

## **April 7th to 13th. Tim's update on the regional vision for the church.**

Tim King joined us last Sunday, to update us on his regional role. He spoke on Acts 10 and the story of Peter being sent by the Holy Spirit to Cornelius' house.

Pause and read Psalm 133 and Acts 10.

Q 1. What stood out to you about the story in Acts?

Notice that the Spirit speaks to Peter while he was going up to pray his midday prayers. Sometimes I've thought that regular set times of prayer or "quiet times" can become religious and perhaps there was a touch of this for Peter. But in this rhythm of prayer Peter had, the Spirit was able to interrupt him.

I've been thinking a lot about lies. Where they come from and how they rob us. One of our major "lies" is busyness. Busyness lies to us that outcomes are dependent on our efforts. But prayer and intentional times where we pray are acts of faith. Faith and trust go hand in hand in us walking with Jesus. Peter's rhythm of prayer grew his dependency on the Spirit and a place where the Spirit could reveal to him the Father's will.

How do you go with your own personal prayer? Share as a group your tips on how to build times of personal prayer with God.

Listening to God leads to the Holy Spirit being able to move in and through us supernaturally.

As a group, discuss:

- Any stories of supernatural connection orchestrated by the Holy Spirit?
- Any stories of empowering by the Holy Spirit to speak to others?

Q. 3. Is the concept of us going into new social networks rather than inviting people into our own social network a new idea?

Q 4. Does this idea fill you with hope, fear, and confusion? If you can see a strong "fear" response, there will be a lie behind it, giving that fear a power that Jesus disarmed at the cross.

Q 5. How much would your life have to change if the Holy Spirit connected you to a new social network and you committed to weekly connection with those people to help them grow in faith? Is it right to do this if it means diminishing connection with your home church family?

Begin praying for the Holy Spirit to create connections with unlikely people.

## April 14th to 20th David in the desert 2 Samuel 15–17; 1 Sam. 23:14–15

“A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” Proverbs 18:24.

Following David’s life certainly isn’t boring. In these chapters, we see David fleeing Jerusalem as his son Absalom, consumed with hatred after giving into unforgiveness, seeks to kill his father and take over the kingdom.

It clearly is one of the darkest hours of David’s life. I can’t imagine what it must have been like for him to not only flee his home but also the throne. One of the many things that stands out in this story is how this painful event sifts David’s relationships. Despite his kindness to many, David discovers which of his companions are ready to abandon him in his trial and who are his friends, those willing to stick with him, even when doing so could cost them their lives.

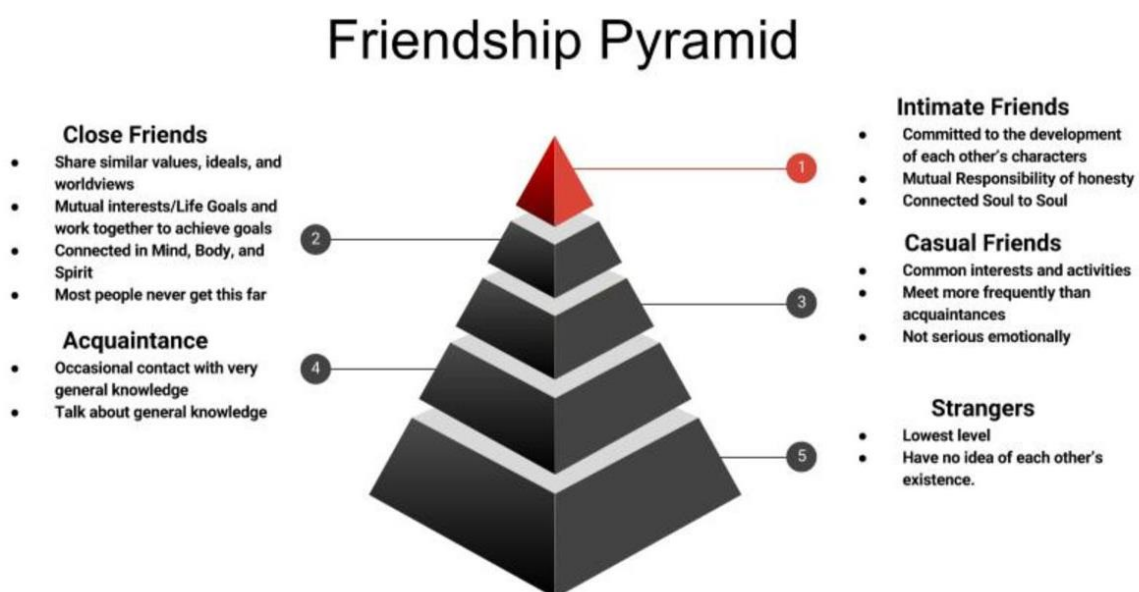
C.S. Lewis, highly valued friendship. He wrote in his book, “The Four Loves”.

“In friendship...we think we have chosen our peers. In reality, a few years' difference in the dates of our births, a few more miles between certain houses, the choice of one university instead of another...the accident of a topic being raised or not raised at a first meeting--any of these chances might have kept us apart. But, for a Christian, there are, strictly speaking, no chances. A secret master of ceremonies has been at work. Christ, who said to the disciples, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you," can truly say to every group of Christian friends, "Ye have not chosen one another but I have chosen you for one another." The friendship is not a reward for our discriminating and good taste in finding one another out. It is the instrument by which God reveals to each of us the beauties of others.”

I've been blessed with some great friends. At times, I've been a great friend, and at other times, I haven't valued friendship as I should.

Adversity has a way of testing a friendship. As adversity reveals what's happening in us and our friends, friendships can grow or diminish.

Below is a picture of the “friendship Pyramid”. Can you identify friendships in your life that have gone up the pyramid due to adversity?



As you read this story, consider what adversity reveals about the nature of David's friendships. Before this difficult time, we would perhaps imagine some responses different to what transpired.

Ittai (2 Samuel 15:21)

Hushai (2 Samuel 15:37)

Mephibosheth<sup>1</sup>- (2 Samuel 16:3-4)

Shimei (2 Samuel 16:6-7)

Abishai- (2 Samuel 16:9)

Shobi- the Ammonites (2 Samuel 16:27)

Reading this story may have reminded you of friendships that have grown or diminished through adversity. To love someone as a friend is risky. If you have been hurt in the past, you may be tempted to hold yourself back from others. Read another quote from C.S. Lewis.

“To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable.” — C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*

The only way we can remain tender-hearted in the face of pain is to spend time with our ultimate friend, Jesus.

In the friendship pyramid, an intimate friendship:

- Is committed to each other's development.
- Mutual responsibility and honesty.
- Soul to soul.

In John 15:15, Jesus says he takes the most intimate secrets between him and the Father and shares them with us. In John 17, he says he wants us to be “one” with him and the Father. And when our friendship was tested with the adversity of the cross, he stuck with us and has said he will stick with us, to the end of the earth and the end of the age.

Q. Are there any relationships that have caused you pain that you can take to your ultimate friend, Jesus and ask him to bring healing to you?

My prayer is that as you bring your pain to Jesus, you will find healing and encouragement to keep on loving and growing as a friend. First with Jesus and then with the brothers and sisters God has placed around you.

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<sup>1</sup> Johnathan, David's covenant friend, had been welcomed by David into his home when the normal protocol would have been to execute him as a rival to the throne. See 2 Samuel 9:6-9

## April 21st-April 27th. Psalm 63 My soul clings to...

Read Psalm 63.

David wrote this Psalm as he fled from his son Absalom, who was trying to seize the throne and kill David. At the end of 2 Samuel 17, David and those loyal to him stopped and were fed by Shobi the Ammonite, Machir and Barzillai.

When they see David and those with him, they say, "The people are hungry and weary and thirsty in the wilderness (2 Sam 17:29). Perhaps this is where David gets the phrase for this Psalm, "O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you." Psalm 63:1.

How wonderful is it when you are tired, and someone else cares for you?

Q. Can you remember a time when you cared for someone weary from adversity or where you were weary from adversity? What did it do for you to give or receive hospitality at that time?

In the story surrounding the psalm, David sent the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem and two attending priests with it, as the Absalom coup unfolded. The Ark was held to be a part of God's presence. It was kept in the Holy of Holies.

I am sure many people saw David sending the Ark away as a sign of his surrendering his throne or at least that God's presence was back in Jerusalem, where Absalom now resided.

Despite sending the Ark back and the pressure of the circumstances, David speaks with intimacy and confidence of God being with him. Read the verses 3-5 with passion.

These are not the words of a person whose son is seeking to kill him, who is fleeing from his life and having everything taken from him. What had shifted in David so that despite losing Ark, home, throne and nearly his life, he could write a Psalm like this?

Pain and suffering, and finding God through it, is one of the most difficult questions anyone will face. Jack Deere writes,

"I've come to expect that God will speak to me in the internal audible voice during times of persecution and pain. When I was going through an extended period of pain, I heard Jesus say, "This is my gift to you." There are some things in us that can only be changed by pain. There are depths in Jesus that can only be reached by pain. There are some magnificent rewards he wants to give us they can only be given to those who have endured pain. I've learnt to look at all my pain and persecution as an opportunity for promotion in God's kingdom. Our God is a great Father. No random, useless pain can sneak by him to afflict his children. The only pain he lets come to us, is the pain he intends to redeem, if we will let him."

Pg 98 Why I am still surprised by the voice of God.

What's your response to what Jack has written? What have you discovered about Jesus through pain?

David gives us keywords that show what he was doing in the face of great pain.

- I thirst for you.
- I have seen you in the sanctuary.
- My lips will glorify you.
- My lips will praise you.
- On my bed, I remember you.
- I cling to you.
- ...the king will rejoice in God.

Jack Deere says, *“The only pain he lets come to us is the pain he intends to redeem if we will let him.”*

Is there someone in your group going through a painful moment right now? One of the gifts we can give each other when we are going through a time of pain is to remind each other that God is with us.

If there is someone in pain in your group right now you can pray for them. Before you do, if you can identify how you see God is redeeming the pain, offer them your perspective. Hopefully, it will be an encouragement to them that despite what they are going through, God is at work.

Finally, as a group, ask the Holy Spirit to come, to be their counsellor, comforter, defender and teacher through the pain.

**April 28<sup>th</sup>-May 4<sup>th</sup>**  
**Psalm 67: Blessings to the nations**

When we read as a whole, Psalm 67 teaches us that there is some justification for praying for ourselves, that there are unselfish reasons for praying the selfish prayer that God bless us. Two such motives are given—immediate and ultimate.

The first reason why we desire that God shall bless us is so that through us, his salvation may be known to all humankind (vs 1, 2).<sup>2</sup>

Jesus said, “Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks.” No wonder then that Jesus did two very important things after his resurrection.

1. He gave the disciples the Holy Spirit. “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so, I am sending you.” 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.” John 20:21-23
2. He told them that they needed the Power of the Spirit to be his witness to the nations... “ it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:46-49).”

In that case Israel’s motive in seeking God’s blessing was not selfish. They prayed that God would bless them, not to wallow comfortably in his blessing themselves, but so that it might pass from them to others. They longed that God would be merciful to them, that thereby the nations might receive his mercy and come to know his ways and salvation. So just as the psalmist prays, God be gracious to us and bless us; it’s right for us to pray it.

Q. How do you feel about asking, “May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine on us?”

If we hesitate to ask God’s blessings, then it’s a sign that we’re living out of our old identity and not the new. Usually there is a lie we’ve partnered with that gives this hesitation power. From my perspective, lies come from three places.

- The enemy.
- Our family of origin.
- The world.

If you hesitate to ask God to bless you, ask the Holy Spirit to show if there is a lie behind it and where it is coming from. If you can identify the lie, ask God’s forgiveness in partnering with it (repentance) and then ask God to bless you so that you can be a blessing (Belt of truth- Ephesians 6:14).

Just like the nations “Watched Israel”, our non-Christian friends and family are watching us. If we claim to know, to love, and to follow Jesus Christ, they will be asking, “What difference does Jesus make to your life?”

The Psalmist writes, “Bless us so that your ways may be known on the earth.”

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Mahatma Gandhi famously said, *I like your Christ; I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.*"

Becoming like Jesus is our heavenly Father's desire and why Jesus died for us (Romans 8:29a).

Q. What are some of the causes for us to stop maturing in our character with Jesus?

In Romans 2, Paul addresses Jews who believed that what made them right with God was their Jewish ethnicity. Sometimes, we can get drawn into the same deception. We compare our lives to others and because we identify as a Christian, go to church, and perhaps lead a "better" life, we begin to have faith in our righteousness rather than Jesus'.

Taking what Paul wrote in Romans 2, I am going to change the word "Jew" to "Christian".

Q. What does this change invoke in you as you read it?

*"You who call yourselves Christian...and you boast about your special relationship with him. You know what he wants; you know what is right because you have been taught his law. You are convinced that you are a guide for the blind and a light for people who are lost in darkness. You think you can instruct the ignorant and teach children the ways of God. For you are certain that God's law gives you complete knowledge and truth. Well then, if you teach others, why don't you teach yourself? You tell others not to steal, but do you steal? You say it is wrong to commit adultery, but do you commit adultery?...You are so proud of knowing the law, but you dishonour God by breaking it. No wonder the Scriptures say, Non christians blaspheme the name of God because of you."*

Verses 3–5 form another section in this Psalm.

We all know people who need the transforming power of Jesus. We want them to know him so that they are blessed. While this is a wonderful desire, John Stott says it is not the "Ultimate" reason to share the gospel with people.

*"The greatest incentive in all evangelism is not the need of human beings but the glory of God; not that they shall receive salvation, but that they shall give to God the honour that is due to his name, acknowledging and adoring him for ever. We cannot be content until every convert has become a worshiper.<sup>3</sup>"*

Paul says that when people experience the presence of God in corporate worship, they exclaim, "God is truly here among you (1 Corinthians 14:25).

We've all been guilty of going to church to receive, to be built up, encouraged and blest. As we've already seen in this psalm, it's right to ask God to bless us, but imagine if we all gathered not to be blest but to give. Not to receive but because we wanted to worship and exalt God. What would happen if we all prepared ourselves before we came to church with that attitude? I bet we'd all want to be in that kind of gathering...and so would people who don't know Jesus yet.

Spend some time praying to God, as the Psalmist says in Vs 5, that our corporate worship services would be a time where we gather because we want to give God the Glory and worship that he is due. That we would shift from seeking to gain to seeking to give.

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<sup>3</sup> John Stott, [Favourite Psalms: Growing Closer to God](#) (Mill Hill, London; Grand Rapids, MI: Monarch Books, 2003), 59–60.

**May 5<sup>th</sup>- May11th**

**Psalm 73. The prosperity of the wicked.**

I remember hearing a transcript of the WW2 War crimes trials in Nuremberg. The main defence of the German judges who sentenced millions of people to unspeakable horrors was that they were upholding the laws of the land. At one point, as this justification was being given by one of those standing on trial, someone from the gallery of onlookers yelled out angrily, *“But isn’t there a law above the laws of man!”*

Sometimes, it can feel like there isn’t. Especially when those who are rich and powerful seem to be getting away with it.

**Vs 1.** The Psalmist outlines the problem: *“Surely God is good to...those who are pure in heart.”* This outlines a Karma or religious belief people fall into. If I do good things, I should expect God to do good things for me. But what happens when people do good and good things don't happen? Or even worse, when they do good and good things happen to those who are evil?

This is what the psalmist believed, and it almost wrecked him. There are three mistakes he makes.

**Vs 2&3.** *But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*

**Mistake 1. Envy.**

Envy is one vice none of us want to be accused of. Even jealousy is better. I can be jealous of what you have and wish I had it for myself, but envy is far more insidious. Envy doesn't just want what another has; it gets satisfaction from goodness being denied to another.

Martin Luther wrote. *“Some people are not happy unless they see that their fellow man is doing poorly... I feel sad when others do well and would gladly lose one of their eyes to keep his neighbour from having any eyes at all.”*<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps you've experienced this. There is “someone” you have had an issue with in the past or perhaps you've been jealous of. Then you “hear” that they have problems. When that has occurred, have you ever felt a twinge of satisfaction for them that it has “gone wrong?” That's envy. It's behind our Australian “tall poppy” syndrome where we like to pull down people who are doing well.

**Mistake 2. Bitterness.**

The Psalmist talks about how envy leads to bitterness. From verses 4-11, he makes a long list of all the benefits of their wickedness and how it seems that they get to act with impunity before God.

He confesses that a result of his envy was bitterness, “When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you.”

Do you recall the old saying “...like a bull in a China shop”? Bitterness moves us to a place of judging others and judging God. Its foundation is arrogance and self-righteousness. “We know best.”

**Mistake 3.** He (almost) gave into the temptation to give up.

In the NLT, it says in verse 16, *“I tried to think this problem through, but it was too difficult for me.”*

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<sup>4</sup> <https://summitchurch.com/GetFile.ashx?Guid=a92542c7-bd68-485d-8d14-1e0d964c74f8>



We've all had times when what God was or wasn't doing didn't make sense. When we give in to this temptation, it results in us becoming a higher moral agent than God. We become "god". This is the temptation Satan offered Adam and Eve in the garden and Jesus in the wilderness. To doubt God's goodness and trust your perspective on a situation as better than God's.

### **The solution.**

We're much more likely to be given to the "mistakes" when we live from earth to heaven or from the temporal to the eternal. The apostle Paul encouraged the Corinthian church:

*"That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. 17 For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! 18 So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever."* 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

So, what keeps us living from heaven to earth?

#### **1. Keep living from the sanctuary.**

The Psalmist says, "...then I went into your Temple. Then I understood..." Vs 16. There is no problem that you and I are facing that worshipping God isn't the best first response.

Q. What does worship do for us when we are tempted to give into envy?

#### **2. Remind yourself that you are "in Jesus."**

Remember all the "Evil" done to Jesus, who is the ultimate "good". Despite this, he didn't give up because he knew his Father was over everything.

The Psalms says, *"Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you."* Vs 25.

When you get to the end of this life, there is only one thing you'll be interested in. Jesus. Jesus says that he gives us eternal life, and no one and nothing can take us from that life (John 10:28) and that He is over all things.

#### **3. Thank God that he works through pain to grow us closer to him.**

In Vs 26&28, the Psalmist reinforces two things:

1. God is bigger than his physical trials and pain.
2. That the difficulties he has gone through have brought him "near to God."

Paul told us to rejoice "in" suffering. We don't rejoice *for* the suffering, but we rejoice "in" suffering because, without it, we so often become self-righteous and move away from God. That is why the sons of Korah wrote, *"I would rather be a gatekeeper in the house of my God than live the good life in the homes of the wicked."* Psalm 84:10.

Spend some time talking about how God has met you in your difficulties and how it has saved you from self-righteousness.

Spend time praying for others outside of your group that they will be strengthened not to give into the temptation of envy and strengthened to hold onto God's eternal perspective.