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**Sunday 7 August 2022 to Sunday 14 August 2022**

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Sunday 7 August 2022

# Being prepared for an unknown deadline

by Pastor Steve Liersch

**It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. He will dress himself to serve, make them recline at the table and wait on them (Luke 12:37).**

Read Luke 12:32–40

Recently, my wife and I went away with friends for the weekend, sharing our return time with one of our children still at home. We had discussed coming home on Monday evening, but around 2.00pm on Sunday, we received a call ‘just checking’ to see if it was Sunday or Monday we were returning as a small number of tasks hadn’t yet been completed. For example, bringing in the washing and vacuuming the floors.

Mild panic can set in when we know we haven’t achieved all that must be done by a given deadline. Distractions abound these days – especially social media time lost, not to mention TV, friends and hobbies, along with the busyness of life. Sometimes the essentials of life can be left to the last minute, and for some, this can also include giving appropriate attention to spiritual and eternal needs.

When Jesus reminds his disciples and us that we must be ready for his return, being watchful, dressed and expectant, he is forewarning us (and the world for that matter) that he will return. He wants to find us ready and waiting for the blessings he has in store for us eternally. Only God knows when that ‘deadline’ will eventuate, and so these words help prepare us to be recipients of his grace.

There’s also something wonderful in the image of Jesus dressed to serve us in heaven, blessing us with his heavenly banquet at the table he has prepared for us.

How well prepared are you to meet Jesus should this life’s deadline come tomorrow?

**Heavenly Father, thank you for your willingness to give us a place in your kingdom. Help me treasure what this world can’t provide, namely your Son Jesus as our Lord, Saviour and Servant King. Prepare my life with your Spirit and word every day. Amen.**

Monday 8 August 2022

**Travelling with our Lord**

by Pastor Steve Liersch

**At the Lord’s command they set up camp, and at the Lord’s command they set out. They obeyed the Lord’s order, in accordance with his command through Moses (Numbers 9:23).**

Read Numbers 9:15–23

Have you ever been camping? Our family has had some great holidays with a campervan. When our children were all under 10, we went to Darwin for a six-week holiday. On our first night, it took one-and-a-half hours to set everything up. We had to learn how to do it quicker, or we’d lose too much time each day and not see anything or travel very far. On our last night, we had it down to 20 minutes. Practice made perfect.

For the Israelites, 40 years of setting up and pulling down their family tents was a fair amount of time to get good at it. Then all they had to look forward to for their food was quail and manna. No fish and chips on that trip. No stopping in at Macca’s. Just desert dust, tents and above all else, keeping an eye on the cloud over the tabernacle and where it was leading.

The Israelites survived their 40-year ordeal – only just, some would argue – by obeying the Lord’s command on when to stay and when to move camp. Only the Lord knew where they were going and why. Their lot was to be obedient and trust that their Lord knew best.

Obedience to God is an act of faith and trust. Routine, repetition and déjà vu can all help to erode our faith as we journey with our amazing God. Ultimately, God led his people to the Promised Land, where they could enjoy a place ‘flowing with milk and honey’. Heaven will be better than that. It will be perfect – whatever it provides – because God is to be trusted that all will be well. He calls us to be obedient as his Holy Spirit enables, so we can confidently travel with him.

What routine things of life do you get tired of and begin to wonder what God is up to as you journey?

**Great Provider God, thank you for leading me throughout my life and providing all my day-to-day needs. Empower me with your Spirit to trust and obey your leading in my life. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.**

*Pastor Steve Liersch and his wife are almost empty nesters as their three adult children explore the world with work. They live in the southern coastal suburbs of Perth near Rockingham. Steve enjoys gardening, watching sports – especially Port Power and cricket – playing sudoku and catching up with friends.*

Tuesday 9 August 2022

# Whom do you fear – and why?

by Pastor Steve Liersch

**I, even I, am he who comforts you. Who are you that you fear mere mortals, human beings who are but grass, that you forget the Lord your Maker (Isaiah 51:12,13).**

Read Isaiah 51:9–16

Strange how when we’re young, we fear so much because it’s all new, big and seemingly scary. Think Father Christmas, the dark, loud noises, zoo animals even behind bars, and those birds that fly too close. Some of these fears we grow out of. Others seem to haunt us all our lives. Phobias are a real thing for many people who suffer from things like spiders, open spaces and crowds.

A fearful spirit is apt to make the worst of everything and think the danger is greater and nearer than it really is. Fears and anxiety can be debilitating, limiting a person’s ability to enjoy many opportunities to experience something new, exhilarating or even beautiful.

Today’s word from our comforting God is meant to be just that – a word of perspective and comfort. Yet our world continues to provide us with a constant barrage of things to fear, especially people we are likely to never meet. Sure, there’s enough criminal element around to be cautious, but letting the fear of those who are ‘bent on destruction’ or breathing ‘the wrath of the oppressor’ can be the difference between enjoying life to the full or being almost too frightened to leave the house. Through Isaiah, God reassured the Israelites – and us – that the threats of Pharaoh and the king of Babylon were no more.

Bible commentator Matthew Henry wrote: ‘Our inordinate fear of man is a tacit forgetfulness of God. When we disquiet ourselves with the fear of man, we forget that there is a God above him’.

Putting our trust in our all-powerful God is exactly where he calls us to put it with this reminder that all threats, oppressors and fear-causing mortals will be dealt with by him in good time.

Is there anyone you fear in your life right now? Why? What’s the worst they could do to you?

**God of all comfort and strength for my life, please forgive me for the times I fear mortals instead of trusting in you to provide my protection and strength. Empower me with your promises once again. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.**

Wednesday 10 August 2022

# Sharpening the conscience of service

by Pastor Steve Liersch

**From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked (Luke 12:48b).**

Read Luke 12:41–48

Every now and again, I need something to prick my conscience that I could do better or I have failed completely. It’s never an easy time. Having someone tell you things that are difficult to hear, or being reminded of tasks not done, makes me feel terrible. I feel like sliding out the door and out of sight, knowing I could have done better.

Age seems to be no barrier for these moments either. ‘Guilt’ has a look all of its own. The list of daily tasks just for any household to run smoothly is a fair indicator of what we’re like. There are the usual daily tasks in our house like clearing the sink of dishes, either in the dishwasher or washing some by hand; hanging out or bringing in clothes; checking the mail; putting out the bins weekly for rubbish pick-up – the list goes on. But if I only do half a job – emptying the house bins into the roadside bin without putting that out for collection – then it can get pretty smelly, especially in the heat of summer. There’s nowhere to hide from a job half done. People notice, and sometimes, guilt has a way of being a good teacher.

I have often baulked at these words from Jesus because it seems unfair and almost against the grain of the gospel to hear him say that doing a ‘half job’ in service for him will still carry an unpleasant consequence with it. I can understand the first punishment of being totally irresponsible and ‘cut to pieces and assigned a place with the unbelievers’ (verse 46). But what about getting beaten with many or a few blows for partial failure? Where’s grace? What about the ‘learning curve’ of life that allows for practice creating a habit that will lead to a good outcome?

On further reflection, I realise that just being told about these situations is grace-filled. What if I faced the consequences without even knowing what I had failed to do and the impending results? I am also very thankful that Jesus has forgiven me for my failures and sin and has taken away the burden of my guilt and shame. Yet my sins of omission still need to be learned from. In this space, my prayers for the Holy Spirit to prompt me to pray, be more loving and show proper care enable God’s grace to really flow through me.

How could you improve in your service to God? Is there a constant prayer you could pray to help?

**Gracious Lord, serving you is a wonderful privilege. Please help me learn from my mistakes and call on your Spirit’s help more, so you can be honoured through me. Amen.**

Thursday 11 August 2022

# Taking Jesus at his word

by Pastor Steve Liersch

**‘Go,’ Jesus replied, ‘your son will live.’ The man took Jesus at his word and departed (John 4:50).**

Read John 4:46–53

Sadly, in our world of fake news, photoshopped pictures and editing programs on our phones and computers, it seems that we have become quite a sceptical society. Seeing is not always believing.

Back in Jesus’ times, a miracle was a miracle. Water into wine in the volume Jesus provided (John 2) certainly ensured whoever did it would gain a lot of attention. Noting this, the royal official had nothing to lose by asking Jesus for another miracle – to cure his dying son.

There is one small sentence we would all do well to hang on to as we read this. ‘The man took Jesus at his word and departed’ (verse 50b). For many of us, taking someone at their word has not always been that easy, especially when they have let us down before. Dealing with fallen human beings all too quickly reveals the extent to which trusting people can leave us deflated because of their inability to deliver on their promises.

Not so with Jesus, who can be trusted 100 percent. When Jesus says, ‘I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life’ (John 14:6), we can be assured that his word will always promise to be delivered upon. After all, Jesus is God, full of grace and truth from whom we have all received one blessing after another. (John 14:14–17).

The result of Jesus’ intervention in the man’s life by curing his son had a profound and eternal effect. ‘So he and his whole household believed’ (verse 53). When we have our prayers answered and see God at work in our lives, what is the result? Do we even talk about it, or do we keep it to ourselves? Just think of the ease with which we can talk about what God is up to in our lives when we pray. When we recognise the answer as God’s blessing when a healing miracle occurs, a relationship is restored, or circumstances unfold that are more than flukes, then we really have a story to tell that honours God. After all, God does want what’s best for us.

Think of a prayer God answered in a ‘miraculous’ way you know about. Who have you told?

**God of wonder, you are the ultimate miracle worker. Thank you for constantly answering prayers that can be life-changing for so many, especially when it all points back to your intervention. Please help us share our stories to the praise of your holy name. Amen.**

Friday 12 August 2022

# Let the ‘games’ continue

by Pastor Steve Liersch

**Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor’s crown except by competing according to the rules (2 Timothy 2:5).**

Read 2 Timothy 2:1–8

At the time of publishing this devotion, the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games are unfolding in the UK. Thousands of athletes strive to do their best to win the victor’s crown in their respective sports.

I love my sport. I have played lots and watched probably way too much, yet I still find the ability of the athletes and competitors quite extraordinary at times. Bodies in peak shape, minds finely tuned to the rules, and knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of their opponents reveal the capacity of our human mind and body to perform at an optimum level.

These words to the young pastor Timothy reflect a common thread of thought by the missionary writer and mentor St Paul. Our journey through this life is like that of an athlete in many ways. Think of us being in a race in such a way as to get the prize (1 Corinthians 9:24). Not running in vain (Galatians 2:2). And running with perseverance the race marked out for us, as the writer of Hebrews points out (Hebrews 12:1). We hear the good news of Jesus as Lord and Saviour. And as God’s Spirit works in our hearts, we slowly change into the people God can use to share the gospel in some way with those around us.

By God’s grace, we are all winners because we know that the ‘prize’ of our faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour is eternal life in heaven. Our baptism is God’s seal of approval over our lives that he wants to be in a relationship with us for eternity.

What a great motivation to keep on keeping on. Sometimes we don’t like all the rules and training that goes with ‘playing the game’ of life, especially abiding by God’s rules. Loving our families and neighbours – even if they’re not always the nicest. Obeying those in authority – even if we didn’t vote for them. Forgiving as we have been forgiven – even when the pain of their actions hurt so much.

Thanks be to God that he has given us his Holy Spirit to empower us to do what doesn’t come naturally – striving to live a godly life to the glory of our Heavenly Father.

What are some of the God-given abilities you use to serve him with your life? How do you fine-tune them?

**Heavenly Father, thank you for giving unique gifts and abilities to those in your family. Help me persevere and use them to honour you and lead others into your kingdom. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Saturday 13 August 2022

**Please intervene again, O Lord**

by Pastor Steve Liersch

**God presides in the great assembly; he renders judgement among the ‘gods’ (Psalm 82:1).**

Read Psalm 82

Remember Idi Amin, Joseph Stalin, Adolf Hitler and Pol Pot? We’d rather not, for obvious reasons. For those too young to know who these evil world leaders were, there’s your Google homework for a few minutes. Remember Idi Amin, Joseph Stalin, Adolf Hitler and Pol Pot? History is full of leaders and others who, either by a democratic path, military coup or fixation on an evil plan, have inflicted unspeakable pain and suffering on their nation that rippled throughout the world. Instead of enacting God’s order for those in their care and becoming wardens of justice, they become empty of any true understanding of moral issues for the betterment of all.

Our psalm reminds us that God is the ultimate ruler and eventually renders judgement among the ‘gods’. The term ‘gods’ here refers to human, earthly rulers who have a position of power over a portion of God’s creation – Earth. In other words, despite what these leaders think, they have and ‘will all die like mere mortals’ (verse 7).

I love the psalms because they reveal so many aspects of our human character. They reveal our pain, inner thoughts, cries for help, praise of the Almighty God, and especially the reliance on the Most High to abolish evil, rescue the weak and needy, and deliver them from the hand of the wicked. History often repeats itself, revealing leaders who think and act as if they are God but are only ‘god’ in their own minds and circle of influence. There’s only so much evil a person can wreak during their lifetime. That’s not to downplay that it isn’t devastating and painful while unfolding.

Examples of leaders unleashing evil are a fact of history. Right now, our world is observing some of these leaders roll out their evildoing as technology brings their devastation into our living rooms and awareness like never before. Our news is full of it. Our hearts ache for their victims. We give what we can to help alleviate their suffering. And meanwhile, we quietly wonder, ‘God, why don’t you put an end to this once and for all?’ He has before. He will again.

Ultimately, when Jesus Christ comes in all his glory, there will be an end to all evil in our fallen world. Until then, we are called to pray, remain faithful to Jesus, and find our strength and comfort in God despite what we see and experience.

Do some research on how long some evil leaders have ruled and thank God their tyranny came to an end.

**Merciful God, please put an end to unbridled evil and tyranny in our world. Be with all victims so that their plight may be a cause for your love to be shared, and your salvation through Jesus can be theirs also. In your mercy, hear our prayer. Amen.**

Sunday 14 August 2022

# A better way

by Annie Duarte

**Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division (Luke 12:51).**

Read Luke 12:49–56

Jesus is not afraid of tension. People were divided in their ideas about Jesus during his earthly ministry … and not much has changed since. Jesus and his lordship are confronting. If he is who he says he is, everything changes. If God has truly sent his own Son to save us from our sin, then there is sin to be addressed in our hearts.

The way we live our lives has to change. For some, this conviction is something they cannot be bothered with or dare to confront. This division Jesus describes is the division between darkness and light, goats and sheep, sin and self-indulgence and the self-sacrificial path of love.

Our natural inclination is to avoid tension at all costs, but sometimes, it is necessary. Without tension on guitar or violin strings, there would be no music. Without Jesus, without his sacrifice on the cross, there would be no option of salvation. The only trajectory would be sin and destruction.

Division exists because Jesus offers the better way; the only alternative to the wages of sin is real life in his kingdom. Of course, the ideal would be that everyone knows and loves Christ and that sin is no more. We will experience this, but not here on this earth.

While we are here, we must accept that the world does not know him. We live in the tension of the ‘already’ and ‘not yet’ of the kingdom of God. Praise God that he has not abandoned us to our sin and destruction but that his own Son underwent the baptism of pain and suffering to give us a better way through this life.

**Jesus, let me be one of your sheep who knows your voice. As I walk in tension here on the earth, let me bring glimpses of heaven to those around me. Amen.**

Annie Duarte is a wife, mum, worship leader and preschool Bible teacher. She and her husband serve in ministry together in the United States. Annie loves seeing God’s word come alive to people of all ages.