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**Sunday 6 March 2022 to Sunday 13 March 2022**

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Sunday 6 March 2022

# Are you trying to tempt me?

by Pastor Greg Fowler

**For forty days he was tempted by the devil (Luke 4:2).**

Read Luke 4:1–13

When I was a teenager, the whole country was obsessed with Australia winning the America’s Cup yacht race. The anthem of the Australia II team was ‘Down Under’ by Men at Work. It was a great song that captured the moment, and one of the lines was ‘Are you trying to tempt me? Because I come from a land of plenty’. It spoke of the reality of temptation only being effective if you don’t have something or are desperate for it.

The devil knows where we are weak. He knows our needs. He knows our longings probably better than we do. And that’s where he will focus his energy. Jesus was hungry, and the devil tempted him with food. Twice he questioned Jesus’ identity as the Son of God, encouraging Jesus to use his supernatural power. In each case, Jesus responded with words of Scripture used in faith. The word of God enacted by faith is a power the devil cannot overcome.

Jesus demonstrates his belief that life and identity are found only in God. God provides for our needs. His declaration that we are his children gives us our identity. We have plenty. We, too, can say in Christ, ‘Are you trying to tempt me? I come from a God of plenty’. When the devil tempts us to trust in something other than God’s provision, this Scripture shows us that we can resist when we return to the truth of who we are and speak the word of God in faith. May the abundance of his grace lead us not into temptation.

**Lord God, when we are tempted, send your Spirit to show me your word and love for me. Allow the truth of your generosity to rest in our souls. May we resist temptation, in your strength, not ours. Amen.**

Monday 7 March 2022

# I’ve never liked tests

by Pastor Greg Fowler

**Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son (Genesis 22:12).**

Read Genesis 22:1–19

I don’t know anyone who likes tests. Stress and the artificial environment mean most people don’t display their best in that pressure situation. I much prefer to work on a problem with others where my skills are used and others’ abilities complement mine. There’s something cold and lonely about undergoing a test on your own. I can’t imagine how cold Abraham felt when God asked him to sacrifice his son as a test.

This story is confronting for any parent or grandparent to hear. The very thought of anything happening to our children is horrific. Worse still is thinking that their hurt was our fault. The pain and guilt that Abraham would have felt if he hurt Isaac would have crushed him. Yet he chose to obey God and trust his nature. It is here that Abraham’s faith is most clearly shown. Abraham trusted that God’s nature was to show love, compassion and grace. He did not assume he knew better, even when given an impossible task. Somehow God would reward obedience with love and blessing.

I am no Abraham. I would likely fail the test God set him. But that’s the greatness of our God. He doesn’t set that test for me. He allows me to be tested in ways that are to my benefit. As much as I dislike tests, I acknowledge that God teaches me things as I encounter them. I know that when God tests me, I will discover depths of God’s character I would otherwise not know. I am thankful my God knows me and loves me enough to reveal his character how I need most.

***Lord God, as I am tested in this life, I pray that you give me strength and wisdom. I pray that you bring me closer to you as I know you more. Amen.***

Tuesday 8 March 2022

# Holiness is a big deal

by Pastor Greg Fowler

**Because you did not trust in me enough to honour me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them (Numbers 20:12).**

Read Numbers 20:1–13

In my years of ministry, I have found the concept of holiness is quite misunderstood within Christian circles. Almost always, people tell me that holiness is morality or purity. To be holy is to not sin. To be holy is to be an upright person. While there is some truth to that interpretation, it lacks a depth that the ancient people of God understood. In this account of God providing for his people when they were thirsty, we see God levels a charge against Moses of not honouring God as holy. Holiness must be more than just acting morally.

I spent a few years disagreeing with my dad when I was a teenager. This is not uncommon, as many teenagers feel that their parents are out of touch or too restrictive or just not as smart as they are and don’t understand the current world. I was fortunate that my dad was always willing to talk to me about how our worldviews differed. He tried to see my point of view even if he disagreed with it. One thing he would not tolerate was disrespect. He made it clear that the only way we could navigate the difficult teenage years was if I showed him the respect he earned as my dad. The rest we could work out. He warned that without respect, our relationship would shatter, and the road ahead would be very hard for us both.

God is telling Moses the same thing here. The issue doesn’t matter all that much; we can work through that. But when there is no recognition of God’s holiness, the basis of the relationship changes, and the road ahead is very difficult. God’s holiness is more than purity and more than the respect I gave my dad. Holiness is the complete otherness of God from which everything is created and sustained. When we love God’s holiness and desire to be made holy by him, we move ahead, joined by his Spirit.

**Lord God, as we navigate the ups and downs of life, may we recognise your holiness, and may you make us holy through your Spirit. Amen.**

Wednesday 9 March 2022

# Love in tough times

by Pastor Greg Fowler

**The Lord said to Satan, ‘Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger’ (Job 1:12).**

Read Job 1:1–12

We all know that life can be unpredictable. The last two years have certainly proved that. One moment we are travelling along nicely, and then ‘wham!’, unforeseen events leave us reeling. Which one of us has not suddenly lost someone dear? Perhaps an illness or accident or an irreconcilable relationship. Maybe a financial crisis or even a pandemic. Like Job, no-one can escape adversity that comes to us all. The question God has for us is: where will we turn in these situations?

Job did not know God had allowed Satan to afflict him. There was no way he could. Job was only aware of the loss he experienced. And despite many encouraging him to turn away from God, Job’s faith remained. All those around Job believed they knew how he could escape the situation and involved being untrue to Job himself. They encouraged him to admit guilt for things he did not do. They questioned the depth of his relationship with God, and they told him to accuse God of the trouble by cursing him. Job chose none of those things.

What we see in Job is instructive. Job did not go looking for things for which he should be guilty. He trusted God’s word and his relationship, so he would know if there was a problem. Job did not blame God for his situation, and most importantly, Job chose to see God’s love in difficult times. He continually remembered the blessings he had received, and he was confident that God does not change. He knew that God’s love was permanent and circumstances temporary. Job chose to accept God’s love even when it didn’t feel like he was being loved. We, too, can lean closer to God in the tough times, knowing his love is permanent.

***Lord God, may we see circumstances as ever-changing and your love as permanent. May we receive a fresh anointing of your love when we feel distressed. Amen.***

Thursday 10 March 2022

# Holy protection

by Pastor Greg Fowler

**Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes (Ephesians 6:10,11).**

Read Ephesians 6:10–20

Over the years, I have had many friends who ride motorcycles. Some had large, powerful bikes, and others had smaller, nimble bikes. Some were very experienced riders, and others were less experienced. One thing they all shared is the experience of falling off their bikes and getting injured at some point. When I point this out to my friends, they are not discouraged; they continue to enthusiastically ride their bikes. What I found is that they love the experience. They acknowledge the risk and take precautions by having the best protective gear. You might even call it armour.

Paul says Christians are in the same predicament. We love the experience of being a disciple, and that puts us at risk of attack from the evil one. Like the bike rider, we, too, take precautions by putting on the armour of God. It is a necessary part of the Christian life because we do not wish to be exposed when we confront schemes and attacks of the devil. Although we tend not to speak much of spiritual attack, it is a reality, and God calls us to check our armour regularly.

Paul’s description of the armour of God is delightful and gives us a checklist to make sure we’re covered. Do we live truth? Do we seek righteousness? How is our faith, and are we using God’s word? Just like a biker would not go on the road without a helmet, gloves and boots, we would not follow Jesus unprotected. This involves examining our lives as well as praying to Jesus. I have found great value in praying for others to be covered in God’s armour and asking for protection. To pray that God’s righteousness covers someone and to be shielded by faith is powerful. To pray that the word of God would defeat the devil’s attacks as a sword is being faithful to our identity as children of God. May we be covered with God’s armour.

**Lord God, may you protect us with your spiritual armour against the attacks of the evil one. May your powerful word defeat his plans, and may your grace surround us, always. Amen.**

Friday 11 March 2022

# Shared experiences

by Pastor Greg Fowler

**Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted (Hebrews 2:18).**

Read Hebrews 2:9–18

We all know that the depth of our relationships is related to our shared experiences. The more time we spend with someone else, the closer we become. The discoveries we make and the emotions we feel together create a bond, drawing us closer and shaping us more like each other. People married for many years understand this instinctively. Shared experiences bring us closer to one another.

The writer to the Hebrews talks about this phenomenon. He asserts that Jesus has shared our human experiences and, therefore, is bound to us. Because he has been tempted, he can supply us with what is needed to resist temptation and flourish in the experience.

When I was training to be a pastor, I visited a member with cancer. I did my very best when I was with her. I read Scripture, I listened to her pain and worry, I assured her of God’s presence, and I prayed she would experience God’s peace. Even so, I knew she needed more. I spoke to my senior pastor, and he told me to take another member along who had survived cancer. As those two ladies embraced during the visit, they said ‘I know’ through their tears. I witnessed a breakthrough. The shared experience allowed us all to receive God’s word more fully, and that wonderful saint was sustained by God through her battle with cancer.

Jesus is the one who has gone through every difficult and painful experience we will ever face. He shares our experiences completely and in a real way. That shared experience combined with the powerful, life-giving word of God allows us to grow, no matter what we face. Be it trauma or temptation, Jesus is there with us.

**Lord God, as we are tempted and face challenging times, we know you are with us. Help us receive your word and promise for what we endure today. Amen.**

Saturday 12 March 2022

# Confronting fear

by Pastor Greg Fowler

**The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? (Psalm 27:1)**

Read Psalm 27

The great American president Franklin Roosevelt said about the Depression, ‘All we have to fear is fear itself’. This classic piece of oratory put the troubles of the time into perspective. Of course, there was unemployment and a lack of income. There was uncertainty about the future, but there was always a reason to hope. Roosevelt called upon the nation to not let the emotion of the time overtake the events. There were ways to combat the problems, which his famous New Deal showed. The president was saying don’t make the problems big and the solutions small.

Centuries before Roosevelt, the psalmist similarly encouraged the people of God. If God is my light, then what problem could possibly put me in the shade? We do not need to fear events or people because our God is bigger than all these things. We need to hear this truth because our eyes can focus on the problem, and our minds can fixate on worry rather than the promise of God.

Today, we face many threats. We know what it is like to live with a global pandemic. We know what it is like to live with geopolitical uncertainty in our region and war in Europe. We know what it’s like to live in a society more polarised than before. Yet we do not fear these things. We have faith in God, who is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. We trust in the salvation of the creator and sustainer of the universe. Diseases come and go; nations rise and fall. Public opinion is constantly changing. These things are not bigger than our God.

**Lord God, may we see you in your majesty and power. May we recognise you are more than any problem we face. Take away our fear and give us your peace. Amen.**

Sunday 13 March 2022

# From helplessness to hope

by Anja Markkanen

The devotions for the coming week are taken from LCA International Mission’s 2022 '40 Days – a Lenten Devotion and Prayer Guide' and are written by mission partners around the world. LCA International Mission invites you to pray for God’s global mission and churches beyond our borders. You can download an electronic copy of the '40 Days' guide at the LCA International Mission website or request a printed copy by emailing lcaim@lca.org.au or phoning 08 8267 7330.

**Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds (Psalm 36:5).**

Read Psalm 36

Think of a sunny day when the sun is high above you, and the clouds are far away. Think of standing on a rock where you can see a long way, with clouds high above you and a stream below your feet. You may think to yourself, ‘What beautiful scenery!’ It is easy to agree with the psalm writer when standing on the mountain and looking around. Everything is calm and beautiful, nature in peaceful order. At the same time, I know that many human beings suffer down here.

God´s love is eternal. We human beings make mistakes due to limited vision and knowledge and our constant struggle with sin. Still, God is always ready to forgive because of his steadfast love and grace. His judgements come from deep wisdom and righteousness. God has mercy on us.

Our imagination is limited in seeing what God is capable of doing. We can just trust that nothing is too small or complicated for God. His love covers everything because of his faithfulness. He has promised to be with us in all circumstances. No matter how great an obstacle we face, we can trust God to help. Jesus said, ‘all things are possible to those who believe’ (Mark 9:23). As those who have been forgiven and loved back to life by Jesus, we are called to join together in bearing his love and mercy to the world – love and mercy that makes all things possible.

'Home of Grace' in Bangkok offers a place to stay for women who are rejected by their family, community, relatives and friends. As women get counselling, empowerment and healing, they become capable of going back to their families and communities and living their lives as equal members of their community. They will also be witnesses of God´s love as they tell of what they have experienced of his love and care.

At Home of Grace, the staff sometimes feel helpless in front of trouble. Not all the challenges are solved when a young mother leaves the home. Prayers follow the young, fragile mother when she leaves the home full of hope for a better future.

If you feel you are dragged down by declining hope or diminished faith, or you have lost vision for your life, you can be sure that God is there with you and will guide you out of despair. He is entirely capable of accomplishing things far beyond our limited vision and humble attempts. God is faithful and righteous, and he has proven that by sending Jesus as our Saviour. Everything is possible with God.

**Prayer: Pray for the church work done in Thailand through the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand parishes and Diakonia Department among vulnerable people. Pray for the beneficiaries of diaconal help, including the women who seek help from Home of Grace. Pray they can be witnesses of God´s love in their neighbourhoods. Pray that you trust God´s faithfulness and righteousness, his eternal love toward his people and earth.**

Anja Markkanen is Advisor of Diaconia Work in South-East Asia, Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM).