

## E = Encounter

Too many of us have come to rely for our spiritual diet on receiving a regular once a week “shot” of teaching, when perhaps what we really need is to *apply* what we already know. This is an invitation to explore what God is saying from His word, and to know Him better, rather than just to know ABOUT Him.

Try setting some time aside for the following meditation. I have adapted it from one my great uncle led at a retreat back in 1914. Take it slowly and see where the Lord leads you.

- Think of God as the Still One, in Whose Presence is fullness of joy and peace of mind and to whom you gladly come.
- Think of Him as Burning Desire, whose longing for fellowship with us is so great that He sent Jesus not only to die for us, but to have intimate fellowship with us.
- Think of Him as the Strong One who can inspire and motivate even stubborn people like ourselves. He and who can move any mountain in order to fulfill His purposes. *“On the day I called, You answered me; you made me bold and stouthearted.” Ps 138:3 (NIV)* I love that verse. I pray that you, as individuals and as fellowships, may call out boldly and see Him move mightily on your behalf!
- Think of Him as the Fulfilled One, surrounded by the Host of Heaven, and by all who have ever loved Him throughout human history.
- Think of Him as the All-Knowing One who wants us to share every detail of our lives with Him, and to walk step by step with Him through life. We love it when we see God’s plans being

worked out in detail. The way He executes His plans is beyond compare, even if He chooses to bring His best out of setbacks and shakings. Think of this in your own and in other people's lives. He will make the future known to us as and when we need to know it.

- Then, because there are paradoxes in faith, think of Him as the Lonely One, who longs and aches for much deeper fellowship with the people He has created for his own praise, but who are taken up with their own self interests.
- Remember what Paul says about Timothy in Philippians 2:20-21. *"I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ."* May we have His interests at heart – and develop our love vocabulary towards Him. It blesses Him so much when He sees reaching out to Him. This is where we derive and deepen our identity: not just from what we *do* but from what we *are* in His presence.

**Here is a serious question. Do you look backwards when you eat?**

How can we move forwards with the Lord if we are allowing our gaze to be consumed by backward glances to how things were? Or by vainglorious hopes of how wonderful everything would be if only our circumstances were different?

When Paul was first converted he didn't hang around waiting for a better moment to come his way: he just rolled up his sleeves and got stuck in ministering the word of God immediately. It is not good to be always looking for some mythical moment "when it all happens."

When Paul couldn't preach, he wrote; when one door closed in his face,

the Lord would simply send him off in another direction. Although often heavily perplexed and pressurized, (2 Cor. 1:8) he never allowed the pressures to defeat him. It has been rightly said that 'he did what he could with what he had, wherever he went' – and by the end of his life, as we all know, he had done remarkable things.

Who are the servants to whom more is given? Those who use the talents they have been given! As Leston Blackburn said in Malvern at the start of 2010,

You will see things in your circumstances that nobody else will ever see. Therefore there is only you who can put that seed into action. Don't put off till tomorrow what you can do today. The will of God is here and now rather than there and then. So long as you do not procrastinate, you will be amazed by what God has done in and through you by the end of the year.

**Here is an equally daft question. You don't eat looking sideways either do you?** It's bad for the neck!

One of the biggest understatements in Scripture is when Paul says that we are not wise when we compare ourselves with each other. (2 Cor. 10:12) It can only lead to feelings of superiority or of inferiority: either way represents a form of pride or inverted pride that will not help our spiritual growth. May the Lord help us not to do it!

*Finally . . . let us press on to know the Lord*

Let us acknowledge the LORD;  
let us press on to acknowledge Him.  
As surely as the sun rises,  
He will appear;

He will come to us like the winter rains,  
like the spring rains that water the earth." **(Hos. 6:3)**

*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 3:12-14)*

Living with Jesus means “*forgetting of what is behind*” – but not in the sense of obliterating or denying the memory of what has happened in the past (Paul had just been doing that in vv. 5-7), so much as by consciously refusing to let them consume his thinking. Paul was determined to allow neither his past bigotry (vv. 5-7) nor his previous spiritual attainments to hold him back from running the race God had in store for him.

It’s easy to settle for what we know and what we’re already doing, when the Lord may be asking us to step out and attempt new things. Don’t be fooled into thinking that you’ve already got all that Christ desires for you!

With the Olympics drawing near, it is good to remember that Paul was not only hot on stadia imagery, but was also thinking continually about his heavenly home calling. Bearing in mind that Paul was by no means a preacher of “perfectionism,” it is highly likely that when he speaks in 3:12 of “not yet being made perfect,” he was using the word *teleioosis* in

the way that Clement, Eusebius and other church fathers told us that it should be interpreted, as meaning “to suffer martyrdom.”

If this is so, Paul was by no means bewailing any deficiency in his own grace or spiritual state, but rather, as Adam Clark puts it,

of his not having terminated his course by martyrdom, which he knew would sooner or later be the case. This he considered as the *teleioosis* or perfection, of his whole career. In a sense he viewed everything as imperfect or unfinished until this had taken place.

The apostle considers Christ as the *brabeus*, or judge in the games, who proclaims the victor, and distributes the prizes. Paul represents himself as having been introduced into the contest by this *brabeus*, with the intention of crowning him, if he contends faithfully. To complete this, [he must . . . ] ‘apprehend’, or ‘lay hold of’ that for which he has been apprehended by Christ, who has converted, strengthened, and endowed him with apostolic powers, that he may fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life.”

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The imagery is of staying in lane from starting gun to finishing line, but pushing hard to the end, rather than easing back as we get nearer to the end of our span on earth. You probably heard the testimony of the sixty nine year old woman who was rescued from under the debris in Haiti, who said that she had spent the whole week in prayer.

May our spirits, too, stay strong and prayerful to the very end, throwing off false condemnation, together with the shock and trauma of

wounding episodes or opposing words, so that we can savour to the full the vocation the Lord has given us, and all He has in store for us.

God bless,

Robert

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