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**Sunday 30 August to Sunday 6 September**

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Sunday 30 August 2020

# Out of control!

by Ruth Olsen

**For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it (Matthew 16:25).**

Read Matthew 16:21–28

Jesus explains the path ahead of him to his disciples (see verse 21). But they cannot comprehend. To human understanding, it was inconceivable that such things could happen to the Son of God from the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law.

‘Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!’ exclaimed Peter.

‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me …’ was part of Jesus’ reply to Peter.

Does that set you back in your seat? Our human perspective is so small, so limited. Have you ever recognised how something you have said just may have been you speaking Satan’s words aimed to hinder someone or yourself from taking steps of faith? For that is part of Satan’s schemes (see 2 Corinthians 2:11; Ephesians 6:11), for us to be doing his dirty work for him. We are blind to it until we ask the Holy Spirit to enable us to recognise what we are doing; then repent and intentionally speak encouragement.

Likewise, it’s instinctive for us to want to save our lives. To let go of my plans and dreams, my control; surely that’s counterintuitive? Yet it is as we yield our lives to Jesus, making ourselves available to him, that we begin to discover the enriching fullness and adventure he leads us into.

***Holy Spirit, I need you, your training and equipping – desperately! Of myself, I am blind to what is of you, Jesus and Abba Father, and what isn’t. Renew my vision. Cause me to grow in using discernment that you give, and the courage to speak the things of God rather than the things of human thinking, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.***

Monday 31 August 2020

# The call

by Ruth Olsen

**Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you (Genesis 12:1).**

Read Genesis 12:1–9

It was time to pack up camp and move on. Abram had left the land of his birth, Ur of the Chaldeans, with his wife Sarai, his father Terah and his nephew Lot to go to Canaan. On the way, they came to Haran, a flourishing caravan city, and settled there until after Terah died (Genesis 11:27–32).

God had previously spoken to Abram (see Acts 7:2–5), and now the call from God to move on came again. ‘Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you’ (Genesis 12:1). In effect, ‘Lay down your life and trust me to lead you to somewhere good’. They go. And again his nephew Lot joined the entourage. After arriving in the land of Canaan, they went as far south as Shechem where the Lord appeared again to Abram, promising to give the land to Abram’s descendants even though Abram had no children as yet. Abram responded by building an altar there to the Lord, likewise again between Bethel and Ai, before continuing further south toward the Negev.

Why was Abram, whose father Terah worshipped other gods (see Joshua 24:2–4), willing to turn away from that culture to trust the Lord? This man who responded to God’s call also had feet of clay, as the following chapters in Genesis display. Yet it is evident he came to know the Lord intimately through activated trust and personal encounter. His journey of trusting God features later in the ‘Hall of Faith’ chapter (Hebrews 11:8–19).

**Abba Father, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, increase in us your Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we may know you more and more. Amen.**

Tuesday 1 September 2020

# Cast out your net

by Ruth Olsen

**Then Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people’ (Luke 5:10b).**

Read Luke 5:1–11

Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret (the Sea of Galilee) with people crowding around listening to him. There were two boats at the water’s edge that caught his attention, left there by the fishermen who were nearby washing their nets. He got into the boat belonging to Simon Peter, sat down and asked him to put out a little from the shore – an ideal setting on a calm day for people present to hear what Jesus wanted to say to them. I wonder what Simon was thinking? If it were you in Simon’s place, what might you have been thinking?

There’s no record of what Jesus was teaching the people, but when he had finished, he said to Simon, ‘Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch’. After fishing all night and having caught nothing, they would have been exhausted and looking forward to going home for some sleep. But Simon recognised something different about Jesus and called him ‘Master’. Then with the loaded nets, he recognised something else about Jesus and of his own sinfulness. He fell at Jesus’ knees, keenly aware of his unworthiness in Jesus’ presence.

But Jesus reassured him, saying, ‘Don’t be afraid; from now on you will bring in people instead of fish’ (verse 10, CEV). Likewise, it can take time for us to comprehend what God has prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). He meets us right where we are, now.

**Father, thank you for creating us anew in Christ Jesus. By your Spirit, train us and lead us to do what you have prepared for us, even now. Amen.**

Wednesday 2 September 2020

# The cost

by Ruth Olsen

**Jesus said to him, ‘No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God’ (Luke 9:62).**

Read Luke 9:57–62

It cost Jesus everything to take our place for the way to be opened for us to be brought back into relationship with the Father through Jesus. New life and relationship with God are given freely to anyone who trusts Jesus. Yet it will cost us to follow Jesus. Impulsiveness won’t cut it, neither will following the rules nor having a divided mind. And a farmer needs to stay focused when ploughing.

Jesus didn’t do his own thing. His focus was on what his Father was doing (see John 5:19–23). ‘By myself I can do nothing … I seek not to please myself but him who sent me’ (John 5:30). Neither can we do anything of the Father’s purposes by ourselves. But Jesus reassures us: ‘Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing’ (John 15:1 NLT). His enabling grace is sufficient for whatever we need (2 Corinthians 12:9); that takes time for us to learn. Even the Spirit of truth will not speak on his own but only what he hears (John 16:12–15), training our focus.

Yes, it will cost us to follow Jesus. But it’s right there, in the midst of whatever is happening, that we can discover his presence and companionship with us, the empowering love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

**Teach me your ways O Lord, that I may walk in your truth. Amen.**

Thursday 3 September 2020

# To know Christ

by Ruth Olsen

**I want to know Christ (Philippians 3:10a).**

Read Philippians 3:7–16

Paul was willing to set aside the status of being ‘a Hebrew of Hebrews, a Pharisee, and considering himself faultless regarding legalistic righteousness’; it’s all worth nothing in comparison with knowing Christ Jesus. He’d rather have been living in union with Christ through faith than still trying to achieve righteousness through the law, having discovered the righteousness gifted by God and received by faith.

Knowing Jesus personally is very different from knowing about Jesus. We start hearing of and knowing about Jesus, and then it’s a growth process, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. As we learn to take God at his word, believing that he means what he says, we start to mature or grow into who and what he has called us to be.

A child in a family will grow up into that family culture. As the child becomes an adult, there will be some things to leave behind, especially to press on in learning to be what the Lord has called him or her to be in this earthly life, using God-given gifts and abilities to serve and encourage others. For a child of God, that involves learning, letting go, receiving and taking up, sifting, sorting, discerning, training, stretching, applying, equipping – all guided by the Holy Spirit. He is our Helper, our Counsellor, our Trainer and our Enabler. He stirs in us the willingness needed and empowers us to ‘just do it’ in our daily life. For it is God who works in us to will and to act (do) according to his good purpose (Philippians 2:13).

**Lord, help me willingly recognise your training, equipping, and onward call each day. Amen.**

Friday 4 September 2020

# Suffering for God’s glory

by Ruth Olsen

**Do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you (1 Peter 4:12).**

Read 1 Peter 4:12–19

Has it ever happened that someone has accused you of saying or doing something that, to the best of your awareness, you have not said or done? It may have happened at your work or place of study, and there it can perhaps be expected. But if it happens in your faith community, the hurt goes in much deeper, because we are not expecting it in that environment. No matter where, we are encouraged to be loving, caring, patient, kind, gentle, and self-controlled.

The bigger test of our character is how we handle the accusation – what we do with it – once we work through the initial shock. Do we take it to the Lord, asking for insight, wisdom, and guidance? Are we willing to process it to move towards giving forgiveness, letting the Lord work his purposes through it? That’s our place of testing, our ‘training and equipping ground’, for that’s where – if we yield it to the Lord – he can use it to build strength of character, resilience, and an open heart. He will give us the courage needed to do whatever he prompts us to do.

Suffering is part of our life in a broken world. But suffering for being a Christian goes deeper. It’s where we begin to taste of the sufferings that Christ Jesus endured (Philippians 3:10, yesterday’s reading). Although it is painful, we learn to die to ourselves, to entrust ourselves to the Lord, letting him vindicate us (Isaiah 54:17) or work his purposes through it (Romans 8:28).

**Lord, help us be faithful to you and continue to do good. Amen.**

Saturday 5 September 2020

# Teach me

by Ruth Olsen

**Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes and I will observe it to the end (Psalm 119:3).**

Read Psalm 119:33–40

‘Teach me, O Lord; give me a teachable heart. Bring your word alive to me and in me; help me understand. Change my heart, renew my mind. Move my focus away from selfish gain to whatever will instead share your life and love with others through me. Draw me closer to you Lord, deeper in knowing and trusting you and your word, for you are the Giver of Life. Preserve my life in who you are.’

Now I encourage you to pause and write out the essence of today’s verses in your own words. As it is for the psalmist, let your words be your personal prayer, asking the Lord to increase your hunger to know him and your thirst to receive deeply from him (see John 7:37–39). Re-read the psalmist’s words in a different translation, and let his hunger for deepening relationship with God likewise stir your hunger.

The Lord always has more for us to explore in relationship with him. Have you noticed his invitation in Jeremiah 33:2–3? Our capacity to understand and absorb is small, but as with physical food, it is mouthful by mouthful. We can rely on the Spirit of truth to guide us into all truth (see John 16:12–15). And as we grow, he will give us more solid food! See the challenge in Hebrews 5:11–14, and don’t let yourself be deterred by your discomfort as you grow.

**O Lord, you are good! Your steadfast love endures forever! Thank you that your Spirit reveals your word to our hearts, renewing our minds. Keep it coming, Lord, that we may honour Jesus in all that we are and do, for your name's sake. Amen.**

Sunday 6 September 2020

# Rules or opportunities?

by Pastor Chris Mann

**Where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them (Matthew 18:20).**

Read Matthew 18:15–20

Have you ever been overwhelmed by a list of jobs, chores, or instructions? I know I have. Life can sometimes do that. And sometimes, reading the Bible does that to me, too.

I don’t know about you, but I’ve sat through sermons and Bible studies where the pastor or leader has given a list of instructions for how to live a godly life, and at the end of it, I feel anything but godly. And this week’s set of passages have instruction after instruction, but in them, we will find grace, hope, and a pathway forward.

And, in my life as a pastor, I’m also aware of having done the same to people who have heard me preach or lead a study.

The passage that we’ve read today has a lot in it, and ironically enough, seems to get used sometimes by us Christians as a weapon when we point out someone’s fault. People say, ‘Aha! I have caught you in a sin! Now, Jesus compels me to tell you!’

For this reason, I like to think of Jesus and how he related to sinners. Most often, it was with gentleness, humility, respect, and grace, but at the same time, with the necessary firmness required. That, of course, is how he deals with me.

And so, it helps me to remember that when I think of someone else’s sin against me – if they belong to God, if they are baptised, if they believe, if they follow – then Jesus is present with them. That person is holy. And if I want to talk with them about sin, I’m moving towards a holy, grace-filled and restorative moment.

And that changes my perspective.

No longer is this passage a play-by-play rule book, but it is Jesus giving us an opportunity to give and receive grace as children of God.

**Heavenly Father, help me to see you in my brother or sister who sins against me and help me to look for holy moments with them. In Jesus name, Amen.**