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**Sunday 3 April 2022 to Sunday 10 April 2022**

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Sunday 3 April 2022

# Responding to God’s love

by Charles Bertelsmeier

**Then Mary took a twelve-ounce jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard, and she anointed Jesus’ feet with it, wiping his feet with her hair (John 12:3).**

Read John 12:1–8

How excited or emotional do you ever get about your relationship with Jesus? In the culture many of us have grown up in, we tend to keep our emotions under control. Our society tends to frown on us for getting too excited about anything religious. I think the culture that Jesus lived in was much the same. Being religious was about obeying a set of religious rules and doing religious things, much like our own society. This type of religion isn’t anything to get excited about; mostly, it is a dreary duty, and many people give up.

Seeing Mary acting how she did – especially uncovering her head to wipe Jesus’ feet with her hair – would have been considered degrading and embarrassing. So, what motivated her to act in this way? Mary had been the recipient of so much love from Jesus, culminating in him bringing her dead brother Lazarus back to life just a few days earlier. In one sense, she couldn’t help herself. She was so thankful and appreciative of Jesus’ love to her that it was just her natural response. I’m sure no-one watching would have doubted her sincerity.  It definitely was not an act she was putting on or a religious duty she was performing.

When people watch me and see how I react, people may think I’m a reasonably decent person, but I’m not sure they would see me acting in a way that was a response to Jesus’ love for me. I’ve learned too many coping strategies for what life has thrown at me over the years; many of these strategies showed little to no love. I’m a long way from Mary’s level of responding to Jesus’ love.

Where God has led me (and he may be leading you on a different path) is focusing on seeing myself from his point of view. Before I was made his child, my life fell so far below God’s infinitely high standards that I was inherently repugnant to him. It was Jesus’ sacrificial love for me (and us all) that led him to enter our messy, smelly world to rescue us and make us his brothers and sisters. I can get excited and emotional about my relationship with God from this perspective. However, when I compare myself with other good people, many of whom aren’t Christians, I can forget how much I needed rescuing and the effort God’s love led him to.

What things do you do to remind yourself of God’s great sacrificial gift to you, and how does this help you to respond in thankfulness to him?

**Heavenly Father, sorry that I’m often so preoccupied with my life that I forget all the wonderful things you are doing. Thank you that your love for us is so great that you keep reminding us of what you have done and are continuing to do for us, and you keep drawing us back into your embrace of love. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Monday 4 April 2022

# Responding to Jesus

by Charles Bertelsmeier

**Then Pharisees called the high council together. ‘What are we going to do? If we allow him to go on like this, soon everyone will believe in him’ (John 11:47,48).**

Read John 11:45–57

Have you ever wondered why you hold the views you do – on religion, politics, sports teams? There are many people in the world with different beliefs to you, so they cannot all be correct. And does it matter anyway? When it comes to our faith, I would suggest it does matter since it impacts how you live your life here on earth and where you will spend eternity.

You would expect that if a God created this universe and the life on this planet and had a plan for every person, he would reveal this information to us. Well, I believe he has in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. This Jesus claimed to be the Son of God and that he was there at the beginning of time and space to bring this universe and life and humans into existence. And he attempted to prove his claim by performing some impressive miracles, including bringing dead people back to life. I believe we have only three options as to who this Jesus was. (1) He was part of the best confidence trick ever played on people, (2) he was deluded and insane, or (3) he was who he claimed to be. (You may think of other options, but I believe they might fall roughly into these three categories.)

If you don’t accept that Jesus was a liar, deluded or insane, you will face the issue that he made some strong pronouncements that will impact your life and require changes to how you live. You can accept that you fall way short of God’s standard of what is acceptable to him. You can receive Jesus’ work of rescue for you. You can entrust your life to a loving Heavenly Father. Or you can decide that you don’t want anyone controlling your life but want to live it how you think is the most satisfying for you. This was the position of the leading priests and Pharisees in Jesus’ day. They didn’t like what Jesus was telling them, and their solution was to silence Jesus, and that meant having to kill him. When we don’t want to hear Jesus’ message to us, I think we, too, try to silence or weaken Jesus’ message. For me, one way is to be busy doing something I enjoy (at least to some extent). Or I can surround myself with ideas and environments that water down Jesus’ claims or explain them away.

Do you really trust that God loves you unconditionally and sacrificially and only wants what is best for you? Do you trust him enough to unconditionally surrender your life to him?

**Heavenly Father, I sometimes struggle to really believe that you know what is best for me. Thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit working in my life to grow my trust in you and your love for me. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Tuesday 5 April 2022

# Trusting God when everything goes wrong

by Charles Bertelsmeier

**In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead (2 Corinthians 1:9).**

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3–11

I was brought up in a Christian household, but my upbringing didn’t prepare me to face what life would throw at me. I sort of felt that my Christianity was some sort of magic shield to protect me from life’s problems. In my early 20s, I met this really wonderful woman, and soon we were married, and I thought life was great. Then the marriage deteriorated, became very toxic, and ended in a very acrimonious divorce. Because there was a child involved, we couldn’t fully separate. The pain continued for many more years with ongoing court cases. There were times when ending it all seemed to be the only way out of this mess.

Although sometimes I was aware of God’s presence and help, there were many times I was not (until looking back years later). God used this time – and the people he surrounded me with – to change me. The biggest lesson I had to learn, and I am still learning, was to actively believe that God loves me dearly and has a plan for my life. Of course, I don’t look forward to tragedies, but I am learning to entrust my whole life and the situations I face into God’s care, trusting that he has a purpose for everything that comes my way.

Some years ago, at a Christian retreat, I was moved by God to go out to the front to be prayed for and surrender my whole life to God. In the following days, I would remember this decision and reaffirm it. But what surprised me was how many areas of my life I wasn’t prepared to surrender to God. He is working steadily to release me from my fear of not being in control and to grow in trusting his love and purpose for me.

As I read about Jesus’ life in the Bible, I am surprised how much of what is written is Jesus reminding the people that God is in complete control. Much of it says he loves them dearly, and they can stop worrying about their own lives and concentrate on following where God is leading them.

How do you respond to new challenges in your life? Is it: ‘Oh, not again. I don’t know how I will survive this’, or ‘Thanks, God, that you will be with me again to guide me through this’?

**Heavenly Father, Jesus made so many promises while he was here on earth that you would be with us always and never leaves us to ourselves. We ask for your help in believing these promises and knowing your peace in whatever is happening to us. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Wednesday 6 April 2022

# Princes and princesses

by Charles Bertelsmeier

**For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6).**

Read Ephesians 2:1–10

One of my hobbies is family history research. I enjoy finding out the names of my ancestors and their relatives and trying to understand other aspects of their lives. And sometimes, we discover very interesting surprises. One was that my great-grandmother in Germany had children with five different men, but we can only find that she was married to two of them. An initial reaction was that she was an immoral person, but we don’t know what her circumstances were, so we intend not to judge. Another surprise is that my wife is descended from royalty across Europe, but predominantly in England and Scotland. We often joke with her that she is a princess.

This brings us back to our reading for today. We are co-regents with Jesus Christ as he reigns over and manages this universe, concentrating on the lives of the people on this earth. (If you can make the time, I encourage you to read the whole passage, not just the verse written above.)

What does this mean? Just as Jesus has been given work to do in revealing his Father’s plan for the lives of all people, bringing them into his kingdom, so too is our role to demonstrate God’s love and purpose for all.

I’ve struggled with this role most of my adult life, and most of my efforts have resulted in failure and discouragement. God’s answer to me amazed me in its simplicity. Stop trying and just follow where he leads. God’s Spirit does all the hard work. We just have to be there to witness God at work (and share the gifts God has already given to us). The hardest part for us is letting go. Letting go of what we think is important, like our reputation, our security (physical, financial and personal) and our time. We can only do this if we are sure that we can really trust God’s promises. If we are struggling with this trust, God is patient and happy to spend the time to teach us. All we have to do is ask.

Oh, the joy (and humility) of seeing God at work changing people’s lives, especially when we had been given an opportunity to be involved many years ago, and we felt we had failed.

How does it feel to be a co-regent with Christ? Are you happy to take the role of a servant in the same way that Jesus was a servant to humanity while he was here on earth?

**Loving Heavenly Brother, Jesus, I really struggle to get my head around the idea of being a co-regent with you. Please help me live out the role you have given me today. Thank you for the Holy Spirit living in me, guiding me to love others in the same way you love me, so my life may be a witness for who you are. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Thursday 7 Apri 2022

# Images of our relationship with God

by Charles Bertelsmeier

**But Christ, as the Son, is in charge of God’s entire house. And we are God’s house, if we keep our courage and remain confident in our hope in Christ (Hebrews 3:6).**

Read Hebrews 3:1–8

The Bible provides many word pictures of the relationship between God and his people. Parent and children; groom and bride; ruler and subjects; the cornerstone of a building and the bricks making up the walls; head and parts of the body; potter and a clay vessel.

Here we have the picture of a household with the son and heir in charge. In thinking about this, my thoughts went to the TV show Downton Abbey, filmed at Highclere Castle in England. Many people were involved in managing the household and the estate in the past.

Each person in the household had a job to do, usually beginning as a trainee under supervision, moving up to a skilled worker able to work unsupervised, then to a supervisor in charge of several people. Eventually, the person may be sufficiently equipped to take over the house or even the estate; but that couldn’t happen unless they were born into the owner’s family or married into the owner’s family.

In God’s household, it is very different. We are all heirs in waiting, still going through the progression of training but, at all times, legally adopted into the family as joint-heirs with the Son. But that doesn’t mean we naturally know how to live as part of God’s family. Thankfully, our heavenly brother has provided us with a tutor, the Holy Spirit, to stay beside us and teach us how to live as his brothers and sisters in the heavenly family.

However, our verse also reminds us that there will be challenges along the way, especially ones that suggest life will be better living outside of the constraints of the heavenly family. Our Heavenly Father loves and understands us so well that he knows it is futile to hold us back against our will and will let us go. And like the prodigal son, we will be welcomed back with open arms once we have the courage (and maybe desperation) to admit our mistakes and return.

In your day-to-day living, how conscious are you that you are a very beloved child of God and a member of his family?

**Heavenly Father, thank you again that your Son loved me so much that he did everything needed to enable me to become a member of your family. Thank you, too, for your Holy Spirit going with me each day to be my tutor, training me in how to live as a member of your family. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Friday 8 April 2022

# Our relationship in the heavenly family

by Charles Bertelsmeier

**Therefore he is able, once and forever, to save those who come to God through him. He lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf (Hebrews 7:24,25).**

Read Hebrews 7:23–28

What mental picture do you have when you read or hear about Jesus interceding with the Father on our behalf? Do you see Jesus pleading with his Father to go easy on you because you are a reasonable, decent person, and you haven’t done anything really bad, at least for a while? Do you see the Father with his chin in his hand, chewing this over in his mind, weighing up the good and bad things you have done to decide where your eternal future lies?

Actually, there is only one argument Jesus has that will work with his Father. His standards of perfection are so infinitely high that we would never pass the test of being good enough. Jesus’ argument is that, on behalf of all humanity, as a 100% human while he was here on earth, he lived the perfect life we could not live – for all of us. And then as the same 100% human, acting as the representative of all humanity, he took our failures on himself in death on the cross and to the grave. When we accept this free gift, we are now clothed with Jesus’ perfection and stand perfect – as measured by God’s infinitely high standards – before God.

I believe we are so conditioned by our existing relationships with family, friends and work colleagues, where we are rewarded for the way we treat others, that we really struggle to believe God loves us unconditionally and sacrificially. He really wants us to get over trying to be good because we will never be good enough. Rather, he wants us to live as members of the heavenly family, with all resources freely provided by the Father and guidance and direction provided by the Holy Spirit. Yes, it can be a bit scary to have to entrust our security and future to God, but it is also so exciting to see how God works in our lives, letting us be a part of what he is doing in the lives of others.

How secure do you feel about God’s unconditional love to you that you can open up to him about your fears and insecurities and ask him to set you free to live excitedly as a member of his family?

**Heavenly Father, we are tempted so often to try hard to be good people so we can feel worthy of your love and care for us. We ask that you would help us stop trying to be good but rather surrender our whole lives to you so that we could share in the joy and excitement of living as members of your family. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Saturday 9 April 2022

# Being thankful

by Charles Bertelsmeier

**Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever (Psalm 118:1).**

Read Psalm 118:1,2,19–29

Many years ago, when I was a child, the family practice at each of our main meals was to say grace at the beginning and return thanks at the end. Grace was a prayer of blessing on the meal, and in most households where this was practised, it was a standard prayer that everyone present said in unison. At the end of the meal, no-one could leave the table until we returned thanks. Like the grace prayer, this was also a customary prayer said in unison by everyone present. In our household, it was the words of the above verse (but from an older translation of the Bible).

Today, the saying of these prayers has fallen out of practice. Although, Christians will almost always ask for a blessing on the meal (usually ad-libbed) when eating together. But it has been a long time since I heard anyone formally thank God for a meal at its completion (but we usually do thank God for the meal when we ask for a blessing before eating).

With our busy and generally affluent lives, it is easy to adopt the attitude that we have everything under control. We work hard to earn money to purchase the things we need to live a healthy and happy life. However, some of the things that have been happening over the last few years (unprecedented bushfires and floods, COVID, Russia’s war on Ukraine) may be making us think about how fragile our existence on this planet is. We exist by God’s love, grace and mercy, and it is good to be reminding ourselves regularly of this and be very thankful to God for the way he is looking after us.

When God was forming the nation of Israel in the desert after they escaped from Egypt, one of the things he initiated was a set of regular festivals (Passover, Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles, First Fruits, Pentecost and Feast of Trumpets). These were to remind the Israelites of God’s blessings on them. We, too, can benefit from developing routines in life that regularly remind us we are dependent on God for our health, food, shelter, companionship, recreation and the other blessings he showers on us.

Think about the events in your life that have caused you to stop and consider what you control. Where do you have to trust in God’s love for you to live the way you do? How have you been motivated to share these blessings with others?

**Heavenly Father, we must apologise that we so often take the credit for somehow achieving the blessings that are really from you. Thank you for regularly reminding us of our fragility in this world and that we live and enjoy life by your love, grace and mercy. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Sunday 10 April 2022

# Taking responsibility

by Maria Rudolph

**But they kept shouting, ‘Crucify him! Crucify him!’ (Luke 23:21).**

Read Luke 23:1–49

Today is Palm Sunday, and if you went to church this morning, you watched the crowd lay down coats and palm branches in front of Jesus, who triumphantly entered Jerusalem. You heard them shout ‘Hosanna (meaning “God, help us”)! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’ (John 12:13). In Luke’s Gospel, chapter 23, verses 18, 21 and 23, we witness three times that the crowd is now chanting another chorus: ‘Away with this man! Crucify him!’ It even says that they shouted with one voice (23:18), and their shouts prevailed (23:23). How quickly the hearts of people can change. What we feel so passionate about one day can change into quite the opposite the next.

That is why it is not good to heed the words of the novella The Little Prince by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry: ‘It is only with the heart that one can see rightly’. In fact, if we followed ‘our hearts’ as many contemporary books, films and opinions teach us, it would be a potluck whether we get it right or make a disaster of any given situation. God teaches us that we must look to Jesus Christ for everything. For absolutely everything. So we don’t see things with our own heart, but with the heart of God, revealed to us through Scripture. The prophet Isaiah tells us (Isaiah 55:8,9) that God’s ways are higher than our ways, and God’s thoughts higher than our thoughts. By walking to the cross and allowing the gruesome crucifixion to take place, Jesus knew that the very people who condemned him to death needed the forgiveness he was about to win for them. ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing’ (Luke 23:34).

God was willing to take responsibility for us in Christ, even when people stirred up by priests and Scripture teachers themselves were unwilling to take responsibility for Christ. When we are unwilling to take responsibility for Christ in our own lives, he still died for us in our unworthiness and took responsibility for us anyway. You are called by Christ to take responsibility for your faith, for the actions that come from your faith. You are called to take responsibility for the mission of the church and be an ambassador of the gospel by how you have been gifted, equipped and called by the Living God. Yet even when you and I fail in this responsibility due to our weak human nature, Christ still takes full responsibility for us. Even when sometimes the priests and Scripture teachers of our time lead a chorus of condemnation of the call in and for Christ, Christ takes responsibility for us all, walks to the cross, lays down his life, and unites us all in himself. Thanks be to God. Hosanna, God help us. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

Where do you think you fail in taking responsibility for Christ?

**Loving Jesus, you have walked to the cross and taken full responsibility for me and all my sins and shortcomings. I am overwhelmed and grateful and have nothing to offer you in return except my whole life, my being, myself. Take me and use me. Embolden me to take responsibility for you, and comfort me with your peace when I fail to do this once again. I give you my all today. Amen.**