****

**Sunday 29 May 2022 to Sunday 5 June 2022**

****

Sunday 29 May 2022

# He wants to know me?

by Stuart Gray

**[My prayer is] that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me (John 17:21).**

Read John 17:20–26

I once participated in a game ‘who is the most famous person you have met?’ As a small group of people, we had quite a list of notable people we had met. We were in awe that we had been in close contact with these people.

So try to imagine just how awesome it is that the creator and co-creator of the universe not only want to meet us but want to have a deep and loving relationship with us. In fact, Jesus wants us to have the same relationship with him as he has with his Father. That’s really awesome.

Jesus also prays that the relationships we have among and between ourselves are modelled on the relationship he has with God.

Most of us have experienced love in our human relationships – love for spouses, parents, children, other family members and friends. But what often happens is we get caught up in the messiness of our relationships, the conflicts, the dramas, the hurt caused either deliberately or unknowingly, and the issues caused by uneven growth and development of individuals within a relationship.

Jesus fervently prays that our relationship with each other and with him is the same as with his Father.

Jesus prays that we be with him so we can see his glory – it’s awesome beyond imagination that the Father and Son, creators of the universe, want to personally share with us the glory of creation.

God becoming man and Jesus paying the ultimate sacrifice and overcoming death gives us access to God. Jesus lived as we do, among us and in us.

I am more aware of the chasm between what Jesus prayed for and who I am, than I am of the love that Jesus prays for. Yet Jesus says our love for each other and him is a witness to him and his relationship with God.

John places this prayer just before Jesus is betrayed. Even knowing the fate that awaits him, he selflessly wants for all believers the indwelling relationship Jesus has with his Father.

**Heavenly Father, we pray that our relationships in the world reflect the relationship between you and your Son, Jesus Christ, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, that the world believes your Son died to reconcile the world to you. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Monday 30 May 2022

# Peace, brother!

by Stuart Gray

**The fruit of that righteousness will be peace; its effect will be quietness and confidence forever (Isaiah 32:17).**

Read Isaiah 32:14–20

To describe a person as ‘quietly confident’ gives a sense of one who knows their abilities, competence and control but with a sense of humility and not boastful or arrogant. It is not the type of leadership that is common in these times.

I often hear people moaning about the lack of charismatic leaders in our society, leaders who are dynamic and great orators who inspire people to achieve great things, be that in business, politics, the church or in life in general. Maybe the desire for such leaders is, it seems, an easier pathway than having to be a leader in your own sphere of influence, take personal risks and be exposed to the barbs and criticisms that leaders must manage.

But maybe what is missing is righteousness.

Last December, Pastor Nathan Hedt’s devotion explored righteousness as having two main elements.

The first is to be right in our relationship with God. Not perfect or sinless – and certainly not judgemental – but having a heart tuned in to God’s heart.

The second element of righteousness is that righteous people seek the good, the benefit and the blessing of the whole community. They invest their time, wealth and resources not for themselves but for the good of society.

Isaiah says that the fruit of God’s righteousness is peace. How we long for peace. But peace is something fought for; we have to actively work for peace. Our prayers for peace are loud at the moment – peace in Ukraine and peace in our highly polarised society, among many other things.

Maybe we haven’t achieved peace because we have not focused on righteousness first.

As Pastor Hedt said, let us pursue righteousness, for in doing so, we will be met and filled by God himself!

**Heavenly Father, we long for peace, quietness and confidence forever. Help us pursue righteousness so that we may bring peace to our world. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.**

Tuesday 31 May 2022

# The hand of the Lord

by Stuart Gray

**But I the Lord will answer them; I the God of Israel will not forsake them (Isaiah 41:17b).**

Read Isaiah 41:17–20

This passage begins by saying the poor and needy search for water, but there is none. How often do we search for what is missing in our lives, and it appears to not be available? We search for peace, health, loving relationships, stable work, security for our families and spiritual satisfaction, among many other things.

And how often does it feel like these things are missing or elusive – we can look for what we want, but it’s not quite there. We still need to search.

But, as is reiterated many times in the Bible, God says he will be there for his people. He will answer our prayers, and he will not forsake us. Not only that, but in this passage, God says he will transform the desolate into rich pastures, make rivers flow on barren heights and grow great trees in the desert. God not only hears us and has promised not to abandon us, but he also showers us with abundance and great riches beyond what we can comprehend or deserve.

God wants us to see, know and understand that the hand of the Lord has done this, and the Holy One of Israel has created it.

We live in a country and period of history that has been like no other in terms of material wellbeing, medical knowledge and technology that frees us from hard, physical labour and gives us unprecedented access to information, an abundance of food and healthier and longer lifespans, and so on.

We should be shouting thanks and praise to God from the rooftops. But look around, and we see people depressed and despairing. We hear young people say they will not have a family because there is no future for the world. Even Christian churches are subscribing to the doomsday mantras of the day. We preach a God who creates and sustains the world with abundance, but we teach our children scarcity.

Let’s hear and understand what God is telling us. He will not forsake us. And as a guarantee of that promise, he sent his Son to die on the cross so that we may have life in abundance.

**Heavenly Father, we thank you for the abundance you shower upon us. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we pray that in our hearts and minds, we consider and understand how you sustain this world. Help us be confident in your promise to answer our prayers and that you would never abandon us. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.**

Wednesday 1 June 2022

# Relationship, relationship, relationship!

by Stuart Gray

**My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one (John 17:15).**

Read John 17:1–19

Being in the world but not of the world. Why can’t being a Christian be easy, or maybe just easier, rather than grappling with what it means to be in the world but not of the world?

When I attended Lutheran Student Fellowship camps while at university, I often wanted to stay in that environment, learning God’s word, being in the fellowship of believers, and transitioning from a childlike acceptance to a more rigorous intellectual understanding of how profound the teachings of Christ are. It was a safe space.

But I had to leave those camps, go back into the world and grapple with being in the world but not of the world.

While Christ was in the world, he was not of this world, and the world rejected him. But look at the effect he had. And we are God’s agents on Earth; we do have an impact on the people and world around us. ‘You are the light of the world.’ ‘You are the salt of the earth.’ We can only be this if we are in the world but not of it.

Any rejection we face is minor compared to the rejection Jesus faced. And we have the protection of the Holy Spirit while we are in the world.

John 17 is the longest recorded prayer of Jesus in which he prays for himself, ‘Now Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began’. He prays for his disciples, ‘For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them’. And Jesus prays for all believers, ‘May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me’.

It is a chapter worth studying because it gives great insight into Jesus’ relationship with the Father, his relationship with his disciples, and what he wants for his relationship with us while we are in the world.

**Heavenly Father, we pray for the world that it may know you. We pray that through our presence in the world but not of the world, those around us come to know who you are and the sacrifice you made so that we may have life and the same relationship with you that Christ has with you. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Thursday 2 June 2022

# Home and away

by Stuart Gray

**So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it (2 Corinthians 5:9).**

Read 2 Corinthians 5:1–10

My wife and I enjoy camping. We have the freedom to easily explore our country with relatively few encumbrances. But when camping, we are exposed to the elements, the wind and rain, the hot and cold.

So we also enjoy our home where we feel grounded and largely protected from the elements. Home is where our community lives. But we can’t have both lifestyles at the same time.

In this passage, Paul talks about living our lives in an ‘earthly tent’ that is temporary, frail and vulnerable. But we look forward to being with God, which Paul describes as ‘an eternal house in heaven’. God’s house is permanent and eternal.

Paul says in verse one that we know if the earthly tent is destroyed, we have a building from God. In verse four, Paul says we know that as long as we are in our bodies, we are away from the Lord, but because God has given us the Holy Spirit as a deposit, a guarantee of what is to come, we are always confident of our heavenly destination.

Paul’s words, ‘we know’ and ‘always confident’, show no doubt. That’s the power of the Holy Spirit.

‘We live by faith, not by sight.’ While we are in our earthly bodies, we groan and are burdened, but by faith, we are confident that our destination is the eternal house in heaven.

So how does Paul resolve this dilemma of wanting to be with God while living in our earthly bodies? We do so by making it our goal to please God, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.

And Paul says that what we do with our lives matters as we will all ‘appear before the judgement seat of Christ so that each may receive due recompense for actions done in the body, whether good or evil’.

**Heavenly Father, give us the will, power and strength to do what is pleasing to you. Give us clarity about our purpose in life so that we may fully live a life that is acceptable to you. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.**

Friday 3 June 2022

# The narrow pathway

by Stuart Gray

**And now, dear children, continue in him so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming (1 John 2:28).**

Read 1 John 2:24–29

I often hear people say things in our society that the world is getting worse by the day. Many church people lament the distractions and false religions that have taken people away from church attendance and learning about values, morality and taking care of others.

In this passage, John encourages Christians to stick with what he taught them about Jesus Christ and that if you remain in him, you will receive what he promised us – eternal life. This encouragement was necessary because even in the early church, people were distracting believers from the core teachings of the church.

Specifically, John talked about an early form of Gnosticism, which taught that spirit was entirely good and that matter was entirely evil. This led to thinking that a person’s body, which is matter, is evil and that salvation is the escape from the body.

But John says that if we continue to have faith in the crucified and resurrected Christ, we not only remain in him but in God the Father as well. This is sufficient to have confidence and be unashamed when we face him at his coming.

What amazing reassurance. We can be confident and unashamed when we face our Maker if we remain in him. It sounds so simple, but in today’s world, we are faced with challenges just as great as the early Christians faced, and we still need to be constantly reminded to stick with the teachings we have been given through the Holy Spirit.

**We pray, Holy Spirit, that you sustain us in our belief in the risen Christ and protect us from the heresies and diversions in the world around us. We pray, Heavenly Father, that you help us to be confident and unashamed about you as we are witnesses to the love you have given us through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.**

Saturday 4 June 2022

# The cloak of creation

by Stuart Gray

**I will sing to the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. May my meditation be pleasing to him, as I rejoice in the Lord (Psalm 104:33,34).**

Read Psalm 104:24–34,35b

Most people have seen something of the wonders of life in and under the sea, be it visiting an aquarium, snorkelling in places like the Great Barrier Reef, or watching some amazing wildlife documentaries made about the oceans.

What always strikes me is the sheer extravagance of the nautical realm. The colours, shapes and sizes, the habitats they occupy, the interdependence of the species, and how they survive and reproduce. I find it truly amazing.

In this psalm, described as a hymn to the Creator, the author sees creation around him as a robe the Creator clothes himself with to display his glory.

Not only has God created this display, but he also sustains it. Psalm 104:27,28 says, ‘All creatures look to you to give them their food at the proper time. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things’.

However, it is not only the nautical world that God has created and sustains. Look at the sky on a clear moonless night. So many stars and galaxies and heavenly bodies. Again, extravagance. Look at the diversity of plants, animals, birds and insects existing on Earth. Sheer extravagance.

Verse one of Psalm 104 says, ‘O Lord my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendour and majesty’.

The wonder of creation is a reason alone why we should, along with the psalmist, say, ‘I will sing praise to my God as long as I live’.

**Heavenly Father, creator and sustainer of the abundance we see in nature, we thank you for the amazing display that shows us your glory. Help us be good stewards of that part of creation over which we have control. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.**

Sunday 5 June 2022

# Not alone

by Georgie Schuster

**But the Advocate, 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).**

Read John 14:8–17 (25–27)

What comes to your mind when you hear the words, ‘And there will be a test’? While assessment of knowledge and skill acquisition has changed considerably in recent times, the idea of ‘finding out what you know’ may bring to mind a range of memories. You may have relished the opportunity to share your knowledge. For others, memories of nights of coffee, cramming and anxiety might resurface. The teacher’s guidance and assistance are withdrawn. You are on your own. There’s the feeling of ‘I’ve tried so hard; will I remember everything?’ Then later, putting those skills and knowledge into practice is where it all becomes very real …

For the disciples, the days of having their beloved teacher and friend walking and talking with them every day were drawing to an end. Jesus was preparing and comforting them for what lay ahead. Things were going to be different, but they weren’t going to be alone. The Holy Spirit was coming to live with and be in them to be their advocate, guide and helper. To remind them of Jesus’ words. To encourage, equip and continue to teach them.

And we aren’t alone today. The Holy Spirit is with us, too. Have you ever had the experience in a conversation with someone when a Bible verse or encouragement that fits the moment perfectly pops into your mind? Or when you read the Bible or hear someone talk about God, and everything becomes clear?

When it comes to God’s love and grace, we are all lifelong learners. And we are not alone. The Holy Spirit is with us all the way!

**Dear Father God, thank you for sending your Holy Spirit to be with us always to comfort, guide, teach, equip and strengthen us each day. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.**