

SEVEN SHORT WORDS for the LONG HAUL



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"Men trip, not on mountains but over stones." (Indian proverb).

In the beginning, God spoke, and so it was.

A child, on hearing the creation account read in Genesis 1, summarized it perfectly: 'No sooner said than done'. The boundless reaches of our vast universe and all it contains is the result of a communicative act of power and love that brought creation into being. His words were not just life-giving and truth-conferring, but were rooted in wholesome purpose and loving intent. The results of His spoken words were inherently and substantially good, as point which God repeatedly affirms (Genesis 1:10; 12; 17, etc.).

But whereas God speaks at creation, He speaks to the first two image-bearing human beings. His words created as well as communicated. He related to them with words of affirmation and delegated authority - and a verdict of judgment when they fell. He controls creation by command, but seeks to communicate with us in justice, love and truth.

God's words reveal and transform – they are one-of-a-kind in their power and effect.

And always relevant. Each and every spoken instruction out of the mouth of God in Scripture is at once both timely and timeless. The Bible (or 'the Word of God written' as our Anglican Book of Common Prayer calls it) is, from first page to last - green garden to golden streets - a living testimony to the truth, power and grace engendered in each divine utterance. God's Word has infinite power to create and complete, to judge and redeem, to inform and transform.

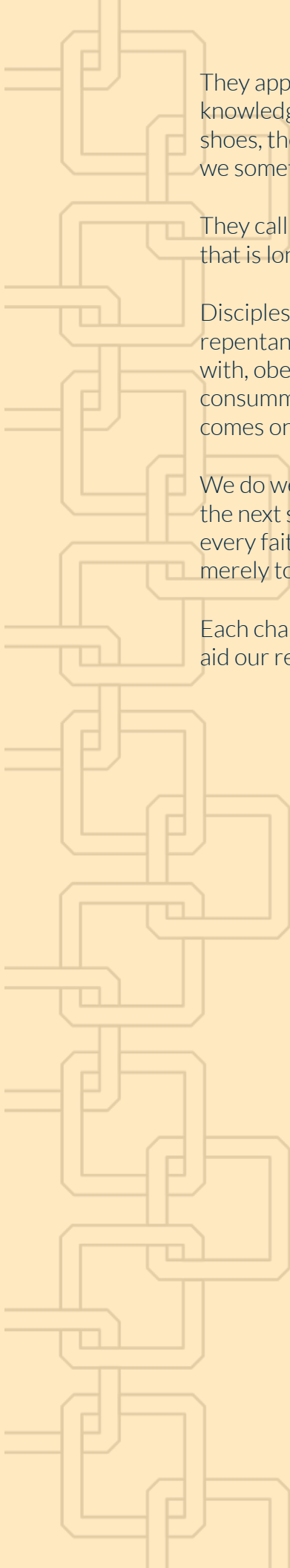
But it is Jesus who is the focal and preeminent point of God's revelation. He is God's Word as John makes plain in the opening of his Gospel - creator and redeemer sui generis – the only eternal Son of God come to earth. And so it follows, His words are life to us – since alone has the words of eternal life (John 6:68).

They invariably communicate God's heart of justice and love. In our fallen world of blatant lies, half-truths, coarse cursing and careless whispers, His word constitute a category all of their own. Unlike us, God always speaks pure, unadulterated truth. And we live and die by what we make of His words.

In Christ, God's living Word took on flesh and bones, and spoke. Jesus called those with listening ears to respond. 'The sheep follow Him, for they know His voice' (John 10:4).

As a disciple of Jesus, I find living by Jesus' words both a comfort and a challenge.

Most of all, it is not the big words of faith that label deep theological concepts that I have most everyday struggles with, but the small words that are the lexicon of daily discipleship - the regular commands and disciplines of faith, captured by pithy transitive verbs like 'wait', 'seek', 'listen' and 'go'.



They appear so often in Scripture that many commit the fallacy of equating knowledge and familiarity with compliance and practice. But like pebbles in our shoes, these small words of God are a grating challenge to the careless indifference we sometimes (or often) pay to holy habits on the way of faith.

They call us to attend to life-style changes and a disciplined focus, to an obedience that is long and practiced, not merely creedal and assented to.

Discipleship then involves a receptiveness to God's Word and ways in which we, the repentant, converted, adopted children of Father God, listen, read, share, grapple with, obey, apply and ultimately live out Jesus' story of creation, redemption and consummation under the power and direction of the Holy Spirit, till His kingdom comes on earth.

We do well then to consider how we listen as Jesus once instructed (Luke 8:18). In the next short chapters, I intend then to look at seven small but potent words that every faithful and fruitful disciple ought to know, live and teach. May God help us not merely to read and listen and learn, but also to do and live.

Each chapter will be followed by two or three application questions that I hope will aid our reflection and application around each word presented.

1. 'Come'

It was the late Canon David Watson who said that discipleship begins not with a 'go' but with a 'come'. We are called as disciples to come to Christ, in submission and worship, on His terms. In order to truly come to Him, something has to be left behind. The basic assumption of discipleship is that in finding Him who becomes our very life, we give up everything else that is an impediment to following Him. (Luke 14:33) This is challenging on many levels.

I want to briefly focus on two: the individual and community.

Firstly, discipleship is a call to come on an individual level. This call originates first and foremost from Christ. In New Testament days, a disciple would choose his own master and voluntarily join his school. But Jesus called those he chose. We see this in the calling of the twelve (Matthew 4:18-22, Mark 1:14, Luke 6:12-16, John 15:16).


Today, we often speak of making a decision for Christ, of giving our lives to Him or of inviting God into our lives, as though the onus was all ours. Yet, Scripture shows us that God is the One who first searches and calls us to Himself. He is the veritable Hound of Heaven. The Apostles seem very aware that they and all true believers were chosen, called and commissioned by Christ.

Romans 1:1 and 7 is a classic example: 'Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God...to all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints.' (See also 1 Corinthians 1:26, 2 Corinthians 2:17, 1 Thessalonians 1:4).

This call to come is both costly and comforting. In Matthew 16:24, Jesus tells all prospective disciples that to follow him involved carrying a cross - by which his listeners would have understood he meant the death sentence of crucifixion. "When a man knows he is to be hanged in two weeks, it concentrates his mind wonderfully," wrote Samuel Johnson. In carrying the cross and following Him, Jesus becomes our great goal, our only horizon.

To come to Christ implicitly involves giving up on self-centered-ness and sin. We have a new Master and Lord. One who also gloriously give us rest. Jesus calls us to come to Him to exchange our wearisome burden, the crushing weight of sin, for a yolk that we now jointly carry with Christ, one infinitely lighter. (Matthew 11:28-30).

Secondly, we are called to come together as community. We who are born-again, are born into a family of disciples. There is no such thing as lone-ranger Christianity. We are called both to share our lives with Him and with one another. So John 15:16, which states that He first chose each one of us is followed immediately in the next verse by the command, 'love each other.' In fact, they are at least 59 'each other'/'one-another' statements in the New Testament alone. We are called into community. Jesus calls us to come to Him, with others.



The challenge to every disciple is to learn to come first and foremost to Christ, with humility and sincerity of heart, seeking Him alone. We must do this often and habitually, whether alone in daily times of meeting and communion with God, or with others in the community where we regularly come together to God, in Great Commission Cells or Sunday congregations. But come we must, individually and corporately.

And whenever we come in Spirit and truth, we will find Him waiting.

Reflection/Application:

- a. What does it mean to 'come' to Jesus daily as a disciple? What activities may constitute obedience to this call to 'come'?
- b. What barriers in my life prevent me from 'coming to' Jesus in my personal life as well as 'coming with' others to him? Ask God to help you remove them today.

How much importance do you give to spending time discipling and being disciples with others? Have you unwittingly succumb to the spirit of this age with its narcissistic tendencies to be about 'me, myself and I' only? Repent to God if you recognize this is an issue in your life.

2. Wait

Jesus never ran anywhere, as far as we know. In his ministry years in the Gospel accounts, we never find him rushing frantically about. Even the imminent death of his beloved Lazarus failed to set Jesus off on a frenzy of travel (John 11:3, 5-6).

Many years ago, Kosuke Kuyama, a Japanese theologian wrote a book called 'Three Mile an Hour God'¹ where he argued that the speed at which God walks with people is the speed of the average walker on a casual stroll - three miles an hour. Kuyama's thesis was that God goes slow in his educational process of man - he took 40 years to teach the children of Israel that both His heavenly manna and His covenant Words were to be their staple diet. God was not in a hurry with His people. Kuyama calls it is the speed of love. In a world of hurry up and go, we need to consider this carefully.

The disciple journeys at God's pace, deliberately stopping where He stops, moving on when He signals. Invariably it involves seasons of being still and waiting on God. But busy people want to get going and are not patient enough to go at God's speed.

Led by what has been called the tyranny of the urgent, the demanding all-pervasive demands of 'here and now' moments, we easily forsake God in the crowd and noise.

Busyness, distraction and restlessness are the dust that choke the life out of disciples' meaningful waiting times on God.

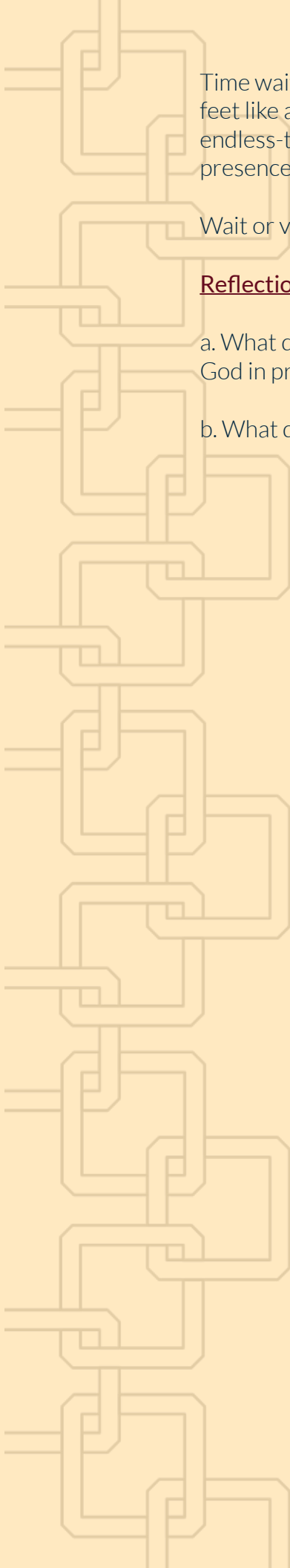
The Psalmist extorts: 'Wait for the Lord, be strong and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!' (Psalm 27:14).

A few years ago, one morning in the midst of my ritual of impatiently browsing through a passage of Scripture and personal petitioning (you could call it 'devotion-lite'), I heard the still small voice of God interrupt my thoughts: 'Come away with Me.'

Immediately, my mind responded with an uncertain 'When, Lord?' In fact, the reticence in my question betrayed my unwillingness to even contemplate the idea. I knew too well that my plate was full of 'other demands' - the busyness of 'Christian' ministry, not to mention family life and work. Coming away with God would just be another item vying for space an already full schedule. I kept God on hold - a servant too busy to heed his master's bidding!

Jesus on the other hand never let needs or ministry demands dictate the pace of His work. The speed of His walk with His Father included walking away from crowds (Mark 1:35); going away on His own (Matthew 14:23); finding desolate places to pray (Luke 5:16) and hiding from popularity (John 6:15).

The only thing that mattered it seemed was pleasing His Father and being with Him (John 4:34, 8:28-29). For us as disciples, this equates to us making space in our lives for occasional retreats (with our spouses and others) and regular daily time alone with God.



Time waiting on the Lord primes us for the work of God. We do better to sit at Jesus' feet like a quieted Mary, hanging on to Jesus' every word, than be hyper-ventilating endless-to-do-list-ticking Marthas, angry and complaining, devoid of peace and His presence.

Wait or vent. Be still or be restive. The choice really is ours.

Reflection/Application:

- a. What does it mean to 'wait' on the Lord? How much time do I spend waiting on God in prayer, worship and rest?
- b. What do I need to stop doing in order to start waiting on God more?

1 Kosuke Koyama (1979), *Three Mile an Hour God*, (UK: SCM Press)

3. 'Seek'

I remember when my son was four or five, he used to love playing hide-and-seek with me. Only his idea of hiding did not require much seeking. There was usually a rear-end sticking out from under the bed or feet showing from under the curtains, not to mention giveaway giggles when I'd take too long to find him.

From peek-a-boos to egg and treasure-hunts, word searches and cross-words, we learn early that seeking and finding things little and large can be fun.

But seeking God is on an all-together different plane. To start with, His ineffable presence is hidden and mysterious; shrouded by clouds of glory and the lights of a heaven far removed from us. As the lines from the old hymn go:

*Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes*

Without Him, we grope around lost and in darkness. In truth, it is our sin working in league with the devil and his concomitant world systems that have kept us sightless and separated from such a holy God.

Yet, when Jesus became one of us, he bore witness to His and His father's desire to seek and find lost people (Luke 19:10, John 4:23). He is truly not far from any one of us (Acts 17:27). In fact, God is in the search-and-rescue business. From first page to last, the Bible is an historical epic of God's movement in search of a holy people who would be His own precious possession. God's first recorded question in Scripture is a searching 'where are you?' God spared no effort, not least the life of His beloved Son, to find us. The light of God's revelation then pierces the gloom and doom of our dark histories and reveals through Israel and her Messiah that God alone is Majestic Maker, Mighty Master and Merciful Mender.

Jesus, in Matthew 6:33 and in the context of teaching about the need to trust God for our daily needs, challenged and contrasted the all-consuming pagan concerns for the here-and-now (read 'modern day consumerism') with a call to look to God's interests first. The Message paraphrases Matthew 6:33 helpfully: "Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met."

We have choices to make every day over the form and content of our lives.

To seek God's kingdom is to let His priorities and His vision shape the order and substance of our lives. The provision (which is literally, 'for-vision') will follow.

Seeking is a conscious act. It is choosing to re-focus our lives so that we trust and obey Him over all other voices, considerations and philosophy. It is a call to the simplicity and single-mindedness of the Gospel. Jesus once told a series of parables equating the kingdom of God to the finding of treasure the is acquired at great, if not total, cost. (Matthew 13:44-46). He also spoke of the need to be single-eyed and have undivided hearts (Matthew 6:22-24.)

Like so many of these little words we are examining, the meaning of 'seek' is plain - the doing is altogether more challenging. Why is seeking God and His Kingdom such a difficult exercise? We should remember that we are all the seed of a couple who tried to distort truth to fit their twisted desires, rather than conforming their desires to fit the revealed truth of God. In Adam, we lost God's one clear version of truth for our endless surreptitious and defective versions. We exchanged simplicity for duplicity. Seeking God calls us back to a world that exists by, for, through, and to Him, on His terms alone.

And so the re-born and renewed disciple of Jesus Christ must make a return to the single-mindedness demanded by his/her Lord. Being part of a regular on-going disciple-making cell is one way we can help each other to keep on seeking the Kingdom of God first.

In addition, I recommend that we take time in occasional retreat to make an inventory or check-list of all regular and leisurely activities, daily tasks and responsibilities that control, occupy or distract us from the single-minded pursuit of God and His ways. Ask God to help us know His mind of what needs to change in our schedules, attitudes and activities so that He can truly have first place.

God's kingdom then is both our goal and reward. For when we purpose to seek God everyday, we shall surely find Him who desires to come close to us (James 4:8). God Himself promised that we would find Him if we sought Him whole-heartedly (Jeremiah 29:13 cf Deuteronomy 4:29). Perhaps, like my son Josiah, God prefers to be found.

Reflection/Application:

- a. Seeking the Lord is a conscious act. How will I know if I am seeking God and His Kingdom first in my life? How will others know as well?
- b. Think of one thing you want to do differently tomorrow or this week, to help you cultivate the habit of seeking God's kingdom first (e.g. making time with God the first thing I do in the day).

4. 'Hear'

'He who has ears to hear, let him hear' (Mark 4:9).

Have you heard the voice of God lately? God speaks to us in many varied ways, including through our reading of the Scriptures; the teaching and preaching of His Word; the counsel of the saints; the revelation gifts of the Holy Spirit; circumstances and creation, the voice of reason, godly tradition and reflective experience. But few of us have heard God speak audibly.

A friend of mine, a fine Christian girl from the Congo, once told me how she distinctly heard God's audible voice in the middle of the night. She had been reflecting earlier on the story of Samuel (1 Samuel 3:1-14) and had nonchalantly asked the Lord to give her a similar experience. Not so long after, in the middle of the night as she walked pass her living room, she heard her name distinctly being called out. But she was no eager-eared Samuel – she rushed back into her bed, drew the covers over and trembled, eventually drifting off to fitful sleep, a response she later regretted.

There is however, little doubt that God spoke audibly to Adam and Eve. But one fateful day, Eve gave ear to a different voice, that of a serpent that questioned and challenged God's command, no doubt utterly beguiling in his most seductive, dulcet tones. Adam and Eve ate and fell. The damming deed done, on hearing the sound of God's approach, they now realized they were not fit anymore to meet with Him. So they did what any sane sinner would: they took cover and hid; not ever asking how one plays 'hide-and-seek' with an all-seeing God. God called out, and when they began finger-pointing, He sent them out of Eden in judgment. Intimacy with God was lost, and with it, our ability to hear Him clearly.

Sin makes us spiritually hard of hearing. God still spoke, but increasingly, the people of God found it hard to listen and remember His words, over and above other competing voices and cultural practices of the surrounding nations. The prophets God sent to Israel found God's people hard of hearing and unconcerned with taking His clear instructions to heart.

Jesus on the other hand, often ended teaching moments with a more enigmatic challenge: 'To him who has ears to hear, let him hear.' Clearly, he was addressing those who were longing to respond to the voice of God, not ignore or question it. And some did, recognizing them as having divine weight and authority. 'You have the words of eternal life,' said one in John 6:68.

And as they listened, faith took hold. For the listening ear is a door to a converted soul. 'Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.' (Romans 10:17). When the searching voice of God finds people willing and ready to listen, transactions of eternal value are effected. The very Word that spoke creation into being, finding entrance in the dark chaotic voids within us, does the ever-novel work of creating light and life once more. In Christ, God speaks to us – through the words of Scripture and through the activity of the Spirit.

But these are days when many Christians struggle to hear God. We are easily distracted by the booming sounds of our own plans, the haunting melodies of illegitimate desires, screaming ambitions and the sheer noise of the world around, which so often drowns out His gentle voice. Listening does not come easy to us who live in the fast lane.

But Jesus had ears only for God (see John 8:26, 28), and expects that we too will know and hear his voice (see John 10:3-5). He tells us clearly that we need to likewise consider both what we hear (Mark 4:24) and how we hear (Luke 8:18). In fact, the clause 'hear the Word of the Lord' is replete throughout Scripture, occurring some 32 times.

Witness then the posture of the true listener - the three closest disciples of Jesus find themselves literally floored when, on that unique mountain-top experience with the transfigured Christ, they learn that God doesn't need grand-advisors or consultants, but obedient servants at the ready - 'This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!' (Mark 9:7 cf Deuteronomy 18:15). We as God's servants must then be ready to respond with faith, rather than harden our hearts by unbelief, as Hebrews 3:15 exhorts us.

Ultimately, just as we must first come to Jesus before we can go for Him, we must likewise learn to listen to Jesus before we can speak or do for him.

Listening is only a precursor to obedience, as many Scriptures warn (Matthew 7:24-27, Luke 6:46, John 14:24, James 1:22, etc.). When I served in the Singapore army, they taught us a simple rule: 'All you have to do is make sure you've obeyed the last command.' This is also true for all disciples of Jesus. Obedience is the ultimate test of our hearing.

And until we obey, we will find Him silent.

Reflection/Application:

a. Start a journal that you can use to write down and record all that God speaks to you - from your daily devotional time, sermons, talks, books, and your conversations with those who are discipling you and those you are discipling. Make a habit of reading back over what you've written, at least once a month. Learn also to share with others what God has spoken to you. Develop the habit of building others up, especially those you are discipling and reaching for Christ.

b. What did Jesus mean when he said 'be careful how you listen'? (Luke 8:18). How do we be careful how we listen to him?

5. See

One day a good many years ago now, during a time of vibrant worship in a large church, I 'heard' God speak clearly to me - 'I want you to have eyes only for Me.'

What I believe God was challenging me to was to have Him as the all consuming vision of my life, not letting any other person or thing capture my imagination, color my zeal and compromise my faithfulness to Him. God desired me to stay focused on Him, to fix my eyes on Jesus.

We live in days when many Christians have spiritual myopia. They see and seek worldly pursuits and goals as though they have ultimate and enduring value. Contra the Apostle Paul, they look not for things unseen and eternal, but for things seen and temporal.(2 Corinthians 4:18).

They have given in to the spirit of our age, which as Ravi Zacharias points out, tends to hear with its eyes and think with its feelings.² In Scriptural terms, they are becoming blind to, rather than seeing with greater clarity, the things of God.

Throughout Scripture, sight and blindness are often used as metaphors referring not to the physical sense and use of our eyes or their lack there of, but to spiritual perception, revelation and understanding or their absence.

For example, Psalm 34:8 encourages us to 'taste and see that the Lord is good'. Sight here is both experiential and revelatory. In Psalm 119:18. the psalmist prays that God may give him 'sight' to see wonderful things in God's law or instruction. Simeon sang of seeing God's salvation as he held and looked on the infant Jesus in his arms. (Luke 2:20) Negatively, Isaiah 6:9,10 (quoted by Jesus in Mark 4:12), speaks of the disobedient children of Israel who because of their stubborn unbelief are given to 'seeing but never perceiving'. In 2 Corinthians 4:4, Paul wrote of how Satan has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the glorious gospel of Christ.

Indeed, because we were all conceived into sin, we are all born partial-sighted.

For we all view events and experiences through the shades and lenses of world-views colored by sin, incomplete knowledge, cultural prejudices and subjective experiences and beliefs. Such skewed perceptions of our fallen nature are as delusional as mirages in the desert. There was even a point in the exodus journey of Israel, when a group of rebellious leaders told Moses that it was Egypt, the erstwhile land of their slavery that was actually flowing with milk and honey! (Numbers 16:13)

To redeem us, God must therefore transform our sight. He does this by changing not merely what we see but how we see it. The Psalmist declares: 'In your light we see light' (Psalm 36:9) - a reality-defining statement matched only in power and magnanimity by an equally sonorous one by Jesus: 'I am the light of the world' (John 8:12). The point of both is clear - God's light is our only trust-worthy source of truth and life.

In the kingdom of God, believing must precede seeing. When He becomes our sole guide in all areas of life, God's truth-telling will alter our reality by changing our altogether deceiving perceptions and expectations, exposing our blind-spots time and again. 'One sees great things from the valley, only small things from the peak,' said G. K. Chesterton.

When we come to see as He sees, things appear very different - in size, importance and consequence. He changes our vision by changing our perspectives.

This change process begins first in our minds with the entry of His word (Psalm 119:130). A transformation takes place through the renewal of the mind that goes hand in hand with a rejection of the world's right to dictate the form and content of our new world-view (Romans 12:1-2). As we walk onto the altar of surrender in a spiritual act of worship and stay there, we will come to see that His will is indeed good, pleasing and perfect. So trusting in God, we will dance to a different tune. This is what Paul meant when he said that 'we walk by faith, not by sight.' (2 Corinthians 5:7). Consequently, we will live differently because we see differently (see, for example 2 Corinthians 5:16 and Ephesians 1:18-19, 5:8).

Therefore, the disciple of Jesus will seek to look deep into God's word as a mirror that tells him like he is, but also is the means by which we are transformed in ever increasing degrees of glory as we continue to behold God's glory (2 Corinthians 3:16-18).

Reflection/Application:

- a. Spend time reflecting on Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6:22-23 about having healthy eyes and vision. In the context of this part of the sermon of the Mount, why is it important to be, as some translations of verse 22 put it, 'single-eyed'?
- b. How can you learn to see things from God's perspective? It will become soon obvious that we need God's Word and His Holy Spirit to transform our vision. Time daily spent in God's word is essential ('to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest' is what Thomas Cranmer wrote in one of his prayers in the Book of Common Prayer) as it being part of a regular disciple-making group in mutual learning, encouragement and accountability. Make a plan of action.

6. Ask

We are the most privileged people on earth! No one else but Christ-followers, adopted children of God bought with His blood, have access into the very throne room of God - a hot-line to the creator, sustainer and owner of the universe!

Jesus talked about it often enough - 'Ask and it will be given you.' (Matthew 7:7) 'Until now, you have not asked anything in my name.' (John 16:24). 'If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.' (Matthew 21:22).

And understandably so, because Jesus knew our vital dependence on God. Prayer is the oxygen of the believing soul, and so the disciple of Jesus will ask, often and with faith.

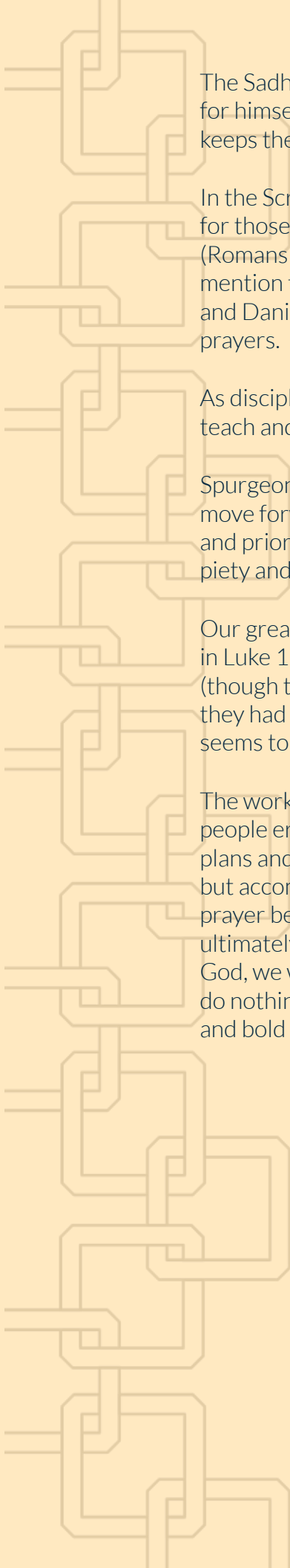
At the most basic level, prayer is the practice of looking to God and articulating in reverent but expectant words, what we and others need to be the people He wants us to be and to do the things He's commanded. We turn our gaze outward and upward to One greater, wiser and more powerful than us, on whom we are utterly dependent.

A disciple who does not then often practice the simple habit of asking God for all he needs, belies a lack of trust in God. He is either proud, presumptuous or plain foolish. An impassioned Charles Spurgeon once wrote, "Whether we like it or not, asking is the rule of the Kingdom. If you may have everything by asking in His name, and nothing without asking, I beg you to see how absolutely vital prayer is."³

The truth is, many a disciple struggles in their prayer life. Corrie Ten Boom famously asked 'is prayer your steering wheel or your spare tire?'

Theoretically, most Christians have no quarrel with the importance of petition and prayer. But in practice, it is a startling how little we pray, either privately or corporately. We all admire the great giant of faith who were always men and women of prayer – think of George Mueller who prayed hours each day for the needs of the orphanage he ran, and then saw God miraculously provide. Or of Charles Simeon whose day started at 4am with four hours of prayer. Or John Wesley whose two daily hours in prayer could well have been learned from watching his mother Susanna, who busy as she was with looking after John, Charles and their 7 other surviving siblings, would cover her head with an apron and sit praying on her rocking chair for each of them.

Closer to home here in Asia, we remember the exceptional prayers life of saints like Sadhu Sundar Singh of India. One of his young interpreters told that he once slept in the same room as the Sadhu during an evangelistic campaign. The young man awoken in the middle of the night to find the Sadhu's bed empty. He shone a torch around the room and found him in the corner of the room, cross-legged with eyes shut and hands clasped, deep in prayer, his face aglow with joy. When he asked him in the morning why Singh was at prayer in the dead of night, he was told that on preaching tours, there was not enough time during the day for prayer.



The Sadhu would later write that: 'Prayer is communion with God....it is asking God for himself. As a boat must be in the water but cannot be filled with the water, prayer keeps the world away from us, so that we are not drowned in it.'

In the Scriptures, we read of the Apostle Paul whose habit of praying constantly for those in the churches he planted, visited and led are attested to in his letters (Romans 1:9-10, 1 Cor 1:4; Philippians 1:3-4; 1 Thessalonians 1:2, etc), not to mention the great saints of holy writ like Abraham, Moses, Samuel, David, Nehemiah and Daniel who equally impressed with their passionate intercession and faithful prayers.

As disciples of Jesus, we have a responsibility both to fill our days with prayer and to teach and model for others the same.

Spurgeon said he'd rather train one man to pray than ten men to preach. If we are to move forward in our Christian journeys, we do well to pay attention to the vital place and priority that prayer should have in our lives above all other acts of Christian piety and service.

Our greatest model and example is our Lord Jesus himself. It is fascinating fact that in Luke 11:1, the disciples came to Jesus to ask Him to teach them not how to preach (though they had never heard a preacher like Him); nor how to do miracles (though they had seen His power consistently at work); but how to pray. Jesus' prayer life seems to have spoken more to them than any other aspect of His ministry.

The works we do must therefore have their roots in the prayers we pray. Some people erroneously think of pray as a way to arm-twist God into conceding to our plans and wishes. We need to correct such an error. It is, in the end, not about us, but accomplishing His will. And when we have that kind of grand vision that raises prayer beyond our puny 'to do' list to seeking His plans for us, then our prayers will ultimately transform us to fit into His will. When we see prayer as partnership with God, we will finally see its importance and priority in our lives. 'Without me, you can do nothing.' (John 15:5). But with Christ, we can ask. And ask we must, with humility and bold faith.

Reflection/Application:

- a. How is your prayer life? Take stock of how much time you actually spend in prayer in an average day. Be honest and truthful to God and ask him to help you grow in your prayer life.
- b. Make a realistic plan to have regular times of pray – a plan to spend 5 minutes of your day in prayer before you leave for work is more realistic than promising God you will give an hour when you come back from work. Work on incrementally increasing the time you spend in pray.
- c. Have a plan for what you will do when you pray – start with confession, worship and praise and then petition God for people and situations you know, or write a list of people that need to hear and believe the Gospel of Jesus, that you are discipling or that you know have particular needs. Pray for leaders in the church and in government (1 Timothy 2:1-4). Then finally pray for your own needs and cares.

³ <http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols28-30/chs1682.pdf>

7. 'Go'

"The most glorious reason you exist is for the proclamation of the glory of God to the ends of the earth." (David Platt).

There is a question NAMS companions have been known to ask: 'which part of 'GO' don't you understand?' This little word 'go', perhaps more than all the others we've been considering, ought to challenge comfortable, well-mannered and affluent disciples than the others. We are a sent-people, but many among us prefer to stay where we are out of fear or apathy.

The greatest barrier to the making of new disciples of Jesus Christ is the inertia of existing disciples themselves. We easily forget a world dying without Christ, that lies outside our petty concerns and harried lives.

But the enormity of the task in the face of these brute-facts are sobering:

¥ At least 6,847 people groups in the world (out of 16, 562 people groups) are still unreached with the Gospel⁴. In other words, 4 out of 10 people alive today have no Christ-follower living near enough to tell him/her of Christ.

¥ The vast majority of unreached people groups live in the 10/40 window (latitudes 10 degrees north and 40 degrees north). However, less than 10% of the global missionary work-force is focused on reaching the people in these nations.⁵

¥ Of the 8,000 languages in the world today, more than 2,000 have not yet one Bible verse that has been translated into their own language.⁶

¥ Christians make up 33% of the world's population, but receive 53% of the world's annual income and spend 98% of it on themselves.⁷

Jesus said 'go' - but many Christians prefer the home-comforts of our fanciful ghettos where we spend much of our time singing lustily to each other and debating ecclesiastical concerns that have little relevance to a world dying without Christ. We care little, pray even less, give the left-overs of our self-indulgent lifestyles and play dress-up at 'church', all the while pontificating and decrying the falling moral standards of society around us while failing to live up to the all-pervasive demands of discipleship as commanded by our Lord.

But Jesus told even the Apostles who doubted him to 'go' (Matthew 28:17 & 19).

I heard of a church in Canada that had a banner hung over the main exit that read 'You are now entering your mission field.' Not all of us are called to pack up and move to another continent. Some of us are called to cross the street where we live. We are sent to places called-and-certified missionaries will never get to - neighborhoods, schools, supermarkets, and restaurants. We go on business trips to far-away factories, carpeted offices and late-night bars in distant cities, meeting people who were bought with royal blood and don't even know it.

We are an apostolic people - part of God's great search-and-rescue act to redeem a people for Himself and to make His glory known and seen in all the earth.

In the creation of the universe, God first made heaven and earth, which He then peopled with the first man and woman made in His image.

In the new creation, God reverses the process. He first rescues and recreates fallen people into His same glorious image, that of his Son (Romans 8:29). We, the redeemed ones are called as royal priests and a holy nation to declare the praise of Him who called us out of darkness into His great light (1 Peter 2:9).

God will one day make a new heaven and a new earth for us to live happily-ever after with him, supplanting every fairy-tale ever told. As we await Christ's return, we have a work to do, a going to get to.

Jesus sent us out into the world in centrifugal fashion and force (Acts 1:8). The good news is that He calls people not on the basis of their abilities and competencies, but only on their willingness and dependence on Him. And we won't be alone. With one breath, He told us to go and in the very next, He said that He will be with us as we went. (Matthew 28: 19,20).

So we must model and teach all Christ's disciples that God can and will greatly use anyone who will trust and obey Him by going to the lost in His name.

Years ago, that great English saint William Booth penned these inspired call-to-action, against the insipid and tardy excuse presented by small-minded disciples who state that God hadn't called them to 'go':

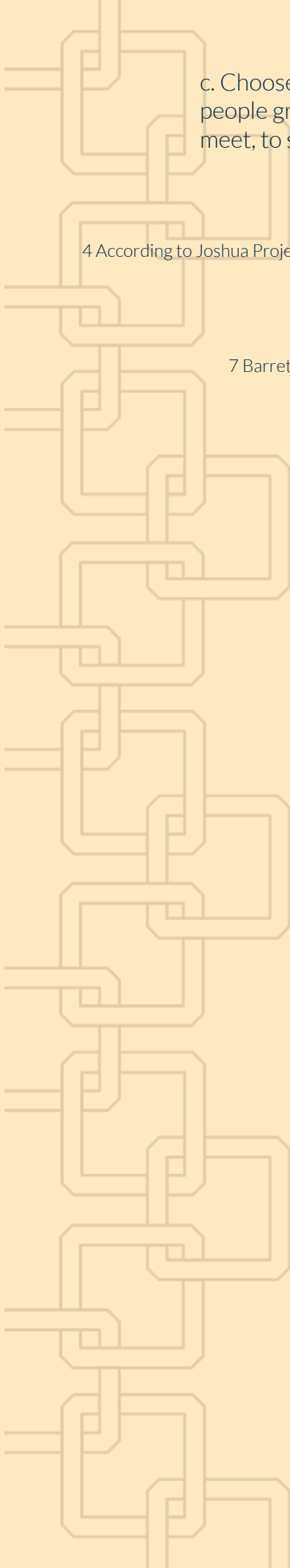
" 'Not called!' did you say? 'Not heard the call,' I think you should say. Put your ear down to the Bible, and hear Him bid you go and pull sinners out of the fire of sin. Put your ear down to the burdened, agonized heart of humanity, and listen to its pitiful wail for help. Go stand by the gates of hell, and hear the damned entreat you to go to their father's house and bid their brothers and sisters and servants and masters not to come there. Then look Christ in the face — whose mercy you have professed to obey — and tell Him whether you will join heart and soul and body and circumstances in the march to publish His mercy to the world."

May we always go, keeping in step with Him.

Reflection/Application:

a. Who has God sent in your life that you are to 'go' and share the Gospel to? Make a list of at least 5 friends and family and began praying for opportunities to go and tell them your testimony and the Gospel in a simple and clear way.

b. Share the names of people you're praying to share Jesus with, with your discipler or disciple-making group, and pray regularly and hold each other accountable to welcome them, share your testimony and the Gospel, and see them come to faith in Christ.



c. Choose as a disciple-making small group, to adopt and pray for one un-reached people group, asking God weekly for set number of months or a year, when you meet, to send out laborers for the harvest among that people-group.

4 According to Joshua Project, an unreached people group has no indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to evangelize them. Source: www.joshuaproject.net

5 http://v2021.org/articles/total_people_groups

6 http://sydneyanglicans.net/blogs/evangelism/lausanne_a_call_for_action

7 Barrett, David B., and Todd M. Johnson. (2001). *World Christian Trends: AD30-AD 2000*. (USA: William Carey Library)

Epilogue to the seven words.

The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is so simple, even a child can grasp, understand and obey it. That same Gospel is so gloriously mind-blowing, eternity will not be enough for us to comprehend the widest bounds and deepest depths of its profundity and passion.

Yet, God desires that we seek to hear, receive, understand and act on His Word while here on earth, so that it fills and ferments our lives and spills over to touch the lives of those around us, affecting them for good and glorifying God. At the Master's word, insipid water becomes vintage wine. (John 2:5-10).

But these are days when God's Word in Scripture is ridiculed, discredited, doubted and opposed in many places globally. It is frequently portrayed by the popular media, especially in the West, as out-dated, fallible, fickle, politically-incorrect and irrelevant. They prefer to manufacture their own versions of truth and reality.

In 1981, the French theologian Jacques Ellul wrote 'The Humiliation of the Word'⁸ in which he argued that there is a fundamental distinction between the visual, which is rooted in physical realities, and the verbal which deals with questions of truth. Through modern science and technology, visual images have come to have a greater power and place as definers of reality and meaning than the spoken word. Ellul argues that images, like idols, keep us bound to a superficial experience of life and prevent a deeper understanding of reality. The truth and meaning of words are increasingly compromised, toyed with and 'humiliated'. But this need not be so. As Christians, we need to restore God's Word to a primary position in our lives and loves. From the beginning till now, God's Word spoken to all of creation, is the truth all reality ultimately conforms to. His truth is actual, not virtual. 'In the beginning was the Word, and not video.' (Ravi Zacharias).

The challenge of each of these seven short words and the whole counsel of Scripture with them, is a call to co-operate with the grace and truth of God, as incarnated gloriously in our Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:14). Since God's Word is living and life-giving, it will change us (Psalm 33:6, Hebrews 4:12, John 6:63, 2 Timothy 3:16). In fact, the greatest apologetic of the power and truth of God's Word in a skeptical and increasingly hostile world, are disciples of Jesus who live out what they say they believe. God's truth incarnated in our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit cannot be silenced. Kill it, and it comes back to life. Furthermore, we are called live it out together as community. Jesus said our love for each other would mark us out to the world (John 13:35).

'If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.' So goes an African proverb. Together and in His power and authority, we can 'come', 'wait'; 'seek'; 'hear'. 'see', 'ask' and 'go' much further than we could ever dream.

To Him alone be the glory.



NAMS NETWORK

If you have found this booklet helpful, have more questions or would like more help to become a disciple-making disciple of Jesus Christ, write to us at the following address: info@namsnetwork.com or directly to the author and GEO of NAMS, Rev Manik Corea: manikagcorea@yahoo.co.uk.

This booklet is a compilation of a series of blogs that appeared on our website: www.namsnetwork.com. You can subscribe to receive weekly helpful blogs from NAMS leaders by clicking the 'contact' tab of the home page of our website.

What is NAMS?

NAMS stands for New Anglican Missionary Society. We are a community of pioneering, global church planters engaged in calling the faithful Church of Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to be obedient to the final command of Jesus (Matthew 28:19-20) by making disciple that make disciples, raising leaders that make disciples and planting churches that make disciples.

We are headquartered in Pawleys Island, South Carolina, USA. NAMS colleagues and associates are making new disciples and planting new communities of faith on 5 continents and are working in or developing work in 42 nations.

You can get more information about us at our website: www.namsnetwork.com or by writing to us at info@namsnetwork.com

Check out our Youtube channel 'NAMS Network' for more disciple-making resources that we have produced to help Christians obey Jesus' final command.

Thank you.
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