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**Sunday 14 August 2022 to Sunday 21 August 2022**

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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.

Monday 15 August 2022

# Unwavering hope

by Annie Duarte

**But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Saviour; my God will hear me (Micah 7:7).**

Read Micah 7:4–7

Unfortunately, you may be able to relate to Micah in today’s passage. He laments the state of chaos around him. The godly have been swept from the land. Those in power are skilled at doing evil with both hands. Even families seem to be in a shamble.

All you need to do is turn on your television or scroll your phone to see stories that echo Micah’s environment. There is actually a term for the excessive reading of negative news stories: ‘doomscrolling’. There is something indulgent about doomscrolling. It justifies our frustrations with the world and gives us the license to despair and to think, ‘Woe is me. Things really are as bad as I perceive them to be’.

Micah could have gone this route. But somehow, he had the ability to hold onto hope. Something in his spirit enabled him to end his list of troubles with confidence that God would hear him and save him. He acknowledged his problems without letting them have the final word.

Maybe this is what Jesus means when he talks about faith like a mustard seed. If we can hold onto his promises and remember his goodness, we will see his salvation. Throughout history, the people of God have been ‘pressed but not crushed, perplexed but not in despair, persecuted, but not abandoned, struck down, but not destroyed’.

When the headlines or even your personal circumstances become doom and gloom, remember Jesus, who gave you victory once and for all when he rose from the grave. He made all the problems you encounter here on the earth so temporary. He sent you his Spirit to help you navigate this life. Watch in hope for the Lord. Wait for God, your Saviour, for he will hear you.

**Jesus, because of you, sin and sadness do not have the final word. Remind me of your hope when I need it most today. Amen.**

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Tuesday 16 August 2022

# Holy glasses

by Annie Duarte

**Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28).**

Read Matthew 10:24–39

Do you have the lens of eternity? A heavenly lens is just one of many gifts you receive as a Christ-follower. When you put these special glasses on, you can see things as they ought to be. As much as the Father reveals, you can see what is happening behind the scenes.

With the lens of eternity, you are given a filter for what is important. You can look at a desert and witness springs bursting forth. You can look at dry bones and see that flesh will return to them. You can carry an umbrella during a drought in faith. You can face the bitterness of death and loss with the hope of the resurrection.

This anointed lens of eternity also empowers you to sift through deception and discern what is true, what aligns with God’s word. You can see the brokenness of a heart though it is disguised in the defences of harsh language or violent behaviour. You can see the loneliness and longing buried beneath a mask of aloofness. You can see a rotten core inside of a shiny, attractive exterior. This is the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The same holy perspective is necessary when you face opposition and adversity especially because of your faith. I have heard it said that fear is having faith in the wrong kingdom. To fear humans – and those who kill the body but not the soul – is to have more confidence in their ability to destroy than in God’s ability to save and redeem.

You are running the marathon, bound for eternity! Place your faith in the one who can actually impact eternity, the one who has won it for you – Jesus. Slip on your lenses of eternity to see things as he sees them. Don’t waste your time and energy fearing people or fretting about earthly problems when the victory has already been won.

**The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked advance against me to devour me, it is my enemies and my foes who will stumble and fall. Amen.**

Wednesday 17 August 2022

# Be reconciled

by Annie Duarte

**Try hard to be reconciled, or your adversary may drag you off to the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison (Luke 12:58).**

Read Luke 12:57–13:9

Notice that Jesus does not point out that the other party in the disagreement may be found at fault and thrown into prison but that you may, in fact, be turned over to the officer. Here, the implication is that blinded by sin, we could likely be the person at fault when we argue with a brother or sister.

This verse is an invitation to examine oneself in humility. God wants us to be truly reconciled with one another – not in a forced way, but in a way that reflects repentance and a change of heart. ‘Try hard to be reconciled’, Jesus says.

Forced retribution ordered by a judge can be helpful, but it does not mean that the matter has been truly resolved or that the relationship has been repaired. It lacks a rhythm that is so crucial to the Christian walk: confession, repentance and forgiveness.

Many churches include this spiritual practice in worship each week and give worshippers a designated time to confess, repent and receive God’s forgiveness. This is not just for corporate worship. We can confess our sins against one another to one another, acknowledge our wrongdoing and repent of it. By God’s grace, this will give way to forgiveness from the other party.

One simple way to be reconciled ‘on your way to the magistrate’ – if you will – is to apologise first. In a disagreement, often both parties have something they could apologise for – an action, a word, an attitude, an assumption. This can be a terribly hard pill to swallow, but the Holy Spirit is gracious to prompt us with gentleness yet convict us in a way that spurs change. How can you be open to his prompting in your relationships today?

**Jesus, you showed me how to perfectly love even those who have wronged me. Open my eyes so that by your Spirit, I may become aware of my own blind spots. By your grace, redeem broken relationships in my life. Amen.**

Thursday 18 August 2022

# Not an ordinary book

by Annie Duarte

**The word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the attitudes of the heart (Hebrews 4:12).**

Read Hebrews 4:12–16

The Bible is a unique book in that each time you open it, something new will happen. You may learn something you didn’t know before, despite having read the same passage many times. You may be convicted of something that needs to change in your life. You may feel the loving embrace of the Father as he reassures you with his promises. You may come across a verse or idea that gives you wisdom and direction for a situation in your life. The more you read the Bible, the more you will want to read the Bible. It is not like any other book.

Sometimes the word of God will practically jump off the page at you. This happened to me with Romans 12:2:

​​Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

It was one of the first verses I read when I started to follow Jesus, and it left me convinced that there were many parts of my life that I needed to give back to the world and leave behind. Prior to this, I was so conformed to the pattern of the world that the rhythms of grace were foreign to me.

Everything about me changed – very quickly! What I prioritised, what I wore, how I spent my time, how I spoke, my relationship with material things, my relationships with others … they all had to be renewed in accordance with God's will. I couldn’t do this with my own determination. God was gracious to renew my mind. The old was gone, and the new had come – I was a new creation.

People from my old life even asked me what had happened. They wondered why I wasn’t interested in the same things I used to be. All I could say to them was that Jesus had changed my mind and heart for good. There was no going back. This is just one small story of the power of God’s word. Memorise his word. Utilise it. Speak it out loud in your daily life. It holds weight. It changes things. Praise God.

**God, let your word come alive in me. Let my heart be receptive to whatever you have for me. Amen.**

Friday 19 August 2022

# King of kings

by Annie Duarte

**On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:16).**

Read Revelation 19:11–16,19–21

Let this be your reminder today that Jesus is sovereign over everything. Every earthly king, queen, prime minister, president, dictator and politician will bow down before Jesus and acknowledge his rule and reign. Anyone with any worldly power – imagine the most powerful person you can – will pale in comparison to the power and glory of Jesus. Everything and everyone is under his authority.

We don’t have many examples of good earthly kings. Even the best of them isn’t perfect. They all ultimately pursue their own interests. Their power and rule are limited and scarred by sin. This is not so with King Jesus. Not only is Jesus the most powerful and exalted, but he is also the kindest and most loving king. He uses his sovereign power to care for those who love him and draw in those who don’t yet love him.

As a Christian, or ‘Christ One’, this is good news for you. This means that your life – your family, work, future, finances, community, joys and sorrows – is all under the watchful care of King Jesus. You can easily relinquish your troubles and heaviness into his hands. There is nothing too big or too small for him to help you with. It is freeing to be able to think, ‘This is above my pay grade!’ and surrender people, issues and circumstances to the King of kings and Lord of lords.

What in your life seems just too big for you to fix? How do you think Jesus may be able to help?

**Jesus, you are in control, so I don’t have to be. You are faithful and true. You are Lord over all. I ask for your help with [insert thing] today. Amen.**

Saturday 20 August 2022

# Forget not

by Annie Duarte

**Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits (Psalm 103:2).**

Read Psalm 103

Which of these is more difficult for you: praising the Lord for all he has done or remembering his faithfulness? To be honest, most of us could do a bit more of both!

The psalmist says in Psalm 92 that it is a good thing to give thanks to the Lord and to sing praises to his name. It is positive for your mood, mind, spirit and health to praise God and give him the glory he is due. It is a good thing to acknowledge his goodness and power.

But what about when we don’t feel like it? It’s true that we don’t always feel like praising God. Life can get us weary, angry, bitter, frustrated, overwhelmed or make us feel plain lazy. It’s okay. Be kind to yourself in those times. Everyone experiences these feelings. This is why it could be important to engage in the second imperative in today’s Bible verse: forget not all his benefits! When life is handing you lemons, what better thing to do than remember God’s faithfulness to you in the past?

One way I like to do this is to look at old journals or notes in my Bible. Even a simple journal entry with bullet points that recall my blessings or how God was faithful can be so helpful in jumpstarting my heart into praise. Journaling can be simple. It can be a note on your phone or a list you keep on the kitchen bench. It can be a letter, ‘Dear Jesus …’ or brief bullet points. Maybe sticky notes around the house are your style. There are no rules.

The important part is to write down a record of God’s faithfulness in a way that will make sense to you later. As much as I love to think I will remember whenever Jesus does something miraculous in my life, the sad reality is that I do forget. Keeping a written record of God’s blessing is what the psalmist has done in our reading today. I promise you that it can make a great difference in your prayer life. May you be filled with joy as you recognise his goodness more and more.

**Father, you are good, and your love endures forever. Let me remember all your benefits and praise you accordingly. Amen.**

Sunday 21 August 2022

# I have come to set the captives free

by Craig Heidenreich

**When Jesus saw her, he called her over (Luke 13:12a).**

Read Luke 13:10–17

Have you ever dealt with a chronic problem like the poor woman in this passage – 18 years bent double? Long-term suffering is one of the hardest tests of our character, and we can even start to doubt whether God is listening at all. Sometimes our suffering is internal and does not even show on the outside.

What a comfort to read in verse 12 of this passage that ‘Jesus saw her and called her over’. Even when we do not know it, our Lord is watching over us for good.

Jesus began his earthly ministry, declaring, ‘I have come to set the captives free’, and this is certainly demonstrated in this story. How amazing it must have been to see the woman straightening up, and what a ‘walking testimony’ she would have been to the villagers in the days that followed.

However, verse 14 says there was an indignant synagogue official. It is astonishing that in the midst of all the joy that day, there was pushback from someone. Humans can really miss it sometimes, and there is a warning here for us to not get so invested in the system that we miss when the Holy Spirit moves.

The leader of the meeting wanted things to be orderly with the focus on the plan for the day. When Jesus showed up, he directed the attention to a woman in need (an insignificant woman). The leader had an idea of the letter of the law, while Jesus demonstrated the spirit of the law, saying, ‘should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?’

Let us make sure that all our religious activities and forms serve the needs of people and do not exist as an end to themselves.

***Lord Jesus, thank you for showing compassion to this poor woman, and thank you that we can dare to hope that you ‘see’ us as well. Help us, Lord, to ‘straighten up’, be free of Satan’s influence and show compassion to others. Amen.***

*Craig enjoys making friends with people from other countries and trying to learn a few words of greeting in their languages. He says it’s fun to see the joy on a person’s face to hear their mother tongue. When he has some spare time, he is happy renovating the home he recently purchased in Kapunda, South Australia.*