice of God and to operate in the realm of the Spirit are privileges given to all Christians. The gift of wisdom, as described in our text, is a work of the Spirit communicating God's wisdom to us in specific situations. It is not just simple motivation to use our "common sense" or our own intelligence. On the contrary, the message of wisdom is revealed to us by God to communicate his divine wisdom for use in specific circumstances. This is what the preceding Scripture verses bear out.

2. The gift of knowledge (Mark 2:8; Luke 1:41-45; John 1:45-51; Acts 5:1-11; 10:19).

The gift of knowledge consists of receiving information from God - facts that the Holy Spirit desires to reveal, having to do with present or past situations in the life of an individual, of a group, of a town, a province or nation. It does not come as a result of the effort of human thought, but it is like a flash of knowledge given by the Holy Spirit.

I remember an occasion when a friend and I were praying for a young man, and all of a sudden our eyes met in surprise. We had both received from God at the very same instant the same revelation about something hidden in the life of this young man. With a great deal of tact, humility and brotherly love, we shared with him what God seemed to be telling us. The information was correct, as no one else was aware of the problem he was dealing with, apart from God. This gave him the opportunity to share his distress with us and we were able to encourage and pray with him for several hours.

3. The gift of faith (Matthew 14: 28-31; Mark 11: 12-24; Luke 8:22-25)

The bible mentions a number of individuals who experienced the supernatural intervention of God as a result of their faith. Of this number we find the Roman centurion whose faith was honoured by Jesus when he healed his paralyzed servant (Matthew 8:5-13). There was also the woman who suffered from hemorrhaging and who was immediately healed when she touched the hem of Jesus' robe (Mark 5:25-35). These examples show us that we all possess a certain measure of faith which God will honour if we trust him. The disciples asked Jesus one day to increase their faith. The gift of faith is more than the measure of faith we all have, it is a faith given by the Holy Spirit for the accomplishment of a supernatural act at a given moment.

4. The gifts of healing (Acts 3:1-10; 5:15; 9:10-18; 28:9).

During my trip to Vancouver Island, I went to the cathedral in Victoria to attend the ceremony of the blessing of the oil used symbolically to anoint the sick. I appreciated the sermon given by Archbishop Roussin, who set his notes aside to share with us his desire for renewed faith, calling upon the reality of the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit who works when we pray for the sick.

Unfortunately, in the extended family of Catholics, this truth is not recognized by all of the faithful. Some refuse to believe it, whereas others (even the religious community) turn to New Age practices, to Reiki and occult sciences. This is why there is a need for discernment, and for believing what the bible says about divine healing. The secret is to cling to the words of Jesus rather than to the opinions of others. This is when our faith becomes strong and when we see God working through us.

Jesus promised that if we prayed for the sick, we would witness many healings. What he said is true and I witnessed it personally a number of times.

Contrary to what we might think, the gifts of healing are not given solely to an elite group of "super Christians". Jesus clearly stated his desire to manifest his gifts though "those who believe" (Mark 16:17-18). Isn't this wonderful!

#### 5. Miracles (John 2:11; 10:38; Luke 5:1-7; Acts 5:12-16; 8:6; 14:3; 19:11).

The bible often uses the word miracle in a general sense to indicate a supernatural act of God (John 6:2). Certain texts, nevertheless, emphasize a slight distinction between these different manifestations (Acts 4:30).

We can more easily differentiate the gift of miracles from the other gifts when, for example, the accomplished act does not involve a healing. In this sense, the first miracle which Jesus did was to change the water into wine at the marriage of Cana. On another occasion, he multiplied the loaves and the fishes.

Jesus considered miracles as a sign of God's approval and proof of his existence (John 10:37-38).

However, some non-Christians can accomplish miracles. It is then that we should wonder where they get their power. Once again the bible is clear on the subject: Matthew 24:24-25; Acts 8:9-24; 13:8-12; Romans 8:9; I John 4:6.

#### 6. The gift of prophecy (Mark 12:35-37; John 4:17-29; Acts 11:27-28; 21:10-11; 27:9-10).

Contrary to the gift of knowledge that reveals information about the present or the past, the gift of prophecy reveals information having to do with the future of a person or a place.

Some people who exercise the gift of prophecy receive revelations that are more "mystical" (angelic visitations, dreams and visions). Others will "feel", "know", "sense", as though they had a more acute sense of perception. In this area of divine knowledge, they do not always understand what they feel, they just "know"!

Believers who exercise this gift are not fortune tellers or "Christian mediums". They do not have all the answers and do not try to take the place of God, as the bible clearly states that God wants to communicate personally with each one of us. The key to their effectiveness must be humility. They must seek to influence people by their lives more than by their revelations.

Immature people and others who prophesy with wrong motives can easily proclaim their own opinions as if they came from God. This is why the apostle Paul gives us the following advice:

Do not put out the Spirit's fire.

Do not treat prophecies with contempt or disrespect.

Test everything.  
Hold on to the good.  
Avoid every kind of evil.

I knew a "prophet" who had given a message to a young man as a "message from God" which called him to go to live in another city. But he had to first sell his house and marry the daughter of the "prophet". Fortunately the young man did not obey.

It is said that at the present time, the country of France has twice as many offices occupied by mediums as there are by medical doctors. People are more and more interested in occult phenomena and activity. Because of the uncertainty of the day in which we live, people want to know what the future holds.

For this reason the prophecies contained in the bible, are of untold importance. Genuine prophetic gifts of the Holy Spirit are also very precious. We need to desire them while at the same time being doubly cautious and discerning.

This is what the apostle John invites us to do: "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood" (1John 4:1-6).

#### 7. Distinguishing between spirits (Acts 13:9-11; 16: 16-18; 19:13-20).

The best way to perfect our discernment is to know the bible well and read it with diligence. The world is filled with false beliefs with shades of spirituality and sometimes even with shades of "Christianity".

In God's name they learn to invoke the spirits of the dead, to believe that "white magic" is a type of the Holy Spirit's action, and that the practices of divination or of Reiki can be adapted to the Christian faith.

More than at any other time in history, we need to be careful when it comes to spiritual gurus. Fortunately, God in his foreknowledge left us his written Word as well as the gift of distinguishing between spirits.

I know a man who practiced Hinduism for many years. He gave conferences in universities and he was so advanced in his religion that he could do miracles. Rays of bluish light were visible emanating from his fingertips. It goes without saying that he had gathered quite a following of disciples. Because he did good deeds, he was convinced that this power was given to him by God. But following his conversion to Christ, all of this "diabolical energy" left him - not without pain however.

#### 8. Speaking in different kinds of tongues (Acts 10:45-46; 19:6; 1 Corinthians 14:2)

Praying in tongues is among the lost treasures of Christianity. Yet the bible clearly speaks of the virtues of this gift. It must be noted here that speaking in tongues is not an aptitude to learning other languages.

Rather, it is a heavenly language, incomprehensible, given by the Spirit. The apostle Paul points out that it is available to all believers: "I would like every one of you to speak in tongues" (I Corinthians 14:5).

It is unfortunate that many theologians despise this gift to the point of associating it with demon possession. This is the conclusion that a few seminarians were quoted as saying recently in an article in the *Journal de Montréal*.

It is obvious that such affirmations show a lack of understanding with regard to the Scriptural texts and lack of respect toward charismatic believers. It is true that some sects and satanic groups seek to imitate or substitute the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but this just proves that if there is a counterpart, then the genuine exists as well.

The bible says that speaking in tongues is given to us by God as a very effective tool in prayer. This gift enables us to free our minds of worries and daily problems and allow ourselves to be transported by the Spirit to a level of prayer that we would have much difficulty reaching otherwise.

Speaking in tongues is also beneficial in unburdening the soul and making it easier to enter into God's peace.

#### 9. Interpretation of tongues. (Acts 2:4-12; 19:1-7; 1 Corinthians 14:5)

The interpretation of tongues is not the ability to translate any more than speaking in tongues is a human aptitude to learning other languages.

In both cases, it is a question of a gift of the Holy Spirit and certainly not of the fruit of one's intelligence.

The interpretation of tongues is simply a word of knowledge with the purpose of grasp and express, in an intelligible language, a message given in tongues by the Spirit.

This interpretation is only necessary if the message is addressed to a person or to a group. Otherwise, the person who is praying in tongues can continue praying without needing to be interpreted.

We conclude by saying that the practice of the gifts of the Spirit is not tied to our degree of spiritual maturity as Christians. God gives his gifts to those who believe in him and who ask him for them. As it is with other aspects of the Christian faith, we should grow in the use of the gifts of the Spirit. There are good books dealing with the subject in greater depth. None of us is perfect, no more than were the disciples in Jesus' day. Let us not allow our fears to hinder us from desiring the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Jesus wishes us to have them.

Other recommended readings: John 20:22; Acts 1:4-8; 1 Corinthians 2:1-16; Ephesians 6:18.

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Ezekiel

Ezekiel was a priest and a prophet who was taken captive and exiled to Babylon where he prophesied for 22 years. His name means "God strengthens."

The book of Ezekiel contains a number of prophetic and end-time visions through which God communicated strength and hope to those whom he loves.

As captives in Babylon, the Hebrews needed to hear that God had not abandoned them. Ezekiel's messages and visions convinced them that God was concerned with their future and his plan would be accomplished in their day as in every generation.

The vision described in chapter 47 is often interpreted as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which would spread throughout the world. This was also foretold by other prophets (Joel 2:21-32; Acts 2:16).

In this vision an angel takes Ezekiel by the hand and leads him little by little into the river of the Spirit until he is totally at the mercy of the current. Ezekiel swims in this clear water and becomes aware that it brings life everywhere it goes.

It flows from the temple of God, purifying the earth and causing trees to grow, their leaves serving as healing to the nations.

Jesus had foretold that after his departure he would give his Spirit to whoever asked it of him (John 7:38-39). This promise is still valid for us today.

We can swim in the river of God daily.

## IN A NUTSHELL

- To believe in the bible and not believe in miracles is to reduce the power of *God* to the scale of human logic.
- There is an absolute truth which we must always remember: No gift or manifestation, which comes from *God*, can contradict what the bible says.
- None of us is perfect, as were none of the disciples of Jesus. We must not let our fears hinder us from desiring the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is Jesus' desire to give them to us.

## WHAT I HAVE LEARNED IN THIS CHAPTER

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MY PRAYER TO GOD

Horizontal lines for writing a prayer.



## Perseverance

To pray is to discover God's will and then to ask him to accomplish it.

God does not want us to remain confused, waiting for vague and uncertain answers. Our faith would be much stronger if we prayed knowing his will. That is why God says through the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah: "Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known."

If, for example, I do not know that the bible tells us God desires every human being to be saved, I could not pray with faith for the conversion of people around me. On the other hand, if I believe sickness is sent by God to test us, then to pray for healing of the sick would be pointless. In order to better understand the role perseverance plays in prayer, let us review what we have learned to this point. This summary will help us gain the maximum from our study on prayer.

1. Praying should not be a burden but rather a joy. God is not a dull authoritative being, but he is joyful (Zephaniah 3:16-20). Even when we are going through difficult times, it is beneficial to come into God's presence and voice our thanks and praises to him. If we don't see anything good in ourselves or in our circumstances, we can still reflect on God's goodness and praise him for his qualities. Our emotions and our thoughts are not always predisposed to this type of practice, but they will change little by little as our faith chooses to reflect on God rather than on our woes. Reading aloud the Psalms, written prayers, or using recorded music and songs of praise can prove very useful in this way.

2. We need to get into our own "secret place", the oasis of rest and closeness which comes as a result of a heart-to-heart encounter with God. If our thoughts roam and bother us, it is possible to direct each of them toward God by changing them into praise. If I am preoccupied with the meal I have to prepare or with the debts that weigh me down, I can thank God for creating such good food or thank him for promising to provide for my needs. Sooner or later, our thoughts will settle down and the peace of God will enable us to hear his voice. Christian meditation is not "emptying oneself", but rather being "filled" by God.

3. This is where conversation with God begins. It is better to listen to his instructions than to speak. It is essential to share with God what is on our hearts, but we must allow him to

direct the conversation to the topic or topics he wants to talk to us about. God is the ultimate gentleman and he always acts in our best interest. The bible says that the Father wants to give us good things, that Jesus prays unceasingly for us and that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. It is important therefore to listen to the conversation taking place between the members of the holy Trinity concerning us. What God has to say may differ from that which we would like to hear him say. His aim is not always to remove obstacles before us, but to accompany us in overcoming them.

4. It is important that we write down what God says to us when we are praying. This will enable us to word our prayers, basing them on the revelations of his will. We can then read them aloud as we intercede. Jesus promised that if we ask any thing according to his will, we will receive it. Our written prayers are the result of our conversation with God and of the revelation of his will with regard to specific issues. These prayers become a powerful tool for intercession when we read them in faith. They help us to put into words the things that God wants us to pray for.

5. It is not impolite to address God by repeating the same things or by asking him to prove what he has already said in his Word. It is also legitimate to insist that he inspire us with passages from the bible depicting his will in certain instances. We can then include these passages in our written prayers.

Regular bible reading is therefore essential to getting to know God's will in a general sense and also to making sure that what we believe we have heard from God lines up with the bible. It is impossible for us to receive something from God in prayer which contradicts his written Word.

6. When we are convinced that we have heard from God and have checked it out in the bible, that we know his will in a circumstance or situation and have written a prayer backed by verses of Scripture, we can then ask God, again and again, to carry out his will, until the thing happens. As we see in the example of the prophet Daniel (Daniel 10:2-14), it is necessary to persevere until we have obtained that which we are asking. Our written prayer will keep our faith alive in spite of the delays in receiving the answer and opposition from the forces of evil.

7. In heaven, thousands of angles and other creatures spend their time praising and worshipping God (Revelation 4). It is said that God dwells in the midst of the praises of his people. In times like these he reveals himself to us in such a marvelous way that we forget everything we wanted to ask of him. We are overwhelmed with his beauty. When one is in love, all that matters

is to be close to the One he or she loves. Worship is simply the expression of a heart that loves God. Most often, it is when we are enraptured in this way that his divine presence becomes tangible and his revelation penetrates our spirit.



## **Between Friends**

Explain in your own words what each of these steps means to you, and mention what stage you have reached in your search for ways to improve.

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

This week I will search my heart, and my notes, to see if there are any prayers or concrete things God had asked of me, which I had not persevered in. I will ask God if I should make up for lost time and pick up again where I left off, or if it is too late to act.

## A PRAYER

I love you, O Lord, my strength.  
The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;  
My God is my rock, in whom I take refuge.  
He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.  
I call to the Lord, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies.  
The cords of death entangled me; the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me.  
The cords of the grave coiled around me; the snares of death confronted me.  
In my distress I called to the Lord; I cried to my God for help.  
From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears...  
He reached down from on high and took hold of me;  
He drew me out of deep waters.  
He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes, who were too strong for me.  
They confronted me in the day of my disaster, but the Lord was my support.  
He brought me out into a spacious place;

He rescued me because he delighted in me.  
You, O Lord, keep my lamp burning;  
My God turns my darkness into light.  
He is a shield for all who take refuge in him.  
For who is God besides the Lord?  
And who is the Rock except our God?  
It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect.  
He makes my feet like the feet of a deer;  
He enables me to stand on the heights.  
Therefore I will praise you among the nations,  
O Lord; I will sing praises to your name.

*From Psalm 18*

### **Hearing from God**

God of love, you invite me to stay in communion with your Spirit by persevering prayer, for the effectiveness of spiritual weapons that you give me depends on continual intercession. I desire therefore to remain alert and vigilant, attentive at the opportune moments, filled with the Spirit and interceding untiringly for all that you lay upon my heart (Ephesians 6:8).

### SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Luke 18:1-8**

"Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up".

Honestly I find there is nothing to add to these words of the Lord. Why not simply read them together and let the truth penetrate our hearts through the Spirit?

"He said: In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary'.

For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'

And the Lord said, 'Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?'

Other recommended readings: Mark 8:23-25; Luke 8:11-15; Romans 5:3-5; 2 Corinthians 6:4-10; Hebrews 6:11-20; 10:35-38.

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Moses

Moses is that person God used to perform great miracles to deliver millions of individuals who were slaves to the Egyptian Pharaoh. His name means "drawn from the water", referring to the fact that after his birth he was found by the daughter of the king in a small wicker basket floating on the waters of the Nile, where his parents had hidden him to save his life.

However, Moses had to leave his position as Prince of Egypt to become a simple shepherd. He spent 40 years in the desert before God accomplished the promise he had made.

Later, Moses met God on Mount Sinai where he received the Ten Commandments from his hand. He had become the friend of God. His intimacy with God was so tangible that his face literally shone with the glory. He is, for that matter, the only person in the Old Testament who saw God in all of his glory (Exodus 33:11-23).

Moses also understood the importance of praying with perseverance. We see a good example of this on the story of the war against Amalek. Aaron and Hur had even joined him in this war which was won simply by prayer and perseverance (Exodus 17:8-16).

## IN A NUTSHELL

- Praying is discovering *God's* will, and asking him to carry it out.
- What *God* has to say may differ from what we want to hear him say. His aim is not always to remove obstacles from our path, but to help us to overcome them.
- It is not impolite to repeat the same things over again when addressing *God*, or to ask him to prove what he has already said in the bible.



MY PRAYER TO GOD

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## 35

### Gethsemane

"*A*s for Sanctus, he also proved himself to be superior. 'I am Christian'. This is what he stated constantly in place of his name, his city, his race, in place of everything, and the pagans heard nothing else from him. There was also great opposition by the governor and the tormentors against him, so much so that, not knowing what else to do with him, they finally applied blades of red-hot copper to his most sensitive body parts. His poor body was a testimony to what happened. Completely wounded and bruised, shriveled, no longer appearing human...

Then there remained the blessed Blandine. After the whipping, after the savage beasts, after the rack, she was finally put into a net and delivered to a bull. For a long time she was thrown about by the animal, but she didn't suffer from what was happening because of the hope and the expectation of what she believed, and her conversation with the Christ. She, also, was sacrificed". (Letter from the churches in Vienna and Lyon, quoted by: Eusebius of Caesarea, Ecclesiastical history. Book 5, chapter. 1).

Do you know that thousands of Christians were tortured throughout history simply because of their faith in Jesus? We see many examples of this in the bible and such events have continued to our day.

Impossible, you say! People tortured because of Christ, in the 21st century? Yes, and a great number of them. For that matter, there are more Christian martyrs on earth today that there were at the time of the Roman Empire. According to "The World Christian Encyclopedia", there were 156,000 Christian martyrs in the world in 1998 and their number is increasing each year.

We have recently translated a book entitled "The heavenly Man". This is the story of a Chinese pastor who succeeded in fleeing his country and who tells of the atrocities which he and thousands of other Christians endured because of their faith. The following is an excerpt:

"Yun (this is the pastor's name) was arrested and tortured for several days because he refused to give them his name. They eventually succeeded, through their own network, in finding out what village he came from and they asked the local police force to come and identify him. After establishing his identity, they had him climb onto the back of a truck and they hanged him from the roof. They drove for some time at breakneck speed. Yun's body was jerked against the metal sides of the truck and the handcuffs ate into his wrists to the bone. His blood was spattered everywhere. (The Heavenly Man. David Hunt. White Rock, Canada. 1999. P.15).

"A few days later, they took him to the prison doctor. Rather than give him serum to cause him to talk, as they often do, the doctor asked the guards to hold him still. He opened a little box and took out some long needles. He drove the first one under Yun's thumbnail, and Yun cried out in pain. He drove another under his fingernail. Yun cried out uncontrollably. The doctor then drove a third needle under another fingernail and Yun lost consciousness. When he was taken back to his cell, he had been beaten so much that the other prisoners, in spite of their callousness, could not keep from crying" (Op. Cit. p.17).

Imprisonments, brutality and terrible torture are inflicted on these twenty-first century believers. Many die simply because of their faith in Jesus. According to Yun, there are presently millions of Christians in China who have underground meetings in order to avoid attacks by the government that wants to extinguish Christianity at all cost.

It is those lovers of Christ who, because of their love for the Saviour, have not retreated in the face of pain. Their lives become a psalm whose every verse calls us to live authentic Christianity.

I have quoted these examples to help us tune up our level of involvement in the service of our Lord. I wonder what portion of the 78% of Canadians, declaring themselves to be believers, would be ready to confirm their faith by dying for the love of God?

I am not referring here to the attitude of the Islamic extremists who blow themselves up for the cause of Allah! I am simply wondering about the sincerity of our commitment to follow Jesus.

We say that, in our country, it is not easy to be a Christian because we have to buck the current. Some young people abandon their faith when their opinions are ridiculed by their classmates or by their philosophy teacher.

I know some adult believers who are ashamed to admit that they read the bible. If they have to mention it, they use vague terms without ever mentioning the name of Jesus, through fear of "persecution". Are we really persecuted?

I believe that we should understand that Christianity is not simply adhering to a church, be it catholic or protestant. Faith is not a religious feeling that changes, from time to time, into pious conversation. The bible requires that we love God with all of our heart, all of our soul, all of our strength, all of our thoughts, and that we love our neighbour as ourselves. For the Chinese Christians, to love their neighbour means first of all to tell him what Jesus did on the cross for the salvation of humanity. They know that religion cannot help anyone and that without Jesus there is no hope of forgiveness. It is because of this message that they are imprisoned or put to death.

Now that we have learned how to pray, are we ready to look beyond the little circle of our personal needs to include the needs of others in our intercession; even the needs of those people we do not know? To pray for the suffering, is not this the least we can do for them? If we believe in the power of prayer, we know what a difference it can make.



### **Between Friends**

Do you ever feel compassion for people who are suffering, even if you don't know them personally? If so, what do you do about it?

In your opinion, what role can prayer play in seemingly desperate situations?

In what way can you pray effectively for people you do not know?

### LOVE IN ACTIONS

There are a number of ways to keep informed about the tragic situations of people in other countries, especially Christians. There are a number of Christian intercessory networks that communicate information regularly via the Internet or by mail; also, most missionary societies publish newsletters about the needs in many countries.

Why not gather this information and become involved, alone or in a group, to pray more for the needs of others?

### A PRAYER

Yahwé, Hear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy.

Guard my life for I am devoted to you.

You are my God; save your servant who trusts in you.

Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I call to you all day long.

Bring joy to your servant, for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

You are forgiving and good, O Lord, abounding in love to all who call to you.

Hear my prayer, O Lord; listen to my cry for mercy.

In the day of my trouble I will call to you, for you will answer me.  
For you are great and do marvelous deeds; you alone are God.  
Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth;  
Give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.  
I will praise you, O Lord my God, with all my heart;  
I will glorify your name forever.  
For great is your love toward me;  
You have delivered me from the depths of the grave.  
The arrogant are attacking me,  
O God; a band of ruthless men seeks my life-men without regard for you.  
But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God,  
Slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.  
Turn to me and have mercy on me;  
Grant your strength to your servant and save the son of your maidservant.  
Give me a sign of your goodness, that my enemies may see it and be put to shame,  
For you, O Lord, have helped me and comforted me.

*From Psalm 86*

## **Hearing from God**

Father God.

I have a tendency to be preoccupied mainly with what closely concerns me. I know that it is right for me to tell you of my personal needs, but I do not want to live selfishly. I want to pray also for people I do not know, whose needs are often much greater than my own. I come to you to ask you to lead me, to speak to me about this. Show me what I can do to alleviate the suffering of others. Tell me what I should pray for.

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Luke 22:39-47**

"Jesus, being in anguish, prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. 'Why are you sleeping?' He asked them."

I believe that this is the only place in the bible where Jesus insisted that his friends pray with him. With his divine nature, he could have chosen to wipe out all of his enemies with a snap of the finger, and risen to heaven on a cloud within sight of all of the inhabitants of the town, who would have then believed in him. But the Lord knew that he must go to the cross. He stayed vulnerable as a man and needed others to support him in prayer. On more than one occasion, Jesus asked his own to pray for him, but they were not sensitive to his request...they slept!

How difficult it is to put oneself in "someone else's shoes" when all is going well for us! How much time do we need to understand the impact our prayers can have in the lives of others? How many times must the Lord come and ask us to pray before we take his request seriously?

Other recommended readings: Matthew 9:38; Mark 13:33; Luke 6:28; 19:46; Acts 1:14; 2:42; 12:5; Romans 15:30; Colossians 4:2,12; 1 Thessalonians 5:17,25; 1 Timothy 2:1; 5:5; 1 Peter 4:7.  
requête?

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Esther

Esther is a Persian word meaning "star". This young Jewish orphan girl became queen in one of the greatest empires in antiquity. She is also the heroine in the book which bears her name. The story of Esther charms us with its simplicity and also by the love that Xerxes had for her. In this regard a profound truth is revealed to us; it is an analogy of the passionate love God has for us and his desire to share the riches of his kingdom with us. The Book of Esther also shows us the primary determining role played by our intercession with God.

In the story of this gracious queen, it is at the peril of her life that she succeeds in pleading the cause of her people and avoid the carrying out of evil Haman's slyly-connived, murderous plot.

Without Esther's intercession, thousands of innocents would have perished. On a larger scale, we can discern another attempt by the forces of evil to annihilate the Jewish nation and prevent the accomplishment of the prophecies about the coming of the Messiah.

It is obvious that God's plan was carried out, but not without the intervention of Queen Esther. This causes us to reflect on the importance God puts on our prayers in spite of his sovereign will. This is a mystery we can only understand when we are on our knees.

## IN A NUTSHELL

- Now that we have learned how to pray, are we prepared to look beyond the realm of our own personal needs to include the needs of others in our intercession, even those of people we do not know?
- To pray for those who are suffering, is not this the least we can do for them? If we believe in the power of prayer, we know what a difference it can make.
- How many times must the Lord come and ask us to pray before we take him seriously?





## The Song of Angels

*We* have seen that worship occupies an important place in our relationship with God. The term, which has somewhat lost its meaning in the half-light of religious practices, is first and foremost the expression of our loving affection toward God.

To worship God is to offer him our life, our thoughts, our actions. It is to contemplate his beauty and allow our heart to be kindled with admiration for him.

To worship God is to let our soul sing a melody to him as gentle and beautiful as the song of angels.

To worship God is to allow our love for him to well up through the uniqueness of our personality.

Christians of all ages have expressed their worship to God in various ways; through music, through the arts, literature, and through contemplation. Their praises, whether joyous or painful, ascended toward heaven like incense, inviting us to join them in their thanksgiving. This is what we read in the Psalms.

It is also what we find in the contemporary songs of adoration such as the works of those who preceded us on the pathway of faith.

These people were lovers of God, believers, whose melodies have spanned the centuries to kindle in us the desire to love God passionately.

Among them we find Theresa of Lisieux, whose writings inspire us to offer our lives as a gesture of love, an act of worship to God. Thank you, Theresa, for the beautiful heritage you have left us:

"It is natural to think of someone we love".

"I speak heart to heart... I simply tell God what I want to tell him, without flowery words, and he always understands me".

"God does not weary of hearing from me when I tell him my joys and my sorrows in simplicity, even though he already knows them".

"I don't tell him anything if not that I love him more than I love myself, and I know in my heart that it is true since I belong to him more than I belong to myself".

"Often silence itself is capable of expressing my prayer, but God understands everything, even the silence of a childlike soul filled with thankfulness".

"Sometimes when I read certain spiritual works where perfection is shown through a thousand obstacles, surrounded by a thousand illusions, my poor spirit tires quickly and I close the scholarly book that was wearying me and drying out my heart, and I put up the Holy Scriptures. It is then that everything seems to light up, a single word unfolds infinite horizons before my soul. I see that I need only to let myself go with abandonment as a child to the arms of a good God."

"In this weakness, the Holy Scriptures and the reproduction come to my rescue; in them I find solid, completely pure food...To keep the Word of Jesus is the only condition for our happiness, the proof of our love for him".

"To me, prayer is a leap of the heart, a simple glance toward heaven, a cry of recognition and love from within a trial as well as from a heart of joy."

"I beg of you, O my God, to see me only through the face of Jesus and his heart of consuming Love".

"Jesus and the poor little Theresa had seen each other and understood each other."

"Keeping my eyes on you. Fascinated by your divine gaze."

"Enable me to be like you, Jesus".



### **Between Friends**

In what way do you express your worship to God most naturally?

Have you ever felt intense moments of spiritual joy or ecstasy? Explain.

Do you enjoy times of worship in the company of other believers? Why?

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

I can worship God in many ways; alone or in a group, through artistic expression, contemplation, celebration, and through joy. This week I will explore new ways of expressing my love to God.

Why not invite other believers, or join them, to simply sing praises to the Lord together?

## A PRAYER

Praise the Lord.

Praise God in his sanctuary;

Praise him in his mighty heavens.

Praise him for his acts of power;

Praise him for his surpassing greatness.

Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,

Praise him with the harp and lyre,

Praise him with tambourine and dancing,

Praise him with the strings and flute,

Praise him with the clash of cymbals,

Praise him with resounding cymbals.

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord.

*Psalm 150*

## Hearing from God

You know, O my God! To love you on this earth, I have but today!

Lord, I want to see you, unveiled, unhidden by the clouds;

But exiled from you, far from you, I languish.

May your loving face not be hid from me, if but for today.

I will soon take flight, to sing your praises,

When the day will have shone, unending, on my soul.

I will then sing with the lyre of angels,

Eternal God of Today!

*Theresa of Lisieux, (June 1st, 1894)*

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Luke 24:50-53**

"Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God".

Praising God is expressing our joy, our love to him. From *Genesis* to *Revelation*, we see numerous examples of men and women who worshiped God with a sincere heart, sometimes in silence and contemplation, but more often in joy and exuberance. That is what we see when we consider the life of David, this man whose heart was consumed with love for God, who left us a heritage of a number of psalms and a beautiful example of passionate worship (2 Samuel 6:12-16).

As our text indicates, the disciples of the Lord knew how to celebrate God. Even though the artists of the Middle Ages often depicted Jesus as serious, sad, or effeminate, his face should have radiated with joy. Can you imagine Jesus jumping and dancing as David did, praising God with all of his strength? Why not?

It is not surprising to see people lose interest in churches when worship is more like a funeral service than a celebration of the risen Christ. Let us allow the Spirit of God to overwhelm us! Let us express our love to God with sincerity and with faith! Let us celebrate him with all of our heart! Who knows! Maybe even the angles will join the party!

Other recommended readings: 1 Chronicles 16; 25:1-7; 2 Chronicles 29:30; Nehemiah 12:27-43; Isaiah 61:1-3; Ephesians 5:18-19.

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Miriam

Miriam, whose name means "rebellion" was certainly a determined woman. Elder sister of Moses and Aaron, she was also a prophetess.

She took part in the exodus of the Hebrew people from Egypt and was witness to the great miracles that God accomplished. We see her, among other places, on the other side of the Red Sea, after God had divided the waters to save the lives of all the people.

At that time Moses had shouted his joy and praises to God. But Miriam could not contain herself. She took a tambourine and began to dance, singing her thankfulness to God. Her overflow of enthusiasm became contagious and others joined in the singing and dancing. What a party! (Exodus 15:1-21).

Who said that our praises to God should always be given in a sober and solemn way? Miriam's example witnesses to the contrary. It is interesting to note that the word "enthusiasm" that we use regularly in our current vocabulary is made from the words "en" and "theos", which mean "in God". God is the source of joy. Let us praise him therefore with love and a thankful heart!

## IN A NUTSHELL

- To worship God is to offer him our life, our thoughts, our actions. It is to contemplate his beauty and allow our hearts to glow with admiration for him.
- Worship of God is the welling up of our love for him, as expressed through the uniqueness of our personality.
- From Genesis to Revelation, we see the many examples of men and women who worshiped God with sincere hearts, sometimes in silence and contemplation, but more often with joy and exuberance.

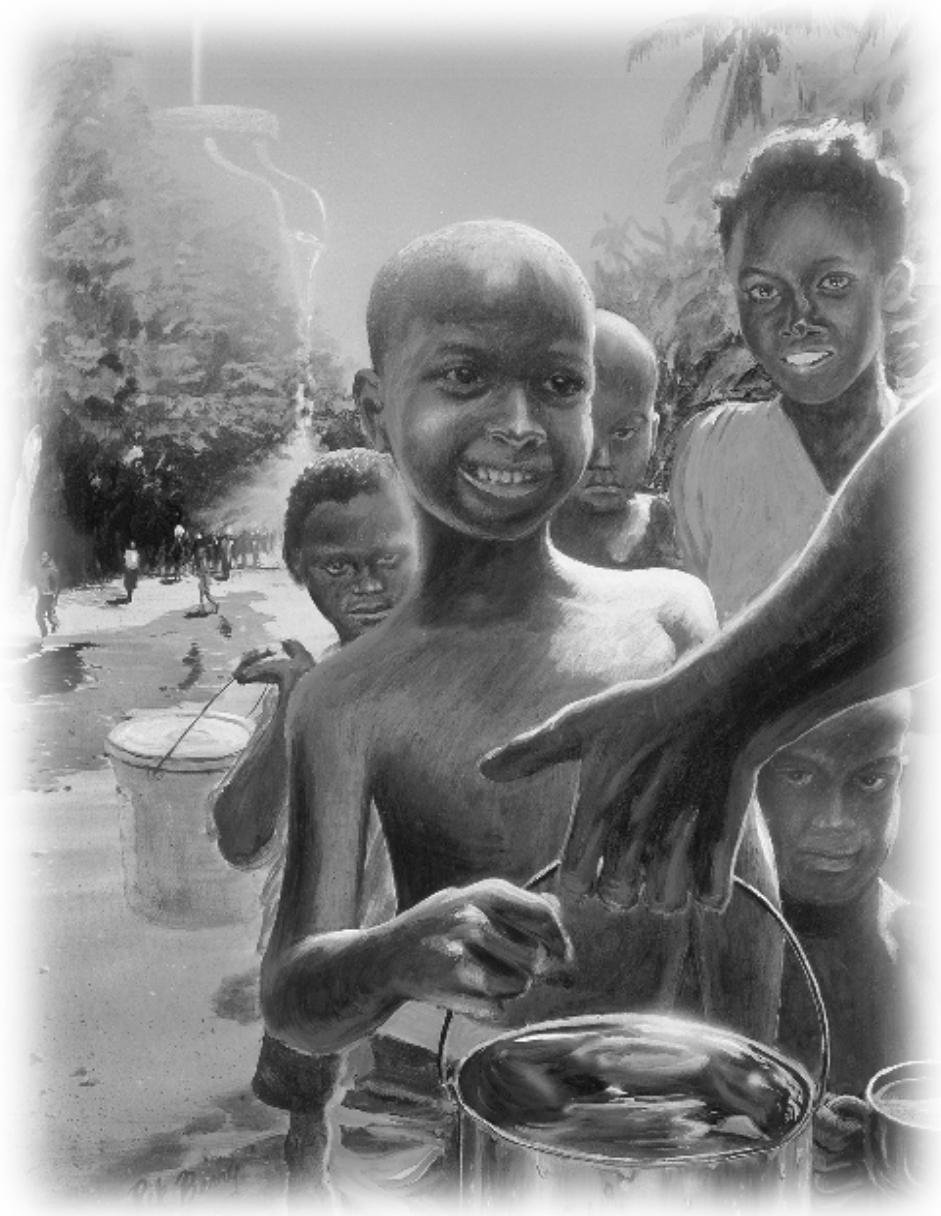






# The Secret of Happiness





CUP OF COLD WATER  
*RIK BERRY*



# Introduction

*We* have now reached the last segment of this great adventure. Congratulations for staying with us to this point. Before getting into this new part, let's briefly review the ground we have covered thus far.

We can summarize Part I, *Loving God*, with the words "heart to heart". In effect, these modules enable us to know God better through the study of his attributes, his character, his creative power and his redeeming love. We see that God has a personality and that he desires to develop an intimate relationship with each one of us.

Part II, *God in Me*, can be summed up as "our spiritual heritage". Through different testimonies and the study of the epistle to the Romans, we understand the importance of responding positively to God's plan of redemption as manifested in the atoning death of Jesus on the cross. We appreciate the beauty of divine pardon and its beneficial effects on our consciences and our lives. The essential role of the Holy Spirit in our walk with God is also emphasized.

In the third Part, *Heart to Heart with God*, we are transported into the world of the supernatural. We discover the primary and essential importance of conversing with God. We learn to change the information God gives us into persevering prayer and we ask the Spirit to bestow his gifts upon us.

Here we are, equipped and ready to proceed to the next step in our spiritual journey. We will now ask the Lord to carry out his will through us unto others. That is the Secret of Happiness!

This segment encourages us to transform our fillings of love unto actions. Everyone should pay a particular attention to the section *Hearing from God* in each module. Take time to ask God for precise instructions about how you (or your Small Group) can get involved towards helping other and how to manifest God's love in your community. It is easy! All we have to do is to extend one hand toward God and the other towards the people around us.



## God in My Home

"*G*od is love and our faith must be alive. Nothing amused me more than those bumper stickers on cars, especially in the United States, that said "God is Love". "How naïve", I used to say, before having experience God for myself. I know now that sincere faith is born out of a personal experience with God. Faith cannot take root in a book.

When I was an unbeliever, I knew the bible better than many religious people, and even though I knew many passages by heart, it was all just theory. I did not know God any more than I knew Churchill, after reading two or three of his biographies. To read about someone, or to read the writings of a person, does not constitute a relationship with that person.

To the one who has had an encounter with God, this experience is deeply moving. As the bible says, it is this encounter that brings about our new birth. From mortal, we become immortal. Life on earth, even the most oppressive life, seems more like a prelude to an eternal existence. Worries, cares, disappointments and difficulties which were of such great importance, are now seen in a totally different light - as exams during a course of study. Those desires and aspirations that controlled our actions and our goals, now give place to the will of God. Meeting God and yielding control of our lives to him makes us like him.

During my years as a practicing psychiatrist, every time I witnessed a patient coming out of social, emotional, or financial misery, I realized that it was primarily because he or she had experienced a profound inner change. In a general sense in our society, the opposite prevails. We want to get rid of crime by repression and fear of punishment. We inject millions of dollars into special programs, hospitals and foster homes - but the misery, poverty and social unrest just continue to increase. We cannot create a social conscience and the recognition of good or evil, by government intervention or health services. Nor can we create loving families, positive self-esteem, the desire to excel, or the sense of responsibility - with government programs. Overcoming misery is triggered from within. This trigger is a face-to-face encounter with God".

*Dr Nathalie Beaudet. (Dieu dans ma maison. Édimag. 2005. p. 36-37)*

## Between Friends

What must I do for God to be present in my home, under my roof?

In what way can I get other families in my neighbourhood interested in God?

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

I will make a list of people that I know who may need help in different areas and/or possibly be interested in participating or starting a weekly small group gathering in their home.

Suggestions: Start a Small Group with:

- the members of your family
- your neighbours
- single-parent families
- single men
- single women
- parents who would simply like to meet to pray for their children

## A PRAYER

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace!

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, light;

Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may

Not so much seek to be consoled, as to console;

Not so much to be understood, as to understand;

Not so much to be loved, as to love;

For it is in giving that we receive;

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
It is in dying that we awaken to eternal life.

*Saint Francis of Assisi*

## Hearing from God

Heavenly Father, show me what to do to make my home and my environment a place where you are welcome. Show me how to love you within my family context. Show me how to cause my home to reflect your joy so that it becomes a haven of peace. I am listening attentively!

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Matthew 5:9**

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God!"

I recently visited a well-known Christian Internet site and was disappointed to see that their approach to believers who were divorced was a very hard approach. According to them, the problem is that divorcees are not genuine Christians. It upsets me to hear such comments.

I understand that one of the roles of the Church is to preserve the sacred aspect of marriage in society and I fully accept this.

However, it is clear that not all churches get involved in helping those who are suffering in their souls. As a result, in certain religious circles, divorced people are still treated as part of an inferior caste. With such attitudes, it is not surprising that churches remain empty rather than being filled with the multitude of hurting people, people thirsting for genuine faith and who should normally be welcomed.

In our country (and particularly in Quebec), the psychologists and social workers have taken the place of the parish priests of times past. People consult them to free their consciences from guilt.

The tragedy is that with a good number of case workers and doctors, in their desire to counter the sometimes negative effects of religion, they have managed to shut out God himself. Many have turned to New Age philosophies. Others have chosen atheism, devoid of all moral principles. The problem with suppressing God is that one also suppresses certain biblical values

which are essential to the good functioning of society. In Québec, this distancing from biblical values has had catastrophic results.

We already know that for a number of years now, Quebec has one of the highest rates in the world of suicides among its youth. Suicide is now by far the primary cause of unnatural deaths in our province. We now have twice as many suicide victims as highway accident victims.

In Quebec, 27.6% of pregnant women choose abortion. We also hold the Canadian record for out-of-wedlock births, with 54.3% of Quebec children born to unmarried couples. This is more than double the rate of out-of-wedlock births observed in the other provinces.

I do not believe that the role of Christianity in the light of these distressful facts is that of an authoritarian judge, to condemn all these guilty people. On the contrary, Jesus taught us by his example to care for people rather than crush them. For that matter, the Bible proves to us that family life was never without its difficulties even among believers. The first family, that of Adam and Eve, as mentioned in *Genesis*, was torn by a terrible tragedy: the death of their son Abel, killed his own brother, Cain. Later, we see the daughters of Lot causing their father to become drunk in order to commit incestuous acts with him. Later on, it was Abraham, for whom a sexual encounter with a servant girl caused serious family conflicts. Jacob, his grandson, forefather of the Jewish people, was polygamous. King David also, a sensitive man who loved God passionately, experienced his dark moments. He committed adultery with the wife of a man who was totally loyal to him, and later had him killed. The child born of this illicit relationship died. Absalom, another son of David, led a violent revolt against his father. And yet another son, Solomon, had an extremely perturbed family life.

It is clear that God never required the authors of the biblical accounts to hide the faults and failures of this great people of antiquity. It helps us understand why Jesus and the writers of the New Testament gave family life and conjugal faithfulness a role of primary importance.

God is sensitive to all true heartfelt repentance and his forgiveness is unending. He nevertheless holds harmonious family relationships in high esteem, where love reigns and where each member blossoms to his full potential.

Hence the importance of not excluding God, but of giving him access to our hearts and our homes, regardless of the difficulties we encounter. To this end, small groups can play as important a role in prevention as they play in providing support.

Rather than judge homes in difficulty, why not seek to help them, following Jesus' example? There is an unfailing recipe for experiencing the fullness of God. In his Sermon on the Mount, in the Beatitudes, Jesus explained clearly how to live happily on earth. Genuine happiness is not

hard to find, and as Dr. Albert Schweitzer put it so well, "Happiness is the only thing that doubles when it is shared."

Other recommended readings: Matthew 7:24-25; Ephesians 5:15-33; 1 Peter 3:1-9; Proverbs 31:10-31

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Joseph

Joseph, an honest carpenter, was in love with a young lady by the name of Mary. They were engaged and soon to be married when the most unexpected event took place. Mary was pregnant. What now?

Joseph knew full well that the laws of the land required that an adulterous woman be stoned, and he also knew that he had not slept with Mary. How would he break the news to family and friends, explaining that Mary had never slept with a man but had become pregnant by the intervention of the Holy Spirit? It was hard to believe! He himself didn't believe it and was preparing to break off with her secretly when an angel of God appeared to him and confirmed that what Mary had said was true. He decided then to marry her.

Joseph and Mary certainly received disapproving looks and were judged by their peers. From that point on their reputation was tarnished in the eyes of society. The beginning of their family life was a succession of difficulties and strife. They traveled for days on a donkey's back when Mary was pregnant, and she had to give birth in a stable. They then left their city in a hurry to take refuge in another country because of the actions of an insane king. They later returned to live in the small town of Nazareth, a town that was not recommended to "respectable" people.

Jesus grew up in a family that had suffered rejection. People must have looked at him and thought: "This is Joseph's illegitimate son." It is not surprising that throughout his life the Lord was referred to as "the friend of sinners". Even though he did not deserve it, he knew what it was to be treated as a reject from society... as a third-class citizen!

## IN A NUTSHELL

- We cannot create loving families, good self-esteem, the desire to excel, or a sense of responsibility - with government programs. Overcoming misery is triggered from within. This trigger is a face-to-face encounter with God.
- Rather than judge families in difficulty, why not follow the example of Jesus and help them?
- Happiness is the only thing that is doubled when it is shared.



MY PRAYER TO GOD

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## God in My Workplace

*A*t a precise time in my life, without realizing the impact it would have on my future, I sincerely asked God to come and occupy first place in my life, to "live in me", as Christians sometimes put it. I gave my heart to Jesus Christ. I accepted what the bible says about him, that is, that he is my Lord and my God. From that moment on I did not fully realize that he had taken me at my word.

"And they lived happily ever after and had a lot of children." What an illusion! My walk with God was not and is still not a fairytale: I sometimes draw back from him, I often fail, and I constantly think of giving up. But he brings me back to himself, he always lifts me up, he helps me regain lost ground, and he never abandons me.

For some months now I have felt like I was walking in a dry desert. In fact I have the distinct impression that I am losing ground in this desert - as though I were walking and all around me is nothing but sand dunes as far as the eye can see. Sometimes I see footprints in the sand, but instead of following them, I do it my way and continue on a path leading nowhere. I stop reading my roadmap, the bible. I communicate using my prayer "walkie-talkie" in a haphazard manner.

But once again, God places a new set of tracks in the sand to help me find my way. And this time I decide to trust him once again.

It is generally quite a challenge for me to "open up", to speak from my heart and not from my head, to be totally real and as transparent as an open book.

For that matter, to speak of a desert is using imagery to express how I feel on the inside. To get to the nitty gritty, I could just say that what's needed in my life is to tune my head to my heart. My life functions according to the dictates of my head. I even have the impression by times that I love with my head and not with my heart. With my head I am in control. The things I do not want known are well protected behind high impregnable walls. I am quite capable of dampening the efforts of whoever tries to get too close to me, and no one would ever suspect that weaknesses and fears are hiding in the background, in my fortress.

But ...what drought!

I see myself at the age of 17, on the eve of the last day to choose my course of study. At the time I had no idea what I really wanted to do. I still had the dust of some crazy dreams from my childhood in my mind, but they were buried very deep in my spirit. Weird ideas they

were. Ideas that I dared not allow to surface for fear of yielding to them. I remember when as a youngster I would gather all my dolls and teddy bears and put them on my bed at night. Playing the role of Mother Theresa, I would heal them, and listen to each one in turn as they told me of their torments. Obviously, at 17, this project no longer made sense. I needed to think ahead. But a future as a missionary was too uncertain. Besides, I would have to depend on someone else in order to succeed - Someone greater than I. I was now at a point in my life where I wanted to do everything for myself, to have total control of my life and everything in it. So I chose to become a policewoman. This would provide job security, a suitable salary, the impression of serving the public, and above all, at this point I did not believe that policemen (women) were confronted with threatening situations which made them vulnerable.

I spent three years in college and Police Academy without ever feeling that I belonged there. At the end of this time, I met the man who would become my husband. Not much time had elapsed between the day I had decided to follow the Lord and the point where I began the procedure of finding a job on the police force. I had already been very disappointed when I realized that I was still the same person the day after my conversion! I had thought that God would change my heart, and give me new talents and new gifts! I could not really accept that I still had the same weaknesses and still made the same mistakes. I thought I understood the theory of his Word and believed that it would be just as easy to put it into practice - after all, the most important thing was to love God and to love one's neighbour, wasn't it?

But for a cerebral person like me, who functioned completely by her intellect, I could not suddenly become the opposite. I couldn't even really love God - my head was telling me that we cannot love someone we don't know and who is not real in the physical sense. Loving my neighbour was just as difficult because to love is to invest of oneself, to accept to become vulnerable and understand that we may also be hurt in certain relationships.

Even though all of these things were still unclear to me, I felt ready to begin my new job. And one week after my marriage I entered the profession. I thought that I would never stray from my principles and that my conduct would be so irreproachable that people would notice something different about me. My pride quickly took a severe blow, not because of my fellow workers, but because of my own mistakes. My comments were not always as kind as I would have wanted them to be, and I was often judgmental. Like the night I was working with a fellow policewoman and told her about some people at our church who were in serious financial difficulty. I told her that my husband and I had decided to help them out by buying them some groceries. I also mentioned that, even though I was convinced this was a good deed, I found it a bit stressful in the light of the precarious state of our own finances. She began to comment,

and in my head I figured she was going to try to reason with me and suggest that we keep our money for our own needs. But no! She said this instead: "Annie, if they are ever in need again, I will give you \$40 to buy a few groceries for them. It's not much, but I would be glad to do it." Well, not only had I misjudged my co-worker in my heart, but I believe that I was motivated by pride in telling her about what we had done. It was to prove to her that, even if I made mistakes at work that could cause people to doubt my faith, I did go beyond the call of duty and make sacrifices for others. Once again I was terribly disappointed in myself, particularly for not admitting my judgmental attitude of her, even though it was but for a second, and for not asking her forgiveness.

I had thought I was strong and that I would never do such stupid things. When I returned home, I felt like giving up totally. How could my fellow workers consider me a genuine Christian when they saw me compromising my principles by times, gossiping, and committing the same mistakes common to everyone?

This was very hard for me to swallow. I was afraid of being judged since I had held up very high standards for myself that I wasn't able to keep. Fortunately I had the opportunity to work with some terrific people who were not the least bit judgmental and who had great respect for my beliefs. I slowly learned to accept my shortcomings and the fact that I needed to apologize for them, and do everything possible to avoid repeating the same mistakes.

I was able to learn a lot from my top-notch co-workers. During this time I was becoming aware of the fact that I could not do the work with my head only, even though logic and judgment do play the greater role in this profession. There were times when my emotions took over and I was confronted with my own vulnerability. And it frightened me.

It was not the type of vulnerability that shows up when we no longer know what to do and we feel trapped, but rather the feeling of powerlessness.

This was made real in one instance when we went to the home of an elderly couple. Upon our arrival the 80-year old man was nervously waiting for us on his doorstep. He ushered us in. It was a small house full of warmth and souvenirs. His wife was lying on the bed. She was very pale, about 75 years old. A number of empty pill bottles lay scattered on the dresser. When we uncovered her, we saw that not only had she taken all of the pills, she had also attempted to stab herself in the abdomen. Up to this point, I had succeeded in carrying out all of my work in an intellectual manner. Then I felt the tug at my heart; I felt so powerless in the situation. No matter what I did, I could not change a single thing. I was unable to console the man who didn't understand why such a thing would happen after more than 55 years of married life. He told me

about all of the difficulties they had come through together. His wife's despair had been devastating but there was nothing I could do to help him now.

Obviously I spoke about this to no one. I tried to put it all out of my mind. Later, there were a number of situations when those same emotions resurfaced. No situation in particular, just everyday cases; those where we invade people's privacy. I could not really figure out how to deal with these emotions and I preferred to stockpile them somewhere inside of me and not think about them again.

But the day came when I couldn't keep it in any longer. It was as though my heart just overflowed. I wept for hours without reason until I fell asleep exhausted. I had worked for more than a year believing that I could handle everything myself and rise above it on my own, by my own volition. This was the first time my heart had sent me an alarm signal, telling me that it existed, and that my life couldn't be totally controlled by my intellect alone. The crisis was over fairly soon, or so I thought, and I resumed my duties, only to realize that I was not functioning well. I had to readjust my sights.

Thankfully I found an amazing ally in my husband. Before this happened, I would talk to him about my work - the facts, the people I worked with, and the funny stories. Never did I share what I was experiencing or what I had felt. Slowly I began to do this.

He didn't insist. I shared with him the emotions that were easiest to put into words, to see what it would do to me. I was very ill at ease. I would only tell him a bit at a time and always spoke of a lot of other things at the same time so that I wouldn't be overcome with the emotion. I didn't want it to show. He never inquired beyond what I was capable of sharing. Paradoxically I became aware that even though I was terrified of opening up and being vulnerable, it helped me immensely.

We began to pray together again and I renewed my spiritual journey; I no longer tried to do everything in my own power. My work went better, my marriage improved, and my relationship with God was slowly growing stronger day by day. It took effort for me to share my feelings with my husband daily, and even though things were going well, I was still disappointed with my own inner resistance to this change.

At this point in time, in the interest of their careers my co-workers decided to apply for transfers, and one by one they left the station. I was losing the only bit of security I had acquired in my work even though we still kept in touch.

Nothing was the same anymore, however. I wasn't really nervous about working with new people as I usually found it to be an enriching experience, but I ended up as the senior person on the team - a role which I did not desire at this particular point in time. In some ways I

avoided specific responsibilities for fear of failure. I had lost the backing of my fellow-workers who all had more than 10 years' seniority and with whom I had worked in a secondary capacity. Now, having to fill the primary role did not appeal to me at all, and as a result I requested a transfer to another job for a couple of months.

I started a new job in a completely different milieu. Rather than being on the road answering calls, I was working in a detention centre. The tasks were totally different and I was back within my comfort zone - intellectual work, administrative tasks with clear procedures to follow. I was no longer confronted with hard-to-deal-with emotions. Within a short time I had completely erased the path I had succeeded in clearing up to that point, and I took back the controls of my life.

Since I was no longer experiencing those former intense emotions, I stopped sharing my experiences with my husband, and little by little those precious times of sharing and closeness disappeared.

I had fallen into an insidious trap. Believing that I had regained control in the employment realm, I thought I was regaining it in my everyday life as well. I returned to my old habit of wanting to be in complete control of everything in my universe - not wanting to feel weak ever again. I didn't want to be dependent on anyone else. However, in reality, I was losing ground! In no time at all I had eliminated all of the "dependencies" in my life which, in my eyes, had made me vulnerable. I closed the fortress of my heart once again and my head took over at the controls. I was happy in my work, I had other very good co-workers, and all seemed to be in order.

But then I began to receive indicators that I wasn't doing too well ...and I didn't want to pay any attention to them. On one occasion when I was in a discussion, I said something stupid and then asked a co-worker to corroborate what I had just said. He answered that he would not denigrate those he kept company with. Another time, in the same week, I almost lost my temper over a triviality. I knew I was in the wrong and I knew that I was giving way to a part of me that I didn't like, but I was following the way of least resistance. My relationship with my husband was drifting into superficiality as well, and my relationship with God was also wearing thin. It was at this point in my life that the editor of this book approached me to write up my testimony!

After a number of days' hesitation, I accepted. Then I took a further month to reflect on what I would write. For a moment I thought I could tell some nice vibrant, touching stories of experiences I had had in my work, and interweave the beauty of walking with God and how he intervenes in my situations. But then I decided to set all chatter aside and share my life as it really is. I wanted to tell how very demanding it can sometimes be to keep close to God, how

difficult it was for me to admit my imperfections, and how even more difficult it was to deal with them. I felt terribly unworthy of this privilege of sharing about God. Especially since, according to me, my story didn't put God in a very good light. At this point, the story of the "footprints in the sand" came to my mind. Perhaps you know it.

A man was contemplating the path his life had taken as it was depicted by a set of footprints in the sand. There were his own footprints, and God's. He observed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that this occurred at the most difficult times in his life.

So he asked God why he had abandoned him in the most difficult times of his life, and God answered: My precious child, I love you and will always love you. When you see only one set of footprints in the sand, it is then that I carried you on my shoulders. If there was only one set of footprints in my desert, they weren't mine, they were God's. In those times when I thought I was strongest, I was actually weakest.

And he carried me on his shoulders.

So I spent a month examining myself, reflecting, and praying. I became aware of quite a number of things in all areas of my life. I was still very fragile as my tendencies to want to be in complete control were still very strong. I knew that I must re-embark on the road I had previously begun, opening my heart and trusting.

I also saw that the person who surfaces when I get away from God is one I do not like and my faults show up all the more. I understood that if God had such high standards and required so much of me, it was not a whim nor just to have me adhere to the rules of some religion. Instead, he wanted my best to radiate to those around me. I also realized that the standards I had wanted to keep weren't God's, as they didn't come from my heart. I remembered that in spite of my difficulties, I had decided follow him one day. And he promised he would never leave me.

*Annie Messier*

## **Between Friends**

Do the people around you know that you are Christian and that you love God? How do they react to that?

How do you live out your faith at work?

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

Were you aware that there are a lot of small groups of believers who succeed in their places of work? I even recently discovered a directory offered to public employees entitled "Directory of Believer Groups in the Workplace". This directory contained a list of the groups that meet in the workplace, usually at noon, to study the bible, to pray, to watch video-cassettes or to share what God has done in their lives.

To my great astonishment, many of these meetings take place in federal buildings including those on Parliament Hill, the Treasury Board, and the R.C.M.P. The Association of Christians in the Public Sector has been in existence since 1979. Their primary goal is to provide encouragement and spiritual help to believers as well as to those who do not yet know the love of God. They pray for the government, the ministries, and for their colleagues.

Why not follow their example and form a Small Group, with the participation of fellow workers, to pray for managers and the other employees? God will certainly show you many ways to make your workplace more pleasant and to do good to the people around you!

## A PRAYER

To love is to be vulnerable. From the instant you love, your heart is certain to be hurt and even to be broken. If you absolutely want to keep your heart intact, don't give it to anyone. Just cover it with hobbies, with trivial pleasures, solidly enclosed in a tomb of selfishness.

In this dull environment, without air or movement, your heart will soon harden and become unapproachable, imperturbable. The only place where we are completely protected from all of the dangers and uncertainties of love... is in hell.

Teach me, dear Lord, to see with the eyes of my heart.

### **Hearing from God**

Dear Jesus, I want to listen to you as you tell me the way to demonstrate your love to others. Enlighten my intelligence so that I can see the qualities you have created in me and how to make them available to you at my workplace. Show me the gifts your Spirit has given me and how you want me to use them. Show me those practical things I must do to become a better employee, or a better manager. Please, speak to me, dear Carpenter!

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Matthew chapters 5,6,7**

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

A paraphrase version of the bible helps us better understand the meaning of this verse. It puts it this way: "Blessed are those who consider themselves spiritually poor, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them."

It is surprising to note how often Jesus repeats the word "blessed" in the beginning of his Sermon on the Mount. It is as though he were insisting on giving us the only sure recipe for a happy life on earth. How does one find genuine happiness? What then is the secret?

Jesus teaches us that the secret of happiness is in the giving of self. To be happy in our relationships with others, we must seek to contribute to their well-being and development. Even when relationships are difficult and the potential for conflict is high, Jesus shows us what to do in order to be happy. At the outset let's say that it would be very difficult to put these teachings of the Lord into practice, unless his Spirit takes up residence in us and we are willing to work with him. The only way to become "poor in spirit" is to recognize our own inability to love by God's standards. It is only when we have attained this stage and accept God's help that we begin to live the miracle of a profound interior transformation.

Let's take the time to meditate on these words of Jesus:

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect". (Matthew 5:38-48)

It is obvious that without God's help, it would almost be unthinkable to live such a spiritual maturity in our daily life. The Lord's goal is to open our eyes to selfishness, injustice

and abuse of power. Jesus as the authority to denounce the oppression of the poor and the weak. And if we are to end up in unbearable situations or difficult relationships in our workplace, Jesus is also teaching us a way to overcome evil by living in peace and in the will of God. The apostle Peter adds: "Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed."(1 Peter 2:18-24)

Take heart, God is with you!

Other recommended readings: 1 Corinthians 13; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Cornelius

Cornelius held the position of commanding officer in the Roman army. One of those who served under him described him this way: "Cornelius, centurion, a righteous man who feared God, and of whom all of the Jewish nation spoke well." The author of the book of Acts adds this concerning him: "He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly" (Acts 10:2).

It is an honor to hear people who are under your authority say such good things about you. It is also a privilege to work in the company of good generous individuals who care as much about your well-being as they do about that of their superiors. It is not surprising that God heard the prayers of Cornelius and orchestrated a number of events in his favour!

We learn that when Peter and his friends arrived at his house, "Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends" so that they would come and hear the message of the Gospel. It is not just in our day that people gather to pray and talk about God!

## IN A NUTSHELL

- When I get away from *God*, I do not like myself, and my faults show up all the more.
- It is only when we accept *God's* help that we can begin to live the miracle of a deep transformation within.
- The only place one is completely protected from the dangers and uncertainties of love is in hell.





## 39

# God in My School

Life for me during the 50's in Winnipeg was very pleasant... that is, apart from the occasional crises of youth: fractured clavicle, not making the volleyball team in Grade 9, and later with my best girlfriend and I both "falling in love" with the same fellow.

My parents loved me and tried to shelter me from the realities of life out there. One of their strategies was to prevent me from staying overnight at my friends' homes for fear I would be abused by some adult. At that time I didn't understand their reasoning and was terribly angry and frustrated. In spite of all of their efforts, a few things happened nevertheless that changed my comfortable impression of the world.

To prepare us for a possible imminent military conflict with Russia, sirens were sounded at regular intervals in our town. On November 22, 1963, President Kennedy was assassinated. I thus learned, as did millions of others, that the world wasn't exactly a safe place.

At this stage I wasn't under any illusion that I could save the world, yet within me was a growing desire to relieve some of its suffering. I knew of only one way to help - I would become a nurse. So, during the major part of my teen years, I dreamed of studying nursing.

In Grade 12, however, a teacher was influential in changing my career plans without realizing it. Most people can remember a range of good teachers, but every once in a while there is one who affects your life, either by his or her kindness, integrity, sense of humour, or a passion for the subject he or she teaches.

The vocation of my Home Economics teacher was for me a demonstration of love and keen interest, as much for her students as for her subject matter. She lit the spark which birthed in me a desire to teach children. I was not simply interested in communicating information to them; I desired to impart something significant to them, something durable and true.

So I entered a four-year program at the University of Manitoba. At the end of my studies, I was overflowing with enthusiasm over the idea of working as a preschool teacher, and of having an impact on the lives of young children. My first job as a teacher was in a private preschool. I started my career full of idealism and zeal, determined to act in the way I had been taught. I wanted to communicate on an understandable level and give the children learning experiences using the open pedagogical method. In some ways, everything went wrong. I didn't succeed in impressing my superior who favoured the more traditional method and way

of thinking. I was dismissed four months later. I believe that the drop of water which caused the vase to overflow was when I forgot to give water to the class Guinea pig. It didn't survive. I was simply too busy getting some artistic programs set up for the students.

So, I was discouraged. But I regained my self-confidence and obtained a job as activity leader in a day-care center. During the years that followed, I worked in a number of places—a correctional institute for teens, a psychiatric center for children, and a university center for research and observation in the preschool setting.

I met hundreds of children - some happy and healthy, others suffering and in difficulty. I know that I was able to help some: Lorraine and Carole, two teens fighting to forget an abusive past; Julie, an autistic girl of 8, institutionalized and ignored by her family; Timothy, 4, traumatized by his parents' divorce.

One winter Timothy and I spent hours sitting in the sandbox, building villages, tunnels and mountains. I wanted to help these children develop to their full potential. I wanted them to feel good about themselves. There were also children I couldn't reach. David, 4, threatened to come to my house and cut off my arms. Loretta, 17, small and withdrawn...

After this, I taught at the college level, training preschool educators. I would always emphasize the development of healthy self-esteem in young people. As child educators, our role is to favor healthy social and emotional interaction, and to help develop positive self-esteem. I maintained that all a person needed in order to blossom was to recognize his own potential and develop it with confidence.

Though this is partially true, I came to believe that we can never truly know ourselves by simply looking within ourselves. We must also look outwardly, to God, to understand who we are. It is He Who can build our self-esteem.

Personally, I learned to trust God, but it took years of suffering before I turned to him.

Even though the decade of my twenties was filled with challenges and I was successful professionally, I experienced great loss and some grief. In 1976 I gave birth to my first child, Christopher Kent.

At birth he appeared healthy, but from the third day the doctors diagnosed him with a serious congenital heart defect. My husband and I brought our son home not knowing how long he would be with us. Two weeks later, he succumbed to heart failure. During the course of the following months, I wanted so much to be holding my son in my arms - each time I saw a pregnant woman, I would turn around discretely and look at her. I was jealous. I was also angry with parents who complained of their children's bad behavior. They just didn't know how lucky they were to have their children with them!

A few months before Kent's death, my father died of lung cancer. Fortunately, my work offered some solace as did the support of members of my family and friends. However, my husband and I were unable to communicate through our sorrow. It spelled the end of a 7-year marriage, a second divorce for me.

I felt totally powerless and undone. I occasionally thought of going to church even though I wasn't convinced that it would make any difference. I told myself that somewhere there existed a God who was kind, but when it came to my problems, I would have to work them out for myself. In looking back I see that I must have had a subconscious fear of God. If so much misfortune happened to me, it was probably because God was not happy with me or was angry with me.

My daughter, Jennifer Joy, was a real light in my life. She was born shortly before the rupture of my second marriage. One Easter day, she was 6 at the time, she saw the film *Jesus of Nazareth*. In a voice filled with emotion she said: "Mama, who is Jesus?" I looked at her not knowing what to say. I had to admit that I didn't really know him.

At this point in time I was teaching a university course. My students were working hard and I was satisfied with the results. Strangely, something deep within me was telling me that I would not have been able to accomplish all of this in my own strength. It was as though I realized that God really existed and that he was concerned about my life. From that moment on, my life took a significant turn.

I began to speak to God regularly and honestly. What a miracle... I felt that he spoke to me too. I could hear the words of Christ clearly in my heart: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Beyond all doubt, I believed that Jesus was really alive.

Shortly afterward, I decided to give him my life and to follow him. I immediately felt God's love surrounding me. I knew that he accepted me fully and gave me back my dignity. I belonged to him. My eyes were opened and I saw beauty in everything around me. I never again experienced that old feeling like I was at the edge of a precipice, or of my old self who couldn't appreciate the fragrance of roses. Now, I was inebriated with their delicate perfume!

That same year our doctor gave me some unexpected news. Jennifer was born with only one kidney and she had to have an operation to re-implant a ureter. My first reaction was to be speechless. But in spite of my fear, I knew that things would be different now. God loved me and he was in control. The day that Jennifer entered the hospital, I was at peace. During the days following her operation, her little body had tubes coming out everywhere. I watched

her sleeping and I prayed silently. Afterward, when they were removing the tubes, I held Jenny on the bed and prayed again, with my teeth clenched. The Lord stayed close throughout these trials. He reassured me innumerable times, telling me that he would never leave me.

So I continued to teach. The content of my courses had not changed much but my attitude certainly did. I took up other challenges... and I also experienced disappointments and routine. I discovered that we cannot measure God's love by our own circumstances, favourable or not. His love is eternal, faithful and true!

I have always wanted to give something significant, durable and true, to others. I have found that "something" in a personal relationship with God, my Father.

*Kathryn Alarie*



## **Between Friends**

In your opinion, does a teacher only communicate course content to his or her students, or does she also communicate some of herself?

Since the teaching of the Christian faith has been banned from most of the schools in our country, what can we do to bring the youth to belief in Jesus?

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

II There are different youth organizations in existence in schools and universities that help with the setting up of small groups for the students. Among these are Campus for Christ and Youth for Christ. In many schools it is also possible to join small humanitarian help groups that organize trips to other countries.

Many churches offer youth-adapted programs, outside of their Sunday services. Young people sometimes form small groups which serve as springboards to other projects through which they can also share their faith in Jesus. Some of these other projects are:

- Theatrical or Mime Groups
- Gospel Choirs

- Christian Rock, Hip Hop, Gospel concerts
- Community involvement
- Suicide Prevention
- Anti-Drug Campaigns
- Volunteer work in summer camps
- Volunteer work for World Vision (in schools)
- Visiting the elderly
- Help to students with academic difficulty

## A PRAYER

As when you entered this life  
 I pray that when you leave  
 Though your face be wrinkled  
 Your heart will still be young

*Bono, U2*

## Hearing from God

Lord, I come to you. I am a grandparent, a parent, a young adult, a teenager... no matter what my age is, you love me and you hear me. Lord, I have a role to play with the youth of my generation. I want them to know you, to love you. Lord, what can I do? Lord, what do you expect of me?

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Matthew 5:13-16**

"You are the light of the world."

The author Tony Campolo, in an interview, maintained that "if we lose this generation, the reason won't be because we're presenting a Christianity that is too difficult, but rather one that is too easy. To ask young people simply to believe in Jesus intellectually no longer works. If on the other hand we suggest that they give their lives to serve the poor, the oppressed, the needy, and preach the Gospel to the whole world, that will really challenge them".

At the present time, in Canada, 70% of young people who have attended church from their infancy leave before they have graduated from high school. Of the remaining 30%, 90% will do the same thing before graduating from university. A total of 3% will continue attending church.

To understand this phenomenon better, I decided during my cross-Canada trip to do my own survey. Since I stayed for several months in one of the most English-speaking protestant cities in Canada (with 85 churches in a population of 40,000) I thought it was the ideal place to ask people what they thought of church. Besides, I spent three months working in a Christian retreat center where many of the groups who attended were made up of a majority of young people. I enjoyed this experience and spent some pleasant times with them. I even worked in the kitchen with a very dynamic team, including the daughter of the director, and his friends. At one point we played baseball in the dining hall, with pie pastry for a ball and a big rolling pin as a bat. What a game! We even threw the ball at a Lutheran pastor who happened by chance to be there... though he didn't laugh at all!

My survey was very revealing. It showed me that I was not alone in hoping for a restructuring of the present church format. Briefly, here is what I learned.

- These young Christians are not ashamed to stand up for their beliefs, at school or in front of their friends.
- They are much less attached to church tradition than their parents are.
- They don't like inter-church conflicts and it is common to see them taking part in the activities of other churches, regardless of denomination.
- They show genuine respect for the Catholic Church.
- They unanimously reproach the church for not knowing how to meet people's needs, other than with through evangelism programs.
- Many young people mentioned that hypocrisy among adults turned them off, and they thought that at least one quarter of the people who attend the protestant church are not genuine Christians.
- To them, Sunday Christianity is not Christianity. They want more direct involvement, a more friendly approach.
- They believe that showing compassion and helping people is more important than attending all of the church services.
- A good number of them had taken part in missionary humanitarian-aid projects in developing countries.
- Young people attach great importance to meetings in small groups where they can

experience more intimate relations with their Christian friends, chat, have a good time, and pray for each other.

Do we not see the signs in these young people that reveal what the church will be like in the 3rd millennium? A church that is more radical in its involvement, closer to the people, and less preoccupied with its "holy" wars? A church without a label and more attached to the heart of the Gospel and to God's heart.

This is also what Normand Provencher, a Catholic author, professor at Saint Paul University, wants to tell Quebecers in his book entitled *Too Late?*:

"Many Catholics consider themselves to be believers without possessing genuine personal faith, without having taken it into the heart of their being. And faith is of necessity a personal response to God who takes the initiative in revealing himself through Jesus Christ (...) The way of the Gospel is not spreading the church, but making Jesus and his message known".

Other recommended readings: Matthew 19:13-15; 21:15-16; Proverbs 2

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Paul's Nephew

Living for God is not just for adults. On the contrary, Jesus encourages us to have the faith of a child. It is easy for a child to believe in God. If his faith is nourished, it will bear fruit from his young age, into his adolescence, and throughout his whole life.

Young people don't always have the resources and the maturity to do great exploits for God, but that is not what counts. A young person who loves God can understand the biblical stories from a perspective that is totally inaccessible to an adult. He can hear the voice of God and be led by his Spirit.

We have a beautiful example in this passage from the book of Acts where Paul's nephew finds himself "by chance" at the right place at the right time. In fact, if he had not been there, the plot of Paul's enemies might have succeeded and Paul would have been assassinated (Acts 23:12-23).

To serve God, it is not necessary to possess the means and a lot of money. To hear God's voice does not require diplomas in theology.

If we love Jesus and if his Spirit lives in us, that's all it takes. No matter how old we are, God promises to lead us by the hand daily.

## IN A NUTSHELL

- At the present time in Canada, 70% of young people who attended church from a early age leave before they have graduated from high school. Of the remaining 30%, 90% will do the same thing before they graduate from university. A total of 3% will continue attending church.
- I have come to believe that we can never really get to know ourselves by simply looking inward. We must also look outward, to God, to be able to understand who we are.
- A young person who loves God can understand the stories of the bible from an angle completely foreign to adults. He can hear the voice of God and be led by his Spirit.





## God in the Church

On October 4, my birthday, the Lord favoured me with a wonderful gift. I had the privilege of attending a conference given by Rolland and Heidi Baker, the missionary couple from California whom I spoke of earlier. God is presently using them to bring about a spiritual awakening in Mozambique. In the past five years, they have seen the number of churches grow under their ministry from four to 7,000. Unbelievable, isn't it?

Rolland constantly crisscrosses the country in his little plane filled with foodstuffs for the needy. He preaches the message of Jesus in simplicity and thousands are converted. I would like to share my birthday gift with you - so I offer a summary of what Rolland shared during this conference. And I pray that his words will touch your heart as deeply as they did mine.



In the 16th chapter of Matthew's gospel, we read these words of Jesus: "Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'"

This passage shows us that this is only one way to follow Jesus. If it doesn't interest you, don't waste your time. Don't try to test the Lord or give it a two-week trial period to see what he can do. To follow Jesus, you must count the cost and see if the involvement is worth it. The Lord requires radical love on our part. With him, it's all or nothing. If you were dying from hunger in Africa and you knew that your harvest was going to be terrible that year, and an epidemic of malaria hit your town and has already killed five of your seven children, what would you do? You would feel the need turn to God, wouldn't you?

In traveling our wealthy countries, I have come to seriously question whether it is possible for the inhabitants of these countries to really love God, without having tasted of suffering, of difficulty, or without having experienced heartfelt grief.

If you are facing a divorce, the loss of employment, injury, sickness, loss of a loved one, or if you are experiencing disappointment or rejection, in reality, you only have two options: To draw near to Jesus, or to remain distant. Most Africans choose the first option and they stick with that choice day after day. I don't want to imply that we must inflict ourselves with suffering to become more spiritual, as the ascetics and the gurus do, but I do say that our love

for Jesus must be a genuine love. A love that will make him our life's companion. A love that gives him first place in our heart. A love that causes us to deny ourselves, to take up our cross, and follow him.

I did not go to Mozambique to try and do better than the other missionaries, to set records in number of converts, or to be hard on myself. Besides, I had no idea beforehand, what would happen there and did not know that our efforts would bear so much fruit. I went there simply because I love Jesus. It was my only motivation. Besides, among my many activities, the moments I treasure are still those times that I spent in heart-to-heart communion with him.

With regards to faith, we are programmed in North America to limit our expectations of the Lord. We go to church, sing a few hymns, go back home, and that's it. We only practice our religion. How could we then fall in love with a God who doesn't reveal himself and whom we never see at work? How do we deny ourselves and follow someone whom we never see at work? Where do we find the motivation to serve a God so distant, and convince people around us to live for him. How do we experience a living faith in him?

The bible says that "Without faith, it is impossible to please God", but it adds that "He rewards those who earnestly seek him". That's a promise!

As missionaries, we teach the bible to people. But we are not there to teach them to have faith and how to follow Jesus. At that level, we are the ones learning. I am in the process of learning how to love God, and they are the ones who are teaching me.

These believers have survived war, famine, poverty, grief, at a level you cannot understand. They have chosen God and are ready to serve him at all cost. They will follow him anywhere. If they hear that there is a village a hundred kilometers away which has not yet received the Gospel, they will go there on foot to preach. We have gone to Mozambique, not because we have all the answers; on the contrary, we stand daily before thousands of people who have nothing to eat. Not even the international humanitarian aid organizations, nor those of the United Nations, are present in the regions where we are set up. The closest medical clinics are hundreds of kilometers away and even they do not have enough medicine on hand.

We have gone there believing that Jesus was the solution to their problems. We wanted to see if the Gospel of Jesus Christ was sufficient to meet the needs of these people. Can we stand before these crowds of people who have lost everything, who live in the deepest distress, and tell them that Jesus is all they need? That is exactly what we do in Mozambique. We tell them loud and clear that Jesus died on the cross to prove his love to each of us and that is enough. It is the central point of our message. The results are glorious and far beyond what we would be able to accomplish in our own strength.

We see great miracles. One year, the United Nations services had predicted a terrible famine because of a drought. We prayed, the rain fell, and there was an excellent harvest. On another occasion, we only had 500 chickens to feed a crowd that was far too large. The cooks prepared the chickens, we prayed, and the pots were not empty until everyone had had enough.

In answer to prayer, we have seen hundreds healed of all sorts of sicknesses and even some sixty raised from the dead. One day, a cholera epidemic spread in a city where we had established an orphanage. Over a hundred of our children were affected. They were put under quarantine so that they could die without spreading the contagion. No one was allowed to enter the building. Heidi couldn't bear this situation and she went in to be at the bedside of those who were in the terminal phase of the disease. The doctors told her that she was crazy and that she too would die. She spent many days praying, holding them in her arms in spite of their diarrhea and vomiting. She came out of that building accompanied by all of the children, healed and in good health!

The poorest people on the planet found the source of living water. They know that they need it. They are poor in spirit. Will Canada acknowledge its need of God? Can it become poor in spirit?

*Rolland Baker (Missionary to Mozambique)*



## **Between Friends**

En In a few words, explain your concept of the Church?

In your opinion, how can the Church of today accomplish the role the Lord has given her?

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

At the present time, the type of small group best adapted to the needs of the Canadian religious population was started by an Anglican church in England. It is called the Alpha program, which most of you have surely heard about. It is active in 152 countries, conducts a huge annual

publicity campaign and offers bible courses through small groups that meet in homes for a period of 10 consecutive weeks. It is estimated that about 600,000 Canadians have taken part in one or another of the courses offered by Alpha.

This is an excellent indicator, proving that people are interested in talking about God, but especially outside of the churches. Obviously, the Alpha program is not too widespread in Quebec since it comes from "the Protestants" and consists of material translated from English. But I persist in believing that small groups are still the best expression of Christianity in our society and that we must simply better adapt them to the needs of Quebec francophones.

After visiting almost all of the cities and towns of my province on two occasions, and discussing with thousands of our people, I have concluded that even if most people don't go to church, they are not closed to God.

With God, there is always hope.

## A PRAYER

Eternal and merciful God, God of peace, of love and of unity, we pray, Father, yes, we beg of you, to reassemble, by your Holy Spirit, all that is divided.

We ask also that you would enable us to be converted to your unity, to seek your only eternal truth, and to abstain from all disunity.

So that we have but one heart, one will, one knowledge, one spirit, one reason and turned wholly towards Jesus Christ, our Lord.

We will be able, Father, to praise you with one voice, and give you thanks through our Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

*Martin Luther King*

## Hearing from God

Heavenly Father, you want me to become involved with the people in my community and also with other believers - your Church. I want to love them, pray for them and become genuine friends with them so that the world may know that your love resides in us. Father, show me how to live Church. As much on Sunday as on every other day. Speak to me, Father. I am listening!

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Matthew 5:17-20**

"For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven".

Les People are beginning to realize that a life without God doesn't work. Actually, the problems of stress, of depression, suicide, violence, divorce, alcohol and drugs are on the increase. Blaise Pascal was right when he said that there is a void in the heart of man that only God can fill.

Moreover, many churches are giving more importance to the formation of small groups among their members. This method provides a flexible structure which permits participants to experience mutual aid and to encourage one another in the faith.

I have already mentioned that the largest protestant church in the world was founded on this principle. In 1958, a young Pastor by the name of Yonggi Cho began to preach the Gospel in Seoul, South Korea.

In this post-war context, people were poor and conscious of the frailness of human life. They were thirsty for authentic spirituality which would bring them genuine comfort and real answers to their questions. The number of believers increased in a short time. In 1961, there were 300; in 1964, 3,000; and in 1974 Billy Graham went to Korea to inaugurate the building for a congregation of 30,000. Today, this church has over 700,000 believers.

Yonggi Cho was not hindered by a traditional view of the church and he became a model for other Christian churches around the globe.

He particularly favoured the implication of women who had long been ignored in religious circles. Presently, of the 50,000 leaders of cell groups, 47,000 are women. Among the 600 Christian workers who are remunerated by the church, two thirds are also women.

The largest Christian church in India also has its system of cell groups. About 85% of its 18,000 members are involved, weekly, in a meeting in the context of one of the 1,900 cell groups spread throughout the city of Chennai.

In Canada, as I said, many churches have also included cell groups in their method of operation. Although this shows a better understanding of Christianity, the growth rate is not very high. At the present time, it is the church members who benefit most from this change as it allows for the development of better relationships among them.

I still believe that small groups will contribute to changing the present church image and that believers will become a positive example of generosity throughout the country.

Christianity is far from dead; it simply needs a new form of expression to meet the needs of society more effectively.

If the Koreans, the Hindus, and the Africans have discovered a more authentic Christian way of life through small groups, why wouldn't we be humble enough to do likewise? This certainly wouldn't hinder our individualistic society where each person lives more and more for self only.

Other recommended readings: Acts 13:49; 18:1-7

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Barnabas

Barnabas, whose name means "son of exhortation" was a friend of the Apostle Paul. In fact, it was he who established contact between Paul and the believers in Jerusalem after Paul's conversion, as they all had misgivings and didn't trust Paul at all. He afterward became Paul's travel companion and member of a small group whose mission was to proclaim Christ and establish churches or other cell groups of new believers throughout the continent.

Barnabas was a courageous man who did not fear suffering or even death. He and Paul, for that matter, had faced great dangers and a lot of opposition. But their love for Jesus continually spurred them on. Thanks to their perseverance, thousands of people came to know God's forgiveness and committed themselves to become Christians.

As his name says it, Barnabas loved to encourage people. On one particular occasion, he tried to convince Paul to change his mind regarding his cousin John Mark, who had left their team mid-way during a previous voyage. Paul persisted in not wanting to take him back. Unable to convince Paul and not wanting to abandon John Mark, Barnabas decided to quit the team and travel with the young man. For him, it was never too late for a second chance and to once again trust someone who failed.

## IN A NUTSHELL

- Christianity is far from dead; it simply needs a new method of expression to better relate to society's needs.
- In Canada, many churches have included the small group concept in their method of operation.
- To follow Jesus, we must count the cost and decide if it is worth the commitment.







## God in the Hospitals

I heard the story of a young African orphan who was chosen to participate in the International Olympic Games for Handicapped Children. He was registered for the 100-meter race. He was on the track in front of thousands of spectators, in the company of other athletes from various countries who run with all of their might in order to win. His performance was excellent up to the point where he tripped and fell flat on his face in the dust, scraping his knee very badly.

One of the participants saw him fall, stopped running and rushed over to comfort him. The other young competitors did the same. She kissed his knee and helped him to get up. Then, with arms locked, all of the runners crossed the finish line together, to the euphoric applause of the crowd. For these handicapped youths, the value of helping one another was more important than the glory and the honors associated with winning a race.

In Part I of this volume, we saw that God didn't initiate suffering on our planet. Sickness and death were inflicted on the entire human race as a result of the wrong choice made by our first parents. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil had been created by God in the Garden of Eden to indicate that evil was a concrete possibility.

God wanted humans to know that evil was a tangible reality connected to the will of each individual. But it was not necessary for man to experiment with it in order to understand its meaning.

By choosing to experience evil, Adam and Eve set off an irreversible process of destruction which would reach all of creation, to this day. Death entered into the world following this break in relationship with God. The original innocence of the human race was replaced by original sin. The perfect state of the universe was replaced by a state of imperfection and decline. In the same way as cancer cells develop within the human body, degeneration and death permeated all levels of God's creation.

We have proof that God is not the author of sickness when we observe the life of the Lord. In Jesus, God Incarnate came to our rescue. Jesus never taught that the Father sent sickness to try us or to atone for our sins. On the contrary, Jesus miraculously healed thousands of people, comforted the depressed, and wept with the suffering.

As I have already stated, God calls us to take care of the suffering and to build hospitals just as much as he asks us to pray for the sick and believe in miracles.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, we see the importance Jesus gives to caring for the sick. In this way the Lord asks us to treat others as we would like to be treated by them. Our responsibility to the suffering cannot be ignored. Whether it be a career in the health sector, getting involved as a hospital volunteer, helping a neighbour who is losing his or her autonomy, visiting the sick, financially supporting humanitarian aid programs or medical research we must become involved.

Jesus said: "Whatever you do for the least of these brothers of mine, you do for me".

I remember a young woman with cancer whom I visited. It took her some time to come into the room where I was waiting because of her embarrassment over her lack of hair and eyebrows. One could see, near her neck, the red and green lines traced where she was receiving radiation treatments. Her eyes were glassy and I felt the anguish of her soul.

I listened to her with compassion. Then, taking her hand, I prayed a short prayer for her. When I opened my eyes, the lady was wiping away her tears.

As I was leaving, she looked at me with tenderness and said these words which I will never forget: "Thank you for coming to see me. I know now that God exists because he sent an angel to my house today."



### **Between Friends**

Recount a time in your life when you were sick. What do you remember about it?

Describe what your daily life would be like if your doctor suddenly told you that you had an incurable disease.

### LOVE IN ACTIONS

In many ways, we can help folks who are sick, depressed, handicapped, or aged. It is certain that the act of short friendly visits is very much appreciated by all those who are suffering.

But there are other means, short or long-term, of helping the sick. If you don't know what to do, inquire at the Volunteer Center in your town, or inquire directly from the people at the establishment where you wish to get involved.

For those who are able and interested, why not suggest a spiritual journey to them and accompany them through the 48 modules of this book?

Those people who are not physically autonomous are not always able to get involve helping others the way you can do, but their prayers can accomplish the miraculous. Also, many will be encouraged by reading this book and by getting to know God better.

## A PRAYER

Lord, open my eyes  
So that I may contemplate your splendour  
And that I may see the distress around me  
Lord, open my ears  
That I may welcome your Word  
And that I may hear the cry of the unfortunate.  
Lord, open my lips  
That my mouth may sing your praises  
And speak truth  
Lord, open my heart  
That I may make a large place for You  
And that I might be open to all.

*Ancient Prayer*

## Hearing from God

Lord Jesus, you who are compassionate towards those who suffer, make me an instrument of your compassion to them. You who understand hearts, you who are aware of all need, show me how you want me to get involved with the suffering. Lord, I am listening! Speak to me.

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Matthew 5:7**

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."

"Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher", he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?"

He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself".

And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live".

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend."

Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"

He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:25-37)

You know, it is sometimes difficult to understand those who suffer when we aren't experiencing the same thing as they. Our lives are so busy that the most of us haven't the time to even notice those who are suffering by the side of the road.

I wrestle with the same dilemma. I have to admit that compassion is not a quality I am endowed with. Besides, I have always hated entering a hospital... up until the time someone I loved very much ended up on a psychiatric ward for several months. I often found myself in the elevator of this building, nervous and with perspiration on my hands, feeling completely inadequate and unable to bring her any relief.

Sitting near her, I saw her glassy eyes, her weakened mental faculties because of the strong medication, her sad anguished look, lost among all of the other patients who were also bearing the same cross. What could I say? What could I do? My heart was bursting; I wanted so much to take her in my arms to console her, rock her like one rocks a small hurting child. I didn't know what to say that would encourage her. I simply felt, by times, that my presence comforted her somewhat.

It was, for her, a long desert to cross.

In spite of everything, even today, when I read these few words that she had scribbled on a piece of paper, I can't hold back the tears:

"In the long hospital corridors, that's where we lose our dream, in this long endless corridor. For me, I keep my dream and my hopes wisely locked up in my heart."

I pray constantly for this person and I ask the Lord to strengthen and heal her. I want to offer her these few words from a poem by Félix Leclerc and to tell her affectionately: Be courageous! Jesus is with you!

*Peace be with you*

*If your feet are hurting from walking in the way,  
And your arms tired from the unbearable loads;*

*If your eyes, dimmed by the noonday sun,  
Search for a bit of shade and can't find it;  
If you can't lie down quietly by a solitary well,  
Where the water is pure and cold;*

*If you are lonely throughout the day,  
Without friends, without music, without love,  
Without a glimmer of hope;*

*If you are searching for the star.  
And the star has gone into the shadows;  
If you are soiled by the dust of the age,  
The sins of life, the lies of men,  
You resemble those whom the Master loved,  
Those whom the Master still loves.*

*Peace be with you.*

*The love for the unfortunate is a precious love,  
Paid for long ago with a great price,  
More than silver or gold, a priceless gift...  
... it is the cross.*

*Félix Leclerc (Adante)*

Other passage to read: Job 3

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### A leper

As he (Jesus) entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean.

Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan.

Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well." (Luke 17:12-19)

It is easy to be thankful when everything is going well. It is more difficult to thank God when our world is crumbling, when suffering draws cries of pain, when our sojourn here on earth is drawing to a close!

If it is not possible to thank God for health, we can nevertheless thank him for having suffered for us, dying on a cross to redeem us!

Thank you, Lord!

## IN A NUTSHELL

- Jesus never taught that the Father inflicted us with sickness in order to try us or to atone for our sins. On the contrary, Jesus miraculously healed thousands of sick people, encouraged the downhearted and wept with the suffering.
- It is sometimes difficult to understand those who are suffering when we are not experiencing the same thing as they are.
- If it is not possible to thank God for health, we can nevertheless thank him for having suffered for us, dying on a cross to redeem us!





## God with the Down-and-Outer

Visiting the underprivileged districts of Vancouver, I was deeply moved to see all of those young street people - young people who also had dreams of happiness but who had not found the strength to persevere. They were shipwrecked on the treacherous shores of an ocean of delusions. I was moved when I saw the faces of young prostitutes offering their body to all passers-by, in the middle of the day, in order to earn the few dollars it takes to buy their heroine fix.

What can I do, Lord? How can I save them? What is my role as a Christian and what do you expect of me? And yes the answer is so simple: "Love your neighbour as yourself."

But I don't live in this city, Lord, and I know that to help these young people would require continuous effort and a long-term commitment! And what about your Church, Lord! Surely Christians would undertake to help these poor people, wouldn't they, Lord?

A few days later I came across an article recounting the testimony of a young Vancouver woman, graduate in theology and minister of one of the many large protestant charismatic churches in the Fraser Valley.

She had recently left her job to devote herself to helping the poor. She had given away her car and had purchased a bicycle. She had given away almost all of her possessions, including her well-furnished wardrobe. And here she was living in the same district as the down-and-outers, giving her life to God in the service of the less fortunate. She had opened a house of refuge for them, a place where they could come to get help.

I also have friends, in the City of Quebec, who have given their lives to help the less fortunate. Established in 1987 by a few volunteers who were touched by the existing poverty in the Saint Roch district, the *Coffee House* was at first a place people could come for a bowl of soup and a sandwich, free of charge.

A year later, the need to help the underprivileged had grown to the point where the *Coffee House* was providing a complete hot meal.

This devoted couple and their small team have become more and more involved in the poverty sector. Their mission is to bring hope, comfort, support and trust to the down-and-outers, welcoming them with a good hot meal and a listening ear. They have become known as dynamic and effective agents of change, working on the front lines in the lower section of the City of Quebec.

Their objective is to provide concrete help to the poor whose problems are related to mental health, violence, delinquency, homelessness, alcoholism, drug abuse, prostitution, etc., and this help is for material needs as well as emotional and moral needs. They aim first of all to create a climate of trust with the person in distress, and then to intervene to:

- Reduce physical and moral suffering;
- Rebuild the person's self-esteem;
- Promote autonomy and possibility of employment;
- Encourage social reintegration;
- Improve social and public health;
- Promote the values found in the Gospel.

Their approach to those who come to this inner city *Coffee House* is based on such Christian values as:

- Unconditional love for the person;
- Hope and joy of living;
- Humility and tolerance;
- Forgiveness and patience;
- Self-esteem and confidence.

The *Coffee House* is now more than a popular soup kitchen. They provide a number of other services as well, such as:

- Hot meals every noon, Monday through Friday;
- Used clothing and second-hand furniture at modest prices;
- Help with local travel and short-distance moves;
- A listening ear and support for those who need it;
- Visits to prisoners and to those who are sick;
- Weekly meetings for sharing and for entertainment;
- A number of activities and services for the youth.

Through this *Coffee House* and with the help of volunteers, my friends have served over 600,000 meals and helped hundreds of people in distress to date. And yet, the needs continue to increase!

## Between Friends

Tell of a time when you helped a person in need and explain how you felt.

In your opinion, why does Jesus persist so much, in the Gospels, in asking us to help the unfortunate and the poor?

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

This week I will find out about the organizations which help the unfortunate in my town or my region and I will inquire as to what services they offer. Then, I will seek to get involved in some way.

## A PRAYER

God be praised!

God be blessed!

O Saviour God.

You have shown us, by your life,

That ministry to the poor is to be chosen above all else.

Through them, Lord, we meet you; in serving them, we serve you.

We throw ourselves into your arms, Saviour of the world.

Lord, we want to follow you.

Enable us, by your grace,

To follow your example and to see things as you see them.

With you, Lord, we will never lack anything and nothing will ever hold us back.

God be praised! God be blessed!

*Saint Vincent de Paul*

## Hearing from God

Dear Lord, I am determined to act. I want to become involved in alleviating human misery. That is why, in this precious quiet time, I come to you. I come to you to listen to your voice, to receive your counsel, your wisdom. I am quietly listening to you.

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Matthew 6:21**

"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"

In the preceding series we saw how God loves to be generous towards us so that we can be generous towards others. During my travels in Canada, I met a group of friends from Manitoba who have become a source of inspiration to me.

These people, members of an evangelical church, are involved in every possible way in their community in order to help the less fortunate.

Besides doing other things, some of the young men collect used household appliances which they repair and fix up like new in order to give them away later, delivery included, if you please!

One of these men mentioned that a young single mother with three children had a hard time accepting their help. She had had some unpleasant experiences with certain churches who did community service only to attract new members into their congregation.

They reassured her, however, by insisting that this was not their intention. It was that they had well understood this truth taught by the Lord: "There is more joy in giving than in receiving". They offered their services free of charge, without proselytizing or hoping to receive anything in return.

And this is the way they delivered good household appliances to the young woman's home, without even inviting her to their church or asking for her telephone number.

They simply wanted to help her!

The pastor mentioned a letter that this woman had sent him and which he carefully kept on file. She wanted to thank them and wrote that their attitude had completely changed her opinion of Christianity.

John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Church, always said:

Do all the good you can  
Every way you can  
Everywhere you can  
Every time you can  
For as long as you can.

Other recommended readings: Proverbs 14:31; Luke 16:19-31; James 2:1-20

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Tabitha

"Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity. At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs.

Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, "Please come to us without delay."

So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them.

Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, get up." Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up.

He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive.

This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord." (Acts 9:36-42)

Symbolically, the story of Tabitha reminds me of the values of the generations before me and for whom help was of utmost priority. In a couple of decades we have practically killed this heritage. Do we really want to see it revived?

### IN A NUTSHELL

- Do all the good you can
- Every way you can
- Everywhere you can
- Every time you can
- For as long as you can







## God with the Grieving

While visiting the towns and villages of this big country of mine, adorned with its beautiful red-leaf maples and its lovely buildings rising tall against the sky, in the shadow of the elegant pines of British Columbia or hidden between the rocky crags along the coast of Nova Scotia, in the shadow of the glowing beauty of my huge country, in the shadow of its strength, in the shadow of its teeming life... I also saw death.

For several weeks I visited the most northern towns, near the border of Alaska and the Yukon. Wildlife abounds in these far-flung regions. In one day's travels I saw six black bears, one of which was a mother with her cubs.

I counted 25 deer grazing here and there along the highway. I was even able to come within 30 meters of a moose who seemed oblivious to my presence as he munched on the tender leaves of shrubs. The following week, I saw a great golden eagle and an enormous owl. Fortunately I didn't meet any grizzly bears!

What surprised me most in this area were the phenomenally long days. At that particular time of the year, it seems that the sun will never set. At 11 o'clock at night, it is as bright as the dawn. I just couldn't convince my body that it was time to go to bed. I felt like I was on another planet.

Throughout Canada I noticed that the people who lived in the small remote towns, far from the big cities, are the friendliest. I especially enjoyed meeting the Amerindians. Even when they pass you on the sidewalk they greet you politely or speak to you as though you were an old friend.

This trip to the northern towns moved me in many ways. The beauty of the landscape filled me with admiration and the beauty of the hearts of the people filled me with renewed compassion. I will never forget this area of our country.

And here I was back on Vancouver Island. I took the ferry crossing from Prince Rupert and to Port Hardy. After spending a short night with some friend, I found myself on the way back towards the town of Sooke. I made a quick stop at Nanaimo to drop off a friend who had come along with me for three weeks of my journey.

I was only two hours from my destination and was eager to see my good friends again, Larry and Betty, who had allowed me to park my motor-home at their place for several weeks.

It happens on occasion that I stop to pick up a hitchhiker, but very rarely when I am alone will I stop for a young woman who is hitchhiking. Mainly a question of principle, or simple ethics. But when I saw her, at the edge of a small town, this young woman in her 20's was standing at the edge of the highway. I had the feeling that I should pick her up. Without thinking further, I quickly pulled my vehicle over on the shoulder, and she began to run in my direction.

She was 26 years old, with long dark hair and sad brown eyes. She was very pretty and appeared likable. However, her drawn face and tussled hair seemed to say that all wasn't going too well for her. She asked me where I was headed and was I did for a living, all the while nervously twisting the loose threads from the tear in her jeans. I hadn't finished my sentence, explaining the goal of my travels, when she burst into tears. Her face became tense, and the terrible pain she was living showed in her features. I suggested that we stop for a cup of coffee. She accepted.

This young woman didn't work, nor did she attend school. She had spent the night with friends and now her heart was exploding with sadness... a sadness she could no longer contain. She had stood there, at the edge of the highway, not really knowing where she was headed. In fact, she had thought rather of not ever reaching her destination, nor any other destination. Karina had death in her soul!

She told me, through her tears, how she had never gotten over the death of her father, who had taken his own life three years previously. She suffered as a result of his death and felt terribly guilty for having cut off all contact with him following her parents' messy divorce. Her mother also suffered a lot.

Then, it was her best friend's turn, her lover, who decided to put an end to his days. And that was too much! She could no longer stand such pain.

The young woman's health had deteriorated as she had begun taking heavy drugs. To make things worse, she now had colon cancer. Her tears no longer could express the intense pain of her young life. Today, June 6th, it was the first anniversary of the death of her friend, and Karina no longer wanted to live.

I listened to her for a long time, totally taken up with her story, her pain and her sobs. I shared a bit of my own history with her and gave her a copy of my book.

Then, I prayed with her. I prayed intensely, with all of my heart, and asked God to have compassion on this young woman so that, from this point on, her life would no longer be a series of unfortunate circumstances. I prayed that she would be blessed by God. Strangely, while I was praying for her, I had a vision in my spirit and saw her at 42 years of age, happy, in good

health, in a lovely dress and traveling onboard a large airplane. O Lord! I pray that it might be that way!

After that time of prayer, Karina's expression became peaceful. God's peace had reached her troubled soul. She told me that she had attended church when she was a child and that she had one day invited Jesus into her life. Along the way she had gotten away from God. She had forgotten his goodness, his friendship... but Jesus had not forgotten her.

He had allowed me to cross her path, on this sad day, to remind her that he was still there in spite of everything.

I dropped Karina off in front of her mother's house and gave her my telephone number. She smiled politely and I left.

I left with a pang of sadness, wondering if she would seek the help she needed to go through these heavy trials. I was worried about her and about her mother. I would have liked to get to know them, to help them, but I can now only see a faint glimpse of her in my rearview mirror... as a dream that disappears in the fog, as a dream that we forget by breakfast time after the first cup of coffee!

Back at Sooke I went to the library to pick up my e-mail. Not much news in my letterbox. Some ads, some details concerning a book that I am editing for a friend, and a few words from people I met during this latest trip.

Among them was a letter from the friend of a lady who had bought my book. That friend had lost her daughter of 22 to suicide.

It was her who was writing me to thank me for publishing the book and for going to her town. She told me how much she had related to my book, and how it had touched her heart. I was happy to have been able to contribute to her healing and honored that she had taken the trouble to write me this short letter. I will keep it.

I opened the last message. This one was not a happy one.

It was from a friend who lives in this city. During my absence a terrible tragedy happened. Three young people from here had died in less than a week. The first one died following a drug overdose. His heart had exploded. He was discovered in the bathroom of his apartment, with blood running from his eyes, his ears and his mouth.

A friend of this young man, who was driving a friend home after the funeral, was involved in a car accident. He died of his injuries. Then, a 17-year old girl, close friend of these two young men, killed herself when she heard the news. How terrible! What suffering for the parents and the members of these families!

I would have preferred not to include such sad stories in my book. I could have described, as an artist would, some of the magnificent landscapes I had seen from the East to the West. I could have stifled the voice of my conscience, this inner feeling, so fragile, so sensitive, so easy to keep quiet.

However, what I saw beyond the magnificent sunsets on the silver waters of the Atlantic, what I felt when walking the "jazzy" streets of Montreal, what I heard on the gentle wind as it drifts over the never-ending fields of wheat, what made my senses vibrate like the Ojibway's tom-tom, what came to my spirit at the top of the high mountain peaks in the West... is that my vast country is sick at heart.

Another reason why I cannot gloss over these sad stories is that my life is now joined to all of those people whom I met. Thousands of faces stream by in my head, thousands of stories of suffering, of grief, and of suicide, living in my memory.

Because of this tragedy, the death of my own son, and because of the choice I made to talk about it and to turn towards others, we have become members of the same family. I had wanted to break the barriers of language, of political prejudice, break the barriers of my own misery in order to take the hand of my neighbour.

And I will never regret it.

I looked death in the face every day of my long journey.

I saw it every day in the eyes of parents and young people who suffer the loss of their loved ones. I looked death in the face and saw that everything crumbles before it. There is no consolation, no religion, no philosophy that can place a balm on the wound it inflicts.

There is only one way to deal with the cold face of death and that is to look into the loving face of God.



## **Between Friends**

Have you ever lost a loved one?

How did you go through the experience?

In what ways can you help grieving people in your town?

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

It is difficult to face losing a loved one. In this distress, the support of members of our family and those who are close to us can be of great help.

With much respect, you could suggest to a grieving person that he or she join your small group. You could also invite him or her to have a cup of coffee together once in a while. It would be good to suggest that together you both look over the book you are now reading. God will work through you to console this person. When we invite him, God intervenes to heal the broken hearts. And that I know of a surety!

## A PRAYER

Lord, Preserve me, preserve those I love  
Brothers, parents, friends and even my enemies  
May they never see wrong triumphing in victory  
A summer without vermillion flowers  
A cage without a bird, a hive without bees  
A home without children.

*Victor Hugo*

## Hearing from God

Father, you understand what death is, you witnessed the agony and death of your Son on a cross, you are the Author of Life. Breathe your Spirit into me. You who loves me, who sees me, you who hears me right now, speak to me, console me, strengthen me!

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Matthew 5:4**

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."

When I visited New Brunswick, I stopped in Moncton to meet with Dr. Gary Leblanc who had also lost a son to suicide. Meeting with him enabled me to understand just how beneficial it is

for human beings who are experiencing the same trials to meet one another and share their feelings. Here is an extract from an article Dr. Leblanc wrote on the subject of suicide:

"The notion that misfortune happens to bad people or that it is a result of evil deeds is erroneous. Yet these wrong perceptions go back to ancient times.

When Jesus was asked if a certain man was blind as a result of his own sins or those of his parents, he answered, "Neither one nor the other" - an answer that surely shook the thinking of those first century listeners.

On the other hand, we all know people of exemplary character who are greatly afflicted, while others with evil characters live happy and prosperous lives. In the book of Ecclesiastes, chapter 8 and verse 14, we read: "There is a vanity which takes place on earth, that there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity".

Even the great Apostle Paul had to endure his lot of affliction from which he never had relief. He had to learn, as we all do, to live by the grace of God alone.

I am completely convinced that we must never attribute good to that which is evil. It's one thing to recognize certain good fruit which can come from unfortunate situations, but it is quite another to admit that evil is good because certain positive elements have come of it.

For example, death and sickness are a result of the sin of the human race and they were not initiated by God "for our good". Life is a gift of God and not death. I witnessed the horror of death; I saw its horrible face.

The death of a child, chronic illness, and tragic accidents - all of these are dreadful, and they break our hearts as they do the heart of God who loves us. I believe that the heart of God suffers along with ours. And even if certain events are "permitted by God", he is not their source.

God's providential strength sustains us. Sickness and death, these horrible happenings, are the fruit of the fallen world we live in and not a deliberate act of God, putting evil to good use to teach us some lesson is a crude way. The love of God, his strength, his comfort and his grace work to help us survive, and his presence manifests itself to us in our worst moments, but God does not cause evil so that he can manifest himself to us.

Another important element to mention is the extent of the consequences of such tragedies. The death of an individual or of a number of members of the same family affects the friends of the victim, the church he attended, the town he lived in, and so on, like the ripple effect on the water in a lake long after an object has been thrown into it.

For us as Christians, all of this should take on a significant importance as to our involvement with victims of a tragedy. We often limit our support to the members of an affected family, but there are other affected people, and they can be numerous, who have difficulty going through such trying circumstances.

Any help we offer in such circumstances should undoubtedly go beyond simply supporting the family. We all have different personalities and we all react differently to the death of a loved one. Someone with an optimistic trait, a positive personality, will react differently than others. The two can be profoundly affected, and not react the same way. Also, one can appear to endure the trial more easily than the other.

And this difference will be even more marked if the person with the optimistic temperament receives support that the other may not have had the privilege of receiving.

Would it be too much to add that these different reactions don't necessarily relate to the level of one's faith and confidence in God? It would be easy to attribute greater faith to the person who goes through the trial more easily than the other, whereas the real reason is that he or she has stronger character traits.

There are a lot of variables in individual personalities, and in their environments, their genetic traits, so that some possess stronger traits than others - and God never violates our personality.

In addition to this I would like to stress the ultimate importance of parental involvement, that of friends and colleagues from work, to those who are going through grief. In such circumstances, acts of love can make all the difference.

In spite of everything, I understood the important truth that God takes care of us in our times of extreme distress. He gives strength, comfort and healing. But not through some magic formula imparting energy and having the ability to instantly wipe out all of our pain, all of our hurts, all of our doubts and all of our sadness.

Rather, God communicates his care through people. He does it through our friends, our family members of our church, our neighbours and many other loving people who pray for us, who visit us, who send sympathy cards and encouraging words to let us know, in the kindest of ways, that they love us and are thinking of us.

It is not enough just to ask God to bless the victims of tragedy, but we must also be ready to become his instrument of blessing. It must be said also that time alone is not necessarily a factor for healing. Those who suffer can require our support for periods of time which can be longer than expected.

And when all is said and done, we must add that God is always present and that his beneficial grace keeps us even in the most terrible moments. He never abandons us, even if we feel very alone by times. His love is always a source of strength and comfort. As he promised, he is always present with us, and this is what should strengthen us and give us hope. Without hope, all is lost, even our desire to live. Either we keep our hope, or we die in distress. And since God is with us all of the time, he puts the sense back into our lives and gives us the courage to face the future with a ray of hope."

Dr Gary Leblanc

Other recommended readings: Ecclesiastes 7:2; 2 Samuel 18:33; Isaiah 61:1-4; John 11:1-35; Romans 12:15.

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Ruth

The story of Ruth is among the most beautiful stories in the Old Testament. It inspires deep reflection on human values and the quality of our love. In the time of the judges, there was a famine in Israel. Elimelech, his wife Naomi and their two sons left for the country of Moab. But Naomi's husband died and she was left with her two sons. They took Moabite wives, one of which was named Orpah and the other Ruth, and they lives there for around ten years. Then, the two sons died also. Naomi decided then to leave Moab as she had learned that the Lord had visited his people and had given them bread.

The three women wept, for they did not want to part. Then, Orpah left her mother-in-law, but Ruth remained. Naomi said to Ruth: *See, your sister-in-law has returned to her people; shouldn't you go with her?*

But Ruth replied: *Don't insist that I leave you, that I go far from you. Wherever you go I will go and wherever you stay I will stay; your people will be my people, and your God shall be my God; where you die I will die, and I will be buried there.*

When Naomi saw how determined Ruth was, she stopped insisting that she go back.

The name Ruth means "a friend". Is there anything more precious than a faithful friend when everything is falling apart around us, in times of distress and grief?

## IN A NUTSHELL

- The notion that misfortune is reserved for bad people or that it is the punishment for evil deeds is erroneous.
- The love of God, his strength, his comfort and his grace work to help us survive, and his presence is made real to us in our worst moments, but God does not create evil so that he can display his attributes to us.
- Is there anything more precious than a faithful friend when everything seems to be collapsing around us, in times of distress and grief?







## God in the Prisons

I met a young Peruvian girl who had immigrated to Canada after experiencing some difficult situations in her home country. After many years of effort and perseverance, she completed her Master's degree in Psychology, with a view to helping young Canadians.

Besides spending long hours on her school work, she volunteered at a center for youth in distress, and with street kids. She wrote her Master's thesis on the behaviour of individuals who are incarcerated in state prisons and more specifically on the case of a young individual named Carl.

Carl came from a dysfunctional family environment. When he was 4, his mother abandoned him and, under threats from her ex-partner (Carl's father), a violent criminal who vowed to assassinate the mother's new boyfriend, she left town, burning every bridges behind her.

Carl was entrusted to his grandparents. He visited his father in prison regularly, totally unaware of the situation his father was in. He had been led to believe that this father, his hero, had been enrolled in the Armed Forces and that the prison he lived in was in reality his general quarters.

The years passed, and Carl became a teen. He learned the truth about his father's offences and the extremely violent acts he had committed, in particular violence against policemen. Carl continued to visit him and even succeeded in providing him with drugs.

Carl turned 15. At this point he was disgusted with life; he was thinking of suicide. His future appeared like a black hole. Could he one day become a good citizen, a good husband, a good father? At any rate, he is convinced he will end up being assassinated sooner or later. At 16, he saw his mother again for the first time, but this attempt at getting together again only lasted four months.

At 17, he was involved in two criminal acts with his father, whose comings and goings in and out of prison are many. One of his crimes involved a kidnapping. The offense turned bad: Carl and his father, hiding in a motel, were spotted by the policemen.

Following an exchange of gunfire, the father was wounded in the leg after hitting a policeman with a bullet.

Carl continued this descent into hell. At the age of 18, following an argument with his girlfriend, he struck a policeman and ended up behind bars.

At the age of 20, Carl was incarcerated once again. This time, he was given a sentence of 13 years for assault and battery, theft and kidnapping. The life of a prisoner is not always easy and Carl was regularly put in isolation because of his bad behaviour. He hardened himself to the criminal world, his heart broken and hurting.

One day, however, he got down on his knees in his cell and asked God to save him. His call of distress was heard and he felt an incredible inner peace, a peace that he had never experienced before. It was the beginning of a new life for him. No longer was it a case of the isolation cell; the prison chapel became his new hangout. Here he learned to read the bible and to know God. He also met a young volunteer worker who occasionally came to visit the prisoners to encourage them and to communicate faith in God to them. She later became his wife.

Carl and Rose have now been married for 14 years and have three beautiful children.

On his release from prison, Carl became director of a center for the homeless and he works actively in rehabilitation of former inmates.

During a meeting I had with him, he was exactly as I had imagined him to be: a simple man, warm and smiling, who rides a motorcycle. He was happy to show me around the new facilities. Carl has continued to maintain a relationship with his father, but this time, praying for him. He has not always believed in the possibility of witnessing his father's conversion and of seeing his life changed. But in spite of everything, he continued to pray.

An event which took place in Carl's father's life allowed us to believe that his prayers were not in vain.

During one of his numerous stays in prison, in fact, three prisoners had succeeded in working their way through to Carl's father's cell, with the intention of assassinating him. One of them was armed with a stick and the other with a knife. The third was keeping watch while his friends carried out their plan. The first one succeeded in hitting Carl's father on the head with his stick but when the other tried to stab him in the abdomen, he was unable to. An invisible force withheld his arm. The three men fled, white with fear. Carl's father recognized God's goodness to him and he yielded his life and his lot into the hands of Jesus.

Carl and his father see each other occasionally but for them everything has changed. Gradually, Carl's father has been allowed out of the prison, a few days at a time and under surveillance... on condition that he stays with his son!

Are there situations too difficult or too hopeless for God to intervene when he is invited? Are there hearts so hard that they cannot be reached by Divine compassion? The experiences which we have just recounted cause me to think not.

## Between Friends

Do you feel compassion for people who have made mistakes sometime in their life?

In your opinion, why did Jesus clearly state that we should visit those who are in prison?

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

In what ways can we help prisoners if we do not live close to a detention center? Following Rose's example, it is always preferable to visit, in person, those who are in prison. But there are other means of staying in contact with them: by letter, by telephone or by e-mail. We can also start a small group, with prisoner support and help to those who are reintegrated into society as our objective. This Manuel is the ideal tool for helping people with a heavy past history turn to God.

## A PRAYER

O Lord my God, I believe in you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
Insofar as I can, insofar as you have given me the power,  
I have sought you. I became weary and I labored.  
O Lord my God, my sole hope,  
Help me to believe and never to cease seeking you.  
Grant that I may always and ardently seek out your countenance.  
Give me the strength to seek you,  
For you help me to find you and you have more,  
And more given me the hope of finding you.  
Here I am before you with my firmness and my infirmity.  
Preserve the first and heal the second.  
Here I am before you with my strength and my ignorance.  
Where you have opened the door to me, welcome me at the entrance;  
Where you have closed the door to me, open to my cry;  
Enable me to remember you, to understand you, and to love you. Amen.

*Saint Augustin*

## Hearing from God

Lord Jesus, you who loves unconditionally, you who pardons all transgressions, you who breaks the heart of stone and who heals the wounded soul, fill me with your love. Open prison doors to me and the doors of hearts in chains. Show me how to obey your Word as it reminds me to remember the prisoners. Speak to me, Lord. I want to obey you.

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Matthew 7:12**

"So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sum up the Law and the Prophets."

A few years ago, in Quebec, I was part of a small group whose mission was to visit prisoners. We had prepared a mime on the love of God which we presented to a group of inmates. I still remember the pensive look that some of them had, in particular that of a big man, tall and robust, sitting on a bench in the front row. In spite of his coarse appearance, I discerned a hint of tenderness in the man's eyes.

I also had the occasion to give a conference in a prison in Alberta.

At both of these places I saw in many of the inmates a genuine interest in the message of the Gospel. I met people there who were very sensitive and wanted only to be loved.

Who among us has never needed forgiveness? Who has never hoped for a second chance?

For many inmates, there is no other way out apart from turning to God. Besides, this is what Jesus is waiting for, from all of us, before he can deliver us from whatever prison we are in.

I personally know a man who spent over twenty-five years of his life behind bars. He was, at one point, among the ten most-wanted criminals in Canada. He had been given two consecutive life sentences, plus another twenty-year prison sentence in the United States. He was considered a dangerous criminal.

After surviving a number of years in this prison jungle, he experienced, in his cell, a conversion so radical that all of the other prisoners believed that he had gone insane. He started to joyously preach Christ to all of the prisoners as well as to the guards.

Miraculously, he was set free a few years later.

Today he gives conferences in many cities in the country. I attended one of them and was moved to tears. Far from justifying his former bad conduct, he recognized that justice must be served and must protect society. But he also described to us the atrocities of a dysfunctional family life which wounded him in his youth and led him to commit criminal acts.

You know, hidden behind the hardest face, there is sometimes a small child crying. Let us never forget these words of Jesus:

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'" (Matthew 25:31-40)

Other Scriptures to read: Matthew 5:22-26

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### The Jailer

Did you know that the Apostle Paul also spent entire years of his life in foul prisons?

One of them was in the Macedonian city of Philippi. Paul and his friend Silas had been beaten and put into prison on false accusations.

The jailer threw them into the interior prison and put them in leg irons. In the middle of the night, Paul and Silas were praying and singing praises to God. All of the prisoners could hear them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, and it shook the very foundations of the prison. At that same instant, all of the doors opened and all of the prisoners' chains were broken. The

jailer awoke and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was going to kill himself, thinking that the prisoners had fled. But Paul cried out with a loud voice: Don't do any harm to yourself, we are all here. The jailer asked for a light, then he entered hastily and threw himself, trembling, at the feet of Paul and Silas. He brought them out and asked them: What must I do to be saved? Paul and Silas answered: Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you and your family will be saved.

And they preached the Word of the Lord to him as well as to all those who were in his house. He took them with him, at the same hour of the night, washed their wounds and was immediately baptized, he and his entire family.

He took them into his home, gave them to eat and he and his whole family rejoiced that they had believed in God.

What a story! It certainly seems that God can use even our most painful circumstances to touch the lives of people around us. Only he is able to open our prison doors!

## IN A NUTSHELL

- You know, even behind the hardest face, sometimes there is a small child, crying.
- Are there any situations too hard or too hopeless for God to intervene if we invite him?
- Are there any hearts so hard that they cannot be softened by Divine compassion?





## God in the Bars

I am originally from Montreal. My parents had seven children of whom I am the eldest. Mother remained at home taking good care of us while Dad worked long hours away from home. Both my parents were Roman Catholics. Dad had the habit of rising very early to kneel near his bed to pray and ask God to bless his day and his activities.

Shortly after my birth, my health deteriorated. My stomach could not hold any food or liquid. In a few months my little body was nothing but a skeleton. Nevertheless the doctor was finally able to get me to gain strength.

At school I couldn't keep still. I was hyperactive. I ran constantly wherever I went. I ran to play; I ran to the corner grocery store; I ran to school and I ran back home... to save my skin from the other students who wanted to beat me up.

During the summer, my parents sent me to the country to stay with my grandfather who was a farmer - a nice place for this little bit of a man to use up some of his energy. It was here that I became aware of the existence of God for the first time, when my grandmother sprinkled holy water on all of the farm buildings to protect them from lightning. However, challenged by the lightning and thunder, I would run out into the fields to make fun of the old lady and defy the sky and God. "I bet the lightening won't be able to touch me!" I would say with assurance as I ran with all my might.

Through irony of fate, or divine reprimand, after bounding over a small fence beside the beaten-down dirt path that led to the farm, the lightning hit just a few meters from me. The impact lifted me up into the air and I was thrown to the ground, gasping and seeing little yellow spots all around me. The experience really shook me, and that day I promised God I would never defy him again in that way.

The summers at the farm formed my character. I learned the importance of work, of effort and of perseverance, but there were certainly pleasant aspects, like driving the tractor, running with the work horses, and training physically to add a bit of muscle to my thinness. In effect, when I was 13, I measured 5 foot 8 and weighed less than 100 pounds. My feet were huge, I wore size 10's. The only advantage to my stature was that, in the winter, I could run on the snow without a problem while my buddies would sink up to their knees.

In June, 1970, I successfully completed my high school studies in the sciences. And I filled out an application to work with the R.C.M.P. (Royal Canadian Mounted Police). They contacted me

and I succeeded, miraculously, in completing their written exams. However, they suggested that I choose another line of work. I was very upset.

I found a job working for a trucker who transported hay to stables in the United States. My work consisted of unloading the truck once it had arrived. At this time in my life, I was 6 feet tall but only weighed 135 pounds. I wore size 12 shoes. At the stables, situated in the state of New York, the other employees, black Americans, joked about me, asking the boss if there were not any better workers than me in Quebec. But they quickly changed their opinion once the truck was unloaded. I had finished the job in record time while the mockers couldn't manage to stack the 500 bales of hay. The year I had spent at grandfather's farm had given me some nerve.

Later on, when we returned to this stable, the guys ran to buy doughnuts and coffee, asking me to stay and relax a bit.

A few months later, I received a call from a police station in Pointe Claire offering a job as radio operator. On my first day of work, there was a snowstorm that lasted four days and was referred to as "the storm of the century". As much as five feet of snow and ice fell. On this my first day of training, we received 550 calls in 8 hours. People spoke Japanese, Chinese, a mixture of English, Italian, Greek and still others.

I went home that night with a violent headache. I was unfortunately constrained to quit this job because of my feeble knowledge of English.

I made a few other deliveries of hay to the United States and then I decided to enroll in the Canadian army to become a weapons technician, after going through language school.

I became involved in a lot of sports - running, weight lifting... and "push-ups". After five months in language school, I was transferred to a base, North of Toronto, to take a course as weapons technician. But once again, I could not overcome my nervousness during certain mechanical tests and the small springs in the machine guns would slip between my humid fingers. I averaged 92% nonetheless. And I didn't give up. Following my father's example, I would pray and ask God for the strength to persevere.

I then chose to apply as an MP (Military Policeman). Following two interviews with the colonel of the base, and a lot of prayer, I was accepted. I began the course a few months later. I finished with an 80% average in Military Law, and was first in Combat Technique and Running.

In November 1972, I was transferred to the Baggotville base in Saguenay. I was given the task of surveillance of the nuclear bombs that were stored in subterranean reinforced concrete vaults.

Every three months, these bombs were transported on the CF-101 aircraft for the simulated attack exercises. For the young active man that I was, it wasn't easy to stay in the same place

all day long, keeping watch in an open field which reminded me of a cemetery. In my free time I continued to run, practice judo and swim. I even took part in a competition where we had to swim 350 pool lengths and I came in second. From time to time I did rifle practice to keep my concentration. I also took underwater diving courses.

I will always remember the watchman's job; what a real nightmare! If we had at least been allowed to listen to a radio station.

But no! We had nothing else but the sun to watch during the day, and at night we listened to the dogs barking at the moon - they probably thought it was a giant cookie. I often fought the urge to sleep. What drudgery!

Then finally, I landed the job of patrol officer. I worked with a corporal and a sergeant and we had to cover the entire base, involving some 1,200 civil and military personnel.

I enjoyed the social life on the base. I made a number of friends among the officers as we practiced the same sports. I remember the first time I had the chance to board a jet for "a little ride". My pilot friends wanted to see if I was as brave in the air as I was on terra firma. We broke the sound barrier to roll over several times with our heads upside down. Everything I had in my stomach wanted to surface. Luckily I was able to hold back and save face.

In June 1974, I sent a number of applications to several police corps departments in the province. A door opened in Seven Islands. August 5, 1974, I was sworn in as a police officer. I immediately loved this town. At the time there were 35,000 people there. It was like an anthill of activity, day and night, like a miniature Montreal, the capital of the North Shore. The police force consisted of 35 individuals with an average age of 23.

I applied myself immediately to studying the municipal laws, and in the month of September I joined the Quebec Police Institute. A long road, and a lot of work, you will say. That's a fact. I didn't let myself get discouraged, either by my failures or by my physical stature. When I had left the base at Baggotville I was given the honorary certificate of Corporal. When I ran, I could do 33 laps around the gymnasium in 12 minutes.

I had also earned the respect of my judo teacher who, every once in a while, would put me in charge of a group in his class. I eventually earned my black belt and made it to the quarter finals in an international competition. Do all policemen have to get their black belts in Judo? No, of course not.

But our profession requires that we keep ourselves in good physical condition. As for the debate over use of force during an intervention, we would all prefer to never have to use it. But it is impossible in some cases, for a police officer to make people respect the law or to take control of a situation without the use of physical force.

Let's return to Seven Islands, where I would like to describe a series of events for you that will put you in the uniform of a police officer for a few minutes.

On December 28, 1974, I had returned to the station. The wind was blowing, cold enough to freeze your blood, and the mercury on the barometer read -28F. Each week, from Wednesday to Sunday, brawls would break out in the town bars. Three motorcycle gangs were often involved.

One night, I had to chase one of the bikers right up to his general quarters. He ran in and shut the door behind him. I quickly called in to the station to give them my whereabouts and to ask for help, but before my fellow workers got there,

I decided to enter by kicking in the door and facing the music. I found myself face-to-face with the gang leader who was preparing to get out the "12 Receiver". The man I was looking for had fled through a window.

I must admit that I got a few strong warnings from the assistant officer advising me never to enter such places alone. We left there, in a group, following reports that licenses had been seized for drug trafficking, operation of illegal bars and prostitution. Along with the RAM and RCMP detachments, we conducted several raids of hangouts. During one of them, I was assigned to the telephones. Pretending to be a new member of the club, I invited the "pushers" to join us for the "party".

In 1980, the local "Night Angels" club was closed by the Quebec Police. Other illegal bars reappeared here and there, but following a visit from the "Hell's Angels" who tore up the crests of the "Night Angels" because of their similarity, the group dissolved. As for the other motorcycle gangs, we didn't give them any breathing space. We formed a young and courageous team of patrol officers and we followed them everywhere they went. Most of them left the town with a pile of fines in their wallets.

On another occasion, I had to face a giant of a man, not the alcoholic type but a man who looked respectable, the president of a large company from Kingston, who was staying in Seven Islands on business.

It was a Friday night and it looked like the weekend was going to be relatively calm. My supervisor asked me to work overtime and to stay for the night shift. Although I was tired, I accepted. My partner was to drive the vehicle and write up the reports, if necessary. Around 11:30 p.m., we received a call informing us that we had to go to one of the town's hotels (Auberge des Gouverneurs).

Once there, the manager asked us to calm a man who, having had too much to drink, had crushed a glass in his hand after a woman refused to accompany him to his room. He was roaming around, putting his bloody hand everywhere on the wallpaper. When we arrived on the second

floor, we saw this huge man of 6 feet or more, almost as wide as the hall. My co-worker was quick to tell me that he didn't speak English very well and that it would be up to me to start the conversation. So I approached the man calmly. I offered to accompany him to the hospital to get his hand treated. He refused saying that he was going to his room and that everything was okay. "No problem, Officer" he said, in a half-polite, half-arrogant tone.

We were hardly out of the hotel when our sergeant informed us that the individual was still causing trouble and that the manager of the building wanted to lay charges. My co-worker looked at me, sighed, and here we were once again in the stairway of the Auberge des Gouverneurs. The suspect was on the third floor this time. There were traces of blood everywhere on the walls.

I approached him and offered to take him to his room. He refused. I told him that, if he did not co-operate, we would be obliged to lock him up. He then replied, shouting "come and get me then" as he leaned his back against the metal doors in the hall. I answered that I was just going to take him gently by the arm and accompany him.

I had barely approached him when he lifted me up and put me against the wall. My partner tried to make him let me go, without success. I was able to grasp his nose and make him turn a quarter-turn, but all he did was grimace. He then tried to hit me, but I succeeded in moving my head just in time; his fist went through the wall. Then, it was a fight, and thanks to a few judo holds, the aggressor was immobilized on the floor while my partner tried to put handcuffs on him. Believe it or not, this fellow's wrists were so big that we almost couldn't close the handcuffs on them. I went home that night, totally worn out.

The man pleaded guilty before the judge, and from what I am aware, he has never again been the cause of any trouble in Seven Islands.

A policeman sometimes has no choice but to use force to carry out his work. God knows that I don't like brawls, but sometimes such circumstances as these are inevitable in the life of a policeman. Fortunately, this type of situation doesn't come up every day.

*Jacques Dupont*



## **Between Friends**

Do you believe that discos and bars contribute to the well-being of society?

In your opinion, why do people gather in such places every week-end?

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

A few years ago, Dr. Catherine Hess, an American doctor, was in charge of some important research on reports given by a Christian organization (Teen Challenge), involved in the rehabilitation of drug addicts. The group claimed a success rate of 70% among those who graduated from their program and were still sober five years after their cure. The majority of secular programs have a success rate of less than 15% for the same data. Doctor Hess who had worked for many years within various United States government programs and had held the position of coordinator in the fight against narcotics in New York City, writes these comments following her research: "The discovery of this program renewed my hope that significant solutions do exist. Teen Challenge is a unique center that knows real success!"

The book that was published about Dr. Hess's report is called "The Jesus Factor". The conclusion of the research demonstrates that the rate of success was even higher than the 70% figure given by the organization. This all leads to the belief that Jesus makes all the difference when he is invited into our lives and into our projects. He sometimes acts with such force that we have to admit that he goes beyond our human abilities.

There are a number of possibilities for small groups to get involved with those who are battling various addictions. We can act as accompanying adult, or as a sponsor, as they do with Alcoholics Anonymous. We can also play a part in prevention and support through a small group. For many, it would be better to learn to pray than destroy oneself with drugs and drink.

## A PRAYER

Comment How can one feel so alone, surrounded by people?

They couldn't care less about what I say,

Trying to play tricks on me.

It's been raining for a week now;

I may be going out a bit.

But when the weather is nice,

Things don't get much better and rain fill my eyes.

It's always raining, when love is gone.

God, where are you, God?

Where are you hiding when I'm hurting?  
Where do you hunker down when there's war?  
When I'm lost and can't go any further?  
When there is no more sun shining?  
When there's been no love for the past 3 days?

*Boum Desjardins*

## Hearing from God

God of love, so many people need love and are seeking to fill this need with drugs, alcohol and sex. Bars and discos have become the "new temples" in our cities and towns. This saddens me a lot! O Lord! You were the perfect example of love and you invite me to love people in spite of their wrong choices. Show me what to do to effectively prove your love to those who are lost in the fog of this world's illusions. Speak to me, Lord! I pray!

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Matthew 5:8; 27-30**

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."

In Almolonga, a city in Guatemala, South America, a few believers prayed fervently to the Lord to intervene in their community. This city was known for its high rate of poverty, violence and alcoholism. Its four prisons were not big enough, and they had to incarcerate the overflow of prisoners in the neighbouring town.

Then God intervened. More than 80% of the population converted to Jesus Christ and decided to follow him. As a result, the four prisons were closed as were the greater majority of the bars in town.

When the Spirit of God intervenes in a town to bring a spiritual revival, the bars close their doors. The same phenomena took place throughout history in other cities of Europe and America. This shouldn't surprise us since nightclubs and bistros are often the cradle of prostitution, drugs, alcoholism, violence and unfaithfulness.

Unfortunately, I can speak to you from experience, for in spite of the fact that my parents never went to bars, I did not always follow their example. I remember all too well the days of

"peace and love" when the love of all the girls was free, when we smoked joints in parks in the middle of the day, when music and partying was all we lived for.

I thought I was happy and yet my dreams were disintegrating little by little. Because of drugs, I couldn't communicate very well with my family or those around me anymore. I was a prisoner of an illusion which had tangibly signed away my future. They were the "cool" years of my generation. We had impregnated society with our ideas of "real freedom" and we are now suffocating in the smoke of those decades marked by the imprint of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones.

How I wish that the rising tide of my days would erase forever the traces that these care-less years left on the shores of my young life. How I would prefer to have never taken part in the moral decline of my nation and in leaving such a bad heritage to our children and maybe even to our grandchildren as a result!

Nightclub attractions are becoming more and more sophisticated, and problems related to drinking and drug addiction are steadily increasing.

Even our government is contributing to the problem by increasing the numbers of casinos, thereby causing gambling addiction for many.

But that isn't all! Bars are becoming more and more dangerous. A woman who was recently out to a Quebec nightclub was kidnapped by five men. According to the hospital and police reports, the group gang-raped her. She was unable to recall the events that took place that night, but tests confirmed she was raped repeatedly, and traces of Rohypnol and of Progesterex were found in her blood. Progesterex is a small pill that is used mainly for sterilization. It is used by veterinarians to sterilize large animals. This drug is now used by rapists in their nights out to sterilize their victims.

Rumour has it that Progesterex is used together with Rohypnol, the rape drug. All that has to be done is to drop the tablet into the girl's drink. The next morning she remembers none of the happenings of the night before. Progesterex dissolves easily in drinks and prevents the victim from becoming pregnant as a result of the rape. This way the rapist need not worry about tests proving him to be the father, months later.

However, the effect of the drug is not temporary but permanent. Progesterex was produced to sterilize horses. Any woman taking this drug will never be able to conceive.

And this is where we are today!

Dozens of organizations are at work in society picking up the pieces, and they can't do enough. Once again, the groups with the highest success rates are always those who encourage people to turn to God.

Small groups can be an excellent alternative to the need for social interaction which many fill by going to bars. And rather than encourage the decline of moral values and the destruction of our society, participants can discover the joy of helping others and the positive feeling of building a better world. Another wonderful thing about it is that no one wakes up the next day with a "hangover".

Other recommended readings: Proverbs 7; Isaiah 5:20-24; Matthew 9:9-13

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Jezabel

The phenomena of drug abuse, alcohol, and sexual promiscuity is as old as the world. History reveals that some pagan temples enhanced their rites with the participation of "holy prostitutes".

The Hebrew people also had leaders who influenced the nation to commit worse perversions. In this regard, Queen Jezebel was at the head of the list. Her name means "Baal is the husband", or "shameless". This woman possessed such powers of seduction that she succeeded in causing all of her generation to fall into wickedness (I Kings 21:25).

What is even more troubling is that the bible seems to imply that this splendid beauty was possessed by a diabolical spirit. In effect, the book of Revelation clearly identifies her as "the great prostitute" (Revelation 17:1-5).

I wonder if the owners of discos and bars, as well as those who go there, ever wonder what spirit is lurking behind their activities? One thing is certain - everything will be brought to light one day. In the meantime, we must, by all means, help those who are blind victims, and preach the freedom that the Gospel brings.

Only Jesus can enlighten their intelligence and deliver them from the seductive darkness.

## IN A NUTSHELL

- Nightclub attractions are becoming more and more sophisticated, and problems related to drinking and drug addiction are steadily increasing.
- Small groups can become an excellent alternative to the need for social interaction that many fill by going to the bars.
- It is better to learn to pray than to lose oneself in drinking and taking drugs.





## God and the Media

Permit me, if you please, to show you how an entire country can accept any system of values whatsoever when the Christian principles on which the country was based are destroyed.

Some time ago our great country of Canada was plunged into a debate on the redefinition of marriage. Who would have believed that we would come to that point one day? Homosexual activists have put into doubt the biblical basis for the establishment of the family. I consider it pertinent to use these facts as examples to convince those who underestimate the power of the media.

I must say at the outset that I do not reject anyone, homosexual or not. Jesus didn't reject anyone and I want to do the same. He does encourage us, nevertheless, to use wise discernment with regard to the many ideologies which are offered to us in our society.

In February, 1972, the national coalition of gay organizations held a meeting in the United Methodist church building, on Armitage Avenue in Chicago. Four hundred ninety-five homosexual organizations had been invited from across the United States.

Two hundred individuals attended this two-day conference, from 18 states and representing 85 gay organizations. They proceeded with the writing of a document addressed to the American government in which the coalition submitted a total of 17 requests. Here are a few of them:

- The abolition of taxes that penalize singles and same-sex couples.
- The installation of programs operated by gay organizations, financed with federal taxes and designed to support gays, victims of discrimination.
- The promotion of sexual educational courses in the schools, financed by the State, drawn up and given by gays (men and women), to demonstrate the validity of the gay lifestyle as a healthy alternative to heterosexuality.
- The abolition of laws forbidding private consensual solicitation of sexual relations, as well as the abolition of laws forbidding male or female prostitution.
- The abolition of laws forbidding transvestism.
- The abolition of laws governing the age of sexual consent.

- The abolition of all forms of legislation restricting sex and the number of persons in the marriage union, with extension of all legal benefits to the said persons living in cohabitation, regardless of their sex or their number. (Laud HUMPHREY, *Out of the Closets... The Sociology of Homosexual Liberation*, Prentice Hall, 1972, p.165)

Following this, the gay activists developed strategies aimed at promoting the homosexual movement among the masses. Here is an example which was published in the *Guide Magazine* in November 1987. In reading these notes, keep in mind that these tactics were begun two decades ago and many of their strategies have already obtained the desired result. The authors introduced their plan of action with this affirmation:

"What we are aiming for in this first phase is the desensitization of the public, nothing else. If you can persuade people to believe that homosexuality is a subject among many others, then the battle for legal and social rights has virtually been won."

They then proposed the conducting of vast media campaigns which would be summed up as follows:

1. *Talk about gays and lesbians as loud and as often as possible.* The principle is simple: Almost all behaviour becomes acceptable if the people are frequently exposed to it in their environment and among their acquaintances. The acceptance of new behaviour will become normal at the same rate as the number of those who accept and practice it. Is a desensitization campaign like this where we freely bring up subjects relating to the gay community sufficient to convince those opposed to homosexuality? No, certainly not. Even if public opinion is the primary source of society's values, there is another force which has to be reckoned with: religion.

When the conservative Churches condemn homosexuality, there are only two things to do in order to confound homophobia and true believers. First, we can muddy the waters; that is, make public the support that the more liberal Churches give to the gay movement. We must state our own theological objections to the conservative interpretation of the biblical teaching and expose the hateful attitudes and the incoherence. Secondly, we can undermine the moral authority of the homophobic Churches by categorizing them as "old fashioned" when it comes to recent discoveries in psychology.

2. *Present the gays as victims, not as aggressors.* In order to ensure public sympathy, all campaigns must present gays as victims in need of protection. In this way, everyone will be inclined, by reflex, to play the role of protector. There are two different messages about the gays as victims which will produce good results. First we must tell people that gays are

victims of fate, meaning that they never had the choice of accepting or refusing their sexual orientation. We cannot therefore hold them accountable morally. The second message must present gays as victims in society. We must show pictures of gays being brutalized and publicly humiliated.

3. *Give the protectors a just cause.* It is important for the gay movement to give their supporters principles of social justice that they will be willing to fight for. They must know how to counter the moral arguments of our enemies. Homophobes dress up their emotional repulsion with religious dogmas, so the defenders of gay rights must oppose dogma with principle.

4. *Make gays attractive.* In order for the gay victim to become approachable for the good citizens, he must be presented as one of theirs.

5. *Make the objectors look bad.* First, we must replace the pride factor which justifies the homophobic attitude in society with a feeling of shame and guilt. Secondly, the anti-gays must be made to look so bad that the majority of people will not want to associate with them. For example, a televised ad shown for a couple of seconds showing an angry preacher, pounding the pulpit with his fist, and ranting against "these abominable creatures".

While these insults fill the soundtrack, the screen shows images of decent gays, likeable and inoffensive. It ends with a close up of the angry face of the preacher. The contrast speaks for itself. The effects are devastating. (Marshall K. KIRK et Erastes PILL, *The Overhauling of Straight America*, Guide Magazine, novembre 1987).

This is where we are at! In only a few years, through the media, the gay activists have succeeded in shaking the biblical foundations of sexuality and marriage which have been in effect for centuries.

### **Between Friends**

What influence does the media have on your way of thinking and on your beliefs?

Do you believe that it is right to use different communication tools to share the teaching of Jesus in our world?

## LOVE IN ACTION

If you do not find it easy to speak out or if you want to share the good news of the Gospel with the most people possible, here are a few suggestions:

- Regularly offer to your friends and people you meet a Christian book, a CD or DVD, containing praise music, a Christian movie, testimonies or teaching which can help them knowing Jesus and help them in precise areas of their lives.

- Write or record your own testimony and offer it to as many people as possible.

- Become a member of an organization that works at distributing the bible and offer free copies of the New Testament to your co-workers, in schools, in hospitals, during public activities held in your town, etc.

- Advertise Christian websites.

## A PRAYER

Just a word of prayer to obey, the order of things and our fathers  
Before leaving, just another life saved from oblivion  
Engraved far better than by a blade  
In the memory of Abraham  
The wait is long for that hour, the sadness heavy in our hearts  
But so great our love, our faith in You  
Though You are sometimes hard to comprehend  
What will our destinies be further on?  
A bit of peace, of love and of bread  
In the hollow of your hands  
The wait is long for that hour  
Heavy the sadness in our hearts  
But so great is our love, our faith in You  
Though You are sometimes hard to comprehend  
Lead our children for the end of time  
Fill with more joy than tears  
The memory of Abraham

*Interpreted by: Céline Dion (Album: D'eux)*

## Hearing from God

Heavenly Father, I spend a lot of time in front of my television screen or my computer. My leisure time and entertainment occupies an important place in my life.

You know, since I was a child, I was taught to make each minute of my day count. My attention is sought on all sides. Often I forget you. I don't bother taking the time to talk to you. Everything else seems more important. It's not surprising then that my prayers remain sterile!

Forgive me, Lord!

I choose today to give priority to our relationship, placing it above all my recreation and my other activities. Free me from my dependence on the television. Teach me to love silence and grant me a peaceful and calm spirit so that I may hear your voice.

Speak to me, O God of Love.

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Matthew 5:10**

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven".

It is surprising to see how much spiritual information is transmitted through the eye of the camera. Immoral and occult practices, joint with beliefs of Buddhism and Hinduism, constantly invite us to accept pluralist ideologies which contradict the teachings of Jesus Christ. This is why it is absolutely essential, for parents as well as for young people, to read the bible diligently in order to acquire the necessary knowledge to be spiritually alert. The bible is the only document given by God to us. It is the infallible Word of God.

Jesus warned us of the dangers of being lured away from his teachings:

"Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few. Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves."

Whether it be through the arts and music, movies and the media, many ideas that appear inoffensive are presented to us on a silver platter. Those who promote them can seem trustworthy, self-fulfilled and happy. But the only way to discern the true from the false is to know the bible well and to verify within its pages to see if the information given to us lines up with

the teachings of Jesus. It is the only way to determine whether the fruit of the tree is good or bad. We can no longer trust appearances. Aware of the reality of evil seduction, John the Apostle wrote: "I say this because many deceivers have gone out into the world. They deny that Jesus Christ came in a real body. Such a person is a deceiver and an antichrist. Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked so hard to achieve. Be diligent so that you receive your full reward. Anyone who wanders away from this teaching has no relationship with God. But anyone who remains in the teaching of Christ has a relationship with both the Father and the Son." (2 John 1:7-9)

I believe that this advice applies perfectly to the contemporary artists and to the media. We are happy to live in a democratic country which promotes liberty of expression. However, the liberty of some can affect the liberty of others.

The artists' and media potential should be used to affect society in a positive sense and not to lead it to destruction. It's up to us to discern well.

Other recommended readings: Deuteronomy 18:10; Daniel 3:1-7; Mark 5:19-20; 15:11; Acts 13:6-11; Acts 19:24-32; Revelation 13:11-17.

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

Simon the sorcerer

"But there was a man named Simon who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the nation of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great.

They all gave heed to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, 'This man is that power of God which is called Great'.

And they gave heed to him, because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic.

But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.

Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, 'Give me also this power, that any one on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit'.

But Peter said to him, 'Your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity'."

We must not necessarily consider someone credible simply because he is charismatic or extremely popular.

## IN A NUTSHELL

- In only a few years, through the media, gay activists have succeeded in shaking the centuries-old biblical foundations of sexuality and marriage.
- We must not necessarily consider someone credible simply because he is charismatic or extremely popular.
- Anyone who wanders away from this teaching has no relationship with God. But anyone who remains in the teaching of Christ has a relationship with both the Father and the Son.







## God in My Town

What a splendid day! The warm rays of sunshine illuminate the entire bay in its multi-coloured robe of the prettiest of summer flowers. A light breeze wafts over me with its perfume, after caressing the turquoise waves that are dancing joyfully.

This marvelous spot on the West Coast has become an oasis of inspiration for me. It is certainly one of the most beautiful spots in Canada. Its enchanted forests are furnished with tall cedars that cover you with their long arms. If you walk noiselessly, you can see small deer playing hide-and-seek.

Nature revives in me a feeling of admiration before the infinite grandeur of Creator God. And there, in his presence, I can open my heart, I can listen to his voice.

I consider myself privileged to have visited my great country in this way. A country of dreams, of riches. A country of ice, of fire, a country where peace reigns. I savoured her mountains and forests, her crystal streams and her long rivers, her sparkling snow. I loved to read the joy on the faces of fishermen coming back to the wharf with their nice catch. I looked with admiration as farmers worked the land on the prairies, till they went out of sight. I smiled at businessmen connected to their cell phones and those imprisoned in their vehicles during traffic jams. I spent lazy afternoons on terraces, watching the passers-by with Japanese accents, Hindu women wrapped in their coloured saris, Portuguese taxi drivers parked beside the parks, joking. I heard children singing. I savoured the aroma of good coffee, of fresh bread... and of life itself. I walked in the streets of its cities until I wore out my boots, and I loved my great country. It inspired me to write this book.

Today, I must write the last module. And as I have done hundreds of times before, I open my scribbler, pick up my pen and ask God to help me. I doodle, I write and I erase, I wait... but, nothing! Impossible for me to write today. I can't understand what's happening, and I can't do anything about it. I might as well throw away the page and start over! I take a new page...still nothing! Perhaps I should close my scribbler, put it aside, and pray?

Yes, that's it! I should pray.

So I pray, I listen, and ...nothing! I am uneasy. What is wrong with God? Has he decided to abandon the project before its completion? I can't figure anything out. I leave the beach and head back to my car when, all of a sudden, I feel his presence very strongly. He hasn't aban-

done the project! He simply wants my complete attention, on the threshold of this last module. And this particular module has to be written somewhere else.

I start the car and just allow myself to be led by the wind of his Spirit. I drive through the mountains on this little highway which follows the west side of the Island. I drive and drive until I reach the end of the paved road. And I drive some more on a beaten gravel road until I reach a small village.

It's a First Nations reserve, inhabited by the members of the Pacheedaht tribe. They once were numerous but hardly number a hundred now. This is a group of people that will soon be extinct. They say that this tribe is the poorest of all the tribes in Western Canada. Misery is written everywhere.

The Lord has led me to this little village and I thought I heard him say, "Look carefully and tell me what you see!"

You want me to tell you what I see?

I see a small village lost in the heart of the forest with dirt roads. I see old cars here and there, old discarded trucks, mountains of old tired, outdated forestry equipment and barrels filled with garbage.

The Lord spoke to me again: "Look and tell me what you see!"

I see houses. What old houses... and no church. I see houses with broken windows, but lived in nevertheless. Houses that haven't been painted in years. Some houses were in need of a new roof but were recovered with plastic to keep the rain out. I see a clothes line and clothes blowing in the wind.

"What do you see in front of you? Tell me!"

I see roving dogs, thin, meandering down the streets. I see an old rusty swing, falling apart, and over there a small cemetery with wooden crosses.

"Look well, Claude, and tell me what you see!"

Yes, Lord! I see men over there! Tanned men with bulging bellies, looking at me distrustfully. I see some teenagers flying by me on their motorbike, immediately swallowed up in a cloud of dust. I see the women with their children, women with shiny black hair, their children looking at me with their little bright eyes. They turn away with saying anything and go into their houses.

Lord! What do you want me to do?

Lord! If I go and speak to them about you, they won't listen to me!

Lord! But, Lord! ...

Yes, Lord! I think I understand.

I will not be able to speak to them of you unless I become like you. You left your heaven to come to this earth and live among men. You could have sent messengers, but you decided to come in person. You walked among us and you gave of yourself without limit to do good all around.

You took care of the sick, healed the broken hearts, you gave people back their dignity. You taught them to love God and to love their brothers. You revealed salvation to them and eternity, so that their spirit would know peace.

I want to become like you, Lord!

Help me! Transform me!

Jesus didn't ask me to come and live among the Pacheedaht tribe, but he wanted to teach me something important. He caused me to understand that in order to serve effectively, we must become like him.

He could have asked me to live in this village and it would have been a reasonable request. No doubt he knows my commitment and my love for him have not yet reached this point.

A few months go by and here I am in my office, after a 16-month absence. Yellowed files, new challenges, other books to edit; routine sets in quickly once again. A few weeks from now, my beautiful cross-Canada trip will have taken its place among my souvenirs. As a book that we place on the shelf that slowly and quietly becomes covered with dust.

A quick trip to the post office to pick up a few letters. I open them. Hidden under some statements and bills, a small page, somewhat timid. Only a few words... but they pierce me like an arrow!

*Dear Claude,*

*I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your book which I have just finished reading. My own son also committed suicide. His name was Steeve, and this past year was a very difficult one. Your book was a great help to me.*

*Sonya*

My heart jumps inside of me. This letter brings me back into the real world. It revives within me the emotions, still fresh, which I experienced so many times during my long trip. And now all of these faces are streaming by in my head - all of the wonderful people I had the privilege of meeting. These heroes who suffered, who persevered, and others... whose effect on my life will last forever.

It's too much! No use fighting it! I give in! I press the button on the computer and leave the key to my office in sight on my work table.

Tomorrow morning I will put my old boots back on, and maybe you will meet me on the streets of your town, with a few books under my arm... and a radiant smile on my face!

*Excerpt from the book: The Traveler*



## **Between Friends**

Have you discovered your "mission" on this earth?

Looking back, has this present book helped you respond concretely to the needs of the people in your town? How?

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

There is something important that needs to be understood.

There are people who don't have much ability and who accomplish a lot with meager means, and yet others are over-gifted and don't bear any fruit whatsoever for the Kingdom of God. It is all a question of the heart and of love for God.

Certain people will go to the end of the earth to serve God and that is good, if that is their mission. If in your case, your calling is to make bread in a bakery and to serve the customer well with the fruit of your labor, well then, do it with all of your heart. The important thing is to be attentive to what God wants.

There are a thousand and one ways to get involved in the welfare of the people in your town; either alone, or in a group. It is better to take small steps in serving others than to remain passive, "waiting" for others (or God) to do it for you.

That is what is revealed to us in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-46). This week, open your eyes wide and take note of all the needs you see around you, in your neighbourhood, in your town.

And then, after praying, roll up your sleeves and act.

## A PRAYER

I breathe, I feel, I think, I love, in You.  
This world which hides You is transparent to me;  
It is You that I discover in nature,  
It is You that I bless in every creature.

*Alphonse de Lamartine*

### **Hearing from God**

Lord, my God, you and I have become good friends. We converse often now! But I need you just as much as the first time I prayed. I beg of you, my Father, let me hear your voice once more. Once more I rest my head on your shoulder. Speak to me, Dad!

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Matthew 5:6**

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

Heureux Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. They know how to take risks. Their battle for righteousness expresses their passion for God and for their neighbour. Blessed are those whose righteousness is not reduced to defending their own interests, those whose determination extends to the poorest and the most unfortunate: They will not be disoriented in the Kingdom of God!

More blessed still are those who seek to live daily with God, never giving up the hope of making progress on eternity road.

In this talk, Jesus intentionally alludes to "hunger and thirst" to indicate the intensity of the commitment we must make to him and to our fellow man. It is to point out how we are to embrace the cause of his Kingdom with all of the fervour our souls can have.

What a contrast there would be if this fervour was displayed by a multitude of people who set out daily in an unbridled race to acquire and possess more goods and riches than they are capable of using!

It is generally believed that the possession of wealth is what enriches us, satisfied us, but Jesus states the contrary. It is righteousness which produces this effect.

Therefore, since you are walking in the ways of righteousness, do not fear poverty. It's for those who covet riches, those prisoners of materialism, to fear losing everything; the righteous possess everything in safety. And if those men who don't seek to help others are so rich, how much more will those be rewarded who distribute their goods.

Jesus promised happiness to those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who seek first to live according to the criteria of the Kingdom of God. He teaches us in this way that all believers who leave their material desires to live according to real values will be satisfied with God's abundance. The rewards he gives to his children far surpass their desires. They can either be satisfied in this present life with the food the Lord referred to: 'My nourishment is to do the will of my Father', and the water he was referring to when he said that for the one who drinks, it 'will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life'.

Other recommended readings: Luke 12:1-44

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### Silas

Silas, also called Silvanus, a Roman citizen, was the companion of the Apostle Paul during many of his missionary journeys. His name means: of the forest. It is said that he was esteemed among the believers (Acts 15:22) and he was also a prophet (Acts 15:32). Silas was a dependable, trustworthy man. He was able to forget his own interests to keep harmony within the groups he was involved in. For that matter, we find him constantly in the company of other believers, crossing sea and land to spread the Good News of Jesus. And God knows what dangers he faced and what it cost to evangelize the towns and villages of the Roman Empire in the first century. The Acts of the apostles give us a brief indication of it (Acts 16-18).

What motivated him to endure such torture and to overcome such difficulties was a genuine love for God and for his neighbour. It is this love that creates true unity within the apostolic team, consecrated to evangelizing. Silas knew the meaning of the words: commitment, perseverance and friendship. The bible has only good to say about him. The Apostle Peter refers to him as a "faithful brother" (I Peter 5:12).

## IN A NUTSHELL

- To serve Jesus effectively, we must become like him.
- There are people who don't have a lot of ability and yet who accomplish a lot with meager means, whereas other are gifted and don't bear any fruit for the Kingdom of God. It is all a question of heart and of love for God.
- It is better to take small steps in serving others than to remain passive and just "wait" for others (or God) to do it for you.







## God in the World

I had the privilege of meeting an extraordinary woman who helped me to understand that to serve God, it is not necessary to wait for help from the government and the religious institutions.

Charla Perea is an ordinary housewife, mother of four and wife of a fireman in North Hollywood. We have translated and published her book *Charla's Children*, a book which has won a North-American literary prize. In it she tells how she founded an orphanage in the north of Mexico, helped by a small group of eight people who met to pray in her living room each week. The project grew and it presently consists of three orphanages, a medical clinic, a school and a mission center.

A few years ago, accompanied by a team of volunteers from Québec, we visited one of these orphanages. I discovered that Quebecers loved being involved in humanitarian aid projects. This is an element that we must encourage in our society.

Listening to Charla, I understood that when people experience a genuine relationship with Jesus, when they want to obey him with all their heart, when they pray passionately to be led in his will, God acts. Her book tells of numerous miracles the Lord performed.

What touches me deeply about the life of this woman is her simplicity and her great compassion. She had the kindness to pay me a visit in Quebec when my son died. We met again in Vancouver at a missionary conference and again she encouraged me to serve God without giving up and to believe him, even for the impossible.

Here is her story:

"I had read an article by the journalist Bruce Van Voorst about 'a huge group of abandoned children'. The main cities in Latin America are crawling with over a million children whose parents do not have the resources to care for them. The article reported that these children (some of them barely 5 years of age) live in dumps or steal food to survive. They wander barefoot, dirty, poorly dressed, and are infested with lice and worms. They roam the streets among the alcoholics and the homeless and live in totally unhealthy conditions. They sleep under bridges, in cemeteries and in sewer pipes. The young adolescents have no choice but to become prostitutes and the young boys become thieves or drug pushers.

Reading this article made me nauseated. Over a million children lived in conditions worse than those of Sodom and Gomorrah. "Lord! If only I could help them!"

At that precise moment, reality hit me dead on. How could someone as insignificant as I was to make even the slightest difference in a situation as critical as this?

I wasn't kidding myself; I had been a failure as a young girl, wife, mother and even as a Christian. At 16 I broke the heart of my parents the first time when I left town with Chuck, abandoning a 4-year university education. During the first years of my marriage, I was an unloving wife, centered on my own needs and constantly finding fault.

The result was a six-month separation and a near divorce. As a mother, I had some false values which led me to be too strict. Living in an impeccable house was more important to me than listening to my children and playing with them. As a woman, I never stopped comparing my abilities and my appearance to other women in a negative way.

I was also a failure as a Christian, reading my bible and talking about love, but not putting it into practice. I could not pray out loud until I was baptized in the Holy Spirit. By myself, I could do nothing for these abandoned children I read about, but with God, maybe I could help them.

Once the bible took on a new meaning for me, I understood that God takes pleasure in righting the wrongs and mistakes of worthless people:

"For consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth".

Proof of these words is manifested from *Genesis* to *Revelation*. Noah got drunk; Moses was a murderer; David, an adulterer; Rahab a prostitute; Mary was a peasant girl; Matthew, a greedy tax collector; John and James were volatile characters; and lastly Peter, a coward, denied the Lord three times.

In the eyes of many, even the life of Jesus was an overall failure, except before God the Father. Neither the joy nor the suffering deterred him from his main goal, to die for our sins and redeem those who would believe in him by his blood.

God loves to use worthless people and he transforms even their failures. He does it for those who depend completely on his grace and his support. I would never have believed that he would use me in this way.

We were in danger on a rocky road with potholes deep enough to break the axle of our car. A narrow road with no guardrails, extending along the edge of a 300-foot ravine which I didn't dare to look down. We had hoped to reach our destination before nightfall, but our cruising speed was about 15 kilometers an hour.

The Mexican Baja California peninsula was now in semi-darkness. We would soon be out of gas... and of courage. Our map led us to believe that there were several small villages along our route, but they were just small fishing inlets, with dilapidated buildings or just a bunch of cabins. There

was not a single gas station in sight. We were lost on this peninsula, about four hundred and fifty kilometers from home, and our family was already expecting us to be back. We had neither telephone nor radio to contact them or to ask for help.

The gas tank was now nearing empty and I shivered at the thought that we could be attacked by "bandidos" who terrorized travelers in this part of the country. It was hard to stay calm!

Chuck stopped the car on the edge of the road.

"What an adventure!" I said to myself.

An article in the local newspaper had drawn my attention to a small village by the name of Colonia Vicente Guerrero. An Episcopalian pastor, on a historic trip to rediscover ancient Spanish missions, had mentioned the ruins of old abandoned buildings: a two-storey theater, a casino and a motel used for prostitution.

The McNally atlas situated the Baja right near California, bordered by the Gulf of California on the east and the Pacific Ocean on the west. The major part of Mexico is east of the gulf. I had felt the need to pray for this little primitive village, without electricity, without a telephone or other commodities. It was situated 288 kilometers south of the American border and our home was 190 kilometers north of the border. I was expecting an enjoyable day's journey.

"Enjoyable" wasn't exactly the appropriate term.

I had suggested to Chuck that we go on Saturday morning, along with our friends Roy and Nell Bean. It was his birthday. Chuck likes to travel and Nell and Roy didn't get the opportunity very often. So they accepted the invitation.

We didn't know anything about Mexico nor of its terrible road conditions. We were thrilled with the notion of seeing the different varieties of plants which grow along the sandy edges of the desert, bordered by the turquoise waters of the ocean,

Considerable time elapsed before we realized that there hadn't been a single village along the way, much less a gas station! Night had fallen and no one wanted to speak to me. Everyone wondered if such a place as Colonia Vicente Guerrero even existed.

"Why would God have asked me to pray for a village which didn't exist?" I asked the silent group, on a defensive note.

"I don't know", replied Chuck, when the car headlights pointed to a pile of rocks, directly in front of us. "But you had better start to pray now, because we hardly have any gas left and we are lost somewhere on this Mexican peninsula".

The night never seemed so dark. We had not seen any sign of life for hours now and fear was haunting us. I thought of our family in North Hollywood. We should all have arrived home by now.

Our children and the babysitter must be worried to death. And here we were in the middle of nowhere, not knowing where to go.

I didn't dare look at the gas indicator. The motor must be running only on our prayers at this point. We were crossing a dry riverbed when, all of a sudden, just before us were some huts and a white stucco building with "Informacion" written on the front.

"Do you see that sign!" cried Chuck. It could mean nothing other than "Information!" We then noticed, through an open window, a short man in dark clothes.

Quickly, Chuck and I, leaning over the steering wheel of our vehicle, tried to make him understand that we were lost and looking for a gas station. After a number of tries, the man seemed to understand what we were saying. He made a few gestures with his hand as if giving directions but could see that we didn't understand, so he indicated that he wanted to get into the car. I moved over and he slid in on the seat beside me. "We have an angel with us!" I said to Chuck. Our guide led us to a dirt road. A few minutes later, by the light of the stars, we finally came to some large buildings.

The man asked us to stop. He got out and started knocking at the door of one of the buildings. He knocked for five minutes until a short Mexican lady, 50 or so, quite stout, with brown eyes and hair, came to open the door.

The man spoke to her for a minute pointing to us a few times, explaining that we were lost Americans. She turned, looked at the car and made signs to us to come in. At last, free of the distress, thanks to the kindness of this woman. But we began to feel the fatigue.

This woman was extremely kind. Speaking English with a Spanish accent, she invited us in and told us that she had once lived in the United States.

"You must stay for the night", she said. "Tomorrow morning I will help you".

Then, Chuck and I remembered the man who had led us here. When we went back to the door to thank him, he had disappeared!

We looked up the road but no one was in sight.

Our host, Juana, introduced us to her son who lived with her; a young man in his 20's, a "macho" with black hair. "I also take care of nine abandoned children who live in the old casino", she told us. I was astonished!

She offered us a chair, but noticing that our faces were drawn with fatigue, she suggested that we go to bed. But how could we sleep without knowing where we could buy gas? I asked her the question. Juana smiled!

"I have everything you need! You will see tomorrow!"

She then opened a door and, with the help of her son, prepared two camp cots.

As a result of the worry and our fatigue, I didn't sleep very well. I knew that back home the children and our neighbours would believe that we had had an accident, and the fact that I was unable to call made me anxious.

I awoke before dawn and rather than toss and turn and wake Chuck, I got up and went outside, overwhelmed with my problems.

As I walked in the soft morning light, I was praying, trying to find answers. I was impressed with the beauty of the area: the abandoned buildings, the gold-coloured sand and the palm trees - all seemingly painted on a canvass in reddish hues at the foot of high mountains.

The first verse of Psalm 121 came to my mind: "I lift up my eyes to the hills - where does my help come from?"

Why would anyone build these buildings in an area with so little traffic? If it was like the newspaper article said, there was a casino here, a motel in the shape of an "L" and an enormous theater made of cement blocks. The old theater was built in an unusual shape and looked like a huge grey elephant at rest.

Prior to that morning, I had never had a vision. But, looking at the abandoned motel, with its faded wooden doors hanging on rusty hinges, the wind making little beige sand dunes inside, I heard the laughter of children, out of nowhere.

How could this be? The building was empty! I went in and saw that no one was there. Then, again, the distinct sound of children laughing. It was real!

Then the bushes, the cream-coloured flowers and the wild shrubs seemed to disappear to make way for a big field of wheat. A bible verse resounded in my spirit: "The harvest is great but the labourers are few."

I was filled with wonder and exclaimed: "Lord, this place should be renovated to house orphans!"

I walked around the whole 72 acres of the property and felt the need to pray over it: "Lord, I dedicate this property to you!"

Of course someone would have to take the place over in order for the vision to become reality. I prayed that God would send that person, - but I never imagined that I, a simple housewife from North Hollywood, California, would one day be the one he would choose."



## Between Friends

God is looking for people who love him. He wants to share his secrets and his projects with us. He wants to take us by the hand and lead us into doing his will. Are we ready to trust him? Why?

## LOVE IN ACTIONS

For over 50 years now, World Vision has been working to change the lives of children in need. At the present time, the organization has representatives in over 60 countries. It is the largest humanitarian partnership in the world.

It is also the largest sponsorship organization in the country. World Vision was officially recognized by the Canadian government as a trustworthy organization which has as its mission to help developing countries. Grants from the Canadian International Development Agency are regularly directed to those in need through this organization and the money is strictly controlled. Today, Canadians sponsor more than 250,000 children through World Vision. The sponsorship provides clean water, health services and education for children. By participating in the sponsorship program, you will receive, every year, an annual report of the progress of the child you are sponsoring.

This report will emphasize what has been accomplished in matters of education and health as well as the child's general state. You will also receive the magazine *Children of the World*, a publication which informs you precisely about the work of World Vision throughout the world. Besides, in accordance with the principle of submission of accounts, financial reports are published annually and are available on request.

You also receive a Christmas card from your child. A recent photo of the child you are sponsoring will be included either in the Christmas card or in the progress report. When you have given your first gift, you receive a folder explaining the different ways you can develop a bond with the child. You can also visit the community of the child you are sponsoring and see the changes your gifts have made possible. Some people get involved even more, taking part in humanitarian aid trips.

It is also possible for you to take part in a dynamic volunteer effort in your area.

By associating with World Vision, volunteers explain the transforming impact sponsoring children has in reducing poverty, hunger and sickness in our world. Volunteers increase awareness

in their own communities to the needs of the poor and explain the ways that World Vision meets these needs. Children who live in poverty do not have the means to testify for themselves. They need us to do it.

Consider the possibility of sponsoring a child, through World Vision or any other accredited organization. You can take part in a humanitarian aid trip or join a group of devoted volunteers who use their God-given gifts and talents to change the world.

## A PRAYER

Lord, may my heart be broken by all that breaks yours.

### **Hearing from God...**

Here I am, Lord. Speak to me, lead me, send me to spread your Gospel everywhere, send me to love those around me... and to love those of the whole world.

## SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

Scripture Reading: **Matthew 5:5**

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth".

And here ends our study of the Sermon on the Mount. It has shown us how to live a BLESSED life, staying close to Jesus and faithful to his teaching.

Those who know they are poor in themselves are BLESSED, for they are small in their own eyes. They recognize their need of the Saviour.

The afflicted are BLESSED because they continually depend on the goodness of God and on the strength the Holy Spirit gives. They are comforted by God.

The meek are BLESSED, for they yield to the unjust whose victims they are, they triumph over evil by doing good. BLESSED are those who do not give in to the cycle of violence and who dare to go as far as to love their enemies. They inherit the earth, from which it will not be possible to remove them .

Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness are BLESSED for they know that true righteousness comes only from God. They know his grace, source of all spiritual blessings. They know that God will never leave them.

Those who show proof of goodness to others are BLESSED, for they have discovered that the secret of happiness resides in compassion towards others who suffer and are in misery.

Those whose hearts are pure are BLESSED, for they see the holiness of God.

Their conscience has been cleansed and they live peacefully. They have turned from their sins and have chosen to quench their thirst daily in the love of God.

Those who create peace around them are BLESSED for they reap the fruit. They remain constantly in love in spite of tumults and agitation. They have found refuge in God and know how to bring calm in the midst of the storm.

Those who are persecuted because they act as God would have them act, are BLESSED, for they are in communion with the Christ who endured the same outrageous acts. In this world, it is the rich and powerful who rule. But the world to come is for those who love God and love their neighbour, for those who are not ashamed to be identified with Jesus and who love his Word.

Other recommended readings: Psalms 4:6-8; 32:2; 84:5-7; 41:1; 73:1-28; Ecclesiastes 2:1-26; Isaiah 48:18; James 1:21-25.

## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

### The friends of Jesus

The last chapter in the Epistle to the Romans ends on a friendly note, with greetings. The expression of such tender sentiments and affection brings us once again to the essential point of Christianity: to love God with all our heart and our neighbour as ourselves.

Although this passage does not reveal any theological truth or dogma, it touches me deeply. It brings me to the time, two thousand years back, where I embrace those who profess the same faith as mine and who love Jesus. The names of these Christians who are greeted by the apostle show a great diversity in origin (Greeks, Romans, Jews), and in social status (people of high rank, slaves, or former slaves). I took pleasure in researching the meaning of each name and inserting it into the text. This is what it gives:

"I commend to you our sister Phoebe (pure and radiant), a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well. Greet Prisca (the small firstborn) and Aquila (this eagle), who work with me in Christ

Jesus, and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Greet also the church in their house.

Greet my beloved Epaphroditus (worthy of praise), who was the first convert in Asia for Christ.

Greet Mary (the rebellious one), who has worked very hard among you. Greet Andronicus (victorious man) and Junia (the young one), my relatives who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.

Greet Ampliatus (the tall one), my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbanus (polite and courteous citizen), our co-worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys (this growing cob of corn).

Greet Apelles (excluded one), who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus (best counselor). Greet my relative Herodion (heroic one). Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus (surprising one).

Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena (refined one) and Tryphosa (delicate one). Greet the beloved Persis (the Persian), who has worked hard in the Lord.

Greet Rufus (the red), chosen in the Lord; and greet his mother; a mother to me also.

Greet Asyncritus (the incomparable), Phlegon (flamboyant), Hermes (hero of the gods), Patrobas (the paternal), Hermas (hero of the gods), and the brothers and sisters who are with them. Greet Philologus (friend of knowledge), Julia (the soft-haired), Nereus (who does not fail) and his sister, and Olympas (the heavenly), and all the saints who are with them.

Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus affirms that the names of those who believed in him are written in the Book of Life. Is there any greater joy here below than to know that one day we will live in heaven with Jesus and the believers from all the ages? Let us rejoice therefore!

## IN A NUTSHELL

- When people have a genuine relationship with Jesus, when they desire to obey him with all of their hearts, when they pray passionately to be led in his will, God acts.
- The Sermon on the Mount has shown us how to live a BLESSED life, staying close to Jesus and faithful to his teaching.
- Consider the possibility of sponsoring a child, of taking part in a trip for humanitarian aid, or of joining a group of devoted volunteers who use their God-given gifts and talents to change the world.





## Conclusion

A few weeks after my return from this long Canadian tour, I contacted a number of persons whom I had met during the course of my trip. I simply wanted to renew acquaintances and chat a bit. What joy to reminisce over the good times we had together, to laugh and kid each other.

One by one I turn the pages of my trip logbook. What memories! Each name opens a new door in my memory, revives a new image. I stand still for a good while, lost in my thoughts.

But wait! At the top of that page there! Karina's name!

Do you remember her? She was the young woman that I had picked up on the highway. I wonder how she is doing. I dial the telephone number at her mother's home.

- Hello! Who is this, please? (It's the voice of her brother).
- Claude... Claude Tremblay. A friend of Karina. I would like to speak to her, please.
- Oh! Well! I don't know you! Are you a good friend of my sister?
- To be truthful, I picked her up in my vehicle when I was on my way back from a tour of the northern towns of British Columbia. I would simply like to say a few words to her. Is she home? I can call later if you would rather.
- A tour? What kind of tour?
- Well! It's a bit delicate! A tour about suicide prevention. Karina had told me that your Dad had committed suicide a few years ago and we had a good discussion on the topic. I am sorry! I understand. It is a difficult trial to go through. I also lost someone whom I loved a lot.
- Oh, I am sorry about that! I am really sorry, Sir! I am sorry!
- Would you rather I call later, when Karina is home?
- I am sorry, Sir! I am sorry! Karina took her own life less than a month ago!
- Ahhhh!!!
- I am sorry! Good bye!

I had a hard time believing what I just heard. No! Not again! Not Karina! She was a pearl! God had good plans for her life! No, this is terrible!

Unfortunately it was true. The sad truth!

How I would have loved to help Karina. How I would have loved to visit her. I wanted to meet her mother. Get to know her brother. Discuss, pray, and cry with them!

But here I am, at the other end of the country, thousands of kilometers away. What can I do?

Well then, I will do what I know how to do best, write!

That is why I dedicate this book to all of the Karina's of our society and to those who want to come to their rescue. I pray with all my heart that God will use these few modules to multiply, a hundred times, the means of help throughout our country.

Small groups offer an effective way to break loneliness and solitude. They are an excellent way to extend a hand to those who are suffering. They allow us to respond to the different needs in our society.

I encourage you to continue your weekly meetings even though this training period has ended. There are other available resources (books, DVD's, Web site) through which you can deepen your study of the bible and grow personally, to become more effective in the various fields of action where you have chosen to become involved.

Remember, God will always be your primary resource. You must turn to him first and foremost. He loves you and will never abandon you.

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