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**Sunday 15 November to Sunday 22 November**

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Sunday 15 November 2020

# Good and faithful servant

by Annie Duarte

**‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things’ (Matthew 25:21).**

Read Matthew 25:14–30

‘Well done, good and faithful servant!’ Aren’t these the words we all long to hear the Lord speak to us when we arrive in eternity? We are all children longing to make our dad proud. As we run the race with endurance, this is the affirmation that awaits us at the finish line. The journey to heaven presents us with countless opportunities to serve Jesus and to make him proud each day.

Obedience is the key. It is faith in action. Real obedience happens when our trust in Jesus is so sure that we feel secure enough to act upon his instructions to us. We are called to not only be hearers of the word but also doers (James 1:22).

You may have found yourself asking God why he hasn’t entrusted you with your lifelong dream yet. When I consider the anointed saints of history, I ask, ‘Why, Lord, have you not called me to a great mission like that?’ But the Lord gently reminds me, ‘You wouldn’t be ready for your heart’s desire if I gave it to you now. You need to learn to obey me in the small things first’.

God is growing me through small acts of obedience. He is making me into the kind of servant he wants me to be little by little, day by day. Earthly parents do this all the time. I want to see that my child can care for a bicycle before I consider teaching her to drive. I want her to remember to feed the fish before we talk about getting a dog. Whatever the Lord has entrusted you with presently is such a gift. It is an opportunity to show him your love and obedience. Carefully consider what God is asking of you right now. He is surely using your current circumstance to build you up so that he can entrust more to you later.

**Jesus, I want to be a good and faithful servant. Holy Spirit, help me to listen and obey and to be a doer of your word for your glory. Amen.**

Monday 16 November 2020

# Former things

by Annie Duarte

**‘Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind’ (Isaiah 65:17).**

Read Isaiah 65:17–25

Imagine this scene: A church full of people. Beautiful music is playing. Flowers create a path on the floor. A bride enters the back of the church adorned in all the finest clothing and jewels. Her groom gets his first look at his wife-to-be, and he is stunned. Speechless. He might even shed a tear. Emotions are high. Love and joy are tangible to everyone in the room. People scramble to take pictures and videos because the whole thing is just breathtaking …

Now, what is the bride thinking of as she enters the room? Probably one hundred different things, but mostly, how overwhelmed she is to be joined together with the love of her life. But do you know one thing the bride most certainly is not thinking about? Her old boyfriends. She isn’t thinking about the first boy who broke her heart or the other one who was dishonest. She isn’t thinking of the heartache that accompanied the road to her husband. She isn’t dwelling on the tears she has cried. She is completely wrapped up in everything about this very moment as she makes her way down the aisle.

That is exactly how it will be when you enter the new creation. You will not remember the former things, nor will they come to mind! Hallelujah! Trauma, sorrow, heartache, loss, longing, loneliness ... all of it will be swept away when you see Jesus face to face. That is not a fairytale. That is a promise. Let this promise strengthen you today. The Apostle Paul says it like this, ‘For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us’ (Romans 8:18). Suffering is a part of our present, but just wait until the full glory is revealed!

**Father, all your plans for me are good. I can’t wait to see and experience everything that you have in store for your people. Strengthen me as I wait in expectation and persevere through adversity in this life. Amen.**

Tuesday 17 November 2020

# Recognise them by their fruit

by Annie Duarte

**‘For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect’ (Matthew 24:24).**

Read Matthew 24:15–28

A messiah is one anointed for God’s purpose. A counterfeit messiah, then, is someone who is self-proclaimed; someone who is carrying out his or her own will under the guise of it being God’s anointed purpose. A false messiah will claim exclusivity – that only he or she has the true knowledge or wisdom, instead of referring to the Father.

A prophet is one who speaks the word of God into a situation. A false prophet is someone who will bring his or her own words and insist that they be regarded with the same authority as God’s words.

If you’re like me, you may have imagined these false messiahs and false prophets as sinister magician-type characters – easy to detect because they’re wild, eccentric and phony. But that isn’t how Jesus says they will come. In Matthew 7, Jesus tells us that they will be in sheep’s clothing but that they will inwardly be ferocious like wolves. Sheep’s clothing, looking similar to the sheep in the Shepherd’s flock.

How can you recognise a false prophet or messiah if they come so cleverly disguised? Anyone who comes promoting anyone but Jesus and anything besides the word of God is false. Jesus says we can recognise them by their fruit. What are the repercussions of their actions? What type of seeds are they sowing? Are they sowing seeds of discord and division within the church? Are they sowing seeds of gossip or manipulation?

Outlined for us in Galatians is the fruit of ministry that is empowered by the Living God. Ministry and prophecy that is breathed by the Holy Spirit will produce the fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, humility and self-discipline.

As you test the spirits and discern whether you are encountering a false prophet or false messiah, look for the fruits of the Spirit to be evident in their life and ministry. The fruit of the Spirit cannot be counterfeit. Satan simply cannot produce love, joy or peace. There is nothing patient, kind or good about him; therefore, his work through false prophets and messiahs will not, and cannot, produce such fruits.

**Father, give me the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that I may know you better. Please help me to identify imposters by becoming so familiar with your true character and loving nature. Amen.**

Wednesday 18 November 2020

# No lie comes from the truth

by Annie Duarte

**‘I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth’ (1 John 2:21).**

Read 1 John 2:18–23

In this last hour, it is so vital that we cling to the truth so that we might recognise a falsehood when we encounter one. We know that the truth we cling to is more than a set of ideas. We follow Jesus, who himself is the truth. No lie comes from the truth. Nothing false, misleading, manipulative, or deceitful comes from Jesus. As the Good Shepherd, he will not lead you astray.

Consider all the promises God makes in his word. He will never leave or forsake you. He will keep you in perfect peace. He has overcome the world. He will counsel you with his loving eye on you. He will bind up the broken-hearted, proclaim freedom to the captives, and release prisoners from darkness. He will bring justice swiftly to the oppressed. Nothing can separate you from his love. These are just a few of the promises God makes.

Praise the Lord that we can trust what he says to be true. He does not speak in vain. None of his promises are empty. He cannot lie because he is the definition of truth. Take a moment to recall your favourite promise from the Lord, and then rejoice because it is not a fairytale or a nice poem – it is the truth.

**Father, I thank you that your words are not empty. Your word always accomplishes what it sets out to do. I ask that your promises would come alive to me today. Please give me a renewed passion for your word. Amen.**

Thursday 19 November 2020

# Blind spots

by Annie Duarte

**‘They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them’ (1 John 5:5).**

Read 1 John 4:1–6

Blind spots. Everyone has them while driving – those areas surrounding your vehicle that you simply cannot see without fully turning your head. These blind spots can be dangerous. We may not see an approaching vehicle or know when we are in danger.

We have spiritual blind spots too – places in our lives where the narratives and perspectives of the world sneak in without us even knowing it. We open ourselves up to the viewpoints of the world when we absorb a lot of worldly culture without refreshing ourselves in the Lord. An educated mind can indeed entertain an idea without accepting it, but at some point, if we do not realign ourselves with God’s truth, we start to give other voices more time and attention than we give God’s voice.

Think about the media you absorb in a day – what you read in the morning, what you listen to in the car, what you watch in the evening. What voices are you listening to? Are they voices of the world, or are they ideas drawn from the word of God?

That is not to say that Christians should shelter themselves and solely listen to Christian music and read the Bible exclusively, though you may feel called to that for a time. There is no command from Christ explicitly regarding these things. The Apostle Paul says to the Corinthians, ‘“I have the right to do anything," you say – but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything” – but not everything is constructive’ (1 Corinthians 10:23). Just because we are allowed as Christians to absorb all types of influences does not mean that it is healthy for our emotional or spiritual wellbeing.

Make it a priority to keep yourself grounded in the truth of God’s word. If we don’t stay grounded in truth, we become vulnerable to the blind spots of our faith and make way for the enemy to feed us lies. If you are unsure about a voice in your life, ask Jesus what he thinks about it. What types of books, music, movies, and even relationships will be fuel for your spirit?

**Lord Jesus, keep me grounded in your truth so that I will not be swayed by the commentary of the culture. Dwell in my heart through faith and help me to be rooted and established in love so that I may come to recognise your voice more and more. Amen.**

Friday 20 November 2020

# Gracious faith

by Annie Duarte

**‘Be merciful to those who doubt’ (Jude 22).**

Read Jude 17–25

Early in 2020, as we were only beginning to learn about the new coronavirus, I stood in the back of the church on a typical, pre-COVID Sunday morning. As worship began, an older woman slipped into the service and took the seat next to me. She commented that she almost hadn’t come that morning because she was becoming wary of the coronavirus that she had read about in the news. My knee-jerk response was to tell her somewhat tersely, ‘Well, we can’t live in fear’.

As we turned our attention to singing the first songs, I could sense that her last reserves of courage that had carried her to church that morning had shrivelled. She had come into the church that morning despite her feelings of fear and doubt. She had told me about those feelings as she was perhaps seeking some encouragement, and I failed to validate her concerns. I failed to build her up. I knew that I needed to apologise to her. I felt so ashamed.

That day I learnt that when we encounter those who doubt, we never want to make them feel guilty or ashamed for their doubts or fears. That only digs the trench of doubt deeper. Instead of condemning someone’s lack of faith, we need to remind them of the promises of God. Instead of telling the woman at my church that she shouldn’t live in fear, I could have reminded her that Jesus has promised to never leave or forsake her.

Truthfully, each of us will struggle with doubting God’s goodness at some point in our faith journey. There will be a day when you will rely on a brother or sister to remind you of God’s promises for your life. I have seen people leave the church because they were made to be ashamed of their questions and doubts. We won’t always get it right, but we continually have an opportunity to encourage, build up, and show mercy to those who trust us enough to share their doubts with us.

**Lord God, you are rich in mercy. You made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in transgressions. Remind us to extend this same mercy and grace to those who doubt. Amen.**

Saturday 21 November 2020

# Praise him with song

by Annie Duarte

**‘Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song’ (Psalm 95:2).**

Read Psalm 95:1–7a

Sing for joy! Shout aloud! Come before him with thanksgiving. Extol him with music and song. The psalmist’s instructions are clear. Worship – the positioning of your heart before the Lord – can and should look like this. And as if the psalmist can hear our questioning, ‘Why?’, verses 3–5 remind us of the vast greatness of our God. Why should we sing, shout, bow or kneel? Because he is so worthy! He created us, and we are his.

What does this look like for you? Are there hymns or songs that help you to set your heart in a posture of worship, awe, and wonder at how great God is? There may be different physical stances that assist you to focus. It is common to bow our heads, close our eyes, and fold our hands when we pray. There is no holy formula to this, but this may help you to concentrate. When you worship the Lord in song, you may find it helpful to bow, kneel, or even lay prostrate in reverence. You may need to raise your hands in surrender or extend open palms before you as you receive strength for the day. You might raise your arms toward heaven, as a child would reach up for his parent to hold him. You might find yourself walking, dancing or jumping with joy and praise! In my opinion, there is no better cardio workout. It is good for the heart in every sense!

You could be thinking, ‘I’m not musical. This isn’t for me’. Rest assured that the Lord loves the sound of your voice, no matter how you feel about it. God created music so that we could use it to please him. Find a recording of a hymn that reminds you of his goodness and crank it up! Play it on repeat if you wish. Don’t let self-evaluation or fear of feeling foolish distract you from bringing to Jesus that which he desires: your heart and your praise. In your car, in your home, on the train or the bus, in the morning or in the evening, come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. You won’t regret it!

**Lord, you are the great God, the king above all gods. I worship you with everything I have because you have given me everything in the first place. Amen.**

Sunday 22 November 2020

# The eyes of your heart

by Verena Johnson

**‘I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you’ (Ephesians 1:18).**

Read Ephesians 1:15–23

Don’t just skim over this amazing verse. Read the verse once more, slowly, and soak up the words. (I’m not just saying that because this is one of my favourite prayers in the Bible.) Hear Paul’s prayer for you.

When you look around with your human eyes, you certainly see a fallen world. You see the struggles that many of us have faced and continue to face during this unprecedented year. You see an uncertain future in terms of the new normal that we are all navigating at the moment.

I have 20/20 vision when it comes to distance and driving, but when I try to see something close or read a book, it all becomes blurry. It’s so easy to have 20/20 vision when we look at the things that we are struggling with. It’s so easy that it can blur what the eyes of our heart should be seeing.

When God enlightens or opens the eyes of your heart to what he has done and is doing, you see something completely different.

You see the hope he has called you to. A hope that is sure and certain, regardless of your circumstances, the world around you, or the ‘normal’ you find yourself living in.

You see the richness of the inheritance that God has for you. He made us for far more than this world. He made us for something truly glorious. There is no uncertainty about that either.

You see his incomparably great power for you. The same power that created the universe and raised Jesus from the dead.

Ask God to enlighten the eyes of your heart, and practise ‘seeing’ with them in the midst of this life. Pray Paul’s prayer …

**Dear God, I pray that the eyes of my heart may be enlightened so that I may know the hope to which you have called me, the riches of the glorious inheritance you have given me,and your incomparably great power for me. Amen.**