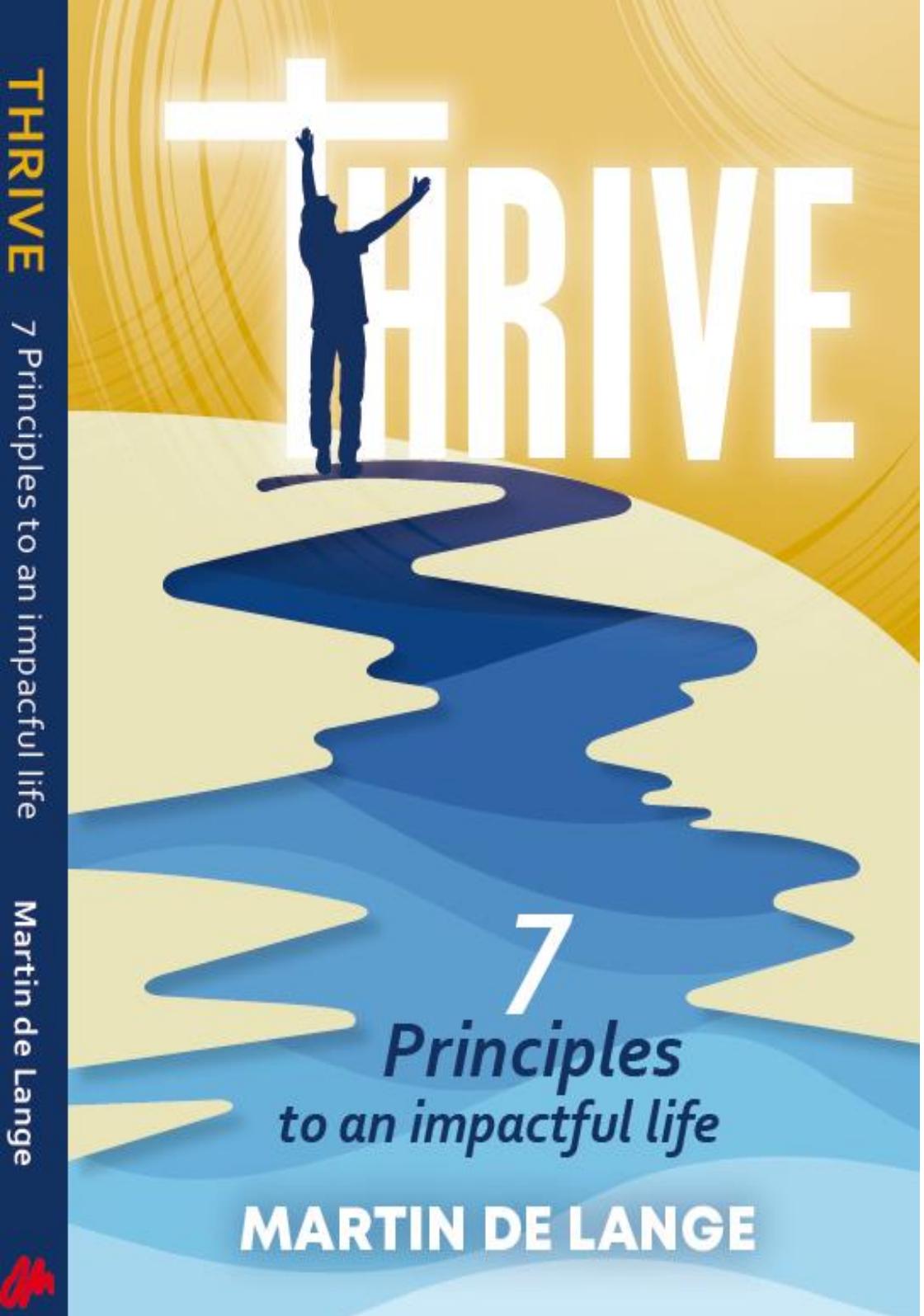


**THRIVE**

7 Principles to an impactful life

Martin de Lange



# THRIVE

7

*Principles  
to an impactful life*

**MARTIN DE LANGE**



# THRIVE

## *7 Principles to an impactful life*

*Do you desire to thrive and live a life of purpose and fulfilment? Do you struggle understanding God's will and sometimes wonder if he is interested in the details of your life? This book helps you uncover God's definition of an abundant, purposeful life and provides you with practical steps to attain it.*

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Martin de Lange is a full-time Christian worker, church planter, teacher and disciple-maker among the Turkish speaking people of Europe. His first book *The Edge of Paradise* has been translated into six languages.

Drawing on thirty years of experience in full-time ministry, de Lange helps you discover and define your personal vision and face the barriers keeping you from fulfilling it. Written in a vulnerable and engaging style, with many real-life stories, the principles in *Thrive-7 principles to an impactful life* will allow you to set a new course for your life—one that is proactive, well-balanced, fulfilling and successful in God's eyes.

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In this practical, experience-rooted, biblically-grounded book Martin de Lange points us to seven principles he and his wife have learned and lived. Practical application steps in each chapter may help us move from surviving to thriving, even in challenging settings. Clear, to the point, and practically applied, I warmly commend this book for new missionaries and old.

- David Greenlee, PhD Missiologist and Author, *Operation Mobilisation*



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7 principles to an  
impactful life

**MARTIN  
DE LANGE**

## **Thrive - 7 Principles to an impactful life**

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*This book is dedicated to  
my parents,  
Ben and Sharan*



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# THANKS

I am grateful to my friends Colin Phelps, Joan Campbell and Matthew Riley, who generously gave of their time and input to help me work on this book.

Their brutal honesty and feedback helped me to write a book that will make an impact on many lives.

Thank you to Allan Sutherland, Willem Botes and Sue Killian for your work on editing this book.

And thank you to my dear wife for the many cups of tea you brought me, and the ongoing encouragement to finish this project that has been on my heart for so long.

I could not make this journey without you all.



*Martin and Petro have been married for 33 years. They have three adult children and a daughter-in-law. They currently reside in France, and can be reached at: [www.martindelange.org](http://www.martindelange.org)*

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The author has been sharing the Gospel with Turkish people since 1993. He gained extensive experience in the Turkish language and culture and was directly involved in planting four churches in the southeast of Turkey. These churches were planted in Mersin, Tarsus and Malatya respectively.

Due to increasingly difficult political challenges in Turkey and mounting pressure on the protestant church, the author was deported with his family, back to his home country of South Africa.

The mission agency Operation Mobilisation, with which the author has been affiliated since 1993, invited him to start an outreach and church planting project among the Turkish speaking people living in France. Since 2012 he and his wife have been living in France. They were involved in the planting of twelve churches among Turkish speaking people in France.

The nearly 1 million Turks living in France presents an opportunity for the local church to share the Gospel of Jesus with them. Due to the comprehensive experience of the author in missions and church planting among Turkish Muslim people, and with his knowledge of both the Turkish and French languages and cultures, the author is in a unique position to share his extensive experience with the reader.

The author holds a Dip Theology (1993) degree from the Theological Seminary of the Apostolic faith mission of South Africa, a BA (Hons) Theology (2014) from the University of the North-West and a MA Missiology (2019) from the University of the North-West.



# ENDORSEMENTS

Martin's vision was to bring Jesus to the Turkish people. This vision and the carrying out thereof would come with much inner turmoil and outward opposition. Thrive gives insight into the beginning, the development and the challenges of becoming a missionary and how God's faithfulness gave him and his wife Petro rewards of joy and victory that they could not have imagined or even hoped for. Martin's writing is very engaging and as you read, you can feel the reality of the situations he describes.

Thrive makes you re-look your own spiritual journey and wonder how you can contribute to the Kingdom ministry, to show people the way to Jesus, whether you are a missionary or not. If that is your heart's desire, this book is a must-read.

**Rosemary Flynn**, *Clinical Psychologist and Christian Counsellor*

Reading this book you will experience the full range of your emotions stirred. You will also be challenged to engage more intentionally with God and what He is wanting to accomplish in and through your life. Martin has been very vulnerable in allowing the reader into his life, family and ministry. This is more than a story of his discoveries. Martin takes us on the sojourn of his life and ministry explaining the realities in such a way that we are able to observe and apply his 7 principles for an effective Christian life for ourselves. You will find this journey insightful, inspiring and challenging.

**Pastor Peter**, *Nicoll International ministry leader, consultant and coach*. Peter has been involved in international missions, people and leadership development for over 30 years.

## THRIVE

Martin and Petro de Lange have lived remarkable lives, leaving their home in South Africa to pioneer ground-breaking ministries in Turkey and then among Turks in France. In *Thrive* Martin draws on his wealth of experience to open up the 7 fold secret of how we can thrive by knowing and doing God's will. The book is full of real life stories and you will be gripped and moved by the openness, humour and honesty of his heart-warming, personal stories. The many practical lessons are all grounded in keen spiritual insights and a solid Biblical foundation.

As Martin explains, it is dead fish that 'go with the flow', but live fish are refreshed as they swim against the current. If you want your life to make a difference in the world for Jesus this is a book for you!

**Julyan Lidstone**, *Ambassador for OM's Muslim Ministries*; living in Glasgow, Scotland.

Long-term service among the least-reached brings joy and fulfillment; our journey can also be accompanied by frustration and pain. In this practical, experience-rooted, biblically-grounded book Martin de Lange points us to seven principles he and his wife have learned and lived. Practical application steps in each chapter may help us move from surviving to thriving, even in challenging settings. Clear, to the point, and practically applied, I warmly commend this book for new missionaries and old.

**David Greenlee**, *PhD Missiologist and Author*, Operation Mobilisation





# FOREWORD

The title *Thrive—7 principles to an impactful life*, clearly states Martin’s intentionality for writing this book.

His life has indeed been ‘impactful’. This book is his reflection on the principles that have led to making an impact. I appreciate his ability to reflect on and examine his life (with much honesty and vulnerability). Throughout the book he recalls events and relationships that shaped these 7 principles. These stories bring the principles to life.

He quotes David Bosch in his book saying: Christians can never be people of the status quo. (Transforming Mission) Be assured, your comfort zone will constantly be challenged when reading these principles. The principles are foundational for any believer wanting to live an impactful life - they are presented in a way that both invites and challenges.

Each chapter has a ‘Making it practical’ as well as an ‘In reflection’ section. I found these very helpful, not only serving as a summary, but indeed making it very practical. Every principle is also based on a Biblical truth.

My prayer is that this book will set up followers of Christ to ‘Thrive’, rather than merely surviving.

*Thrive—7 principles to an impactful life* is helpful, not only for missionaries, but for anyone wanting to live an impactful life.

**Hansie Breedt**

International People Care Director – Operation Mobilisation



# INTRODUCTION

We all experience lessons in life and every person's experiences are unique. Because we, as humans, are social beings, we can learn a lot from interaction with one another. Unfortunately, many of us never share our experiences, which denies those around us from benefiting from what we have learned. This book has been in my heart for many years. The chapters that follow have been the product of many presentations and talks at churches, small groups and training facilities. From the responses of those who listened to the issues that I will share in this book, I became aware of the importance of sharing our experiences, our lessons and our mistakes with others so that we can learn from one another.

I will share seven lessons or principles to an impactful life. No-one will deny the importance of an impactful life, a life that is a blessing to yourself and to all those around you. It is a lie and a mistake to think that we are living on an island. We are all connected to people around us and the choices we make influence those close to us. Sometimes our choices might have an impact far beyond our borders.

The principles that I will share are by no means the keys to a successful and fulfilling life. They are simply the ones that I walk by, which I've identified through introspection, and which have kept me close to the Lord Jesus. Your life path might look very different to mine. I hope that you will be challenged to search and identify your own set of principles or values to live by. It is my sincere wish that you will be encouraged to discover the benefits of living by certain

standards and that you will see what the impact thereof will be on those around you. The words of Jesus in John 10:10 often stir in my heart when I think of these issues.

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” (ESV)<sup>1</sup>

Jesus came to this earth to make a way for us to know God in order for us to step into a relationship with God the Almighty, the Creator, for us to be reconciled with Him and for us to glorify His name. He also came to give us a life in abundance, full and limitless. Jesus wants us to be successful, He wants us to discover our life calling and direct our lives accordingly. It is when we discover this that we can really glorify God. This, of course, does not mean that we will never face challenges or even suffering - these are all part of real life. The question is: how do we cope in all of this?

I have discovered that many people constantly react to what life \_\_\_\_\_ throws at them. If they have a good day it means that all their experiences that day were positive and a bad day means that most things just went wrong. This is a very normal human reaction, but it does not lead to a life of success, fulfilment and meaning. God wants us to be **proactive** in life. Man was created to make life happen, to initiate, to be creative, to set the pace, to walk in the front. \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>1</sup> English Standard version 2016

## INTRODUCTION

in life it means that you take control. In a relationship with Jesus Christ we live out the promise that we find in John 10:10; we live a life of abundance and fulfilment as we walk on this earth as conquerors and not as those who are conquered.

Of course, it is important to emphasise that I am talking about those who have confessed that they cannot live life by their own power. They are sinners separated from God, in need of redemption and forgiveness that only Jesus can give. If you do not yet have a personal relationship with God through Jesus, you might find these principles weird and far-fetched. I am approaching this subject from the principle that Jesus is the one who rules and guides your life. If He is not yet doing it, I want to invite you to consider this. Please, I appeal to you, commit your life to God by believing in Jesus. If you are moved to consider this invitation, please turn to the back of this book and look at the steps outlined there before you continue reading.

Another important point to consider is our definition of **success**. Unfortunately, the world and the environment in which we live has indoctrinated us to believe that success is measured by the size of our bank accounts, our houses or the cars that we drive. There is nothing wrong with being financially strong or living in a big house, or having a flashy car, but this is not proof of real success.

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Real success is measured by the degree to which you walk in the way that God has prepared and predestined for you.

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Real success is measured by the degree to which you walk in the way that God has prepared and predestined for you. The question that needs to be answered is “Have I found my place in creation and am

I doing what God created me for?” We are all on a journey and each one’s journey is different from the other, but it is important that we run the race that is set before us.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” Hebrews 12:1 (ESV)

I cannot run someone else’s race. I have to run the race that is set before me by God, who had a very special purpose and plan for my life.

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” Jeremiah 29:11

God thinks about us every day. His thoughts are good and full of blessings for our well-being. We have to trust that God’s way for our lives is good, because God is good.

My wife and I are currently serving as church planters in France. Our calling is to reach out to the almost one million Turkish speaking people in France. Most of the lessons that I write about in this book I have learnt on the mission field in Turkey.

We have ministered to the Turks for the past twenty-eight years and it was during this time that I had to identify certain principles that I needed to live by and according to which I could direct our ministry. I believe that until now we have lived the life that God has set before us.

## INTRODUCTION

Was it always an easy road? No, there have always been challenges that came our way. These were often disguised as a betrayal by close local believers, death threats by locals, imprisonment, being deported, the murder of teammates, and constant financial pressures and challenges.

However, this did not determine our level of success. We consider this as part of our calling and part of the price that we had to pay when walking in obedience to God.

I have generously shared real-life, personal stories that made an impact on my life. Each chapter has a “**Make it practical**” section where I outline some basic points to help you identify the core issue of the particular principle that I share. The chapter then concludes with a “**Reflection**” section, where I present a few questions to help you to reflect on the chapter. Please consider taking time to prayerfully work through each of these questions.

I want to encourage you to start a journey of your own to discover the principles by which you should live. Let us start this journey together and discover what the Lord has in store for you and me.



## CHAPTER ONE

# DEFINE YOUR VISION

Some of us may be dreamers all our lives but it is the visionaries that make the difference. There is nothing wrong with dreaming and imagining a better world, or a change of environment. Our dreams may take us to places where we could never go. That's how it was in my childhood.

I grew up in the western suburbs of Pretoria, South Africa, in a working-class neighbourhood where both parents worked. My grandparents, who lived with us, or rather we lived with them, kept a watchful eye on me and my sister during the day.

It was not difficult to keep myself occupied in our huge back yard with its many fruit trees and tool sheds. In a time before computers, the internet, smartphones, and video games, a young boy like me would have to rely on his imagination to entertain himself, and I had an ample supply of this useful stuff!

I would build a plane from pieces of wood lying around in the back yard and then fly all over the world. The next day I would be a world-famous racing car driver in a car built from leftover cardboard boxes. My imagination was alive and well.

I dreamt about saving the world and being a hero. Yet, reality often sets in as we age, and the dreams of the back yard of our childhood die away, only to be forgotten.

I soon realized that to only dream would bring no change to life. It is when you start to develop your vision that you embark on a journey to make a difference.

This is the essence of **defining your vision**. It is about making a difference.

### **Birth of a Vision**

After finishing school, I joined the South African Police and qualified as a crime scene investigator, attaining the rank of sergeant at the age of twenty-two. I was happy and fulfilled, with an exciting career ahead of me. I loved my job and enjoyed the challenges I faced every day. Young and ambitious, I worked hard in an understaffed unit, dreaming of becoming a captain within the next five years. Petro and I had married and I could not be more content. As a young Christian, I thought I had it all.

Then, one morning, the Lord Jesus stepped into one of my quiet time moments. Our first home was a small, simply furnished condo. I used the mostly-empty spare room to have my early morning moments of prayer and scripture reading before leaving for a day of fighting the rising tide of crime. The salt and pepper coloured carpet in the room was where I would spend most of my time in prayer.

At one time I was meditating on the letter Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome.

“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God.” Romans 1:1

## DEFINE YOUR VISION

Suddenly it seemed to me as if the words in the Bible came alive and filled the room. It was as if the Lord Himself spoke to me, a supernatural experience that changed my life. In the room next to me, Petro was still enjoying the last moments of a good night's rest, completely unaware of my experience.

Although I was a young Christian at that time, I was satisfied with my life and the direction in which it was heading. However, the experience that morning changed me and set me on a new course. I became aware of a deep inner calling - a desire to leave what I was doing, and to follow Jesus into a life of full-time commitment and service. It was as if the ambitions and goals that I had in the police service were no longer relevant. I suddenly realised that my main calling was to share Jesus with the rest of the world.

At that moment I realised that it was not enough just to aim for the highest rank in my unit. I wanted to aim for the highest possible calling of the Lord Jesus in my life. As I came into alignment with the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus started to flood my spirit with what He wanted for my life. This birthed a deep desire to serve Him on a full-time basis and ultimately led to my decision to leave the police service.

### **Right where you are**

I would like to clarify something important here. I am not propagating that everyone who wants to serve the Lord Jesus needs to quit his job and become a missionary.

Perhaps you are a plumber or a receptionist, going about your daily routine and the Lord presents you with a variety of opportunities to be His witness. A good friend of mine, who is busy with his doctoral

studies in nuclear science in Paris, shared with me the amazing opportunities he had as a Christian to share Jesus with highly educated, intellectual people, which would be totally out of reach of any ordinary Christian.

My oldest son Martin Jr. recently shared with me the many opportunities that he is presented with of sharing Jesus in his work as a compliance officer for a national insurance company. He is responsible for several branch offices in his region and often has to encourage the managers of these offices when they share personal challenges. He is

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You may be able to fulfil the calling that the Lord has placed on you right where you are.

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in a unique situation to share Jesus with people that would never be touched by the traditional clergy.

For my friend and my son, this is their calling for now. You may be able to fulfil the calling that the Lord has placed on you right where you are.

### **A journey of obedience**

It was different for me. I embarked on a journey of obedience where the Holy Spirit revealed His will to me one step at a time. Having received my calling, the next step was to open my heart to it. This was easier said than done. I had a very real struggle to submit my will to the will of God because I still had plans for my life, and I desperately wanted God to bless them.

It was one thing to become a Christian, acknowledge my sinful condition and repent of my old selfish ways. It was much harder to die to Christ. This was a process rather than a moment. As I read and meditated on the Bible, I was encouraged to submit and obey.

## DEFINE YOUR VISION

God showed me that I had to step down from the throne of my own life and let Jesus take His rightful seat on the throne. I discovered that my plans were not necessarily the plans God had for my life. As I spent more time reading the Bible, I came across Jeremiah 29:11

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

I found it astonishing that God had a plan for my life. I thought He just wanted to get me saved and not to go to hell. If God had a plan for my life, that meant He wanted to use me. His plan was to prosper me and to give me hope and a future. God did not want to harm me, but bless me.

I was hooked! I wanted to know more. I wanted to be part of that. I learned that I was on God’s mind.

Twelve months after I received my calling. I resigned from the police and entered Bible college to be trained as a pastor. I was on a new journey towards a destiny that I did not know. All I knew was that the Lord had placed in me a burning desire to serve Him in a full-time capacity. In my frame of reference, that meant being a minister in a church and that was what I was preparing myself for.

### **It starts with Jesus**

Sometimes we journey through life trying different things, never really discovering our destiny or one clear calling. This can be a frustrating experience. As someone who believes in the importance of having a

personal relationship with Jesus, I believe that **true purpose of life** can only be found in and from Jesus Himself. It is when we submit our

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lives to the authority of Jesus that we can find true purpose.

The development of my vision was a long process, bathed in prayer, in the Word, and in meditating on and being obedient to God's will.

The development of my vision was a long process, bathed in prayer, in the Word, and in meditating on and being obedient to God's will. It was a process rather than a moment. The vision developed into a solid idea that over time came into sharp focus.

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It was important for me to be sure of my vision because it released energy into my spirit that made me move forward, even during challenging times.

The vision that formed in my heart over time, can today be captured in one sentence:

*My life's calling is to help others find their place in the Lord Jesus and for now, I am called to help the Turkish people find that place in their lives.*

By sharing our personal story I would like to encourage you to discover and develop your vision to the point where you can formulate it in one or two clear and simple sentences.

### **How godly vision is born**

I grew up in Africa and love the continent and its people. As someone who loves the outdoors, I would often go on camping trips in the African bush. My father was an exceptional hunter.

## DEFINE YOUR VISION

I did not share my father's passion for hunting, but as the son of a skilled hunter who could hit a bullseye at a thousand meters, I had a lot of exposure to guns and hunting. When hunting big game such as buffalo, leopard, or big antelope, you use a high-calibre rifle with enough power to kill with the first shot.

You would search and track your prey until you have a line of sight, then quietly take aim, gently pull the trigger and fire the shot. To be successful in the hunt you need to take aim and have a clear, direct shot. You need focus and be calm, or you will miss your target.

You would not hunt buffalo with a shotgun, for you might just lose your life when a buffalo bull charges at you.

### **Find one thing**

The same principle applies when we search for God's plan for our lives. Instead of searching for different plans and destinies, or visions to pursue, search or 'hunt' for that one thing that you are good at.

We see this echoed in Philippians 3:13 where Paul says

*"This one thing I do..."*

Our destiny is a moving target<sup>2</sup> and it is up to us to hunt for and find it. The purpose you have in your life is bigger than any obstacle that you might encounter.

In his book *One Big Thing*, Phil Cooke says that destiny wants to be pursued. It wants to be discovered because it is in the journey that we learn to understand, and value what it means<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Cooke, Phil Howard. *One Big Thing* (p. 10). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

This was very much my experience. My purpose and vision were released into my heart one obedient step at a time.

But the questions that we struggle with are, where does vision start, how do I get going, what are the first steps to a godly vision? I would like to share with you where this started for me.

### **What disturbs you?**

As a freshman at Bible school, my wife and I lived in the suburb of Mayfair, Johannesburg, in the middle of a large Muslim community. For me, this was a new experience! As someone who grew up during the height of apartheid in South Africa, I had never been exposed to other religions or cultures. It is bizarre to think that in a multicultural country like South Africa one could be so ignorant and isolated from other cultures. In Mayfair, I was suddenly surrounded by Muslim neighbours and heard the call to prayer from the local mosque instead of the church bells of our local Dutch Reformed church.

It did not take me long to visit the local mosque and make acquaintance with the Imam<sup>4</sup>. I was inquisitive and wanted to learn more and, as I did, I became deeply disturbed by the darkness of this religion. I could not believe that the Christian church stood so cold and aloof to its Muslim neighbours, never making an effort to engage with them about Jesus. I wanted to change this and therefore got involved in a local outreach group that would knock on Muslim doors in the neighbourhood and share Jesus with them.

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<sup>3</sup> Cooke, Phil Howard. *One Big Thing* (p. 14). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

<sup>4</sup> The spiritual leader and teacher of a local Muslim community.

## DEFINE YOUR VISION

It grew into an interest, a passion, and a calling to share Jesus with Muslim people. This started thirty years ago. Later, one of my bible college professors came back from a visit to Turkey and shared the dire spiritual needs of this Muslim-majority country. I was challenged that in a population of fifty-nine million<sup>5</sup> people, only 500 were Christians (1992). I wanted to change this, and this was where the calling for us as a family to move to Turkey was born.

Another time, God refined my vision through something that disturbed me. This happened after a few years of living in Turkey. We found ourselves in the south of the country, in the port city of Mersin, just next to Tarsus.

I was deeply touched by the complete lack of knowledge of Jesus by the Turkish people. Town after town and village after village that we travelled through, were complete barren fields to the Gospel. No one ever shared Jesus with these people, and no one had access to a Bible.

This was before the time of the internet, Wi-Fi and smartphones. I wanted to make a difference. It was unacceptable to me that there were thousands of printed Bibles in warehouses in Istanbul, yet no one distributed them. Especially in the east of Turkey, no one dared to go around and distribute Bibles to Muslims. This would be a blatant act of defiance.

Just the right environment for me! I started a distribution company called Kayra Ltd., a registered company that focused on the distribution of Christian literature and the Bible. It was the first of its kind in the east of Turkey. This grew into a fruitful ministry that covered most of

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<sup>5</sup> <https://countryeconomy.com/demography/population/turkey?year=1992>

the eastern part of Turkey. Our mission was to get a New Testament to every Turk.

But my vision was about to be refined again. After 14 years of fruitful ministry in Turkey, we were deported back to South Africa by the Turkish police. Although Turkey is supposedly a republic where every citizen enjoys religious freedom, our activities were not appreciated by the Turkish police who brazenly maintained that Turkey was a Muslim country and not a secular state. This resulted in us being arrested for questioning and intimidated several times.

After some years back in South Africa, Petro and I were invited by the leadership of OM France to start with church planting work among the one million Turks living in France. Once again, the spiritual state of these Turks, living in a secular European environment, moved my heart to make sure that they got to know Jesus.

In the development of my vision, there was always completed dissatisfaction with the current situation. I wanted to make a difference. I believed I was a change agent!

Vision is born in the heart of the person that is consumed with the tension between what is and what could be. It is formed in the heart of those who are dissatisfied with the status quo.<sup>6</sup>

This is exactly what moved me to embark on a journey of obedience to the Lord.

In the very first steps of discovering and developing your godly vision the questions that beg for an answer are:

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<sup>6</sup> Stanley, Andy. *Visioneering* (p. 19). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

## DEFINE YOUR VISION

1. What things in your life disturb you right now?
2. With what are you completely dissatisfied?
3. What is the status quo where you are right now?

The answers to these questions might be the first green leaves of a new vision pushing through the fertile ground.

### **The components of godly vision**

The question that I wrestled with for a long time was to try and determine whether or not my vision was from my own carnal ideas and ambition, or from God. I would lie awake at night asking myself over and over, “Is this from God, or is this from myself?”

How do you know if you have a godly vision? As a follower of Jesus, you want to make sure that you are busy with the things of God, rather than with your own ambitions and pursuits. Thomas Merton, the American Trappist monk, once said:

*“People may spend their whole lives climbing the ladder of success only to find, once they reach the top, that the ladder is leaning against the wrong wall.”<sup>7</sup>*

Make sure that the ladder of success that you aspire to climb is placed against the right wall. I believe some road signs will help you see if your vision is a godly one or not.

One of the classical examples of someone fuelled by a desire to bring change and make a difference is Nehemiah. He was the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes I during the time that the Jewish people were in exile

<sup>7</sup> <https://findingyoursoul.com>

in Babylon around 445 BC.<sup>8</sup> Nehemiah was moved by the state that Jerusalem was in, and after sharing his dream and vision with the king, was granted permission to travel to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall.

Upon arrival in Jerusalem, he took a few days to inspect the situation and then gathered all the people together and gave the following compelling speech in Nehemiah 2:17-18

“Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.” I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me.”

From this short quote we see the four vital components of an effective vision:<sup>9</sup>

### **1. The problem.**

What problem disturbs you? Be clear on what you identify as the problem. Try and hunt here with the rifle. You need to take clear aim at the problem. Write it down. What are the issues around you at this moment that are bothering you?

### **2. The solution.**

The solution might be a work in process. In my life, developing a godly vision took most of the time.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Nehemiah>

<sup>9</sup> Stanley, Andy. *Visioneering* (p. 88). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Before we launched the Bible distribution ministry in the east of Turkey, my teammate and I spent three months prayerfully considering the solution to the problem that we had identified. It was a time of hard work and planning, all bathed in prayer.

**3. The reason why something must be done.**

The answer to this question is important because if your motivation is not birthed from God, you run the risk of pursuing your own carnal ambitions. This will not be enough to bring the vision to completion. Is it creating a desire within you to make a difference?

**4. The reason why something must be done *now*.**

Timing is everything! The story of Joseph<sup>10</sup> in the Bible provides an excellent example of someone with a vision, but bad timing. As a young, arrogant lad Joseph had a series of dreams showing himself in a position of power over his brothers. Sharing these dreams made him quite unpopular with his siblings and nearly got him killed. What are the solutions to these issues and what should be done?

God's timing for the fulfilment of His vision for your life is not always the same as your timing. We tend to get impatient when things don't go according to our plan. God, however, stands above time. He created time and is not influenced or pressured by it. God moves in another dimension and can step into and out of time as He wants. So, be patient!

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<sup>10</sup> The story of Joseph is one of the best-known stories in the Bible. Joseph was eleventh of twelve sons of a wealthy nomad, Jacob, and his second wife, Rachel. His story is told in the book of Genesis 37-50. Joseph was very much loved by Jacob because he had been born to him in his old age.

Your vision will come to fruition in His time.

*“A vision rarely requires immediate action. It always requires patience.”*

Andy Stanley<sup>11</sup>

Considering these four components will help you develop your God-inspired vision and plan the way forward.

Dan Black<sup>12</sup> runs an internet-based church leadership forum and on his regular blog he identifies the following characteristics of a godly vision:<sup>13</sup>

- 1. A godly vision will lead to helping others.** A godly vision is not about myself, my plans or even my dreams. It is about how others can be helped. Ask yourself: Is what I believe God has imprinted on my heart going to help other people? If your answer is yes, you are most probably on the right track.
- 2. A godly vision will glorify God.** It will always be about the glory of God and not the glory of man. God alone is the One who must be lifted up and glorified.
- 3. A godly vision is future focused.** A godly vision more specifically looks into the future.
- 4. A godly vision will defeat the devil.** This means whatever will be accomplished by this vision will suppress the devil and his demons. It will stand against Satan and his army. This, of course, opens the door to resistance from the enemy.

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<sup>11</sup> Stanley, Andy. *Visioneering* (p. 27). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Nehemiah>

<sup>13</sup> Stanley, Andy. *Visioneering* (p. 88). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

**5. A godly vision will always seek to advance the Kingdom of God.**

This is what Jesus came to do and this is what we also need to do.

As your vision begins to develop, you will experience the rippling effect of this new path that you are taking. Nothing we do happens in isolation. All our actions cause a reaction of some kind. In the same way, embarking on the journey of discovering and developing the vision that God has for your life will create a ripple effect that will influence and impact all aspects of your life.

**The fruit of godly vision.**

As you start the work on developing this godly vision in your heart it will affect you and those around you in significant ways. I have seen first-hand how the process of developing my vision affected my wife.

I am a person who processes information and thoughts verbally. I need to talk about what is in my heart. It is not uncommon for me to present an opinion on any issue starting from point A and ending up at a very different point B. To the frustration of my dear wife, with whom I have been happily married to for thirty two years, I flooded her with my new ideas and inspiration, which often made her nervous.

My wife, who is much more of an internal processor and an introvert, had to learn that not all the new ideas I presented were set in stone and ready to roll out. Once she learned this, it helped her to relax more when I used her in my verbal processing phase of exploring God's calling and vision.

The developing of a godly vision does not affect just those close to you. It also carries with it certain fruit that you will see.

### 1. Purpose

I lived in the port city of Mersin in the south-east of Turkey for many years. We started our church-planting experience in this city and the neighbouring city of Tarsus. One of my favourite pastimes was to take long walks or run along the sea-facing promenade, watching the boats leaving the harbour. The Mediterranean Sea can get rough, particularly in winter when it is no fun to be on a ship in stormy waters. In contrast, the harbour is always safe. However, if you stay in the harbour, you do not journey anywhere. All those ships I watched leaving the harbour knew where they were going. They each had a specific goal and destination in mind.

*“A ship is safe in harbour, but that’s not what ships are for”* William Shedd, nineteenth-century American theologian.<sup>14</sup>

For us to embark on our journey, we also need to know our destination. I call this destination a **vision**. I would not have been able to do what I am currently doing for such a long time, without a clear vision. Unfortunately, many people are pursuing other people’s visions.

“...And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”  
Hebrews 12:1

God has marked out a path for you to follow - a vision that He wants to deposit in your heart. If you are a visionary person, are you pursuing

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.getabstract.com>

## DEFINE YOUR VISION

someone else's vision or are you running the race marked out for you?

Are you helping others to make their vision a reality while neglecting the vision that is brewing in your own heart? For some, this concept might come across as an unrealistic pie-in-the-sky idea that only works for others. Be encouraged, vision is for everyone! If you understand what a vision can do, you will look for it with a greater sense of urgency.

Vision gives you direction and a sense of purpose that sets you on the path of life and takes you towards your destiny.

Be careful of other people telling you what God has planned for your life. I love to see the Holy Spirit working in people's lives and I believe that He still works in powerful ways today. I like to see the gift of prophecy in action in our meetings and fellowships, but we must be careful when so-called prophets come to us with "words of God" to instruct us in what to do with our lives. I believe that if I have a personal relationship with God, He lives in me with His Holy Spirit and He will talk directly to me.

When someone comes to you with a prophetic word regarding your vision, calling or future, it will either confirm what the Lord has already impressed on your heart, or will in a very short time be confirmed in your heart by the Holy Spirit. As I understand the Scriptures, I do not believe that the Holy Spirit gossips about us to other people. Of course, if there is sin in our lives God may sometimes use a prophetic word to deliver a message to us because we are not in tune with the Holy Spirit and cannot hear His voice.

### 2. **Energy.**

Vision is that sparkle in your eyes when you talk about what you do.

Vision releases energy that nudges you forward and helps you to get out of bed in the morning. One of my personal favourite verses in the Bible is Jeremiah 29:11. It shows me that God thinks about me and that His thoughts about me are of blessings and abundance. The vision God has for my life is a vision of blessing and great things.

When you become inspired by the godly vision for your life, you will sense a release of energy that enables you to move forward with this vision. People who know me and work with me will describe me as a high-energy person.

There may be many factors contributing to this, but I believe one of them is my sense of a clear vision from God. I am inspired by this calling of God on my life, and it helps me to fulfil His vision for my life. God's vision for my life energises and excites me, and I believe it is because the Holy Spirit anoints us to complete the task that God has laid before us. The anointing<sup>15</sup> of God is crucial; it is God's way of saying, "This is from Me."

Godly vision inspires. To me, it is one of the distinguishing elements to discern between carnal and godly vision. Where God is present His anointing will also be present.

### 3. **Faith.**

God can do far beyond what we can imagine. We read in Ephesians 3:20 -

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<sup>15</sup> The primary purpose of anointing with the holy anointing oil was to sanctify, to set the anointed person or object apart as "godly", or "holy" (Exodus 30:29). Originally, the oil was used exclusively for the priests and the Tabernacle articles, but its use was later extended to include kings (1 Samuel 10:1). In the Bible the anointing oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

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“God can do far more than we could ever ask for or imagine. He does everything by His power that is working in us.”

I believe it is time to imagine impossible things for our lives. Vision from God is bigger than what I am. A vision from God is so big that it will scare me, it will terrify me and therefore require me to trust in Him with all that I have.

If I can achieve my vision with my resources or effort, it is probably not from God. A vision from God is bigger than the resources I have and will bring me to a place where I am fully dependent on God. I cannot achieve or reach a vision from God with my means. A vision from God takes all that I have.

We find a classical example of this in the story of Abraham. God wanted to see if Abraham would obey Him. For many years Abraham could not have children. When his wife Sarah finally gave birth to his only son Isaac, God asked Abraham to offer up Isaac.

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A vision from God  
is bigger than the  
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am fully dependent on God.

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“When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.”

Genesis 22:9

When Abraham was at the point of offering Isaac on the altar, he had no back-up. He only knew that God was faithful and would come through with greater things.

“Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied. “Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.” Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.”  
Genesis 22:10-14

Godly vision asks for godly faith.

## **The cost of godly vision**

It would be a mistake to assume that a godly vision comes without a price tag. Just as there is ‘no such thing as a free lunch’, it can also be said that there is no such thing as a free godly vision.

### **1. Loneliness**

From the moment I got involved with Muslim evangelism, I experienced resistance. My classmates at the bible college frowned at my newly-inspired vision to introduce Jesus to the Muslim people of Mayfair. I was the talk of the class and was often confronted with the question, “Why occupy yourself with the salvation of Muslims if you need to prepare for the higher calling of taking care of God’s people in the church?”

As Petro and I answered the call to become missionaries and church planters in Turkey, we also experienced fierce resistance from close

## DEFINE YOUR VISION

family members. The overall attitude was that we had lost our minds and needed help. No one in their right mind would leave family and home behind to set off to some God-forsaken foreign country to pursue a so-called “calling”.

We often felt misunderstood. Being missionaries required trusting God for our daily needs and monthly expenses. We were living in faith but were often accused of being beggars living off the alms of people who felt sorry for us. Close family even accused us of enjoying a holiday in a foreign country at the expense of people back home.

These hostile attitudes and comments hurt and often made us question our vision. We often felt lonely with no one to relate to what we were experiencing.

A year later, ministering in the hostile spiritual environment of eastern Turkey was also a lonely experience for me. I would often load a small suitcase full of New Testaments and take a bus to different towns and villages, spend the day evangelizing and distributing my precious cargo, only to return late at night and tired from the journey, just to do it again the next day.

Often the local police would follow me and take me in for questioning in order to intimidate me and make me stop what I was doing. They would confiscate my New Testaments and command me to never return to their village. I was determined to give as many Turks as possible an opportunity to read or hear about the love of God for them through Jesus, therefore my loneliness and discomfort at the hands of the police was a small price to pay. But still, there was a price.

In the pursuit of your godly vision, you may find yourself misunderstood. Many times, you will walk the road alone because others are unwilling to pay the price to stand with you. Your determination and

faith will intimidate others and remind them of the lost opportunities they wished they had taken.

Stand firm on God's Word and let 1 Corinthians 15:58 encourage you.

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In the pursuit of your  
godly vision, you may  
find yourself  
misunderstood.

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“Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.”

## 2. **Sacrifice**

I wanted to become an officer in the police force as I loved helping other people and, through my forensic experience, could help detectives identify criminals and link them to crime scenes. The high pace and pressure of my work also appealed to me.

### **The sacrifice of my plans and ambitions.**

It was therefore not easy for me to resign from the police service. It took me more than a year to make my decision and act on the conviction of my newfound calling. At first, I tried to do part time bible college, thinking I could have it both ways. I convinced myself that the Lord would understand. After all, a man has to feed his family - that is the responsible thing to do. I soon learned that a godly vision asks for total commitment.

*Vision requires the commitment of a parachutist. You don't "sort of " parachute. You are either in the plane or in the air. You either do it or you don't.*<sup>16</sup> Andy Stanley

The moment you strap on the parachute and throw yourself out of the plane, there is no turning back. There is only total commitment. To make the jump you need to have courage and trust your parachute.

That was a big sacrifice for me. I had to sacrifice my independence, my ambitions and plans for my life and jump out of the plane. The moment you take the leap there is only faith, and that is where you want to be.

It is in that moment of total dependence on God that you bring a smile to His face and He steps in.

“And without faith it is impossible to please God.”

Hebrews 11:6

### **The sacrifice of my family**

Petro and I always took our children with us, seeing them as part of the team. When we visited with Turks and planted churches in the south-east of Turkey, they were with us. Our children were helpful to gain the trust of our newly-formed Turkish contacts since Turks love children and have an attitude of ‘the more, the merrier’.

When the quality of Turkish education became an issue, we changed to home-schooling for two years. It did not work for us and we put

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<sup>16</sup> Stanley, Andy. *Visioneering* (p. 88). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

the boys back into the education system and supplemented their curriculum where we could. We were always committed to keeping them with us, for as long as possible. We did not want to send them to a boarding school in a foreign country while we continued with our church planting work.

When we were forced to leave Turkey after fourteen years of service, we returned to South Africa and put the boys back in school. They adjusted well and we bought a house. Just as we got back into the rhythm of life in South Africa, OM France invited us to start a work among the Turkish-speaking people of France. Initially, I was not interested. I did not want to live in Europe and I did not want to learn French at my age. Yet, as we prayed about this, both Petro and I saw this as a godly invitation to continue with our vision to share Jesus with the Turkish-speaking people.

This resulted in a major challenge for us. Our eldest son Martin Jr. was a first-year student at a university two hours from us. Benjamin, our middle son, was in the last months of high school and due to start university soon. Samuel, our twelve-year-old, was just starting middle school.

What should we do? Stay in South Africa until all the children were out of school and at university? That would take another five years and would postpone the work in France. Or make the move to France, leaving Martin Jr. and Benjamin behind in South Africa and take only Samuel with us?

The last option was the most difficult, but it would allow us to start with this work and continue the vision. Petro and I were both in our late forties and, keeping in mind that we still had one year of French language school ahead of us, we knew that time was not on our side.

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We had to make the most difficult decision of our lives. After much prayer, fasting and discussion with the children, we felt the peace of God leading us to make the move to France. We had to leave two of our children behind, split up our family, take Samuel away from his siblings and move to Europe.

As a couple, we were devastated! This was so hard and many nights we cried looking for another option. There wasn't any. The call of God was stronger than ever. The vision to see Turks coming to know Jesus was burning in our hearts and we could only obey His calling. In all my life as a church planter and missionary, this was the most difficult sacrifice to make. I had to put my children on the altar.

I have learned the hard way that the bigger the vision and calling of God on your life, the bigger the sacrifice that it will require.

Another sacrifice was leaving my parents behind. My relationship with my father had always been troublesome. While I lived at home, my father was far from God and addicted to all sorts of substances. This caused many problems in our family and also in my parents' marriage.

By the grace of God my father had a powerful, life-changing experience with God and became a completely changed man.

This experience and newfound life in Jesus helped start the process of healing our relationship. We drew closer to one another and I dearly loved my father. As a young missionary, it was one of the most difficult things in my life to separate from those whom I so dearly loved. I would see my mother and father only every two or perhaps three years.

Time moved on and our boys grew up without the blessing of a close relationship with their grandparents.

I grew up seeing my grandpa every day and I also wanted that close relationship for my children. However, in the pursuit of our godly vision, close family life had to be sacrificed.

In April 2016 my eldest son, Martin Jr., got married to Xenia and we visited South Africa for the wedding. My father conducted the wedding, which was an honour for us. His health was deteriorating, and he was not his old self. The years of indulgence and life away from God had started to take its toll on him. Although he was now closer to the Lord than ever, his body was suffering from a weak heart.

After the wedding and before we returned to France, I asked my father if we could pray together. He was delighted. I wanted him to anoint me like the patriarchs in the Bible who blessed and anointed their sons. I believed there was a blessing to be transferred and wanted to have my moment with my dad. He cleared his schedule, asked my mother to leave the room and took a little flask of pure olive oil from his bookshelf and anointed my forehead. He then prayed a prayer of blessing over me.

We both broke down in tears and together, as father and son, enjoyed the presence of God. It was a special moment filled with love and appreciation.

Deep in our hearts, we both knew that this would be the last time that we would see one another on this earth. I greeted my father and kissed him and said that I would see him again, I was not sure about the exact address, but I knew that I would see him again.

We returned to France the next day and continued with our work. Two months later, on a Sunday evening, Petro and I were returning

home from one of our Turkish-speaking churches in Rouen where we had ministered for the day. When my phone rang and I heard the voice of my sister, I knew that my father had changed his address. He had moved to the eternal presence of God. I stopped at the nearest gas station and Petro and I broke down in tears as we wept over the loss of my father. He was 74 years old.

This was a difficult sacrifice to make, but it was not the only one.

### **The sacrifice of my finances**

We had a burning desire in our hearts to see the Turks come to know Jesus and believed with all our hearts that this was what God had called us to do. Our vision was clear, and we wanted to obey the call of the Lord. I wanted to be like Noah.

“Noah did everything just as God commanded him.”

Genesis 6:22

I could not sit around and do nothing; I had to get moving. To move on we started to pray. We wanted to distribute the Bible and get the message out because we believed that to see churches planted there had to be wide and generous sowing. There is no better seed to sow than the Word of God. In our years of ministry, we have been blessed to be a part of the planting of fourteen churches. None of them would have grown if it had not been for the seed of the Word of God.

Therefore, early in my ministry, I wanted to get hold of as many Bibles as I could, to give out to whoever was interested. This involved a considerable cost. I shared the dream with prayer partners and donors

and made a start. I took whatever money I could lay my hands on and bought Bibles. I paid for the shipping and also for my travel expenses to the different towns and villages, to distribute these New Testaments.

Later, as the ministry grew, I set up an office and hired personnel. Before our expulsion from Turkey in 2006, we had three national offices in Mersin (South), Malatya (East) and Samsun (North). I had a team of four workers, most of them full-time and on the payroll. They were born-again, committed Turkish believers who shared the same passion to distribute God's Word far and wide.

Rent, utilities and salaries were regular expenses. Donors were generous and although the ministry was financially supported by fellow partners, there were many months we just could not make ends meet. I had to dig deep into my pocket to meet the financial needs of the ministry.

This put a huge financial strain on us as a family. Holidays would be cancelled, Christmas gifts would be modest and only for our children. Many times, our family budget was used to meet the ministry needs. Petro and I saw that God was always faithful and as we acted in faith and stepped out - as we 'jumped from the plane' in total dependence on Him - He would always be there to open the parachute and come through for us.

As our ministry developed in France, the same thing happened. We would visit the different church-planting projects all over France on our budget, driven by the need and the incredible opportunities presented to us. Muslims started to come to faith and needed to be discipled so we had to be there with them. Contacts had to be followed up in person and small, vulnerable communities of Turkish believers had to be encouraged.

Europe is expensive, especially for South Africans receiving their financial support from partners in South Africa.

We could not sit around and wait but had to take the first steps. Again, we used our own money to get started. Many times, we would invest our finances into the ministry to make disciples, and never get it back.

Today we are in the very fortunate situation of having a fully-funded ministry. We are blessed with faithful partners that not only support us personally but also the ministry. Today the financial burden is not so much on us anymore. We can use a separate account to cover ministry expenses. This was not the situation when we stepped out in the beginning.

I have learned that a godly vision also asks for a full financial commitment. It may require every single penny you have to get started. Unless you are willing to put your bank

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I have learned that a godly vision also asks for a full financial commitment. It may require every single penny you have to get started.

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### **The sacrifice of life**

The first time Petro and I travelled through Malatya, a city of one million people in the

east of Turkey close to the Euphrates River, we were disturbed by how unreached it was and realised that this was the fertile ground for a deeper vision to be born. We felt a desire to plant a church in this unreached city. In April 2003, we moved to the city with our three boys and rented a house in the western suburbs. There were no other Christians or missionaries in the city.

We were pioneers, trailblazers, spearheading a new work that God wanted to start. In the following months, our team would grow. By the end of that year, we were a team of four families, from different agencies and cultures, working together in unity towards the common goal of planting a church in Malatya.

We prayed, fasted, went on prayer walks and evangelised where we could, trusting God to do His work. Slowly the ice started to melt, and contacts became believers. We, as a team were unified and passionate about seeing God's kingdom come in this city.

Many times, we would cry out to God in our prayers to do whatever was needed to plant His kingdom in this city.

*“Even if it requires our lives, Lord, we are willing to lay them down.”*

Little did we know how the Lord would take us up on our word. By the beginning of 2006, we had a small fellowship of thirty new believers. It was a miracle from God to see so much fruit in such a short time in an Islamic stronghold like Malatya. We wanted more but we did not realise that to have more, more needed to be sacrificed.

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We wanted more but we did not realise that to have more, more needed to be sacrificed.

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in South Africa.

By the end of 2006, our family was deported from Turkey. The police found a gap to get rid of us and barred us from entering the country again. We were broken, confused, and felt betrayed. Dreams were crushed and we tried to put our lives back together

Just as we thought we had seen the worst, tragedy struck. On the afternoon of 18 April 2007, my phone rang. It was Stephan, my good

friend and teammate from Mersin. With a quivering, broken voice, he told me that my teammates in Malatya had been killed earlier that morning.

Five young men with whom they were doing Bible studies for the past three months, came to a pre-arranged Bible study at the office. This time the five men overpowered my friends, tied them to their chairs and tortured them for two hours, trying to force them to disown Jesus. When my teammates refused to denounce their faith, they cut their throats one by one. The young men were arrested by the police on the scene. Later in court, the men told the judge how each of my friends, Tillman, Necati and Ugur, died confessing Jesus as the Messiah. Tillmann left behind Suzanne and his three children, Necati left Shemsa and two children and Ugur was engaged to be married.

When we arrived at Ataturk airport in Istanbul to attend the funeral of our friends, the police immediately arrested Petro and me and barred us from entry into Turkey. Until this day we have not made it back into Turkey. We left shattered.

Never in my life have I experienced such pain, so deep and for so long. My dearest friends who I recruited to join us in the church-planting team, paid the ultimate price.

They gave their lives for the gospel. There is no greater sacrifice a person can make. Today, fourteen years later, there is a thriving church of two hundred people in Malatya, as well as a growing Turkish church, an Iranian church and one of only two churches for deaf people in Turkey. God used the blood of my friends to establish His kingdom in His way. Today the grave of my good friend Tillmann Geske in Malatya stands as a testimony to the goodness and power of God.

You might never be called upon to give your life in a literal sense

to see your godly vision come to fruition, but this does not mean that God expects any less. A godly vision asks for everything. If you are not willing to put your life on the altar to see your godly vision come to fruition, do not bother to continue. It would be better for you to just walk away.

If you decide to continue, allow me to use the last pages in this chapter to share with you the reward that accompanies a godly vision.

### **The reward of godly vision**

As we prepared to move to France to start the church-planting work among the Turks, I desperately wanted the Lord to confirm this new venture through His Word. It was, and always still is important for me to hold on to Scripture. In my journey with God, He would always confirm His calling and directions through Scripture that spoke to us, especially for the moment.

Although there were many confirmations from different sources that assured us that we were in line with God's will, and although I had peace in my heart about the next step, I still needed Scripture confirmation.

I felt like Gideon,<sup>17</sup> one of the leaders of Israel, who kept asking for confirmation from God before he would move. God, in His faithful, loving way, heeded my call.

I met Willem by accident. It was literally an accident! I love to do triathlons and in 2008, I was preparing to participate in my first Iron Man competition. One morning on a long, eighty-kilometre practice

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<sup>17</sup> We read of the story of Gideon who was chosen by God to lead the people of Israel. Gideon wanted to have confirmation from God and kept on asking for a sign, Judges 6:33-40.

ride, I was going downhill when I was caught by a red traffic light. It was still very early, with no traffic around, and in a split second, I decided to run the light. Instead of seeing the red light, I saw the flash of a white BMW appearing as from nowhere. The impact was brutal! I broke both my hands, a rib, and my jaw in two places. My cycling helmet split in two from the impact and tore my left ear halfway from my head.

When I gained consciousness, I was lying flat on the road in a pool of blood. Willem, a fellow cyclist whom I had earlier passed after briefly sharing a few words with him, before continuing at great speed, was staring at me, his face pale from the shock of witnessing the accident. I wanted to get up, but he kept me down telling me the blood on the road came from me and that the ambulance I heard approaching was for me. I do not recall how long I was unconscious, but I spent a week in an induced coma in the intensive care unit of the local hospital.

Willem often visited to check on me. We became close friends.

With our final days approaching to say goodbye to South Africa, Willem called and asked if we could have breakfast together. Our friendship had grown and Petro and I eagerly agreed to meet with him and his wife Lynne.

At breakfast the next morning, Willem told me that he had been praying for me and believed that the Lord had given him a verse to share with me.

This immediately got my attention and as I scrambled around looking for a pen to make a note of the verse, Willem calmly took out a piece of printed paper from his pocket saying, “Don’t worry Martin, I already printed the verse for you.” He handed me the piece of paper and when I saw the verse, I could not contain myself. I burst into tears.

My wife, Willem and Lynne were startled, and other customers in the diner also turned their heads to see why this adult man was weeping like a child. At that moment God confirmed in my heart that we were on the right track. This was the last confirmation that I needed. It was as if the Lord said that He knew what we were going through and that He had it all in His control.

The verse was Psalm 126:6

“Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them.”

The following week, after more tearful goodbyes and a long journey, we arrived at the OM France office in the eastern suburb of Pontault-Combault, not far from the city centre of Paris. Simon, our leader, helped us to carry the many bags up the stairs to a guest room.

Once we were alone, Petro walked over to the bed and on the pillow found a little welcome card from Simon’s wife, Sue. Petro opened the card and there, in French, were written the very same words from Psalm 126:6. This time it was Petro who cried uncontrollably! The Lord had spoken and confirmed His Word. The journey ahead of us would indeed be difficult. We would spend hours weeping before God, but the promise of His reward sanctified all our tears.

As I understand it, the rewards of godly vision are:

- Daily moving in, and experiencing the presence of God in a special way.
- Meeting new people whom God places in your life to become like family. These dear friends, brothers and sisters, become even closer than your blood relatives.

## DEFINE YOUR VISION

- To see the reward of your labour. We have been very fortunate to see fourteen Turkish speaking churches planted in the years of our ministry. Although we worked hard and gave it our all, we can take very little credit for this. It is God who makes the seeds grow. It is all about His glory.
- To see and experience God's miraculous power. There is Elif, a young Turkish woman with three children, giving her life to Jesus, in tears, on the front lawn of a local hospital. There is Emre, a radical Muslim Turk, who had a vision of Jesus in his local mosque while praying, and later decided to follow this Jesus. There are the many miracles of brain tumours being healed, people completely recovering from a severe stroke after we prayed for them and women falling pregnant after years of infertility after we laid hands on them. There are many believers eagerly wanting to know more about Jesus and countless other stories. Suffice it to say that we could see God's miraculous power at work every day.
- To see how God meets our financial needs in so many unique ways that we could not have imagined.
- The many places we travel to all over the world, the places we have seen, the churches that we have ministered in and the people that we have met.

I would not have it any other way! Vision is an incredible gift to have; it is a gift for everyone. It is a blessing that infuses and inspires you. With vision, hope is released in our spirit - a hope that fills us with an eagerness to move forward, to climb the mountain, to scale the obstacle that we face to accomplish what God has planned for our

lives. Press deeper into your relationship with Jesus and let Him flood your mind and spirit with His vision for your life.

God has implanted in you a very specific DNA. You are very different

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Vision is an incredible gift to have; it is a gift for everyone. It is a blessing that infuses and inspires you.

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from the next person; your experiences are unique and special. You have to remember that you were put on this planet for a specific purpose and goal and that the Lord looked for two specific people whose DNA, if mixed, would produce a human being with your unique abilities

and capabilities who would fill a specific place on God's time-line. You are no accident, but a person with a clear destiny and calling to fulfil. This calling can only be fulfilled from a relationship that is founded in Jesus. It is only from this intimate relationship that you can truly journey towards your destiny.

Define your vision and embark on the journey of a lifetime as you follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

**Reflection:**

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Let us reflect on this chapter by answering the following 3 questions:

1. What are the areas in your life that are disturbing you at this moment?

Make a list of these points as you prayerfully consider your spiritual situation and the environment in which you find yourself.

2. What is the one thing that you are good at?
3. What are the sacrifices that you will have to make in order to pursue the vision that God has placed in your heart?



## CHAPTER TWO

# EVALUATE AND, WHEN NEEDED, CHANGE THE STATUS QUO

There is a natural resistance to change in the human being. We do not like it and we try to avoid it. The status quo gives us a false sense of security and comfort that we do not want to give up. We experienced this first-hand as we started to look for an apartment after finishing our language school in Paris in the spring of 2012.

The four-storey apartment block did not look very appealing - to say the least, it looked run-down! There were two other apartment blocks of similar size close to this one, but this one looked the worst of them all. Sylvie, our middle-aged, slightly overweight estate agent was very excited to show us the apartment on the third floor. After weeks of looking at different apartments, all over the city, Petro and I were not very hopeful about this one.

Paris is a ruthless place to hunt for a rental apartment. Estate agents are extremely unhelpful and will never call back, follow up, or go the extra mile to help you. They always make you feel inferior and seem to experience some kind of sadistic enjoyment in rejecting your application. This is why we decided to come with Sylvie, this final time. She was different, she followed up, called back and searched for apartments for us. This was exceptional and we did not want to brush her off.

## Lessons from Ris-Orangis

Ris-Orangis, in the southern suburbs of Paris, was a dominantly Turkish neighbourhood. The area looked run down, streets were littered, and it just felt dangerous. Reluctantly, Petro and I followed Sylvie up to the third floor. Petro looked at me with annoyance, whispering with clenched teeth, “There is no elevator and I will have to carry the groceries up three floors every time I go shopping!”

I tried to show some sympathy but muttered to myself that this might be good because then she will not go shopping so much!

Sylvie reached the third floor and paused for a brief moment to catch her breath. She fiddled around in her handbag searching for the right keys to the apartment. There were three different locks on the same door. One at the top of the door, one in the middle, and another lower down.

This made me worry. If they needed so many locks on one single door, it must be a rough neighbourhood. Sylvie opened the locks and gently pushed the door open. She stepped in and waited on the side for us to enter. The first door to the right led to the small, but well-equipped modern kitchen, which opened up to the living room. The apartment was recently renovated and was bright. It looked clean, modern and had a postage size balcony with a view of the Eiffel Tower on the horizon. The two bedroom apartment with its seventy-five square meters floorspace was enough for our small family.

Petro loved the place and immediately indicated that she wanted it. After a brief discussion in the next room, we agreed and told Sylvie we would take the place. The apartment stood in strong contrast to the

rundown building, but it was the first available place that we could find after weeks of searching.

Later that afternoon we submitted the paperwork, paid the deposit, and signed the contract. This would be our first rental in France after we finished the first year at language school.

A week later we moved in. Our friends from the language school helped us carry what little furniture we had up the three flights of stairs. Although there were four apartments on each floor, we did not see any sign of our neighbours.

### **The status quo in our new apartment**

The few times we would encounter a neighbour on the staircase, our warm “Bonjour Madame/Monsieur” would be greeted with a cold “Bhmmmf!”

We could not make out what they said; it was as if our new neighbours tried not to cross paths with us. We assumed that the French culture would be cold and that neighbours would not be very interested in interacting with one another. In the coming days, we desperately wanted to connect with our neighbours, but it felt as if they were avoiding us.

One morning around nine the doorbell rang. We did not expect anybody, Petro opened the door, and was met by a grey-headed old lady, who started talking to her. She was dressed in a modest grey skirt with a matching white blouse and comfortable black shoes. Although slightly bent over from advanced years and arthritis, she had sparkling, walnut-brown eyes and spoke with a lot of energy.

With only a few months of French and a limited vocabulary, Petro called me over to come and assist. We did not know the lady. It turned out that she was the neighbour and close friend of Madame Renaud, a lady of eighty-five years who had lived in the apartment complex since its construction, fifty years ago. Madame Renaud was the elderly widow who lived right below us. Madame Claude was her next-door neighbour.

Madame Renaud complained to Madame Claude about the noisy, new neighbours that had moved in upstairs. Madame Renaud was particularly annoyed at Petro using the vacuum cleaner every morning! She wanted Petro to understand that she was disturbing Madame Renaud and wanted her to stop making noise so early every morning.

We were startled and tried to ask Madame Claude what time would be convenient to Madame Renaud for us to use the vacuum cleaner. Madame Claude hesitated a moment and said, “*Après neuf heures du matin*”, after nine in the morning. Petro, taken aback by this comment, hesitantly agreed and with that Madame Claude turned around and disappeared down the stairs.

This was our first meaningful interaction with any of the neighbours in our apartment complex. There was no “Welcome, how are you?” or even “Who are you, where are you from?” No, this would be too intrusive for the French culture! Just the old lady who felt that we needed to comply with the unwritten rules in the apartment.

### **The plan to challenge the status quo**

Christmas was fast approaching, and we thought of how we could break the ice in our new apartment block. No one reached out, no one

came to say welcome, and no one showed any interest. This was bizarre to us. It was the very opposite of what we experienced in Turkish culture. We did not like the situation and we decided to do something about it.

With only a few days to Christmas, she baked some delicious cookies and decorated them on a plate. One plate for each of the twelve apartments in our building. When we were ready, we ventured out with our

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We did not like the situation and we decided to do something about it.

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limited French, our lines memorised and cookies in hand. We knocked on our immediate neighbour's door first. They were from the French Congo and had three children. Freddie, the father opened the door. We introduced ourselves and said that with Christmas approaching we wanted to share this small gift of cookies with them as a family. Freddie was very friendly and with a smile accepted our gift and closed the door.

That was it! No "Who are you?" "Where are you from?" Nothing! "Ok, let's go downstairs," Petro said. This meant the apartment of Madame Renaud. We rang the bell and waited: just as we were about to move on to the next door, we heard the turning of several keys and locks. The door opened a crack, it was Madame Renaud. "*Oui?*" she said. Petro and I introduced ourselves to the very pale, old, grey-haired lady, who looked as if she just got out of bed. We explained that we were the new neighbours from upstairs and that we are sorry we had disturbed her. Petro presented the cookies on the plate and the old lady asked, "What is this?" "It's a gift," Petro said. "For what?" she asked. "We are celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ one of these days and we

would like to share gifts with friends and neighbours”, Petro replied.

The lady looked somewhat taken aback. “No one ever shared this with me; thank you very much”, she replied, her eyes all teared up. She took the plate and closed the door. We looked at one another, surprised at the abrupt end to our conversation. We thought it would be good to move on to the next neighbour, Madame Claude, the friend of Madame Renaud. We rang the bell, and she immediately opened the door. I think she was eavesdropping on our conversation. “Hello Madame Claude, we hope you are doing well?” Petro started. “What do you want?” Madame Claude replied without giving Petro a moment to say another word. “We want to give you this gift for Christmas”, Petro responded, presenting the nicely decorated plate with the cookies on it. Suspiciously Madame Claude asked, “Are you selling these?” “No!” Petro said “It is a gift for you.” “Why?” she asked, more suspiciously. “It’s for Christmas,” Petro said again “Oh!” she replied, took the plate from Petro’s hand, thanked us and closed the door.

We could not hide our surprise at how cold and aloof our neighbours were towards us. On the eve of Christmas Petro felt she wanted to prepare something nice at the entrance to our apartment. We saw that in other apartment buildings they would decorate the entrance for Christmas, and it seemed to be an acceptable thing. We went down to the lobby and very discreetly decorated the entrance with the nativity scene and some colourful strips of ribbon. It looked beautiful and gave a warm festive feel to the entrance of the apartment building. With the white snow and cold winter on the outside, the decorations made it look welcoming - unlike what we felt!

## **The result of challenging the status quo**

The day after Christmas we met Madame Robert in the lobby. She lived on the first floor. Petro and I had just returned from the local weekly market and the bags we carried were heavy. I thought of how I still needed to carry these up three flights of stairs to our apartment. “Was it you that decorated the entrance?” Madame Robert asked, looking at Petro cautiously. Petro nodded her head, “Yes,” she replied. “It is really lovely, thank you for doing that,” and with that Madame Robert left the building. Petro stood there with a smile on her face and looked at me saying, “It is working!

‘They are finally talking to us!’ She was so happy, the ice was broken, the status quo was challenged and started changing.

The following Easter Samuel painted a cross and an empty grave and again Petro decorated our entrance with ribbons, Samuel’s paintings, and a bowl of chocolates with a little card in the front saying “*help yourself*”. The residents of the apartment loved it! They warmed up to us, and after more than a year of trying to break the ice, the residents became our friends.

I took long walks in the forest with Monsieur Robert; Petro did art and crafts with Genevieve and later, when a Turkish family moved in, Petro was the first to welcome the mother and help her with her newborn babies.

After our second Christmas in the apartment Madame Renaud died in her sleep. We went to her funeral at the nearby Catholic church where we met more of the neighbours. One cold morning I was busy tying my running shoes for my daily run just outside our apartment

door. Monsieur Laurent, one of our neighbours who came from Guadeloupe<sup>18</sup> came down the stairs and greeted me warmly. “Going for a run?” he asked. “Yes, but it is cold and wet,” I replied, hoping for some sympathy. I asked him how he was doing. It was one of those everyday questions where you do not expect the person to be honest.

It was different with Monsieur Laurent. For the next ten minutes, he told me about his battle with prostate cancer. I was surprised by his openness and asked if I could pray for him. He eagerly agreed. There, on the sidewalk, outside in the cold, I prayed a simple prayer with Monsieur Laurent. When I opened my eyes, I saw tears running down his cheek. “Thank you so much, Martin, no one ever prayed for me.” He excused himself and walked away. I stood there, surprised at what just happened.

A French man just openly shared with me about his battle with cancer

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The status quo of our neighbours being aloof, cold, and distant from us had been challenged and we started to see some significant developments in our relationships with them.

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and allowed me to pray for him! This was quite unusual! The status quo of our neighbours being aloof, cold, and distant from us had been challenged and we started to see some significant developments in our relationships with them. Later, when the brother-in-law of Monsieur Laurent committed suicide, it was his wife who called us and asked for prayer. They are not Christians but felt

that they wanted to know more. The atmosphere in our apartment

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<sup>18</sup> Guadeloupe, overseas department and overseas region of France consisting of a group of islands in the Lesser Antilles chain in the eastern Caribbean Sea.

building changed completely. Our neighbours would stop us on the stairs to interact with us, show interest and visit us. It was a complete change from when we first moved in.

Our experience of challenging and changing the status quo is not unique. We see multiple examples of this in the Bible. One of my favourite passages from the Old Testament is the story of David and Goliath.

### **Lessons from David and Goliath**

We encounter the story of David and Goliath in the book of Samuel. Let us look at a few verses from this chapter to refresh our memories:

“Now the Philistines gathered their forces for war and assembled at Sokoh in Judah. They pitched camp at Ephes Dammim, between Sokoh and Azekah. Saul and the Israelites assembled and camped in the Valley of Elah and drew up their battle line to meet the Philistines. The Philistines occupied one hill and the Israelites another, with the valley between them. A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp.... Then the Philistine said, “This day I defy the armies of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other.” On hearing the Philistine’s words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified.” - 1 Samuel 17:1-11

David, a young shepherd, needed to take care of the family’s flock. His brothers were on the battlefield. Because David was too young, he could not go with the Israelite army into battle against the Philistines.

“David was the youngest. The three oldest followed Saul, but David went back and forth from Saul to tend his father’s sheep at Bethlehem.” 1 Samuel 17:15

### **The status quo for Israel**

This time, however, the situation for Israel was a bit different. The Philistines had a war hero, a giant who challenged the army of Israel to battle. The Israelite army did not have anyone who could match this giant and they were terrified. What made the situation worse was the fact that the giant returned every day and defied the army of Israel and their God. Israel was overcome by fear and could not stand against the verbal attacks of Goliath.

The normal state of affairs for Israel was that of fear, ridicule, and defiance; this was their ‘status quo’. They believed that this battle that was still to take place, was already lost. The army of Israel, their leaders and their king accepted the state of affairs. That was until a young shepherd boy stepped onto the scene. He was cut from a different block! David had a different experience with the God of Israel. This God was a great reality to him. He knew this God.

While he was taking care of the sheep in the field, he was forced to fight a lion and a bear to protect his flock of sheep. He accomplished this in the name of his God.

“But David said to Saul, “Your servant has been keeping his father’s sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it.

## EVALUATE AND, WHEN NEEDED, CHANGE THE STATUS QUO

Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them because he has defied the armies of the living God. The LORD who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine.”

1 Samuel 17:34-37

God was very real to David when he stepped onto the battlefield to take supplies to his brothers. He could not stand the insults that Goliath threw at the God of Israel. You see, David knew and loved the God of Israel. This reality of God released a deep dissatisfaction within him about the current state of affairs and a plan to change it was birthed in his heart.

### **The plan of David against the status quo**

This made David stand up against the situation. He said NO to the status quo! He believed that he and his God could change it. David had a plan, a very simple plan. He would do what he always did.

“Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd’s bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine...”

1 Samuel 17:40

In the name of his God, he had stood against the bear and the lion. For him, Goliath was no different. This giant was an enemy of his God and he was not going to tolerate the ridicule and the scorn of the giant.

David did not accept the status quo; he was not content with the state of affairs and he was going to do something about it. David knew that with the power of God and in the name of his God, he could kill this giant.

He walked over to the giant and confronted him. David did not run away from the situation; he did something about it. He walked head-on into it and made a difference.

### **The result of challenging the status quo**

We know the outcome of the story; we know how David killed the giant and ushered Israel to victory. He was the new hero, the saviour of his people. The enemy was defeated, and David was the national hero. Redemption for the people of Israel was achieved through the reluctance of one young shepherd boy to accept the status quo.

“Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground. So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand, he struck down the Philistine and killed him. David ran and stood over him. He took hold of the Philistine’s sword and drew it from the sheath. After he killed him, he cut off his head with the sword. When the Philistines saw that their hero was dead, they turned and ran.” 1 Samuel 17:49-51

Let us turn to the New Testament and take a look at the attitude Jesus had towards the status quo.

## **Lessons from Jesus and the money changers**

We pick up the story of Jesus and the money changers in the Temple. John gives us a clear picture of what happened that day in the temple when Jesus challenged the status quo.

“When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts, he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!” John 2:13-16

## **The status quo in the temple**

In the days that Jesus walked the earth the nation of Israel was far from God. The law was not practised as it should have been, and the hearts of the Jews had grown cold towards their God. The temple was supposed to be a holy place where God and man met on this earth, a place where man could make penance for his sin. Unfortunately, in that political and religious climate, the temple became a place of commerce and fortune.

It was no longer about man meeting God; rather it was about man making money.<sup>19</sup> This was the status quo that Jesus encountered when he entered the temple.

I am sure Jesus had been to the temple many times and observed

the situation. He was very aware of the status quo at the temple. It just seemed as if the situation did not bother anybody. The priests and the chief priest were not worried or disturbed by the situation - perhaps they were profiting from it.

Jesus would no longer have any of this. He was on a mission. He was a great reformer.<sup>20</sup> He was the Word of God incarnate on earth.<sup>21</sup> It was the Word of God that came to the temple that day.

### **The plan to challenge the status quo**

The situation disturbed Jesus and He devised a plan. Again, as we see with David and Goliath, the plan was simple. He would no longer tolerate the situation and faced it head-on.

Jesus made a whip and beat the money-changers out of the temple. He was not gentle, or politically correct. With whip in His hand, He walked over to them, started to turn the tables over and beat everyone that was behind a table. The message was clear, the plan simple. 'Clean the temple for it is the house of my Father!'

### **The result of the plan against the money changers**

He cleansed the temple; He restored the honour of His Father's house. He made a clear statement to everyone who saw it. The temple

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<sup>19</sup> Henry, Matthew. *The Complete Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (One-touch Navigation). Christian Miracle Foundation Press. Kindle Edition.

<sup>20</sup> Henry, Matthew. *The Complete Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (One-touch Navigation). Christian Miracle Foundation Press. Kindle Edition.

<sup>21</sup> John 1:14

should be kept holy and separate unto God. It is not to be a place for commerce and self-gain!

The priest and the authorities stood rebuked. They knew it was wrong to allow this for so long. Jesus was right to act in this way and so restore the honour of His Father's house.

### **What is the status quo?**

Martin Luther King Jr. once commented on the subject of the status quo, saying that:

*“The soft-minded man always fears change. He feels security in the status quo, and he has an almost morbid fear of the new. For him, the greatest pain is the pain of a new idea.”*

The English dictionary describes the status quo as a Latin phrase meaning *the existing situation*. It is the nominal form of the prepositional Latin phrase “in status quo” – literally “in the state in which”.

I like the explanation of the *status quo*, the existing state of affairs. We tend to like things the way they are, the existing state of affairs. In contrast to this the reality is that if there were not people who did not approve of the existing state of affairs, we would never have had the invention of the wheel. The existing state of affairs at that time was to carry your possessions or load it onto yourself or on animals, or even drag it. If Thomas Edison liked the existing state of affairs, he would never have invented the light bulb. He would never have spent thousands of hours trying to make the perfect lightbulb. If the Wright brothers were satisfied with the existing state of affairs they would

never have invented the first aircraft. There are many more examples but I believe the point is clear.

It is a good thing not to be satisfied with the current state of affairs. In your dissatisfaction, creativity is released to look for other options and to bring about change in a godly way that can benefit all.

Looking back at the situation in our apartment building we see that the existing state of affairs was one of non-involvement. Strangers were treated with suspicion and kept at arm's length. The residents of the building did not get involved with one another and kept to themselves. A typical northern European approach! Blend this with the Parisian/French culture and you have the perfect individualistic, independent person, minding his or her own business in an apartment complex.

### **Why do we need to challenge the status quo?**

The question that begs an answer then is: "Why do I have to change the status quo?" If there is nothing wrong with it, why not keep it and comply with it? However in our lives as church planters, missionaries and pastors of several Turkish churches we could not live by this rule.

Lolly Daskal<sup>22</sup> gives a very meaningful reason for us to challenge the status quo, saying:

*To create something meaningful, we must create significance.*

*Nothing great is ever achieved by doing things the way they have always been done.*

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<sup>22</sup> Lolly Daskal is an international executive leadership coach.

<sup>23</sup> [www.lollydaskal.com/leadership/how-leader-must-challenge-the-status-quo](http://www.lollydaskal.com/leadership/how-leader-must-challenge-the-status-quo)

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*To challenge the status quo we must take one fearless choice at a time, one brave decision at a time, one courageous action at a time.*<sup>23</sup>

Both Petro and I had a deep inner conviction that we were called to be different and had to make a difference. This conviction was born and influenced by our understanding and interpretation of the Bible and also the life of Jesus. Since we stepped into a relationship with Jesus, our lives started to change. As we got to know Jesus more and more, we wanted to be more like Him.

Reading through the Bible, God does not strike me as a God who is satisfied with the current state of affairs. What I do see in the first and second chapters of the book of Genesis is that God was satisfied with what He created. However, the moment sin penetrated and polluted our world, I see a deep dissatisfaction in God. He refuses to accept the new status quo. It is against His creation plan. He never created man to be a slave of sin but to be free and serve Him. It is therefore logical that He promised a change in the new state of affairs. Jesus came and did His work on the cross to forever change the status quo of creation. He gave His life so that we can have hope of a new life.

David Bosch, in his book *Transforming Mission*, says:

*Christians can never be people of the status quo. They pray, "Your kingdom come... on earth as in heaven!" and interpret this both as a petition to God and as a challenge to themselves to attack evil structures around them.*<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> David J. Bosch. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (20th Anniversary Edition) (American Society of Missiology) (pp. 502-503). Orbis Books. Kindle Edition.

It is therefore my conviction that the status quo should be challenged in the following situations:

1. **Where the status quo is against the glory of God**

We challenge the status quo when it does not glorify God. I cannot emphasize this enough. We as human beings are created in the image of God and for His glory. As a believer and follower of Jesus Christ, my highest priority must always be the glory of God.

\_\_\_\_\_ Christians can never be people of the status quo. \_\_\_\_\_ You might want to point out that the whole world is caught up in sin and has departed from the glory of God. I would agree with you. It is therefore important for us to make sure that human beings are introduced and reconciled with God so that Jesus Christ can restore the glory of God in them.

This is why we do missions and why we go to foreign countries and learn difficult languages and risk our lives so that people can come to know God and glorify Him.

2. **Where the status quo is hindering people from hearing the gospel**

As I previously explained, the situation at our apartment in Ris-Orangis was of such a nature that no one was open to developing meaningful, neighbourly relations.

This hesitancy and aloofness towards us prevented us from sharing about the love of God. We had to challenge and change this to gain an open door to share the love of God with our neighbours.

Where the status quo is hindering people from hearing the gospel it should be challenged and changed.

3. **Where the status quo creates an environment of injustice and sin towards other people**

For the past ten years, OM France (the international mission agency to which we have belonged for the past twenty-eight years) has ministered and continues to minister among trafficked women. It is a very important and effective ministry and it has helped numerous women to gain freedom in Jesus. This ministry was born when the hearts of Marcel and his wife Aose were moved to reach out to the sex workers on the streets of Nantes and later Paris.

Many of these women are sex slaves, captured and used by ruthless pimps to make money. This is an unacceptable situation where God is not glorified and where women are caught in injustice. This status quo of the sex industry needed to be challenged. Marcel and his wife are two of the many full-time Christian workers all over the world who are working tirelessly to bring an end to this unacceptable industry.

There are many more examples. Suffice it to say that we as believers in Jesus are called by Him to be different. In Matthew 5:13-16, we read the following (emphasis mine):

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. **You are the light of the world.** A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead,

they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

We were never called to blend in and be the same as the world. We as believers are called to be a light in the darkness.

### **Lessons from fly fishing**

Matt is one of my close American friends. Like me, he likes fly fishing; for both of us, it is a welcome break from the pressures of being full-time missionaries, church planters, husbands, and fathers. Out in nature one can take a breath and relax as you enjoy God’s creation. I visited several times with Matt and we would always find an excuse to go on a quick fly fishing excursion to see if we could catch one of the many rainbow trout that live in the cold streams and rivers close to his home.

On one such visit, we walked up and down the river for hours, and tried to cast our flies at several places. Although we did not catch anything that day I could not help but notice how the trout would lie in the shadows, especially in the heat of the day. They would turn against the stream current and allow the cool, fresh water to flow through their gills. The oxygen-rich water would help the trout stay alive. They have to lie facing the current to breathe.

In the same way, we are called to take a stand against the current status quo. It is when we are against the current that we get refreshed. It is when we do not accept the status quo that we get inspired. It is in the deep dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs that vision is born.

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I always tell my sons that it is only dead fish that will go with the stream current. As Christians we are not called to go with the flow. We are called to be a light in the darkness, a voice in the desert, the conscience of society.

Like trout, we as Christians need the oxygen-rich water and empowerment of God's Holy Spirit to flow through our gills (our human spirit) to stay alive. As Christians, we have been called by God to be different. In our personal lives as missionaries, this is how we have lived, always evaluating and where needed, changing the status quo.

It is not always an easy calling.

### **Bringing it together**

Jesus was radical about the status quo. Mike Douglas<sup>25</sup> on his internet blog comments on the incident with the money changers, saying:

*In Jerusalem, He attacked the money changers, who were running a scam trading Jewish money for Roman money at a profit. He didn't just chew them out, He physically threw them out. When a corrupt tax collector decided to follow Jesus, he returned all his ill-gotten gains and then some. "Business as usual" just couldn't continue when Jesus got involved.<sup>26</sup>*

When it comes to the things of God, we as believers and followers of God need to love His glory and His honour above all else. Whenever

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<sup>25</sup> Mike Douglas started to blog about his mental health issues.

<https://www.openjournalbc.com/contact>

<sup>26</sup> [www.flyinginthepirit.cuttys.net](http://www.flyinginthepirit.cuttys.net)

we see or hear that the name of God is dishonoured it should fill us with a deep dissatisfaction and a desire to stand up against the lie.

David experienced resistance from his kin when he stood up and said the status quo was unacceptable. We also should expect resistance when standing against the current state of affairs. You will experience ridicule from those close to you when you want to bring about change. Remember, people do not necessarily like change.

When David stepped out to challenge the status quo he did it in the name of his God. He did not step out against the status quo in his own strength. This is a very important point to remember: if you step out in your own strength you will be very limited. It is only when we are plugged into God that we can benefit from unlimited strength and insight to challenge the status quo.

### **Making it practical**

How to challenge the status quo.

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Whenever we see or hear that the name of God is dishonoured it should fill us with a deep dissatisfaction and a desire to stand up against the lie.

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1. *Stop and evaluate.*

We need to evaluate the status quo in our spiritual lives and also in the environment that we find ourselves in.

First of all, it is important to determine where you are at now in your spiritual life. Take stock of your current situation and prayerfully identify the areas you need to change. Ask the Holy Spirit to make your spirit sensitive to the things that bother Him. Jesus wants to be in constant fellowship with

## EVALUATE AND, WHEN NEEDED, CHANGE THE STATUS QUO

us through the Holy Spirit. He wants to talk with us and be a close acquaintance of us. As we open up our hearts to hear His voice, He will talk to us.

We should be on a path of spiritual growth. To grow spiritually we need to know where we are and also where we want to go. In the Bible, the as followers of Jesus are constantly encouraged to grow and change to be more like Jesus.

“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.”

Romans 12:2

Secondly, take a good look at the environment that you find yourself in. Ask yourself why you are there? Is this the place where God has put you for this moment in your life?

If your answer to this question is ‘yes’, then you can continue to evaluate this environment.

Earlier on I mentioned three situations where the status quo needs to be challenged. After you evaluate your environment, ask yourself:

1. Is God being glorified in the environment that I find myself in?
2. Can I freely share the message of the gospel in this environment?
3. Is there sin and injustice that need to be addressed?

The answers to these questions will help you to take the next step.

## 2. *Formulate a plan.*

Each one of us is placed in a unique situation in our environment. Every one is connected to different relationships and situations and each of us has a calling like David to stand against the giants in our lives, that ridicule our God, and the status quo that we have grown so accustomed to. As we seek God's presence in our lives, He will gently show us what areas of our lives we need to influence and in which areas we need to change.

After you evaluate your personal spiritual situation, or the environment that you find yourself in, you will have a clearer picture of what you need to do. This will be very helpful, for once we know where we are, it is easier to chart the path to the place where we want to go.

This is where most of the preparation will take place. This is a step that must be prayerfully considered. As a believer in Jesus, you have the unique privilege to stand in a personal relationship with God. This also implies that God is talking to you; it is here that you need to invite the Lord to open your spiritual ears to hear His voice.

As you consider the plan, the Holy Spirit will gently nudge you, talk to you from Scripture and highlight certain areas that need attention. Take your time and consider all of these as you formulate a plan to challenge and change the status quo. As the Lord Jesus starts to talk to you, be committed to obeying Him. Listen and act on His voice.

## 3. *Implement the plan*

After you have evaluated the status quo and formulated a plan to change it, you will find yourself at the most challenging step. This is the step of implementing the plan. It is important here to keep in mind

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that the plan that has been formulated, has been done in collaboration with the Lord Jesus Himself.

Be sure that you are not implementing your own ideas and convictions.

To implement the plan, courage is needed. You need to step out on the water. Whatever the situation might be, you need to act.. Without action, the status quo will not be changed.

Petro and I had to break the ice in our apartment building, we had to go and knock on doors and talk to people. David had to go down into the valley, pick up stones, put one in his sling and release it towards the giant. Jesus had to make the whip, confront the money-changers and turn the tables.

Without courageous action, nothing will change. Implement the plan until change happens. Stay with it, endure until you see the breakthrough.

### **Against the stream**

When we were called to Turkey to live and work in the predominantly Muslim country, we were also called to stand against the status quo. The status quo of our environment in Turkey dictated that there was no other God but Allah and that Mohammed is his prophet; that the Bible as we know it had been changed and corrupted; that Jesus never died on the cross; and that it is impossible to have a relationship with God.

These were the giants that Petro and I stood against. These were the giants that my children were confronted with every day at school. These

were the giants that influenced our neighbours and our environment. When we moved into our new environment that was saturated with these lies, we had to stand against the status quo. We could not go with the flow; we could not agree with what everyone believed. We were called to be light in a dark neighbourhood. We had a calling to bring the light of truth into our area surrounded by Muslims that were captured by a lie.

This was, and still is our calling and this is the status quo that we stand against. As I write this, I am engaged in discussions with imams from different Turkish mosques in Paris. Our topic is Jesus and His person. Islam does not have the full truth about Jesus and His work and in my talks with these imams, I have the amazing opportunity to share with them the truth as it is in the Bible. For most of them, these are truths that they have never heard. I am called for now to stand against the status quo.

Your situation will look very different than mine. The question you must ask yourself is, what has become the norm for you? As you stir up your spirit to hear God's voice, you will also receive instruction from the Holy Spirit to stand against that which displeases our Lord Jesus. Stand up and be encouraged!

In the the Old Testament book of Joshua, God promised Joshua that He would be with him.

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.” Joshua 1:9

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As you stand against the current, you will be refreshed for it is only when we stand against the status quo that we truly come alive.

As we look at the life of Jesus, we see that He came to break the curse of the law; He came to stand against the status quo; He came to be different.

As a follower of Jesus you are not called to blend in. You are called to be a light on a hill that will shine for all to see. You are not called to be a secret agent. You are called to display the power of God in your immediate environment.

*Faith can never be a religion of the status quo. Dynamic change is to be expected since God is a dynamic being, engaged in the active direction of history.*<sup>27</sup> David J. Bosch

When we are dissatisfied with the current state of affairs, we start to ask the question of how it should be. Here it is important to not imprint our understanding of how a situation must be. No! For the follower of Jesus the question must always be, how does Jesus want to influence the situation? It might be a challenge for us to understand this, but the truth is that Jesus already showed us His will through the Bible. It is already revealed in the Bible. He will always lead according to His word as we find it in the Bible. Through prayerful waiting on Jesus, we will discover what He wants us to do and then we must act in obedience and implement which He shows us.

Evaluate the status quo and, where necessary, change it!

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<sup>27</sup> David J. Bosch. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (20th Anniversary Edition) (American Society of Missiology) (p. 3). Orbis Books. Kindle Edition.

Reflection:

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1. What are the issues that need to be challenged in your situation?
2. Identify the steps that you need to take to challenge or change the status quo in your situation.
3. David Bosch says that “Christians can never be people of the status quo”.  
What does this mean to you, and why?





## CHAPTER THREE

# HAVE A POSITIVE ATTITUDE TOWARDS PROBLEMS

I have learned that problems will always be part of our lives and we need to adapt to a lifestyle where we can live with it instead of 'it' ruling or ruining our lives.

In hindsight it seems easy to come to this conclusion. I had a long journey to travel to learn this important lesson and it started in Turkey.

### **A mushroom cloud of apricots**

It was late January 2006 in Turkey and in Malatya, in the eastern corner of the country, a thick snow blanket lay snug around our multi-storey house. It was early morning, and still dark outside. I had not slept well, and had I spent the last part of the night praying on the colourful Turkish rug in our spacious living room.

It was in this living room that the church in Malatya first started. I remember how embarrassed Petro and I felt as missionaries to rent such a spacious three-storey villa in one of the upmarket neighbourhoods in Malatya. The price was irresistible, only two hundred and fifty dollars per month, for such a mansion. When we first looked at the house, I took the marble-tiled stairs up to the terrace on the third floor, and with a view over the city I could not but start to pray for the city.

I remember telling the Lord that it felt wrong for us to rent such a luxurious house. It was way beyond our comfort zone. At that moment I had a vision in my spirit. I saw a mushroom cloud of apricots that rose from the city and filled the sky and then reached out all over the land and the earth. I was stunned by this image and had no idea what it meant. I prayed there on the marble-covered terrace and asked the Lord what the meaning of this was.

It was then that I clearly sensed His gentle voice whispering in my ear, saying that what He wanted to do in Malatya was build His church and that this work would influence the whole world. I also sensed in my heart a great peace and confirmation that we should rent the house.

I went up to the terrace a reluctant man and came down with great peace and joy, knowing that the Lord would plant the first roots of His church in this unreached city of Malatya and that He wanted to do it from this house. This is exactly what happened. In a very short time, the Lord established a church of fifty new believers, and it all started in our spacious living room.

But this morning was different. I paced around the coffee table like a caged animal, praying and crying out to the Lord to show us a way through the current problem that we faced. The first light of day started to filter through the curtains. Everyone else was still sleeping as I wrestled with God.

### **Our big problem**

The source of all this anguish and wrestling with the Lord was a visit from the police the previous afternoon. The three officers that came

to my office informed me that our residence permits would not be renewed and that we needed to leave the country immediately! I tried to get some more clarity, but they were adamant.

I explained that I had lived here for fourteen years and that I could not just pack up and go at a moment's notice. Still, they were determined that we should leave immediately.

I later discovered that one of the believers I employed in my literature distribution company, had been an informant for the police. I trusted Levent. He had worked in my company for two years. I trained him, led him to the Lord, baptised and disciplined him. He was like a spiritual son to me. Unfortunately, there was also a dark side to Levent. He called my customers and bookshop owners and made threatening remarks to them, which resulted in some complaints to the police. It was done on the company telephone and I was responsible. No manner of explanation to the police could satisfy them. This was enough reason for them to deport us. They always looked for something to get me out of Turkey and this was it!

Wrestling with the emotions in my heart, I pleaded with the Lord. I had invested fourteen years of my life in this country, I loved the people, I was fluent in the language, I was a successful church-planter and a leader in the missionary community in Turkey. I wanted to stay in the country. I had no intention to leave. What else would I do?

It did not matter what my intentions were, God had another plan in the works, and I had to make peace with the fact that our time in Turkey had come to an end. In September 2006 our family was deported from Turkey. We could never go back to the land and the people that we loved.

## **My bargaining with God**

As I prayed, I asked the Lord to make this all go away. I asked Him to fix this problem, which was perhaps the biggest problem I had faced in my life up to that moment. I tried to bargain with the Lord. I told Him of all the things we had done, how successful we had been, and how Petro and I would like to stay on and continue with the work. With deep-felt pain and grief, I dumped my feelings of betrayal by one of my beloved disciples at the feet of the Lord. My heart was broken and shattered. Again and again I cried, “Lord, please let this go away!” It was in that moment of deep-felt betrayal and pain, that I heard the voice of the Lord saying:

“Martin, you are right, I can make this all go away in an instant, but I am not interested in your comfort, I am interested in your character.”

This was it, so short and yet so powerful!

I would like to think of myself as a visionary person. I tend to be positive most of the time. This does not mean that I do not get discouraged. It does not mean that I never face any problems. On the contrary, challenges and problems are a very real part of our daily lives.

This is the same for each and every person. We are surrounded by problems and sometimes it feels as if these problems are going to suffocate us. In our ministry to the Turkish Muslim people, problems were part of our everyday lives.

## Attitude

Problems come in different shapes and sizes, each one uniquely tailored for you. It is important to understand that what could be a problem for me, might not be a problem for you at all. We are faced with our own problems and in our interaction with our problems, our attitude will determine to what degree our problems overwhelm us or become an opportunity for God to show His power in our lives.

The dictionary defines the word attitude as:

*manner, disposition, feeling, position, etc., with regard to a person or thing; tendency or orientation, especially of the mind.*<sup>28</sup>

One of the items on my bucket list is to learn to fly. I've had a keen interest in flying and aeronautics from a young age. I would build little model aeroplanes and later saved enough money to buy a radio-controlled model that I built from balsa wood. It was one of the greatest joys that I had to fly it around the open fields of our neighbourhood.

One of the things that I learned with my very limited experience in aeronautics is the meaning of the word attitude. In aeronautical terms, the word attitude would mean the inclination of the three principal axes of an aircraft relative to the wind. These three axes are Left and Right, Forward and Backward, and Up and Down. In aviation though, their technical names are the lateral axis, longitudinal axis, and vertical axis.

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<sup>28</sup> <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/attitude?s=t>

This then, also leads to the expression in aeronautics of:

**Attitude determines altitude.**

I thought that this was quite significant as it can also speak of our attitude towards problems. You see, in aeronautical terms the manner of inclination of the wings of an aircraft towards the wind will determine whether or not the aircraft would climb or descend.

One could say that if the inclination of the wings relative to the wind is positive then the aircraft will climb; in the same way, if the inclination of the wings of the aircraft would be negative towards the wind, the aircraft would descend. Thus, the expression ‘attitude determines altitude’.

Pastor Chuck Swindoll says of attitude:

*The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what people think, say, or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness, or skill. It will make or break a company... a church... a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we embrace for that day. We cannot change our past... we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play the one string we have, and that is our attitude... I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it. And so it is with you... we are in charge of our attitudes.<sup>29</sup>*

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<sup>29</sup> Ken Wytsma. 2015. *The Grand Paradox: The Messiness of life, the Mystery of God and the Necessity of faith.* Thomas Nelson publishing house. P62

The most encouraging part for me from this quote is the fact that I have a choice about the attitude I want. In a world where we cannot pick, select or even ignore our everyday problems, it seems like a blessing to have the privilege to choose our attitude in the face of problems.

My attitude towards any given problem will determine how high I fly, or whether I will crash. For many of us, it is the crash part that we fear the most. The Bible also encourages us to have the same attitude as that of Jesus Christ.<sup>30</sup>

The Bible teaches that Jesus had a humble servant-like attitude, a willingness to lay it all on the altar and obey His Heavenly Father to the point of death, trusting His father would raise Him from the dead. Jesus acted in love and patience towards a people that were hard and stubborn.

Although the Bible encourages us to have the same attitude as Jesus, it is still difficult for us as Christians to keep our attitude in check. In my walk with the Lord Jesus, I have often been challenged to adjust my attitude or face crashing into the ground. Here are some of the things I would do to change and adjust my attitude:

1. Acknowledge the situation that I am in.
2. Focus on how I can move forward instead of pondering on the past.
3. Plan and stick to it.
4. Make sure that my talk, my mind and my walk are in line with the Bible.
5. Give it to God.

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<sup>30</sup> Philippians 2:5-1, New Living Translation.

As a Christian, I need to look at the challenges I face from the foundation of the Bible. One of the most inspiring events in the Bible for me is the parting of the Red Sea, as we find it in Exodus chapter fourteen. This portion of Scripture has a clear redemptive message as it is about Moses who led the people of Israel out of slavery into the desert and on to the Promised Land. It is a picture of Jesus leading us out of the grip of sin to our promised land, which awaits us in heaven, to be with God forever.

But I am also inspired by the miraculous intervention of God to save His people from the Egyptian army. To me, it is one of the biggest miracles that took place in the Old Testament and I want us to revisit this historical moment because I believe there are valuable lessons locked up in this event.

### **Moses' big problem**

After the last plague, the death of the firstborn, Moses finally managed to get Pharaoh to agree to let the Israelites go. After Pharaoh accepted the demands of Moses, he ordered the people of Israel to collect their belongings and move.

Three days later, they arrived at the Red Sea, only to find that Pharaoh had changed his mind and wanted them to return. However, the people of God were on the shores of the Red Sea, with nowhere else to move. To increase the pressure on Moses, he learned that Pharaoh was right behind them with his mighty army, and he was coming to take them back into slavery.

If ever you wanted to see an example of a huge problem, I think this is a good one. Like people usually do in these situations they turn

on one another or start the blame game. This was no different. The people of Israel started to blame Moses. He suddenly became the reason for this problem and it was because of him that they were in this predicament!

### **The need for problems**

To see and experience a miracle you need a problem. If we look at the Bible, we find that every single miracle was preceded by a problem. Here I want to refer to the situation that Moses found himself in, in Exodus chapter fourteen. He was in a tight spot; he had nowhere to go. Moses had a huge problem. He was threatened by the Egyptian army from behind and in front of him was the Red Sea. He could not move anywhere. It was here that God did the miracle of opening up the Red Sea and guiding the people of Israel to safety.

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To see and  
experience a miracle  
you need  
a problem.

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Another example in the New Testament is the very first miracle that Jesus performed at a wedding.<sup>31</sup> It might seem insignificant, but still, Jesus was there. His mother asked Him to save a desperate situation. The wine was finished and there was still a lot of partying to take place. The bridegroom was faced with an embarrassing problem and Jesus stepped in and did His first recorded miracle.

I would like to encourage you to do a study of the different miracles in both the Old and New Testament and look for the common factor, and you will find that it was always the presence of a problem.

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<sup>31</sup> John 2:1-11.

If we can agree on this important point, I would like to move from this foundation to the next building block, which is our attitude towards problems. During my years in ministry, I spoke about the attitude towards problems with many audiences and I always asked them, “Who of you would like to see a miracle in your life?”

Everyone would raise a hand. This is a very normal response, just like the first followers of Jesus.

When I ask, “Who of you would like to have a problem?” usually no one responds! Most of those in the audience would indicate that they were in the midst of a problem, or that they were confronted by an impossible situation. You might find yourself in this same situation right now. Perhaps you are desiring to see a miracle, or would like to see some sort of breakthrough in your life.

Take heart, you are in good company. It is important to understand that to see, or to experience a miracle, you need to have a problem. There is no need for you to see a miracle if you do not have a problem. This might be cancer, financial difficulties, or relational issues; it does not matter.

There is good news for you if you are faced with a problem today. If you find yourself in the middle of a challenging situation, or if you see no other outcome, you are in an excellent place, you are a candidate for a miracle.

The greater the problem,  
the greater the miracle that is needed.

## Miracles

I am sure that each one of us would like to see or experience a miracle, perhaps right now or at some other time in our lives. There is nothing wrong with desiring to see a miracle taking place. In the time of Jesus, the people also demanded a miracle as a pre-requisite to believe in Him.<sup>32</sup>

A well-known American theologian, Wayne Grudem, defines a miracle as:

*“...a less common kind of God’s activity in which He arouses people’s awe and wonder, and bears witness to Himself.”*<sup>33</sup>

The Cambridge dictionary defines a miracle as:

*“an unusual and mysterious event that is thought to have been caused by a god because it does not follow the usual laws of nature.”*<sup>34</sup>

A miracle is an unusual or mysterious event orchestrated by a higher power and, for the sake of our focus here I’d like to state that this higher power is God.

I would like to present a definition of a miracle as:

*An event where God intervenes, in His timing, showing me He is alive and active in a situation that would not have been resolved if it were not for Him.*

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<sup>32</sup> John 6:30.

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.puritanboard.com/threads/grudems-definition-of-miracles.67683/>

<sup>34</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/miracle>

It is important to acknowledge God's timing in all of this. There are situations where God does not give the expected outcome, such as our deportation from Turkey. It was not what we wanted but the truth is that even our deportation was part of God's greater plan to eventually start a ministry among the Turks in France.

The above-mentioned definitions might give us an idea of what a miracle IS, but the question still is: 'WHAT do I need in order to see a miracle?'

Someone might argue that to experience and see a miracle, one should have faith, or that one should pray. Another might add fasting. Some might say you need obedience, and so on. All these answers are not necessarily wrong, but I would like to focus on one specific element that is required to see or experience a miracle.

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Without the presence of a problem, one does not need a miracle.

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First, let me clarify that I do believe that for any godly miracle to take place we need to God to be present. A godly miracle requires the need for God to be present.

Another common factor that needs to be present for any kind of miracle to take place is the presence of a problem. Without the presence of a problem, one does not need a miracle.

### **Putting it into writing**

I like to keep a daily journal to capture my thoughts and experiences. It is that place where I can have an honest conversation with God about my challenges, frustrations, victories, and my needs. In the back

of my journal I always have a list of the problems and challenges that I am faced with. I would make a note of the date that I presented this need to the Lord and in another column I would write the date that I received an answer or a breakthrough in the situation.

This part of my journaling is my favourite part when I look back at the list of challenges and problems and I take note of the dates that I presented these to God and, next to it, see the date that the Lord answered my request. I am encouraged because I see proof of a living God who steps into the most impossible situations and provides a way out.

### **Flowers in the street!**

The birthday of my wife is always a very special occasion for me. I always try to make her birthday special. It was during a financially challenging time, that Petro celebrated her birthday some years ago, in South Africa. I could not treat her as I wanted to. To be honest, I did not even have enough money to buy her a bouquet. My wife loves Gerbera daisies, particularly autumn-coloured ones.

The morning of her birthday, I left the house for my usual morning run. Petro was still fast asleep. I left the house expressing my frustration to God for not being able to treat my wife to the special day that she deserved. I explicitly asked the Lord to provide so that I could buy my wife some flowers.

As I turned a corner, I stumbled upon a fresh bouquet of Gerbera daisies lying in the middle of the road. It was difficult for me to come to grips with how quickly God answered my prayer. It was early in the morning and the air was crisp and fresh.

With the flowers in my hand, I headed back to a very surprised birthday girl. The Lord Himself thought that she was so special and heard my prayer. My very small, insignificant problem was important to my Heavenly Father. He prepared a lovely bouquet of her favourite flowers, especially for her birthday!

We tend to spiritualise miracles to the degree that we always think of miracles as supernatural powerful events, but we tend to forget that it is also the mundane issues that other people might not think important, but is important to you.

In my experience and my walk with the Lord Jesus through the years, I have learned that what is important to me, is also important to Him. God loves me as a father does, and He takes note of the challenges I am faced with every day.

### **Size does not matter**

You might say, 'but I am faced with such an insignificant situation, why bother Almighty God with such a small problem?' It is important to understand that it does not matter how big or how small our problems or challenges are, we have a loving Father in heaven who wants to be part of every aspect of our lives. We just need to invite Him into our problems and challenges and step aside and let Him do His work.<sup>35</sup>

I have found that I do not have the strength, the energy, or the wisdom, to sort out my problems. I need God to help me.

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<sup>35</sup> Matthew 11:28-30.

Some years ago, we met Elif for the first time in the garden of one of the local hospitals in the northern suburbs of Paris. She was a Turkish mother of three who had just committed her life to Jesus.

We learned that Elif had a brain tumour when she showed us the medical scans. Our little Turkish Christian fellowship accepted her with loving, open arms and we all committed to pray for her daily. Six months later when Elif had another brain scan, the results came out clear! Her doctor was very surprised and sent her for a second scan with another physician. This also came back negative. Elif was completely healed from her brain tumour. This was a big deal, and it greatly encouraged our small Christian fellowship.

But God does not always answer in the way in which we would like Him to. During this same time Hassan, who was the brother-in-law of Ahmet, one of the leaders in the Turkish-speaking church in Soissons, got sick with liver cancer. We prayed; we fasted; we confessed Scripture over him. His family went far and wide to get the best medical advice and treatment. Yet, despite all our efforts, eight months later Hassan died from cancer in his liver.

There were other problems such as the cyst on my wife's ovaries, and my Turkish friend who had a stroke and was left blind, deaf and paralysed<sup>36</sup> and also financial challenges that needed a desperate breakthrough. The Lord did His miracle work every time. However small or big, it does not matter, the Lord Jesus that I know wants to be part of my life and do His work in my life.

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<sup>36</sup> Read about the supernatural, godly healing of Turgut, a good friend of ours during our time in Mersin, Turkey. De Lange, Martin. *The Edge of Paradise* (Kindle Location 919). Lion Hudson. Kindle Edition.

I cannot explain why Elif got her miracle and Hassan did not get his. I can only say that God is sovereign, and He is in total control. This will not hinder me from trusting Him for a miracle, however big or small.

### **A higher standard**

I find that as followers of Jesus, we often live as if we are about to be overwhelmed by the world.

We tend to forget the words of Jesus in John 16:33:

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

We tend to live a reactionary life. We are usually on the back foot, desperate for some sort of breakthrough.

This is not the life that I believe the Lord had in mind when He said that we can take comfort in the truth that He has overcome the world. Petro and I decided to live a life of being conquerors. We decided to live a lifestyle of being proactive, to make life happen and not to be dictated to by life. Many of us live in a constant reactionary mode. If life is good, we feel good, when life throws us a curveball, we feel down.

We need to live by a higher standard.

We cannot afford to be dictated to by the ebbs and the flowsof life. When we live by the standards that God has given us inHis Word we are operating from a higher platform. The Word of God is unchanging!

Our measure and standard should be the Word of God. If we live from this truth it will dramatically influence how we approach problems. *God wants to be involved in our lives.* We can trust God for both the big and the small issues in our life. Sometimes the Lord intervenes; other times He is silent but this does not change His love for us.

### **A very real enemy**

As followers of Jesus, we need to understand that we are in a very real spiritual battle with the enemy. Our enemy as Christians is Satan, and his demons. They hate God and all that God has made. Satan is in constant conflict with God. His very existence is identified by his commitment to destroy the work of God. Satan hates every human being because we are created in the image of God and he will do all he can to destroy the image of God.

Do not for one moment think that Satan and his demons will give you a break or a day off. He will attack and attempt to destroy you when you are most vulnerable and at your weakest. Therefore, it is important for every follower of Jesus to understand that you cannot stand against the enemy by yourself. We have no power to fight Satan. We will be overwhelmed and defeated; the only way to stay standing and be strong is in Jesus Christ. For it is only Jesus that defeated the power of Satan.<sup>37</sup> When we are in Jesus, we are safe, in Him we find strength.

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<sup>37</sup> Study the following Bible verses to read about Satan's defeat: John 12:31, Romans 16:20, Ephesians 6:11-12, Colossians 2:15, Hebrews 2:14, James 4:7-8, 1 Peter 5:8-9, 1 John 3:8, 1 John 4:4, Revelation 12:9-11, Revelation 20:10

I am not saying that all our problems are attacks from dark spiritual forces. There are times that the problems we are faced with are because of our own mistakes and unwise decisions. It will be unfair to blame Satan and the demon armies for all our woes. This will cancel out a responsibility that we have to take ownership of our decisions.

I want to put the origin of problems in the following categories:

1. **Sin:** We live in a broken world; the sin of Adam and Eve has infiltrated all aspects of creation. We know from Scripture that there is a price on sin, which is death. This is the reason why Jesus died and through His suffering and death on the cross, the price for sin has been paid. This does not mean that sin has completely disappeared from the face of the earth. It only means that, when we make Jesus the Master and Lord of our lives, sin cannot have a hold on us anymore. We are free from the bondage of sin. So, when someone gets cancer, it is not God who gave the person cancer. This is a false concept of God. God is a good God. When someone gets cancer, it is a sign of the sinful nature of the world that we live in. Diseases, cancers, and death are all fruits of this sin. Because we are in this world we will sometimes be influenced and affected by this.

2. **Self:** Sometimes the origin of problems can be because of bad decisions that you have made in life. Because of an unhealthy lifestyle, perhaps you suffer from diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure or other ailments. These are all challenging problems in your life that you would want to overcome. It will be wrong to blame God for these problems. If you encounter financial problems because you overspent on your credit card or bought a new car

knowing that you cannot afford the monthly payments, you created this problem and need to take responsibility for it.

If you experience problems in your marriage because of years of neglect on your side, it would be unfair to blame God, or even Satan for your problem. You need to own up to your problem and take responsibility for it.

3. **Satan:** It would be naive not to take into account that Satan is real and that his demons seek to destroy all that belongs to God. There are situations where you have done all that is right and are still faced with a problem. This is when you need to remember that as a Christian you are in a very real spiritual battle. This is a battle that you cannot fight in your own strength. You can only hide in Jesus and ask Him to fight the battle for you. This is our spiritual warfare.

Searching for the origin of your problem does not mean anything. It might help if you learn not to make the same mistake again, but it will do nothing to solve your current problem. I would not spend too much time trying to figure out WHY I have a particular problem, but I would rather focus on HOW the problem can be solved.

### **The power of the flame**

Camping in Africa offers one of the best experiences of camping. There is nothing that can be compared to a sunset in the bush of Africa. As the night descends, the bush comes alive and the sounds are incredible. Add to this the crackling sound of a good campfire and you have the ultimate experience. I have often noticed how insects are

attracted to the faintest light. When you are in the bush and you light a candle, in no time, there will be moths circling the small flame of the candle.

Some venture too close to the flame and get scorched to death. They could not help themselves; they were attracted to the candlelight and got burned by it.

This is the same picture that I have when I think of the battle we have with Satan and his demons.

The moment you stepped into a relationship with Jesus, your spirit was born again and you became alive, your candle was lit and you started to shine.

This is also the moment you got the attention of the enemy.

Those who do not stand in a personal relationship with God through Jesus, pose no threat for Satan and his demon armies. It is those people who have been touched by God, who gave their lives to Jesus in surrender, and who have been born again by the Spirit, that pose a threat to Satan.

The very being of Satan is programmed to attack what is dear to God, but like the moths that fly too close to the open flame of the candle, Satan burns his wings every time. He loses every time! He cannot win! He hurls problems, challenges, and difficulties at the Christian and every time the Christian just presses deeper into God to find his strength, Satan loses. He is defeated because Jesus defeated him on the cross.<sup>38</sup> Even if, as a Christian, I lose my life due to the challenges and problems, I will be with God in heavenly glory and this means that Satan still loses.

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<sup>38</sup> Colossians 2:15.

## His glory in my problems

The followers of Jesus should adapt to live a life of victory. Problems, challenges, and difficulties make us run to God more and more. *When Christians wake up in the morning and think about the problems that they must face each new day, they should be filled with unspeakable joy, for they know that in their own strength they will not be able to stand.* They rejoice in the knowledge that on this new day they are going to press deeper into God. They enter the day with a heart that is full of expectation to see and experience their miracles for this day.

As Christians, we cannot be like normal people - we are abnormal! We are in this world, but not of this world.

We need to get energized and excited when we are faced with problems; we need to rejoice and dance before our God when problems are presented to us, because this puts us in a place of dependence on God and we will see miracles taking place.

Problems are good for us; we need them! We should want them, for it is in our problems and weaknesses that we see the glory of God. At the end of the day, it is all about the glory of God. Let us live in a way that the name of God will be glorified.

Those who look at us in this world must wonder how we can be so happy in the face of our problems. We are happy because we do have problems, which cause us to run to God in total dependence on Him to work His miraculous power in our lives.

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It is in our  
problems and  
weaknesses that we  
see the glory  
of God.

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## Making it practical

This chapter would not be complete if I did not share a few practical pointers on how to handle our problems. These come from my own experience of thirty years as a full-time missionary/pastor/church planter.

I am very aware that each one of us has different experiences, but I believe that there are common overlapping issues that are present across the board and we can learn from this and use it to have a positive approach towards our problems. In handling my problems in life, I have used the following steps. You might want to make use of these pointers or identify other steps that would be helpful to you:

1. **The God factor:** I believe God is interested in all my problems, whether I am praying for flowers for my wife's birthday or for a brain tumour to disappear. Therefore, I make a point of inviting God into all of my problem-solving. As I make a plan and implement it, I do it prayerfully and in dependence on God. God is the factor in all my problems that gives me hope. This is where my faith and relationship with God helps me to stay positive and active as I prayerfully work towards a solution. I know the Bible says that nothing is impossible for God<sup>39</sup> and this means He has all the means to guide me to a solution for the problem.

2. **Acknowledge the problem:** This seems like a no-brainer, but you would be surprised how many people refuse to

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<sup>39</sup> Luke 1:37.

acknowledge the problems that they are faced with. Unfortunately, the longer you refuse to acknowledge a problem the longer it will take you to sort it out. It is important to name and tag the problem you are faced with. It gives an identity to something that might be very abstract.

3. **Talk to a friend:** I need to verbally process my problems. This usually means tht I need to talk to someone about it. Depending on the nature of the problem I would engage with a close friend in seeking his counsel. The Bible says in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.<sup>40</sup> If it is a very private matter I would talk to my wife and God about it. It is one way that Ifind helpful in managing the issue. You might be a person who processes this inwardly. Perhaps you need to think it through before you articulate it. You may find it helpful to discuss the problem with someone who is outside of the situation, who can give you objective input. Sometimes we are so close to the crisis that we cannot see the solution in front of us. When you seek counsel, you are taking a step back from the situation and you are looking at it with fresh eyes.

4. **Make a plan:** This is the stage where you tackle the situation head-on. Usually, we procrastinate on this issue. In planning to tackle the problem you are laying down some tracks to follow to come to a solution. Depending on the scope and the size of the problem, your plan might be long-term or short-term. It can take

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<sup>40</sup> Proverbs 11:14.

hours, weeks or even months for you to implement the plan. A plan helps you take charge of the problem. It brings you from a reactive stage to a pro-active stage. It gives you hope and is a breath of fresh air amid a crisis.

5. **Implement the plan:** There is no sense in going through the pain and effort to work on a plan and then to put it on the shelf and keep on worrying about the problem. Once the plan is made it needs to be implemented, which is when you start managing the problem instead of the problem managing you.

6. **An accountability partner:** As you implement the plan it is wise to ask a friend to keep you accountable. Sometimes the nature of the problem is such that it requires a long-term commitment to the plan. This means a daily commitment to implement the plan. This is why an accountability partner can help you stay focused and committed to implement the plan. It is also wise to frequently revise the plan and adjust where necessary in order to stay on target.

Problems are a reality in our lives. We cannot hide from them, but we can decide how to manage them. As I confront my problems every day, it encourages me to press deeper into God through Jesus.

My problems bring me to a more intimate place with Jesus. It is because of this that I say, "Bring it on because with my God I can do it all."

Enjoy your problems for as you face them you are forced deeper into your relationship with your Heavenly Father.

Reflection:

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1. Name the biggest problem that you are faced with right now.
2. How would you describe your attitude towards this problem?
3. What are the practical steps that you are going to take to overcome this problem?
4. Where in this problem do you need divine intervention?



## CHAPTER FOUR

# TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Within the Christian community and more specifically, the community that comprises full-time Christian workers - be it pastors, missionaries, counsellors, and so on - 'self' is generally a topic that does not get a lot of attention.

The awareness that we need to focus more on others, is very much part of our calling as full-time workers. We labour and act selflessly. Many think that the mark of true holiness is to be completely stripped of "self". We are encouraged to put others above and before our own needs.

To focus on self is seen as a weakness, and even as sin. Of course, it depends on your spiritual background: this might differ from being ultra-conservative, where the self is sinful, to completely on the other side of the spectrum on the edge of liberalism, where the self is seen as a god. Whatever your opinion and personal background might be, I hope to present to you a balanced godly way of approaching and engaging "self".

I believe we need to look at the Bible for us to understand this. Let me draw your attention to where Jesus had a conversation with the spiritual leaders of His day. They approached Him asking what the greatest commandment is in the law. His answer was direct and clear:

“...Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ...And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’”<sup>41</sup>

For many Christians, the first part of this command is clear and direct. It is the sign of a true born-again believer and follower of Jesus to love God with all we have.

We tend to struggle with the second part of this command. We would like to confess that we love our neighbour; this is what Jesus commanded us to do and we want to be good Jesus-followers. Unfortunately, many of us stop here and we do not look, study, or even apply the last part of this command, which is to love oneself.

### **You are...**

Let me make a few radical statements. This is all about you, the reader:

- You are beautiful.
- You are lovely.
- You are unique.
- There is no other person on the face of the earth who is like you.
- You are loved by God.

The Bible speaks directly to us, saying that God thinks of us constantly. Right now you are on the mind of God. What is even more amazing is that when God thinks of you His thoughts are filled with good plans

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<sup>41</sup> Matthew 22 :37-39.

and plans for a bright future.<sup>42</sup> I want to categorically state that God is a good God<sup>43</sup>, there is no evil in Him and when God looks at you and thinks about you, His thoughts are only good. He wants to bless you and prosper you and give you a bright future.<sup>44</sup>

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Right now you are  
on the mind  
of God.

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This is echoed by King David from the Old

Testament who stated: ‘God knew me even before I was born’.<sup>45</sup> He saw me even before I took my first breath, He determined my way even before I could make my plans. When we look at ourselves the way God looks at us, we will have a different view of ourselves.

God clearly states in the Bible that He loves us and that there is nothing that can separate those who are followers of Jesus from the love that He has towards us.<sup>46</sup> He looks at us and gives us the place next to His son, Jesus Christ. He made us joint-heirs with His Son.<sup>47</sup> He raises us up and calls us His children.<sup>48</sup>

These are amazing truths! When God looks at us, He looks at us with love and compassion. Why is it then, that when we look at ourselves, we look with a different eye? Does the Bible not state that we should have the same mind as that of Jesus?<sup>49</sup> Anything less is sin. I had to repent from the way that I looked at myself. I had to change the way that I thought about myself. If God loves me, if God thinks of me as a winner, if God calls me His son, how dare I look at myself differently?

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<sup>42</sup> Jeremiah 29:11-14.

<sup>43</sup> Psalm 73:1.

<sup>44</sup> Ephesians 1:3-4, Deuteronomy 28:2, Psalm 119:1-3.

<sup>45</sup> Psalm 139.

<sup>46</sup> Romans 8:31-39.

<sup>47</sup> Romans 8:17.

<sup>48</sup> John 1:12.

<sup>49</sup> Philippians 2:5.

We can be so arrogant, caught up in our ignorance, pretending to be pious, downplaying how we feel, and look at ourselves as unworthy.

## **Through the eyes of God**

It is time for us to come into line with God's Word and look at ourselves through the eyes of our loving Father in heaven. You are a prince, a princess, a person who is unique and deeply loved by God. That is who you are! God loves you and you should love yourself. Anything less is not from God and is a lie. The world needs more people who will love themselves the way God loves them. Only then can we be good, loving and kind to our neighbours. Only then can we love them the way God loves them. Only then can we fulfil the greatest command.

“God loves what God makes – including you.”<sup>50</sup>

From this foundation, let us move on and look at the practical ways that we should love ourselves. How do I love my body, my mind, and my spirit? Well, the best way to love these is to start by taking care of them.

## **What is the Self?**

We articulate our love and care for our neighbour and those close to us in the Christian community and even our family and still, we struggle

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<sup>50</sup> Charles F. Stanley, 2008, *Life Principles study series: Discovering your identity, find yourself in Christ*, Thomas Nelson, p39.

to love ourselves. I often ask people if they love themselves and I have seen good Christians squirm at this question. They feel uncomfortable to answer. They think that if they answer in the affirmative they are sinful - besides, we must live a sacrificial life like Jesus and in this kind of life, there is no place for self.

You might find it difficult to answer the question yourself, but can I encourage you to look in the mirror and be honest with yourself? What do you see? Do you like what you see? Are you satisfied with what you see? The answer to these questions will give you an indication of whether you love yourself. Usually, people are not satisfied with themselves or they do not like what they see in the mirror and they are always on a mission to change it or to be somebody else.

### **My poor neighbour**

The Bible is clear on the issue. Love your neighbour like yourself. This means that if you do not love yourself you cannot love your neighbour. Neighbourly love begins with self-love. Allow me to make a confession. When I arrived in Turkey in 1993, I did not love the Turks. I did not appreciate their culture in the way they dressed, spat on the ground, or even talked! I was in Turkey purely out of obedience. I loved God and I believed with all my heart that He wanted me to go to Turkey and plant churches in that unreached country. I was not necessarily motivated by love. One of the reasons was that I still did not love myself.

How could I love my neighbour or even the unreached Turk if I could not stand myself? I am convinced that to see more love, acceptance, sacrificial and unconditional love in this world, we need more Christians that will love and accept themselves. I was disturbed in

my spirit by my lack of love towards the Turks. I felt guilty. Besides, I was here to share Jesus with them. I had people back home who prayed and gave finances sacrificially for me to share the love of God with this unreached Muslim people group.

Yet, here I was with an empty heart! My hypocrisy was painful and forced me to self-reflect on this dark condition in my heart. It was then that I discovered that I first needed to love myself. I started to take stock of my personal life and discovered that my experiences as a young boy directly influenced my present ‘heart condition’. I could not love myself because, when I was in my formative years, I did not experience unconditional love and acceptance from my father. I am convinced that this was the root of the problem.

### **A father’s love**

We do not love ourselves because we do not fully understand how our Heavenly Father feels and thinks about us. It is a well-known fact that the relationship between a father and a child influences the way that the child will think and act towards God.

David Dollahite, a professor of Family Life at Brigham Young university says:

*“Even though children know intellectually that God is fair, loving and kind and patient, it’s hard for them to relate to God at a gut level in a deep way if their own father is not that way.”<sup>51</sup>*

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<sup>51</sup> <https://www.deseret.com/2013/6/15/20521033/father-figure-perceptions-of-god-may-stem-from-father-child-relationships#a-jewish-father-helps-his-son-read-from-the-hebrew-holy-books-in-jerusalem>

The world that we live in today has many broken relationships. It is becoming more and more a novelty to find families with healthy relationships. Unhealthy father/child relationships have become the new norm.

This reality translates into a negative view of God and ourselves.

To experience true neighbourly love, it is imperative for us to love ourselves, and for this we need to look at the way that God our Heavenly Father views us.

### **The ultimate example**

Jesus Christ was the perfect human being. He is dearly loved by God. He is the only one who showed unconditional love towards me. It is only in Jesus that I can experience full acceptance, love and understanding. You can decide to live life as a victim, or you can decide to take charge of your life. It is in the Bible that I find love. If I want to know how God feels and thinks about me and how He loves me, I need to only look at Jesus Christ. God loves His Son unconditionally. His Son, Jesus Christ, obeyed His father and was willing to be sacrificed on the cross so that all of humanity could have an opportunity to be completely free from sin.

Therefore, true love is only found in Jesus. Jesus told the Pharisees that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind, and with all your strength, and the second commandment, following on this one, is to love your neighbour as you love yourself.<sup>52</sup> Jesus clearly showed that the foundation and the

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<sup>52</sup> Matthew 22:37-39.

very bedrock of love rests in Him alone. Full acceptance and pure love comes from this foundation.

<hr style="width: 200px; margin-bottom: 5px;"/> <p>If you want to love your neighbour, first learn to love yourself.</p> <hr style="width: 200px; margin-top: 5px;"/>	<p>I have learned on the mission field that to experience true love and acceptance from God, I need to take care of my relationship with God. It is out of this relationship with God that I can love, accept, and forgive myself. This translates into true love for my neighbour. If you want to love your neighbour, first learn to love yourself.</p>
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This love should be lived and experienced in the whole man.

**The whole man**

*“May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*<sup>53</sup>

My understanding from the Bible is that we are more than just a body. Man is created from the dust of the earth.<sup>54</sup> This means that our physical body will decay and return to dust when we die.<sup>55</sup> However, we are more than this; we are also spirit<sup>56</sup> and we have a soul.<sup>57</sup> Our spirit belongs to God<sup>58</sup> and it returns to Him when we die.<sup>59</sup> Our soul or intellect is who we are. Without our bodies or our spirit we are not able to live on this planet.

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<sup>53</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:23.  
<sup>54</sup> Genesis 2:7.  
<sup>55</sup> Ecclesiastes 12:7, Psalm 90:3, Job 17:16.  
<sup>56</sup> Zechariah 12:1, 1 Corinthians 2:11.  
<sup>57</sup> Hebrews 4:12.  
<sup>58</sup> Ecclesiastes 3:21, Job 32:8.  
<sup>59</sup> Ecclesiastes 12:7.

Given the topic of this chapter, I would like to approach this matter from the viewpoint that man is made up of three separate parts (*Trichotomy*). For me it is consistent with the Bible verses that we find in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and Hebrews 4:12. It also supports my approach to the topic of caring for oneself in a holistic way - body, spirit and soul. All of these different areas need to be taken care of for us to live a healthy, balanced life on this earth.

In this chapter, I want to share with you what I have learned about this issue. I know there are many books available, which go much deeper than I do, and I want to encourage you to read about it, study it and make it your priority to take care of yourself. But for the sake of our topic, I will focus on what I have learned on my journey about taking care of self, and how this has become a principle that I live by.

### **Shape up...**

I have always been committed to staying in shape physically and being active. I was never a champion in any specific discipline but exercise has given me energy and later in my life it would become a great stress reliever.

It does not end with just physical fitness. I am also very aware that there are people who are in great physical shape and they still die prematurely from heart failure, but this should not be a reason for us not to be committed to staying in shape. There is much more to it. It is about taking care of self. This means to take care of 'me' as a whole person.

## 1. The Body

How do I care for my body? In the following paragraphs, I want to look at caring for the physical side. This means taking care of what I eat, taking care of my physical body through exercise and handling my health and the issues that threaten my health with earnest intent.

### **My father's influence**

My father was a practical man, a hard worker and a skilled electrician but he did not take care of himself. The life of sin that he followed in his early years took its toll later in his life: constant pain, diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure and finally heart failure at age seventy-four.

The same goes for my granddad. Although he did not have a drinking or smoking problem, he did not take care of himself. He was overweight, suffered from high blood pressure and eventually died of heart failure at the age of eighty-two.

One might argue that it was not so bad and that they both still reached a good age. Perhaps you are right, but I always think of how different it could have been if they had had a healthier lifestyle. What could they have achieved if they had taken better care of themselves? I believe we could have been together much longer. They could have had more of an impact for the kingdom of God.

This influenced me to take care of my physical body from a very young age. I made myself a promise not to be like my father; however, there is always a part of your parents that lives on in you. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Our parents have good qualities as well and we can learn a lot from them.

In my case, it is resilience, hard work and determination and perhaps a bit of hard-headedness, a love for God and a commitment to take care of those in need. These are all qualities that I see in my own life.

## My check-up

Some years ago, during one of our furlough visits in South Africa, I visited my doctor friend for my regular check-up. With my family history, this included an ECG<sup>60</sup> for me. He made me climb stairs to increase my heart rate. I started out and after a few minutes, he looked surprised to see that my heart rate was still below the threshold that he wanted. It took longer than expected to get my heart rate up in the zone for him to conduct the test.

I was fit and healthy and my resting heart rate was, and remains, generally low. You might wonder why bother with a regular medical check-up. Given my family history of high blood pressure, heart failure and diabetes, I carry some scary genes in my DNA. I am likely to run into trouble because of these bad genes. I need to take extra care of myself. For me, this means keeping my weight in close check to the ideal BMI<sup>61</sup> for my age, and staying fit. Although my ECG came out

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<sup>60</sup> An electrocardiogram (ECG) is a simple test that can be used to check ones' heart's rhythm and electrical activity. Sensors attached to the skin are used to detect the electrical signals produced by ones' heart each time it beats.

<sup>61</sup> Body mass index (BMI) is a value derived from the mass (weight) and height of a person. The BMI is a convenient rule of thumb used to broadly categorize a person as underweight, normal weight, overweight, or obese based on tissue mass (muscle, fat, and bone) and height. Commonly accepted BMI ranges are underweight (under 18.5 kg/m<sup>2</sup>), normal weight (18.5 to 25), overweight (25 to 30), and obese (over 30). BMIs under 20 and over 25 have been associated with higher all-causes mortality, with the risk increasing with distance from the 20–25 range. Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Body\\_mass\\_index](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Body_mass_index)

clear, my cholesterol and blood pressure levels were borderline. The doctor said that I could not afford to stop training.

I am currently fifty-four and still in good shape and feeling fit and strong. I like to do triathlons because I enjoy the different disciplines of swimming, cycling, and running. I do my regular check-up every year and stay on top of my health.

When was the last time that you had a proper check-up with your doctor? In our path to loving self and eventually loving our neighbour, a first step is taking care of your body. Make an appointment with your family doctor and find out what condition you are in. This is where you should start, especially if you are someone who never does any physical exercise. Please do not start a one-hour training program if you have been a couch potato until now. See your doctor first.

### **Ministry implications**

For the spiritually-minded reader, taking care of the physical body might not be your highest priority and you might well ask, “Why bother?” Here follows some reasons why you should reconsider:

1. Ministry is stressful and the constant stress can cause medical conditions like high blood pressure, ulcers, depression, heart conditions and a host of other ailments.
2. If you take care of your body you will have more energy, be able to do more without feeling tired all the time, and be more aware during your interaction with people.
3. Be an example to those in your circle of influence, inspiring them to a more-healthy lifestyle.

Reality shows that nothing will fall into place without an action plan and a commitment to implement this plan. Therefore, I suggest that you start by taking care of the following issues:

### **Making it practical**

Your needs might be different. The principles here are:

1. Take note of your **eating habits**. Make sure that you are on a balanced diet. Here again, the situation for each person is unique but I do believe it is always good advice to cut down on the intake or try to stay away from sugar, salt, too much alcohol, and greasy and oily food. Supplement your diet with more vegetables and fruit and drink lots of water. Make sure you drink at least one litre of water every day. I am no dietician and please do get professional advice if you have special needs. The point that I am trying to make is to take note of what you put into your mouth and take charge of what you eat.
2. **Start moving**. Block out time for yourself at least three times a week that is convenient for you personally, where you will do some exercise. Focus on a physical activity that you like. It might be walking, or playing a ball game like football, or tennis, or perhaps swimming, running or cycling. Do not be someone else, be yourself, so do what you enjoy, but at least start to move. The minimum recommended activity for an average person is at least three times a week for thirty minutes.

3. Keep a **journal** where you record your progress and how you feel after each session. Start slowly and then increase it every week or second week. Soon you will find yourself being able to do more and as you get into better physical shape you will have more energy and feel better about yourself.

4. **Commit and communicate** this to your family, friends, or those close to you. Invite someone to keep you accountable and keep on doing this until it becomes a habit. Be encouraged, you are on the right path to a balanced healthy life.

My wife and I are both committed to this kind of lifestyle. However, we seldom train together. She has a very different energy level to mine and she trains in a very different way. Both of us are committed to doing physical exercise at least five times a week and for us, it works best to do it in the morning before we start our day.

This principle has been well-established ever since our time in Turkey. Our neighbours and friends were very aware of this. It helped us to stay in good physical shape and to handle the stress of a full-time ministry and big family.

Taking care of the body is only the beginning of showing love for yourself. We will now move deeper, from care of the outward to seeing how we can take care of the spirit.

## 2. The spirit

We are not a complete human being with only a body. In Genesis chapter two we read of the creation of the first man, Adam. He was

## TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

created at the very end of all the other acts of creation. It was as if God had left the best for last. According to the creation story, Adam was made from the dust of the earth by the very hands of God Himself. After God formed man into His image, He breathed over man and man became a living being.

Each one of us carries within us the breath of God.<sup>62</sup> In Hebrew, it is called the *Ruach* of God. We call it the spirit of God. It does not belong to us but without it, we cannot exist. Jesus was once in a discussion with a Jewish leader and we read of Jesus telling Nicodemus that his spirit needed to be born again to receive eternal life.<sup>63</sup> This assumes that our spirits are dead, which happened when man chose to obey Satan in Eden's garden instead of obeying God. That is the moment our spirits died.

If you are reading this book as a follower of Jesus it means that you have come to a place where your spirit was born again; your dead spirit became alive when it was touched by the Spirit of God. It means that you are set on a course to live forever, and you will not die,<sup>64</sup> but it also means that you need to nurture and take care of your spirit. Our spirit is the gateway to our relationship with God<sup>65</sup>, the door that opens so that God can step into our life.

The spirit part of us is as important as the rest of our being. We need to love it, nurture it, develop it, train it and care for it.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Genesis 2:7.

<sup>63</sup> John 3:1-15.

<sup>64</sup> John 11:25-26.

<sup>65</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:16&17, Romans 8:6, Ephesians 3:16.

<sup>66</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

I believe that God wants to talk to us. I believe God wants to be uniquely intimate with us. I believe that God desires a personal relationship with each of his children.<sup>67</sup> The only way to develop and sustain this is by focusing on developing the spirit within us. This spirit is that part of us that connects directly with God.

The early years of my childhood influenced the way that I would think about myself. I did not love myself; I did not like myself; I was convinced that I was a failure. There came a time when I decided not to continue in this downward spiral. I wanted it to be different. We can only be truly different when we step into a deep, intimate relationship with God, through His son Jesus Christ.

### **Sustain the spirit**

It can be difficult to get your mind around this reality. The spirit of a person is so abstract; you cannot touch it or see it and yet it exists. I therefore need to take care of it. In the years that I have been in fulltime ministry, I have learned to take care of and sustain my spirit. I have learned that the health of my spirit determines the health of the rest of my being.

Francis Schaeffer writes about true spirituality and the Christian life, saying that it is to believe in God not just when you accept Christ as your Saviour, but every moment, one moment at a time.<sup>68</sup>

The Bible teaches that God is Spirit<sup>69</sup> and that he who approaches God should do it in spirit and truth.

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<sup>67</sup> John 30:27, Isaiah 30:21, John 16:13, Jeremiah 33:3.

<sup>68</sup> Francis Schaeffer, 1972, *True Spirituality*, Hodder and Stoughton, p108.

<sup>69</sup> John 4:24

## Ministry implications

When you sustain and grow your spirit you will be able to:

1. Stand strong in times of challenges and difficulty.
2. Resist the temptations that the enemy will lay before you.
3. Encourage the people around you and minister in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The question that still needs to be answered is, “How do I sustain my spirit?” The following are a few examples of what I do in my own life to sustain my spirit.

## Making it practical

Spiritual health starts with the daily disciplines, the commitment to focus on the health of your spirit every day. As a follower and disciple of Jesus, as a believer in God, I need to spend time with God. I do this daily, through:

1. **Reading the Bible**, the Word of God.
2. **Contemplative prayer**<sup>70</sup> - prayer is that part of my spiritual life that sustains me and strengthens me. Prayer is my daily conversation with God.
3. **Memorising scripture.**
4. Periods of **fasting.**
5. **Keeping a journal** of my prayers, insights, and thoughts.

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<sup>70</sup> I define contemplative prayer as prayer that would focus and meditate on God’s Word and His presence. A focused effort to listen to the voice of God with a quiet and still heart.

I get up early in the morning and spend time in prayer, or my wife and I listen to at least one chapter of the Bible. We then discuss what we have learned from this chapter, and make some notes in our journals before praying together. These are not the only moments that I focus on developing, growing and sustaining my spirit. I also need to have my time in prayer, because it is through prayer that I speak to God. In my moments of meditation, I am listening to what the Holy Spirit wants to share with me.

I believe that the state of my spirit directly influences the state of my mind. It is therefore important to pay attention to this part of my being as well.

### **3. The mind**

The soul, or rather our mind, is one of the most neglected areas of the human being. Especially so among the full-time Christian workers' community. Usually, people agree that they need to stay healthy and take care of their bodies. This is something that can be seen and touched and our progress measured. Christians also generally accept their responsibility to take care of their spirit. It is the Spirit of God dwelling in us and that makes us unique. However, it takes more effort to persuade someone that it is important to take care of their mind.

#### **My state of mind**

We tend to simply accept the state of our mind and go with whatever we have; but we do not need to be a victim of the mind! It is also

something that needs to be taken care of. Our brain is like a muscle that can be trained and improved.

When I talk about the mind, I am talking about the intellect and the emotions of man. You may want to call it the soul. Whatever you prefer, it is that part of us that distinguishes us from animals, which allows us to reason, make decisions and plan and reflect on life and dream together with our loved ones. The mind is a wonderful thing, and we need to love it like we love the body.

*“Our soul is like a stream of water, which gives strength, direction, and harmony to every other area of our life.”*<sup>71</sup> Dallas Willard

### **But how do I take care of the mind?**

Allow me to share with you my journey, not to boast about my achievements, but in an effort to encourage you to discover your own journey.

When I finished my schooling, I wanted to study geology or architecture. From a young age I was inquisitive, loved nature and liked to design things. I would come up with all sorts of inventions on paper.

By the time I finished high school, our family was in an unhealthy financial situation. My father tried to work through his bankruptcy as I finished high school. I wanted to study at university but my family could not afford it, and so I ended up starting a career in the police force.

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<sup>71</sup> John Ortberg, 2014, *Soul keeping: caring for the most important part of you*, Zondervan. p15

After my six months of basic training, I signed up for training as a crime scene investigator. The variety involved in this kind of work was something I enjoyed. I was trained as a fingerprint expert, a photographer, a forensics expert, and a draughtsman. I loved my job! My dream was to excel and to be promoted as quickly as possible, and therefore I also started to study law. Within the first few years, I had passed all the required exams to be promoted to an officer's rank.

But God had another plan for my life. I had a powerful encounter with God, which set a different course for my life.

### **My Damascus road**

I soon experienced a strong calling in my heart to resign from the police force and become a full-time minister of the Gospel. Not long after this, I was enrolled in a Bible school. I enjoyed the theological studies and did well. The discipline of research and study was something that stimulated me. I would never describe myself as a star student. I just enjoyed it. Consequently, it became important for me to stay intellectually sharp.

Later as I was exposed to Islam and heard the call to go into the Muslim world and share the love of Jesus with the vast Muslim population in Turkey, I enjoyed the research and study of Islam.

Add to this the need to acquire a new language - Turkish - and I was all set to stay intellectually stimulated, something I believe to be good for a person.

As my ministry towards Muslims developed, I learned several ways to engage with them and challenge them to start questioning the

reasons for their beliefs. It can become quite monotonous working with Muslims. You know the objections that will be presented to you and you know how to handle them. Like clockwork, Muslims will question the authority of the Bible, then they will question the divinity of Jesus and then the Trinity.

### **Staying sharp**

After some years of this, I felt the need to be exposed to more intellectual stimulation. It was a goal for me from very early in my ministry, to read at least two books each month. I like to read biographies, books on leadership and missions, and some theological subjects. I read to equip myself, as I believe there is a lot to learn from other people.

### **I am not boasting**

You might wonder what is all this boasting about? On the contrary. I want to give God all the glory for His grace in my life. All that I have, and what I have achieved is only by His grace. Other people have done much more than I have done. My motivation for sharing all of this is to encourage you to embark on your own journey of self-discovery and training. We need to stay intellectually sharp to be of great use in the kingdom of God.

As my academic training developed, it helped me to present Jesus and the principles of the Gospel to the Muslim community with greater skill and authority. It helped me to think critically and to be able to reason with sense in my interaction with non-believing Muslims. My ability to communicate fluently in four different languages opened

many doors and opportunities across the world to present Jesus to non-believers.

It helped me too, to be a better person. With a commitment to stay intellectually sharp, one achieves wisdom and God is glorified even

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With a commitment to stay intellectually sharp, one achieves wisdom and God is glorified even more.

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more. I do believe that it is important for any follower of Jesus to be equipped in the things that will bring glory to God.

In the letter that Paul wrote to Timothy, he encouraged young Timothy to stay sharp so as to present himself as one approved and able to handle the Word of God in a

right and proper way.<sup>72</sup> This should encourage us to be committed to learning to be better equipped and be an instrument in God's hands to expand the Kingdom of God.

### Ministry implications

When you are committed to developing your intellect, you will be:

1. More informed and better able to give quality input.
2. Better equipped to impart knowledge into the lives of those who find themselves in your circle of influence.
3. Intellectually stimulated and eager to learn more.

*We need to commit to learning something every day.* Where are you intellectually at present? When was the last time that you learned a new skill? When was the last time that you took up a book to read about someone else's

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<sup>72</sup> 2 Timothy 2:15.

experience and life lessons? Perhaps you are doing this right now and that is great! Do not stop! You need to expand. Perhaps you think that you are not academically inclined. That is all well and good. We are not all meant to take up academic studies. My wife is a practical person. She does not like to sit in a class, yet she has learned four languages and a host of other skills. She is an excellent cook, creates wonderful art and can sew her own clothes - all self-taught skills.

I am trying to encourage you. It does not matter what age you are, live a life committed to developing your intellect. My path will look different than yours, but let us be committed to learning more things. What is that one thing that you always wanted to learn? Maybe you always wanted to learn a new language, or start memorising more Bible verses, or learn how to play a musical instrument. Now is a good time to start. There is no need for you to postpone any longer.

Take care of what you are programming yourself with. If you only read romantic or science fiction novels and watch soap operas on TV all day long, do not expect to grow intellectually. We need to be committed to sharpening our intellectual skills; it does not matter what age we are. If I could learn French at the age of forty-six, you can do much more!

### **Making it practical**

Here are some suggestions for you to consider as you commit yourself to develop and grow your mind:

1. Start by taking stock of where you are right now. What do you like, what 'strums your strings', and what gets your blood pumping? Start with that.

2. Read about other people's lives. Read outside of your comfort zone.
3. Learn a new skill. Perhaps, in the past you wanted to learn how to play the saxophone. Do it! Perhaps you wanted to get a private pilot licence or perhaps there is that university degree that you always wanted to get. Enrol and start.
4. Reactivate your brilliant mind and regularly commit yourself to learn something new.
5. Set yourself some goals to acquire a new skill in some sort of discipline every year. This will motivate you to get started.
6. Communicate this goal to your loved ones and friends and ask them to keep you accountable. Where do you want to be five years from now? What kind of skill would you like to develop? Prayerfully consider your future with God, so that He can be glorified in your life at all time.

Robert E Quinn in his book *Change the world* talks about the importance of being open to change:

*“...we need to change continually. But that doesn't mean change just for the sake of change. It means change that allows us to become not only more effective people, but also more in alignment with our true selves.”*<sup>73</sup>

As we embark on a journey of personal development, there will be many changes in our lives. Usually, we do not like change, but if we

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<sup>73</sup> Robert E. Quinn. *Change the World: How Ordinary People Can Accomplish Extraordinary*

keep in mind that the change is for our benefit it will help us to stay committed to this pathway of personal development.

*Stay committed to sharpening your intellect. Learn something new every day. Take care of yourself. Whatever you do, do not be content with where you are intellectually.*

Each one of us should be committed to growth. Let us grow to greater heights and let the glory of God shine through us with greater strength.

### **A word on rest**

I run the risk of creating the impression that we constantly need to evaluate, align and work on ourselves like some hyperactive hamster in a spinning wheel. This is not the impression I want to leave with you. As we evaluate our whole being and where we want to grow, I believe we need to do it wisely.

It is for this reason that I want to encourage you to **rest** as well. We need to take care of our whole person, and this also implies making moments for rest. In his very busy, pressing ministry Jesus made time to take His disciples away to rest.<sup>74</sup>

If you are someone like me who needs to minister to other people all the time, preparing teachings and sermons every week, taking care of the spiritual needs of those that the Lord has entrusted to you, you must make time in your schedule to rest.

I always encourage ministers to take a day off for rest with no ministry or administrative responsibilities.

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<sup>74</sup> Matthew 14:22-23, Mark 6:30-32.

Closely combined with this, I also want to encourage you to make regular time for a retreat for relaxing and resting. In my personal life, I

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If you burn the candle on both ends you will end up destroying yourself.

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try to take a three-day retreat every quarter, and at least a two- to three-week holiday every year. If you burn the candle on both ends you will end up destroying yourself.

Remember that if you do not plan your moments or days to include rest, it is not going to happen by itself. There will always be more pressing matters to take care of.

### **Love beyond understanding**

Let us not continue in ignorance or arrogance; since God loves you, who are you not to love yourself? God loves your mind, your spirit and your body unconditionally. Yet, despite this amazing truth of how God thinks and dreams about us, we sometimes still refuse to think of ourselves in the same way.

Paul invites us to exhibit the same mind that is in Jesus Christ.<sup>75</sup> If we are truly followers of Jesus Christ, we will think about ourselves and look at ourselves the same way as God looks at us. This is the invitation to every one of us at this time. We must learn to love ourselves and meditate on Scriptures to programme ourselves to understand how God loves us through His son Jesus Christ.

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<sup>75</sup> Philippians 2:5.

## TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Charles F. Stanley summarises it in a wonderful way when he says:

*If anyone asks you "Who are you?" your answer should be this: "I am a believer in Christ Jesus. I am in Christ."<sup>76</sup>*

Let us take care of ourselves! In taking care of ourselves we are exhibiting love for ourselves. This is not an unhealthy love that is idle or vain or occupied with self all the time. I am talking about a love that is unconditional, love that is giving, love that will consider others.

If we truly want to fulfil the greatest command that Jesus has given us, if we truly want to love God and love our neighbours, we need to start by taking care of ourselves.

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<sup>76</sup> Charles F. Stanley, 2008, *Life Principles study series: Discovering your identity, find yourself in Christ*, Thomas Nelson, p15.

Reflection:

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1. Do you love yourself in the same way that God loves you? Why?
2. What steps do you need to take in order to care for your:
  - a. Body.
  - b. Mind.
  - c. Spirit.
3. How would you describe your current relationship with your earthly father? How can you improve this relationship?





## CHAPTER FIVE

# VALUE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

Close to where we lived in Pretoria, South Africa, there is a mountain range. It is not very high, but to us young boys it might as well have been Mount Everest. This mountain range, extending through our neighbourhood and known as the Magalies Mountains, was an ideal playground for adventurous boys.

Every Friday afternoon after school, my gang of four would hop onto our bicycles and meet at an agreed rendezvous point. I enjoyed the company of my three loyal friends, Banie, Tinus and Schalk; we were a very close group.

### **Friends forever**

Banie's mother was a housewife. She always kept a suspicious eye on our adventurous group. We would walk up the mountain from Banie's house because his house was the closest to the mountains. We knew that wild donkeys and mules were grazing on the top of the mountain. It was our goal to catch these free-roaming animals and ride them, the more danger, the more fun! After we caught the wild donkeys with the ropes that we smuggled past the watchful eyes of Banie's mother, we had fun riding them. Of course, we fell, got bruised and lost some skin. There was a reason that these donkeys were left wild!

When we arrived back at Banie's house, we were met by an angry mother. She grabbed us by the ears and then spanked all four of us. We later discovered that she followed us up the mountain with binoculars. There was no way that we could deny what we had done, and as a gang of four 'brothers', the punishment we received together only made our bond stronger.

I am still friends with Banie. It has been forty years, but the friendship has grown deeper with time. Our paths in life took separate ways, but we made it a priority to stay in contact. I needed to share this story with you because it gives you a small glimpse into the events that shaped my life, and the foundation that formed in how I approach the different relationships in my life. Each one of us has a different story, and this is mine.

### **Family is everything**

I have discovered in my personal life that loyalty is a virtue I value quite highly. This loyalty is also reflected in the Middle Eastern cultures that made such a deep impact on my own life. Upon arrival in Turkey, I was impressed and greatly influenced by the tight family relationships I encountered within the Turkish community.

In the Middle East family is everything. It is very unusual and out of character for someone from the Middle Eastern culture to act independently of their family members. I am very aware that there are always exceptions to this rule. The head of the family is the father or grandfather, and they would rule the family as the patriarch.

This system is quite unusual and foreign for us in the individualistic-orientated North American or European cultures.

The honour of the family should and must be protected at all costs. This means that no member of a family would dare to disgrace the family. Relationships and family bonds are very strong in the Middle East and this is something that I enjoyed during my time as a full-time Christian worker and church planter in the southeast of Turkey. Family is everything!

### **Created for fellowship**

When we study the Bible's teachings, we are immediately confronted with the truth and the reality that man is not created to be alone. This reflects directly from the relationship that we see between God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God is never alone. Within the Godhead, the Trinity, there is fellowship and communion and from this, we can assume that relationships are important to God.

During the life of Jesus on earth He expressed this several times. He was in contact with His Father through prayer. In the Gospel of John, Jesus talks about the intimate relationship and love that exists between Him and His Father in heaven.<sup>77</sup>

After God created everything,<sup>78</sup> He looked at what He had created and saw that it was good. On the sixth day, God created man from the dust of the earth, breathed His Spirit into man, and man became a living being. Adam came into existence, created by the very hands of God.<sup>79</sup> A little later, God said that it is not good for man to be alone.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> John 17.

<sup>78</sup> Genesis 1 and 2.

<sup>79</sup> Genesis 2:7.

<sup>80</sup> Genesis 2:18.

Man needed a partner, man needed fellowship. Adam needed to be in a relationship.

Nothing in God's creation could be found that was a suitable companion for Adam. This resulted in the creation of Eve, the partner of Adam.<sup>81</sup> Finally, man was in a relationship with another human being, much like himself. After God created everything, He looked at it and He said that it is very good!<sup>82</sup>

Billy Graham once said:

*God created us for one reason: to know Him and love Him and have fellowship with Him.*<sup>83</sup>

In the first chapters of the Bible, we note that man stands in a direct relationship with God. For the sake of our conversation in this chapter, I would like to refer to this relationship as the *vertical relationship*. This is the relationship between man and God. We also see that man finds himself in a *horizontal relationship*. This is the relationship between him and other human beings.

For a man to exhibit healthy, meaningful, horizontal relationships, man needs to have a healthy vertical relationship. The health of interpersonal relationships is directly connected to the health of the relationship man has with his Creator.

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<sup>81</sup> Genesis 2:20.

<sup>82</sup> Genesis 1:31.

<sup>83</sup> <https://billygraham.org/answer/god-created-us-for-one-reason/>

In the rest of this chapter, I will unpack the different kinds of relationships and look at how these relationships must be maintained and kept healthy.

The different relationships that we find ourselves in can be arranged in the following order:

1. Our relationship with **God**.
2. If you are married the relationship with your **spouse** follows next.
3. If you have **children**, these would be the next important relationships.
4. Following next are the relationships on the outer circles - with **extended family members, friends, colleagues, and neighbors**.

Your situation might be different from mine. You may be a single parent or recently divorced with no children, or perhaps be engaged. In the following paragraphs, I will briefly touch on all these different categories of relationships.

### **Maintain the fire**

Anyone who spent time around a campfire, would agree that a campfire needs to be maintained. If you do not maintain it, the fire will soon die after the wood has been consumed by the flames.

This means that from time to time you must add wood to the fire. In the absence of wood, the fire will simply die out. Therefore, as you

enjoy a campfire and the company of your friends, you will from time to time have to get up, add some wood, poke the fire with a metal rod to clear out the extra ash, sit back, relax, and enjoy the heat of the flames.

Looking at relationships, we need to remember that how we take care of a campfire is like taking care of our relationships in the same way. Maintaining relationships maintains the fire in that relationship.

If a relationship is not maintained, such a relationship is doomed \_\_\_\_\_ to die. The question, however, is how to maintain a relationship for it to last for the long haul. It is also true that not all relationships need the same kind of attention and maintenance. The relationship between man and God needs a different kind of \_\_\_\_\_ attention than the relationship between a husband and a wife. In the same way, a relationship between friends will be maintained and cared for differently from the relationship a father has with his children.

### **Prioritizing the right relationship**

Within the Christian full-time workers' community, I have come across colleagues who prioritize the wrong relationships. Often in my interaction with them, I find that ministry-related issues and ministry-related relationships take a much higher place of importance than they should. Many times, this unhealthy prioritizing of relationships leads to tension in those relationships.

The relationship between husband and wife can never be categorized or demoted to a lower place of importance.

## VALUE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

The moment you elevate a relationship of lesser importance and value to a higher place, some other relationship needs to be demoted.

The relationship between friends can never be placed on the same level of importance as the relationship between husband and wife. The moment a husband gives the same importance to his friends as he gives to his wife, someone is due to be upset.

Yet, so often we encounter this in our modern-day world, when people prioritize the wrong relationships. I am convinced that because we are confusing our priorities, we are exposing ourselves to unwanted and unnecessary tension in those relationships that are important. Very early in my ministry I learned to categorize and prioritize my relationships. This helped me maintain healthy relationships on all the different levels. Once I had set these principles in place, it helped me to be able to say no to those relationships that were vying for more attention from me.

Within the Turkish culture, where relationships are so important, it is quite normal for relationships to be mixed up when it comes to their priority. It is not unusual for a Turkish man to prioritize the relationship with his friends above the relationship with his wife. Likewise, it is not unusual for a Turkish woman to prioritize the relationship with her children above the relationship with her husband.

We see this same tendency in our western culture. This is one of the reasons that Petro and I had to establish a principle regarding relationships. We had to identify which relationships are the most important, which are on the outer circles of our lives, and which are best left alone.

It is also important to remember that one should expose oneself and invest in relationships where there are mutual benefits. If you find yourself in a relationship where there is only one direction of giving and taking, this is usually doomed to failure. The ideal relationship would be one where there is mutual benefit and interaction.

Let us start with the most important relationship we find ourselves in. This is the relationship between us and our Creator.

### **Relationship # 1- GOD**

The vertical relationship between humans and God is the lifeline of the human being on earth. This is undoubtedly the most important relationship that we will find ourselves in. If it is most important then it also implies that a high degree of effort needs to be given to this relationship. As human beings, we need to take special care of and maintain this relationship in a way that we will maintain no other relationship.

It is therefore important for us to put a rhythm of maintaining our relationship with God in place. We need to spend time with God daily. We need to read the Bible, talk to God through prayer and daily put ourselves in a place where we quiet our spirits, open our ears, and

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A daily time or rendezvous with God is of utmost importance for each of us, to maintain a healthy spiritual life.

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hear the voice of God. In my personal life, I have discovered that if I neglect this important aspect of my relationship with God, it can then lead to other problems and difficulties.

A daily time or rendezvous with God is of utmost importance for each of us, to

maintain a healthy spiritual life. For me, these moments take place early in the morning before the start of my daily activities. I discovered that if I do not make it my priority for the day, it becomes more and more difficult for me to make time for it later in the day. I have been at the place where I would soothe myself with the thought of making time to be with God whenever I have time available.

If one day should go by without me making time to be with God, the next day something else will come in the way and by the third day, I might not be bothered anymore.

Going down this road usually leads to a spiritual coldness that brings distance between me and God. It is not God that is stepping away from me. On the contrary, it is me stepping away from God. Unfortunately, after a while I become content with the situation and find myself having not spent time with God for several days. This then can lead to a spiritual dryness. Like the campfire that needs constant attention, my relationship with God needs daily attention.

It might be more of a challenge for you to carve out time to be with God in the morning; perhaps you are more of an evening person, or you are someone who can make a regular commitment to be with God during the day. Whatever works for you, do it. The most important principle here is to be committed to being with God every single day. Not a day should go by that you have not connected with God!

Every believer in Jesus Christ who acknowledges a personal relationship with Him, should be committed to regular moments of prayer, meditation, Bible reading, and listening to the voice of God.

## Making it practical

The following are some guidelines to develop our relationship with God:

1. **Select a time slot** in your day where you will commit yourself to be alone with God. This time slot should work for you and just commit to keep it regularly. Deciding on a time slot helps you to prioritize your relationship with God.
2. **Find a place** where you will be able to be alone with God. For some, it could be a quiet corner in the house, garden, or office. Others might prefer to sit in a coffee shop having a cup of coffee while they spend time with God. The important point to remember here is that it should be a place where you are comfortable and able to focus on God without being interrupted or disturbed.
3. Start with **reading the Bible**. Reading the Bible helps to focus one's thoughts and spirit on God. Read in a balanced way, read from the Old and the New Testament, a Psalm, and a Proverb. Choose a book in the Bible and read through the whole book chapter by chapter. There will always be themes in our Bible reading that will speak to us personally.
4. **Pray**. Bible reading fuels our prayers. Here are five points to focus on in the time of prayer:
  - *Praise*: Praise is the way that we enter the presence of God. Praise God for His goodness and grace towards you.
  - *Repentance*: As we stand before God, we realize that we cannot stand before Him, a Holy God, with sin in our hearts.

We must take time to search our hearts and ask the Holy Spirit to show us if there is any unconfessed sin that needs to be owned up to.

- *Intercession:* In a balanced prayer life, there should be intercession for others. This is a segment in our prayer time where we put the needs of others before our needs. Pray for the world, and the needs of friends, family, loved ones, and unbelievers.
  - *Supplication:* This is the moment in your time of prayer that you present your own personal needs. The Lord encourages us to present our needs to Him and trust Him to provide for us.
  - *Thanks:* Finish your time of prayer by thanking God. It helps to focus on the goodness of God and trusting Him to hear our prayer. Prayer is an act of faith, trusting in God to step into our lives and let His will be done. In this last segment of our time of prayer, we present our gratitude to God.
5. Keep a journal: In a busy life with lots of demands on us, it is helpful to write down our thoughts. We tend to get interrupted and forget the impressions we had in our spirit as we spent time with God. Keeping a journal will help to look back and see what God is busy doing in your life.

These are some of the practical things to develop our relationship with God. Let us move on to the second most important relationship in our lives.

## **Relationship # 2 - MY SPOUSE**

Assuming that you are a married person, the next most important relationship is the relationship between you and your spouse. Petro is my high school sweetheart. She was sixteen and I was seventeen when we first met. It was love at first sight and I have never loved anyone else ever since. For both of us, loyalty is one of the virtues and values that we seek and offer in our relationship.

We have all seen the disasters that can follow when someone does not value, care or spend time with his/her spouse. It is of the utmost importance that a husband and wife maintain a healthy, open, and clear relationship. To maintain a relationship in a marriage you need to communicate often. In our marriage, we needed to make sure that we connect at least once a day. We like to refer to this moment of our day as our 'couch time'. We are now in a season in our lives where our children have grown independent, they have left the house for studies or to get married or to follow a career path of their own. For us, the nest is empty.

This makes it even easier for us to live our own lives. In the past, our lives were very much concentrated and focused on the well-being and care of our children. Even in those times we made it a point to be with one another every day. Petro has always been a housewife and wonderful ministry partner. I would leave the house for my office in the mornings, return later in the afternoon after ministry on the street, only to prepare for more ministry with small groups, church services, or discipleship in the evening.

It was easy for us to live our lives separately from one another. My wife would take care of the children and the management of the house, and I would focus on the ministry, discipleship, and evangelization of the Turkish people. Therefore, we made a clear decision early on in our ministry to lay down some guidelines and principles for ourselves to follow.

When coming home I would leave the challenges, anger, disappointments and frustrations of the daily activities at the door. Both of us were committed not to transmit the frustrations, disappointments and challenges that we had during the day onto one another and our children. Our children were always aware that the relationship between their mother and father was the most important in this family, next only to the relationship we had with God.

This was expressed in different ways appropriate to my culture. I am aware the following points may not be as important to everyone as it is to me:

- Date night
- Couch time
- Sharing a meal

I am also aware that the commitment to a regular date night alone with my wife is a western or European-American cultural activity. For us it worked and helped us in our relationship. Depending on your cultural orientation you might not experience the same need for this commitment.

- **Date night**

It was very common in our house to have a date night. In our case, these took place on Tuesday evenings. Very soon in the lives of our children, they knew that mom and dad would go out for the evening to spend time together. We would invite a babysitter to come and take care of the children for the evening. As a reward, we would order in pizza for the children and allow them to watch a video. As it goes with children and routine, this very soon became a habit for them as well.

Once, our son Benjamin asked if I was not going to take Mummy out for the evening; I looked at him surprised and asked why. He informed me then that he was looking forward to the pizza and the video that they were to enjoy that evening!

These evenings out became an important lifeline for Petro and me. It became a moment in the week where we could stop, reflect, and engage with one another without the children being present, and we could clear the air if there was any kind of tension. It helped us to stay focused and committed to our marriage. We never assumed that our marriage would take care of itself. Both of us were very much aware that the secret to a lasting, loving marriage relationship was a commitment to work hard at it and communicate well with one another.

- **Couch time**

Another habit that we had in our daily routine was ‘couch time’. These were the moments when I would arrive home from a busy day, Petro would make a cup of tea or a mug of coffee, the children would be

playing after they had come to say hello, and both of us could just reconnect, talking about the day's events. To maintain a healthy family, one needs to spend time with your family and your spouse.

- **Sharing a meal**

In our travels across the world, we have met families in many different countries, and we have always been intrigued by how little time families spent together. One of the commitments that we had as a family, was to enjoy at least one meal a day together. This was the bare minimum that we would be satisfied with. In the modern-day that we live in, it is uncommon for families to sit around a table and have a meal together.

A family needs to be committed to eating together. These moments of mutual sharing around a table should be moments that are free from any cell phones.

In our house, we do not allow the use of smartphones or electronic devices during our mealtimes. Even if you are a visitor to my house, we would politely request you to put away your phone while we have our meal. It is very disturbing to see how many parents are using smartphones to keep their children occupied while they are having a family meal. This is an unfortunate practise and a habit that we would strongly discourage as it breaks down the communication within a family. These electronic devices should never be used as babysitters.

In the Bible, we find that sharing a meal is a sign of a healthy relationship with one another. In the book of Revelation, Jesus Himself invites us to open the door to our heart because He desires to

enjoy a meal with us.<sup>84</sup> In the Middle-Eastern culture enjoying a meal together with your friends and family is something quite normal. When you visit friends the normal thing to do is to share a meal.

Even in the ministry that we are involved in, it is normal for the Turkish-speaking Christians to share a meal with us every time that we visit them. Sharing a meal is a sign of fellowship with one another. Preparing a meal for your visitors is a sign of acceptance and love. This is the middle eastern way of doing things.

Spending time together, whether it be on a couch drinking a cup of tea, or around a table sharing a meal with your loved ones, is of the utmost importance in maintaining and caring for such a relationship.

### **It is not the children**

We have encountered many families where the wives would communicate to their husbands that they are the second most important factor in their lives. For these wives the most important relationships are those that they have with their children. This kind of commitment and expression leads to tension. When a spouse elevates the relationship between them and their children to the same or higher level as the relationship with their spouse, it is doomed to cause trouble.

Perhaps you are in the fortunate position to have a house full of children - little people who love you. If so, you still need to be committed to the most important human relationship that you will find yourself in. This relationship is not the relationship with your children. This relationship is the relationship with your spouse. The children

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<sup>84</sup> Revelation 3:20.

need to know that there is love, respect, and acceptance between their mother and father. The greatest gift that you can give your children is not money or a house or clothes; it is to love their mother or father unconditionally. When a child observes and experiences love between his or her mother and father it gives him or her the security, comfort, and safety that they need to grow their own healthy understanding of relationships.

Make time for your spouse, husbands! Make sure that you date your wife at least once a week. Wives, make sure that you carve out a moment in your day to be quiet with your husband, spend time with him, make eye contact with him, and listen to what is on his heart. Husbands, leave your frustrations, your challenges, and aggressions, at the door of your house. Do not vent your frustrations, challenges or the bad experiences that you had during the day on your wife or your children.

Be committed to maintaining the relationship that you have with your spouse. Every marriage asks for full commitment, it requires communication and attention and work. The benefits are out of this world.

### **Making it practical**

We have been happily married for more than 30 years and we believe that we are entitled to share some personal opinions and observations on how to develop a healthy relationship with a spouse. A happy

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A happy marriage does not just happen. A happy marriage asks for commitment and hard work.

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marriage does not just happen. A happy marriage asks for commitment and hard work. This chapter, however, is not a marriage-counselling chapter. What follows are a few points that helped us develop, nurture, and maintain our relationship with one another:

**1. Communicate:** In a busy world, it is common that each spouse should have a full-time job to keep the home afloat and it can become challenging to stay connected. Petro and I are committed to communicating honestly and regularly with one another. It is important to incorporate moments in your day when you can connect with your spouse to talk about the day. Petro and I call it 'couch time'. After a busy day, we sit together on the couch and talk about the day.

**2. Date night:** I have referred to this earlier in the chapter and want to highlight it again. When you date your spouse, it opens space where you can be alone with that special person in your life. Go and do something together that you enjoy. Get a babysitter to take care of the children and go out, dress up for dinner, a play, or just go out and take a walk or have a romantic picnic. There are many things to do: the point here is to go out of the house and leave the children with someone else for a few hours every week.

**3. Pray together:** It is shocking to see how many couples do not pray together. I would hope that you are in a relationship where you and your spouse both have a personal relationship with Jesus. If so, you are blessed and fortunate. Use this blessing to pray for one another and together. The closer the two of you move to God, the closer you will move to one another.

**4. Clean air:** Keep the air clear! Do not let your differences and misunderstandings build a wall between you. Be committed to a short account. This means you sort out any differences sooner rather than later. The Bible encourages us to forgive one another and not to let the sun go down on our anger. This is very good advice. Do not go to bed angry with one another; it can be very cold!

**5. Mutual respect:** Anyone in a long-term relationship will confirm the importance of mutual respect. In our relationship, Petro and I have laid down some rules when it comes to us disagreeing: we will agree to disagree. In a perfect world, everyone agrees with everyone else all the time. However, it is very different in the real world.

**6. Keep to the rules:** There are certain rules to keep to when you disagree:

1. Do not attack character.
2. Do not belittle.
3. Never threaten with divorce.
4. When you disagree in front of the children be sure to reconcile in front of the children as well.
5. Do not use foul language.
6. Be the first to say you are sorry.

There may be some other points that you can add. Please add them, and stay committed to them. Build your relationship with your spouse. Value that special person that God has placed in your life.

## **Relationship # 3 - THE CHILDREN**

If you are married, have children, and are a believer in Jesus Christ, the third most important relationship is the relationship with your children.

### **In search of balance**

As a father, I had to learn to make time to be with my children. We are blessed with three sons. I remember with the arrival of our firstborn what a challenge it was for me, as a young father, to find the balance in my daily schedule. We do like to have our lives organized.

As a single person, you are the master of your time. The moment you get married, there is suddenly another person in your life who demands attention. This can cause tension and there is a constant awareness of finding a balance between giving time to your spouse and having enough time for yourself.

Just when you find this very fine line of balance, you are blessed with a new life as you celebrate the arrival of your first child. Of course, with this blessing comes other challenges. The challenge that I experienced with the arrival of our firstborn was to find time for myself in all the things that were happening around me. When my firstson was born, my wife and I were students at Bible school. We had juststepped out of a full-time career, and committed our lives to be trainedand equipped as full-time ministers in the work of God.

We were happily married, life was good, we were living a life of faith and despite the financial challenges that we experienced at that stage in our lives we loved one another. When my first-born son arrived,

I suddenly had to make time for an extra human being in my life. I wanted to be a good and godly father - the father that my son needed in his life. I was on a journey to find balance in my life.

Most parents, especially first-time parents, will agree that raising children does not come with a manual! When you are blessed with that firstborn, there is not some sort of manual that arrives with the firstborn, educating you on how to be the best parent. All parents must learn by trial and error. For us, it was no different! Suddenly, we had different roles in our lives, and we had to find the balance between being husband and wife, father and mother, and bible school students. Add to this the social life of a normal family and it can be quite challenging to find and keep the fine line and balance in all these relationships. As time goes by, you get more experienced, get the rhythm of life, move on in life, and then - the second child arrives!

### **When the boxes mix-up**

Most men compartmentalize their lives into different boxes: there will be a box for the wife, a box for the role as husband, a box for leisure, friends, sports, and so forth.

In my case, I thought I had it all worked out! After several months of trying, I found the balance. But as life goes, the moment you find the balance, you lose it again. For me, this happened with the arrival of our second boy, Benjamin.

All of a sudden my life was chaotic again and I struggled to find the time and the correct balance to give time to my wife, my children, the ministry, and myself. Later, with the arrival of our third son, I came to

a place where I kind of just ‘go with the flow’ and realize that it doesn’t always work to have everything figured out and put into boxes. *Most of the time the boxes get mixed-up!*

These challenges brought my wife and I to a place where we felt the need to identify certain principles regarding relationships, especially relationships with our children. How do you make time for each child when it is already a big challenge to spend healthy time on your marriage and growing ministry?

### **Making it practical**

To maintain a healthy connection with our children, we identified the following principles to guide us:

1. **Routine:** It is important to commit to a daily routine and rhythm in connecting with our children. Routine gives our children security.
2. **Face time:** Connect with each child face to face every day. When you play with each child separately you show that he or she is important to you.
3. **Fun together:** Make time to do fun stuff with all the children together, going to the forest, the mountains, cycling together, playing together in the backyard, or a trip to the mall. When a father spends time with his children it gives the mother time to catch her breath.

4. **Pray with them:** Make it part of your daily routine to pray with your children. In our case, this happened in the evening when we put them to bed.
5. **Be present:** When you interact with your children, make sure to leave your cell phone elsewhere. This is a sacred time: do not allow others to interrupt it.
6. **Be a parent:** *A parent cannot always be the best friend of the child.* Children need their parents; a parent is not always popular, but parents are doing the right thing. Guide your children, love them, and gently correct them onto the right path when needed.

As our children grow older, they do not need all this personal attention. Our relationships develop and we still regularly spend time together, but in a different way. When you follow these guidelines, you communicate to your children that they are important and loved.

## **Relationship # 4 - FAMILY, FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES**

Let us move on to the next important level of relationship in our lives. This is not a specific one-person relationship. This category is with family, friends, and colleagues.

### **Social media**

Just recently, Petro's brother, Julius, had a massive heart attack. We had no idea what happened, and we only learned of it the following day via a post on Facebook posted by one of his children. After some frantic

calls, we learned that he was out of danger. We felt disturbed by the fact that we had to learn about this incident via social media. After some more inquiries, we managed to talk to the youngest daughter of Julius

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Social media can never replace the value of real in-person friendships.

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who had posted the message. She confessed that she posted the message without thinking that she should have informed each of the related brothers and sisters personally. She thought it was best to put it on Facebook so that everyone would know.

This is only a reflection of the reality that we live in today. Personal relationships and friends are valued and measured by the likes that you receive on a social media platform. I want to categorically state that your friends on any social media platform are not your real friends.

Real friends are real people that you can look in the eye and engage with. It has become a sad phenomenon in our day to see how lazy we have become in engaging with our real friends. This should not be the case. Social media can never replace the value of real in-person friendships.

Roger Patulny, an Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Wollongong in Australia said:

*More and more Australians are becoming physically isolated. My previous research demonstrated that face-to-face contact in Australia is declining, and this is accompanied by a rise in technology-enabled communication. Enter social media, which for many is serving as a replacement for physical connection. Social media influences nearly all relationships now.*<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> <https://theconversation.com/does-social-media-make-us-more-or-less-lonely-depends-on-how-you-use-it-128468>

I know that there are positive sides to social media, and I am not disputing it. My problem is with the tendency to replace the real deal with the fake, superficial, and instant relationships that we encounter on social media. My call to every reader is to stay committed to keeping it real and personal. This asks for extra effort and commitment.

We can be committed to developing, building and nurturing our relationships as much as we want to, but if the other parties in these relationships are not committed to doing the same maintenance, it will eventually bring strain on such a relationship.

We are called to a lifestyle of exchange of giving and receiving.<sup>86</sup>

We know that life is not always so clearly divided into black and white. There are many moments in life that we do not have clarity on what we need to do.

### **What if...?**

There are many “what if” situations. Let us look at some.

### **What if I am a single parent or divorced?**

I have the utmost respect for single parents. In my opinion, they are the unsung heroes of today. It is only the single parent who will understand what it takes to make life work, manage the house, take care of the children, work full-time, and try and maintain a social life.

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<sup>86</sup> Barnett, Betty. *Friend Raising: Building a Missionary Support Team That Lasts*. YWAM Publishing. Kindle Edition

For a single parent, the most important relationship is the one with God, then the relationship with the children, followed by the rest. If you are a divorcee with children and the father of the children is still in contact with the children, of course you need to make room for that in your life as well. It is here where it can get complicated with custody battles.

The bottom line is that the children have a right to get to know and to spend time with the other parent, and you should accommodate them. Then there are the grandparents on both sides. I know it is complicated but do not be overwhelmed. Make time and space for these essential relationships in your life and plan around them. Maintaining the fire of these relationships is important to you and your children. Whatever you do, do not isolate yourself.

### **What if I am engaged?**

For the person who is engaged, the relationship with the fiancée will move to the top of the list, just below the relationship with God. This is an important relationship in your life, and you need to invest in it if you are going to make it work. This is where parents start to move to the back seat; they need to make space for the future spouse.

### **What if I am single and live independently?**

You hardly find a person as busy and as occupied as a single person. Their programs are full, and they hardly have free time on their schedules. If this is you, remember your parents. You need to stay connected with them regularly. Just as you make time to socialize with

friends and colleagues, you need to make time to connect with your parents as well. This is the right thing to do. Focus on relationships that build and encourage you.

I believe it is good to identify a few important relationships and focus your time and energy on these relationships instead of trying to be friends with everyone and having no depth in any of them.

My friendship with Banie has lasted for more than forty years because both of us have stayed committed to nurturing and building this relationship. This friendship bond has been a blessing to me for a very long time.

### **Remember the parents**

As children grow up and develop relationships with friends, they tend to neglect the relationship with their parents. It has become a principle in our own lives to connect and build a relationship with our parents. Because this relationship is important, we make time for it. One of the biggest sacrifices for us has been the fact that we are far away from our parents, loved ones, and families. To compensate for this, we are committed to staying in contact with our parents. This also means that we encourage our children to connect with their grandparents.

If you are a single person, make sure that you spend time with your parents. If your parents are divorced, still make time to connect with each one regularly. Regular might mean once a week or perhaps once a month. It is important to make time to spend and interact with your parents.

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It is important to make time to spend and interact with your parents.

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If you are a young person who has a broken relationship with your parents, prayerfully consider this relationship. As parents we are not perfect, we make mistakes, no manual was handed to us at your birth, we navigate the complex path of parenting in a way that sometimes leads to mistakes. Be committed to make the relationship with your mother and your father a high priority in your personal life.

## **Forgiveness**

The relationship between me and my father was not the best. For a large part of my young adolescent life there was a lot of tension between us. Later, as my father became a follower of Jesus and my faith in Jesus had grown, I learnt to forgive my father and be committed to establishing a deep, intimate relationship with him.

Jesus came to make a way for us so that we can be reconciled with our Heavenly Father. We as human beings stand guilty, deserving of death and eternal condemnation before God and therefore have no right to stand before God.<sup>87</sup> We deserve to be punished because of our sins. Jesus Christ, through His grace and mercy, paid the price for our guilt and sins. Jesus made it possible for us to be reconciled with our Heavenly Father.<sup>88</sup> Our Heavenly Father loves us and desires to have an intimate relationship with us. If God could forgive us for our transgressions, we should also forgive those who have transgressed against us. I had to forgive my father for the wrong that he had done towards me and my family. It was only in forgiveness that I found freedom. It was only as I forgave my father that our relationship could be restored.

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<sup>87</sup> Romans 3:23.

<sup>88</sup> Romans 5:8.

The ancient church father Polycarp said:

*If then we entreat the Lord to forgive us, we ought also ourselves to forgive; for we are before the eyes of our Lord and God, and “we must all appear at the judgment-seat of Christ, and must everyone give an account of himself.”*<sup>89</sup>

Perhaps you find yourself in a similar situation, perhaps you have all the right to feel hurt. You may be in a place of pain and rejection with your parents. I want to encourage you to forgive and reconcile with them. The Bible very clearly commands us to honour our father and our mother.<sup>90</sup> This command to honour our parents is unconditional. The Bible does not say if our parents are model parents, or if our parents are perfect, or if they never made a wrong action involving us. No, the command is clear and explicit to honour

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The Bible very clearly commands us to honour our father and our mother.

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your parents despite who they are and what they are doing to you.

### **I do not like you...**

I am in danger of creating an impression that I am in a perfect relationship with everyone I know. I want to clarify that I am a person who desires to have a good standing and a good relationship with everyone in my life. Unfortunately, the reality is that not everyone I meet will like me.

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<sup>89</sup> “*The Epistles of Polycarp to the Philippians,*” in Ante-Nicene Christian Library, vol. 1, The Writings of the Apostolic Fathers (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1867), 72–73.

<sup>90</sup> Exodus 20:12 and Ephesians 6:12.

Some years ago, while I was the chairman of our communal property in Pretoria, South Africa, I was responsible for the management of twenty-three housing units. One of the members on the board had a dispute with me, and to find a solution to our dispute I visited her one evening with some of the other board members. During the conversation, Hilda stopped talking, looked me straight in the eye from across the table, and in front of the other board members said: “Martin, I do not like you!”

Her words left a dark imprint on my heart. It was not pleasant to hear it, especially for someone like myself, who thought he was liked by everyone. There was absolutely nothing I could do to make her like me; no amount of reasoning would work, so I had to accept it, respect it, and deal with it.

I have had a fairly rocky relationship with one of my close family members ever since we were children. As the years went by, we grew further apart. We did not have a lot of interaction, but I always wanted to be in a good relationship with her. Today, after many years of expressing and showing an effort to stand in a good healthy relationship with her, I still have not been successful.

I had to make peace with the fact that she does not like to spend time with me and does not want me to be part of her life. After accepting this reality, I could move on.

You cannot force someone to love you, to like you, or to be with you. In our families we are often confronted with similar situations.

The Bible is clear about what we should do in such situations. It encourages us, as far as it is possible, to live in peace with other people.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Romans 12:18.

We should pursue a life of peace in our relationships and not one of hatred, vengeance and unforgiveness.

### **A word on conflict**

Wherever you find two human beings together, you are bound to find two different opinions about any given matter. In any relationship, you may well encounter conflict.

There are different ways to handle conflict and the level of our emotional intelligence will determine how we approach conflict situations. As someone who submits to the teachings of Jesus Christ, I let myself be guided by the principles as stipulated in the Bible. I believe them to be true and just, and a healthy guideline to direct my life, especially in times of conflict.

Here are some Biblical principles that helped me in my relational interaction:

1. Do to others as you would like others to do to you.<sup>92</sup>
2. First remove the beam from your own eye before you try to remove the splinter from someone else's eye.<sup>93</sup>
3. Love your neighbour as you would love yourself.<sup>94</sup>
4. Do not let the sun go down on your anger but resolve an issue with someone as soon as possible.<sup>95</sup>
5. A soft answer turns away wrath.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Matthew 7:12.

<sup>93</sup> Matthew 7:5.

<sup>94</sup> Mark 12:31.

<sup>95</sup> Ephesians 4:26

<sup>96</sup> Proverbs 15:1.

A few months ago, a good Turkish friend of mine and his wife who had been closely involved with us in ministry, decided to step away. He cited different reasons for not being able to continue to work with us in the ministry.

My friend had been struggling with anger for a long time and after I confronted him about this, he refused to acknowledge the problem or deal with it appropriately. He opted rather to end our relationship and walk away. No manner of intervention from me or other respected believers in our community could convince him otherwise. After I tried extensively to resolve the issues, I had to accept the fact that our relationship had come to an end. It has been a painful experience for me and Petro and it took us some time to mourn the loss of this once deep and intimate relationship.

Unfortunately, conflict in this situation caused the death of a relationship, as my friend decided to resolve the conflict by stepping away from the relationship. Yet, there are relationships that you just cannot step away from and you must stay committed to working on them. These are the relationships you have with your spouse or children. There will never be a time that you will tell your child he is not your child anymore. You might have your differences, but you can never cut this bond. Your child will always be your child by kinship, descent and by blood.

In the same way and early in our relationship, Petro and I have committed to never use the word divorce in our marriage. It just never was an option! For us, this is a relationship that we never could step away from, and we had to work diligently on it.

The scope of conflict resolution is wide and deep, and I can by no means present you with an exhaustive guide that will equip you with

enough to handle it appropriately. However, I want to share with you some of the points that helped me to handle conflict in my life and ministry.

1. **Pray** - Before I engage in a situation where there is conflict, I encourage all involved to pray together. I know this might not always feel appropriate but by praying together we acknowledge that there is a higher power over us and that we are inviting God, through His Holy Spirit, to take control of the situation and guide us as we seek to resolve the issue. If you are in a situation where there is conflict and the parties involved are not necessarily believers, you can still pray in your heart and ask the Lord to help you and guide you as you work towards a solution.
2. **Be calm** – Never engage in a conflict situation in anger. If the situation is too emotional or filled with anger, make sure that all the parties involved calm down before you engage any further. If the emotions flare up again, it is better to pause before you continue.
3. **Listen** – Before you want to announce your opinion or feelings, take a moment to listen to the other parties involved. This will help you understand the issue on the table and will give you a good perspective before presenting your point. To listen, you need to be quiet. Do not interrupt the other person while the issue is being explained. When you are committed to being quiet and listening, you earn the right to explain yourself when it is your turn.

4. **Seek to understand** – It is helpful to put yourself in the position of the person that you are in conflict with. Try to look at the issue at hand from their perspective.
5. **Identify the “feelings”** – In any kind of conflict there are certain feelings or emotions involved. These feelings will influence the attitude of the person towards you, or towards the issue at hand. Try and identify these feelings by asking appropriate questions, such as:
  - a. What did you feel when I said...?
  - b. How did you feel when I acted...?

I have found that sometimes my actions make others feel differently from what I intended, and it is therefore important to identify these emotions and clarify them. Many times, we perceive a situation very differently from the intention of the other person involved.

6. **Identify the problem** – Once we put a label on the issue at hand, we can start to focus on finding a solution to the problem. The parties involved can then understand that it is not personal and all can move forward to find a solution.
7. **The solution** - With the problem identified, the parties involved can then move forward to find a solution to the issue. This plan of action creates hope and a renewed commitment to the relationship. If both parties agree to the solution, they can hold one another accountable as they develop the relationship.

8. **Say you are sorry** – It is important to acknowledge your mistakes, however small they might be. Say you are sorry; many conflicting situations can be resolved immediately if one of the parties involved would just acknowledge their mistake and say the golden words, ‘I am sorry!’
  
9. **Make haste** – Do not ignore a conflict situation. It only poisons the well and leads to bitterness and resentment. If you are in a conflict situation pay immediate attention to it. It is not going to go away if not dealt with. It is said that time heals all wounds but in the case of conflict, time only covers the bitterness and resentment under concrete. This has the potential to blow up in your face in the future, if you do not deal with it.

Therefore, I believe the Bible encourages us to not let the sun go down on our anger<sup>97</sup> and to make sure that we deal with issues in our relationships urgently. Of course, as I mentioned earlier, if the parties involved are not interested in finding a solution to the issue, you need to respect that and give the situation to God. He will deal with it in His way and time.

10. **Find a mediator** – It is normal to encounter situations of conflict where the parties involved find it difficult to agree on a way forward. They find themselves in a stalemate with no way out. This is where a mediator can help. A mediator should be a person who is accepted by all parties involved. This should

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<sup>97</sup> Ephesians 4:26

be a person who will remain neutral and will be willing to listen patiently and impartially to all aspects involved. The mediator will then propose a possible way to solve the conflict.

Do not shy away from conflict in relationships, for when it is handled in the correct manner it only strengthens the relationship.

Be patient, it takes hard work to develop and build a relationship. It is a work in progress with great benefits.

### **A journey to healing**

My parents came to visit us in Turkey some years ago and my father and I went on a journey to the different Biblical sites. One night we stopped over in the city of Rize, on the Black Sea coast, and enjoyed a meal in the rooftop restaurant of the hotel. We were tired after a long day of sightseeing. I remember that I ordered fish from the region and my father preferred to enjoy some of the Turkish meat dishes. Just before the meal arrived, my father tenderly looked at me. His eyes started to tear up as he asked me to forgive him for the wrong that he had done to me in the past.

It was a very special moment. Although we were both born-again believers at this time, we never spoke about the pain and grief that was caused by his drinking problem. I forgave my father in the past for the wrongs that I experienced from him, but he never admitted to it or asked for forgiveness. This is what made this moment in this rooftop

restaurant so special. With tears in my eyes, I could articulate my forgiveness to him; he accepted it, we hugged, we cried, and enjoyed a godly moment as the Holy Spirit reunited and restored our hearts that evening.

It is a moment in my life that I will never forget. The moment a father asks forgiveness and the moment his son accepts and extends his forgiveness. Perhaps you are in a place where you need to forgive a child, or a parent. Do it sooner rather than later. Restore the relationship. God wants us to be reconciled to one another, just as we are reconciled to our Heavenly Father through Jesus Christ.

### **Do not be a rubbish bin!**

Do you spend time with those people that build you, encourage you, and want to take you forward, or are the people in your life always using you to dump their problems? It is noble of you to encourage, listen, and build other people up and we may at times be a shoulder to cry on. If these kinds of needy relationships are the only relationships in your life, it is not healthy.

I believe the secret in our approach to healthy relationships is to surround ourselves with people who love us, believe in us, encourage us, and energize us.

Life is short, do not expose yourself to long term abuse in relationships that are tearing you apart and not building you up. As we enter into a relationship, prayerfully consider those people that you are in touch

with every day, who do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. What should your approach to them be? Can you be that friend or colleague who will introduce Jesus Christ to a person that desires freedom, eternal life, and peace in their own life?

Relationships ask for commitment, loyalty, and understanding. It is like fire; it needs to be maintained. Make sure that you pay good attention to those relationships that are important in your life.

In our lives as a family, these are the principles that worked for us. It helped us to maintain our relationships with our children at different ages and during different stages of their development. Even today we still maintain this rhythm and routine of connecting with our children although we live continents apart.

We are not created to be alone. Let us nurture and grow those relationships that God have placed in our lives.

**Reflection:**

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1. Compile a list of the important relationships in your life.
2. What steps can you take to develop these relationships?
3. Do you need to forgive someone?



## CHAPTER SIX

# BE GENEROUS

In the era in which I grew up, as a young Christian, generosity and our way with money were seldom discussed. I had to learn by trial and error, and in many ways find my own path. The church I attended was committed to tithing and offerings each month. Not understanding it, and with no one who disciplined me on this, I felt pressured by legalism and soon left. I wanted to be free and not bound by more rules.

This did not fill the void that existed in my life on the issue of money. My elders whom I respected, never spoke about it and it was a taboo subject in many conversations. It took me years to find my way and form a principle that would be my compass for the future. It is because of this lack of guidance on the issue of generosity in my early Christian life that I decided to speak out about my own experiences.

### **It is personal**

This is perhaps the most personal chapter in this book. I am sharing very intimate convictions that Petro and I have never discussed with anyone previously. I want to be transparent on the subject of generosity because when I was being formed as a young Christian, I could not find anyone who was willing to guide me on this issue. No one was willing to open-up and be vulnerable with me and show me the ropes.

I trust that the examples and real-life stories in this chapter will be read in the light of my commitment to be vulnerable and transparent about my own experiences. I trust that it will not be perceived as any effort from my side to boast and make you, the reader, feel guilty.

What about a definition!

Trying to put a definition of generosity on the table can be complicated. When you define it, you need to decide if you will do it according to the normally accepted ‘worldly’ manner, or whether you prefer a more Biblical definition.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines generosity as:

*the quality or fact of being generous.*<sup>98</sup>

This does not really answer the question for me. What does this actually mean? Looking at the definition of the word ‘generous’ in the same dictionary, it is defined as:

*liberal in giving; openhanded.*<sup>99</sup>

This begins to make a little bit more sense to me, but I am not yet satisfied. This led me to formulate my own definition of generosity, which is:

The commitment to live with, and have the attitude that all I have comes from God and He can have whatever He wants from me, whenever He wants it.

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<sup>98</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/generosity>

<sup>99</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/generous>

The issue of generosity and of giving did not come easily to me and this chapter tells of my journey on how I arrived at this point.

I was born and grew up in the southern hemisphere. For a great part of my life my birthday, which is in February, would be in the middle of the South African summer. It is very hot, and everyone walks around with shorts, flip flops and T-shirts. Birthdays are supposed to be a joyous occasion and friends and family enjoy the outdoors with those whom they love.

### **Lessons from Hot Wheels**

On my fifth birthday my grandfather, my sister, my parents' friends and their children, and my cousin were present at our old house in Pretoria. My mother baked me a big birthday cake and covered it in white icing sugar, my favourite! She delicately placed five candles in a circle on top of the birthday cake.

My father bought me six 'Matchbox' type cars as a birthday gift. These little metal cars are better known as Hot Wheels. I loved these cars. Generosity was not high on my agenda on the day of my fifth birthday. I was very possessive about my new gift.

When the other friends wanted to play with my gift, I did not handle it very well. I grabbed my six Hot Wheels cars, stuffed them into my pockets and very aggressively stepped away from my friends. I clearly indicated that I had no intention of sharing my present with them. Our friendship had not developed to the level that I was willing to share such a precious gift with anyone else. Typically of the time and age in which I grew up, punishment from parents was swift, intense, and accompanied by pain!

My reluctance to share my gift with my fellow party friends, initiated a swift and intense response from my father. He grabbed me by the collar of my shirt with one hand and with his other hand spanked me. I burst out in tears in front of everyone. Like any five-year-old boy would do, I ran over to my mother to seek comfort from her. She was not that sympathetic towards me either! My unwillingness to share with my friends, made me cross a line, a fixed principle, and my parents felt it needed to be addressed right there and then. Not being generous is something that did not sit well with my parents. They wanted to teach me to share, and if that lesson had to be given at my fifth birthday party in front of all my friends, so be it!

I cannot categorically say that I turned out to be a very generous person because of that spanking. My mother, however, informs me that after my moment of intense discipline from my father, I immediately shared my birthday gift with my fellow party friends.

### **Real-life stories**

To increase generosity in your life I want to share some practical points. I want to encourage you with real-life events from other moments in my life. Let me re-emphasize that these are stories and principles that I learned from my personal life and I have full appreciation for the fact that God works in a very unique way with each one of us.

In later years, this commitment to share generously was prioritised in the lives of my parents. After my father had an encounter with Jesus and his life changed completely, both he and my mother committed to taking care of homeless people. It was not unusual for them to

accommodate people in need in our home. My father died a few years ago but my mother still takes care of the physical and spiritual needs of 150 homeless people. She is now seventy five years old and still sharing her life with others.

It was not that easy in my case. I did not necessarily like to share. I had to learn to share. Although I grew up in an environment where everyone was expected to share, it did not come naturally to me.

### **A life of faith – the first steps**

After I resigned from the police force and stepped into full-time Christian ministry, I had to learn to live a life of faith. This implied that Petro and I had to trust God for everything we needed. There was no one that we could go to and ask for our monthly salary. The Lord Jesus was our source; He was the one who took care of us.

God works through people. Usually, God will not give through any other means but His people. It is through people that God chooses to provide for people.

In all the years that I have lived a life of faith and trust, I have never received a cheque that fell out of heaven. My financial provision always came through other people. People would be stirred in their spirit to give towards us and the ministry. If these people did not obey the leading of the Holy Spirit to give to us, we would not be able to receive what the Lord wanted to give us.

I also had to learn to give. *If I do not lead a generous life, I do not have the right to expect other people to contribute to our ministry generously.* The Bible is clear about this:

*“...do to others what you would have them do to you...”*<sup>100</sup>

This was not an easy lesson for me. My natural tendency was to keep what I had, especially for a ‘rainy day’. I would reason that I was the one in need - surely the Lord could not expect me to give. My belief was that in my commitment to keep what I believed God gave me, I was helping God to provide for me. Surely the Lord would understand.

As I studied the Bible, I was challenged by the many examples of giving and receiving. As a young missionary, it became imperative for me to learn to be generous. Generosity developed into a habit for me.

### **The man with the envelope**

Just before our departure to Turkey in 1993, we attended a large church gathering in the northern suburbs of Pretoria. During the church service, I had a very strong leading in my heart to give all the money that I had in my wallet to the church during the time of offering.

All the money that I owned, was the money I had in my wallet at that moment, a total of seventy US dollars. I remember how I reasoned with the Holy Spirit about why I should not give this money.

Firstly, the Lord needed to understand that this was all the money I had in my possession! Secondly, He should understand that I was a responsible father and husband and I needed to provide for my family. How could God expect me to give all I had? Thirdly, this would be a bad example of being a good steward.

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<sup>100</sup> Matthew 7:12

But, despite my reasoning, the impression in my heart only grew stronger. I had to make a choice right there, during the church service. Would I obey the Lord, or would I try and be the responsible person guarding the little that I had?

I decided to obey the impulse in my heart. When the offering basket passed me, I opened my wallet and put the last of the money I knew I had, in the basket. At that moment, as I obeyed and gave, I experienced an unnatural peace descending on my spirit. It was as if the Holy Spirit was comforting me with the assurance that God would provide.

After the service, we got up to leave the church. We waited for our turn to be part of the stream of people approaching the exit door. As we waited in line, a man I did not know, approached me. This stranger walked over to me with a white envelope in his hand. Looking at me, he acknowledged that he did not know me, and then told me how he felt the Holy Spirit impressing on him to give me the white envelope. I accepted his gift, thanked him for his kindness and he walked away. I put the envelope in my pocket and when I got to my car I opened the envelope to find that it contained a gift of three-hundred US dollars!

I could not contain my emotions as my tears flowed freely. I told Petro what had happened. I was humbled by this incident and God taught me a precious lesson. It is better to obey... even if you have to give away all that you have.

### **It is not for me**

One could assume that these moments, the lessons learned on our life's journey, would forever correct the way we approach the issue of

generosity. Reality shows us something quite different. It is through many lessons that an ingrained attitude is continually adjusted to align with what God intends it to be. This means that sometimes you have to learn multiple lessons for a habit to be established.

During my first years on the mission field, I considered myself to be a generous person. However, up to that moment in my life, I only gave sporadically, and I would only give as I could at that instant. I was convinced that the teaching of tithing was an Old Testament concept and that we New Testament believers, living in the new dispensation, were not bound by the laws of the Old Testament.

This then implied that as far as generosity and giving my tithe to the local church go, I would give as I wanted and as it pleased me. I believed that I was living under grace, and that God would understand my needs. I was not opposed to anyone wanting to give his or her full tithe every month to the church. However, I believed that I was walking on a higher road and that was the road of grace, love and understanding. In my opinion, giving and generosity were dependent on availability.

### **Give it away!**

In 2006, after fourteen years of ministry in the southeast of Turkey, we were forced to leave the country. The local authorities in the city of Malatya refused to extend our residency and work permits and deported us back to our home country. It was a shock to me and Petro as we wanted to stay in Turkey for much longer. This unforeseen turn of events put a lot of financial pressure on us as a family. How do you

relocate your family back to your home country within a matter of weeks with no financial means?

There was a lot of correspondence between us and our home church in South Africa. Plans were made, budgets discussed, and the deadline for our departure approached. It became clear that we needed an enormous amount of money to relocate to South Africa. We had to buy aeroplane tickets for five people; we had to move all our furniture and everything we had across two continents back to South Africa.

According to our calculations, it would be easier for us to move our house using a container than it would be to re-establish a whole household from nothing back in South Africa.

The budget was close to US\$10,000. It was way beyond our means. As all good missionaries, we prayed about this, we fasted and communicated the new developments of the needs we had to our financial partners. Slowly money started to trickle into our bank account, and within a few days, we had an unexpected amount of US\$1,000 in our bank account.

Late one evening, as I lay awake listening to the soft sounds of Petro sleeping, I was finding it difficult to trust God. He had taken us on some wild journeys and had always provided for our needs, but I had no idea how He intended to pull this off! We needed to leave the country for legal reasons, as soon as possible. Yet, God seemed to be dragging His feet in making this possible. "I want to trust you, Lord", I prayed quietly. "But you aren't exactly proving Yourself very trustworthy at the moment. We need so much money, but You have only given us a little. What am I supposed to do with just US\$1,000?"

The instructions I received from the Holy Spirit at that moment were enough to set my stomach lurching: “Give it away!”

Only five minutes earlier, US\$1,000 had seemed like such a pitiful sum of cash. Now, as God challenged me to sow the largest sum I had ever given away in my life, I only saw a big zero written in a vibrant red marker on the whiteboard of my mind! I woke Petro, looking for some kind of absolution from guilt rather than advice. “Speak to me through my wife,” I begged God, as Petro sat up, sleepily rubbing hereyes. “Use her to show me that this bizarre idea comes from the enemy, and not from You.”

“We have to go for it though, don’t we?” she stated matter-of-factly, when I had explained the situation to her, even emphasizing the sheer ridiculousness of the idea.

“I mean, you can’t just ignore God and hope He’ll still provide for us. Give it away!” Calmly, she rolled back onto her side and fell back to sleep, leaving me to worry and fidget for the rest of the night over the size of the task God had given me. In the morning, I faced the situation and rang a colleague who was working with OM in Istanbul. Reluctantly, I explained our situation, and told him that in the early hours of the morning I had been given the distinct instruction to send the full US\$1,000 to him.

I heard sobbing from the other end of the phone line. Between sobs, he explained to me that he was also moving, and needed exactly that amount to move his family to a new region in Turkey. He had been begging the Lord to provide and now, it seemed God had done just that. For him it was an answer to prayer!

We did not receive the lump sum we needed to pay for all our expenses at once. I definitely would have preferred it that way. It certainly would have been easier to trust God with the assurance of a comfortable, big figure in my bank account. Instead, little by little, as each new bill for our international move was delivered to our mailbox, we would receive just enough money to remain free of debt. Our airfares were paid just in time. We hired a moving company in Malatya to help Petro pack all our furniture and household goods in boxes, and I had just enough funds to hand over their fee on their last day of work. The quote I was given to ship our container by sea showed amazing correlation to the small amount of credit I discovered in our bank account one day. Day by day, God gave us our bread, as well as what we needed in order to be obedient to Him.

### **Lesson learned – finally**

I do believe that if I had not been generous and obedient earlier by giving away the US\$1000, I would not have been able to reap the benefits of our generosity. By being generous to the point of no return we kept ourselves relying on the only source that could help us through this troubled time, Jesus Christ Himself.

When we are in a position of complete reliance upon Jesus Himself, we are at the best place to experience His miraculous power. God Himself moves people so that the needs of His servants are met.

Never could I be the same after I experienced what happened with our relocation to South Africa. We were committed to being generous. We believed in generosity and had to expand this generosity beyond what we had ever experienced.

But lessons learned are not always lessons practised. Sometimes we tend to forget what we have learned. Although we have seen how God has

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Lessons learned  
are not always lesson  
practised.

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time again God has to teach me to make Him the only source of all my needs.

worked in the past, the current situations that we find ourselves in sometimes overwhelm us to the degree that we fall back into default. Default looks different for each person. For me, default means guarding what I have and trying to help God to provide. Yet time and

### **It all belongs to God**

This is an attitude that I have encountered in many full-time workers and missionaries across the globe. Notwithstanding this, we confess that generosity is an important part of our lives, and that generosity seems to be quite insignificant compared to the amazing blessings that we receive. Christians across the world do not give more than two and a half percent<sup>101</sup> of their income to the church or to Christian charities, let alone the ten percent that traditional Christianity teaches us to give. Imagine what it would look like if we would live with an attitude of truly believing that everything we have belongs to God.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> <https://nonprofitssource.com/online-giving-statistics/church-giving>

<sup>102</sup> Study these Bible verses on the subject of "Everything belongs to God" Genesis 14:19&22, Exodus 9:29, Exodus 19:5, Leviticus 3:16, Leviticus 25:23, Leviticus 27:26, Leviticus 27:30, Deuteronomy 10:14, Job 41:11, Psalm 24:1, Psalm 50:10, 11&12, Psalm 74:16, Psalm 95:4&5, Psalm 104:24, Jeremiah 46:10, Daniel 2:20, Haggai 2:8, Romans 12:19, 1 Corinthians 10:26.

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*“If you have money, power, and status today, it is due to the century and place in which you were born, to your talents and capacities and health, none of which you earned. In short, all your resources are in the end the gift of God.”* Tim Keller<sup>103</sup>

If everything I have belongs to God, it also means that I am only a steward of what was given to me. It implies that the Owner of everything I have, has the right to decide what I will do with what He has entrusted to me. He can do with it as He pleases.

Upon arrival in France, we joined the language school in the south of Paris to learn French. After one year of language school, we settled in a Turkish neighbourhood where we started with our ministry among the Turkish-speaking people in France.

### **Give away your car**

Living in Europe can be expensive, especially for missionaries from countries like South Africa. In an effort to put the financial needs that we experienced into context, I will try and explain it in the following way. Compare the average salary that a teacher in South Africa would receive every month and multiply it by four, and you will have an idea of the amount of money we as a family needed to just make ends meet in France. As I saw it, the equation always was that the more financial needs I had, the more faith I needed to trust God for His provision.

The ministry among the Turkish-speaking people in France had grown to the extent that we travelled to six different cities across France

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<sup>103</sup> <https://www.kevinhalloran.net/the-best-timothy-keller-quotes/>

each month. We needed a more reliable vehicle that would be able to cover greater distances. By the grace of the Lord, enough money was raised to purchase a second-hand vehicle with low mileage and in a good condition. I was still making plans to sell my previous vehicle when Petro approached me one morning. She had a very clear leading in her heart to give away our old vehicle to a family that had a need. I was baffled!

I thought it was quite a challenge to give away the US \$1,000, and I certainly had learnt my lesson. After this incident, we were encouraged to increase our giving. We started to give more and more. As we became more generous, we experienced more financial blessings. Now I want to state that generosity is not a pre-requisite for obtaining financial blessing. On the contrary, our foundational principle and point of view are that all we have belongs to God, meaning that He can do with our possessions as He pleases. We are also further convinced that as we live with the attitude that all we have belongs to Him, the Lord Jesus Himself will provide all our needs.

Giving away a vehicle was never something that crossed my mind. To me the vehicle that we had was a resource for further finances. I intended to sell our little grey Nissan Almera, and turn it into savings for another 'rainy day'. Apparently, the Lord had other plans and He decided to talk to my wife about it! My initial resistance as my lovely wife shared her impression, evaporated after we prayed about it. We both felt in our hearts that we had to give away our vehicle to the particular family on our hearts. Never had I given away a vehicle! After the decision was made, an appointment was set up and a meeting was arranged for us to go to this family. This Turkish Christian family had no idea what we were about to do.

As we sat around the table asking them how they were doing, we listened with great interest and anticipation to the needs that they had. We announced that the Lord Himself had laid it on our hearts to give them our car. We saw that it was difficult for them to comprehend that we as missionaries actually wanted to give away our vehicle to them. We had to repeat ourselves and after a while my Turkish friend, with tears in his eyes, thanked the Lord for His provision. They had a need, and they had nowhere to turn. The Lord imprinted His wish on our hearts, we obeyed and became a channel of God's blessing to this family.

Through our giving, we released the blessing of God on our own finances and we became a blessing to this family as well. We left the keys and the ownership documents of the car with this family and on our way home we both rejoiced with gladness in our hearts for being able to bless this family.

### **The gates of heaven opened**

I could not imagine what we had started in the spirit. In the following months we had several breakthroughs regarding needs that we had. We lived in an apartment, and desperately wanted to rent a house with a small garden where we could be outside. Anyone who has lived in France will appreciate how difficult it is to rent any sort of accommodation. Yet within two weeks, we not only found a new house with a garden within our budget, but we also moved in. This very unexpected development led to us needing essential appliances like a refrigerator, washing machine and dishwasher.

In the next few weeks, one of Petro's closest friends asked her if she could buy her a washing machine. Sultan knew that we did not have

a washing machine and Petro had to make frequent trips to the local laundromat to wash and dry our clothes in the very rainy climate typical of Paris. The washing machine was soon delivered, installed and fully used.

A week later another Turkish believer approached us, asking if he could buy us a refrigerator. *I was blown away! In all the years that I have ministered to Turks, I was always the one who had to provide for their needs. Never in all my life and ministry among Turks had it happened that they ever wanted to give me anything. With this, I do not mean that they are not hospitable people. Indeed they are! The foreigner was always considered to be rich, to have the means to meet needs, and wasto be approached whenever they had needs.*

Yet here I was approached by a Turkish believer wanting to buy me a brand-new refrigerator. A few days later the refrigerator was delivered and soon after that, we received another gift from yet another Turkish believer enabling us to buy a dishwasher.

So, with us sowing one simple old vehicle, we released something in the spiritual world that caused an outpouring of blessing on us as a family. Indeed, we have learned that as it is written:

*“...it is more blessed to give than to receive.”<sup>104</sup>*

There are many similar stories I could share from my own personal life and experience, but this is for another book and I would miss the focus of this chapter. These incidents that took place in our own lives encouraged us to lead a life of generosity. *With an attitude of generosity, blessing will flow from God Himself.*

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<sup>104</sup> Acts 20:35.

## Let's talk money

In our traditional Christian circles, I have come across a hesitancy to engage, debate, talk or preach about finances and generosity. In general, Christians shy away from the subject of money. It could be because of the attitude or conviction that money, and everything connected to it, is evil. I believe this concept may come from the verse in the Bible that says:

*“... the love of money is the root of all evil.”*<sup>105</sup>

Many well-meaning people in our Christian communities quote this verse as justification for not discussing the issue of money. I am convinced that this is the wrong interpretation of this particular verse of Scripture. These dear fellow Christians are focusing only on the second half of this verse namely:

*“...money is the root of all evil.”*

We need to look at it in context. It says that:

*“...the love of money is the root of all evil.”*

If you love money more than you love God, you are on a road that will take you on a downward spiral. It does not state that money is evil.

Looking at sources in the Bible, we find that Jesus Himself spoke about money frequently. The subject that Jesus taught, preached, and

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<sup>105</sup> 1 Timothy 6:10.

engaged on the most was the kingdom of God. This is the single most important subject that we see in the teachings of Jesus.

The second most-preached and taught-about subject of Jesus was possessions and our way with money.

Jesus often spoke about our attitude towards possessions and our dealings with money. Following these two topics, the subjects of prayer, faith and holiness that Jesus taught about, are just as important.

In the letter that Paul wrote to the church in Philippi, he encouraged them - and us - to have the same attitude and mind as Jesus Christ had.<sup>106</sup> This means that my walk and my talk should be like the walk and talk of Jesus. I should talk about the kingdom of God often, and I should talk about possessions and finances, and how we deal with it as Christians. We tend to make it a very private matter, but in the teachings of Jesus, and the teachings of the early church, finances and possessions were normal topics of discussion. As Christians, we should adopt these same principles. Let us look at what Jesus spoke about.

### **The biblical foundation of generosity**

Through the years we have learned to become generous. My emphasis is on the word **learned**, it was not something that came naturally to me and Petro. Learning implies that we had to change our way of thinking about generosity. We became convinced that the way we approached generosity was not necessarily the way that Jesus taught it in the Bible.

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<sup>106</sup> Phillipians 2:5, NIV, Holy Bible, eBook. Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

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For us, the priority was to align with and conform to the teachings of Jesus. The Bible is very clear about generosity.

For a Christian all that he has belongs to God the Father.

One of the verses in the Gospels that altered the way we approached generosity is:

“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured to you.”<sup>107</sup>

I am aware that one should not build a whole theology or doctrine based on only one verse in the Bible. This particular verse altered the way I approached generosity and in the light of Scripture as a whole, it is in line with how Jesus approached generosity.

The command here is clear:

“...give, and as you give it will be given to you.”

In order for you to receive, you first have to give. The way that God gives back to you is not the same way or measure that we give to Him.

When God gives to us it will be:

- a good quantity...
- pressed down...

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<sup>107</sup> Luke 6:38.

- shaken together...
- and running over...

The image that Luke is using is that of a container that is being filled with something like wheat flour. A person filling a container wants to make sure that every inch of space in the container is being utilised. The flour is pressed down and shaken together, until it runs over! The way that God gives back to us is also a good and generous quantity. When God gives, it is also good - so abundantly that it overflows!

The most intriguing part is in the second half of this verse where Luke states that with the amount that we use, it will be returned to us again, and again.

### **God's cupboard**

I have a healthy imagination and thinking about this verse makes me want to paint a picture of a hypothetical situation. To me it means that there is a measure, a container. This container is my measure. The measure of the container is the quantity or amount that I give away. For the sake of our conversation on generosity let us keep the focus on the financial aspect of generosity.

I do not want to neutralise the other aspects of generosity, such as being generous with your time, your gifts or your resources. To keep the focus of this chapter, I want us to stay with the issue of finances when we talk about generosity, but understand that the subject of generosity embraces elements other than just finances.

When the Bible talks about the measure that I use in my giving, it describes a specific volume, specific containers and a specific amount

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of money that is being given. These containers may be big or small. The interesting hypothesis here is that I, as the giver, determine the size of the giving. In the proportion that I give away, it will be given back to me.

It boils down to this simple fact: if you give little, you will receive back little. On the contrary, if you give a lot, you will receive a lot.

My imagination wants to run wild some more! Let us imagine that in heaven there is a locker, or a cupboard, or a closet, however you would like to describe it.

Let us talk about a place where the containers we use in our giving are stored. I imagine that every one of us has such a container placed in heaven in a closet with our name written underneath that receptacle. Let us imagine that there is a 3D printer up in heaven. When I give money, God takes my measure and makes a copy of the measure I have given. My measure might be the size of a teaspoon, or of a one- litre bottle, or if I'm generous, I may give with a measure the size of a twenty-five-gallon drum.

Let us imagine that our Almighty Father in heaven takes note of the measure that we have been giving with, puts it in the 3D printer, and makes an exact copy of that measure. After He has made the 3D printed copy, He takes it out of the machine and walks over to the closet in heaven, looks for an open space where He can store my measure, and puts my name with a clear black sticker at the bottom of my container. God closes the closet and then goes about His business.

Next time I have a need, as a child of God knowing Scripture and understanding God's love for me, I approach God with a request. I

express my need; perhaps it is for finances. I share with God that He invited me to ask Him anything in the name of Jesus and He will, through His grace, provide in my need. I imagine how God, as our loving Father watches over me as I pray. Telling me to wait a moment, He walks over to the closet, this storage facility where everyone's measures are stored. He opens the door, looks at the alphabetical arrangement of the names and finally finds my name. He takes out my container. It might be a teacup, a spoon or a huge drum, and He starts to release the measure I have deposited back to me.

This is what He promised. He will give it back to us with the same measure that we have given to Him. I imagine then how, if my needs are greater than the measure I have deposited in heaven, I cry out to my loving Father expressing my frustration that I need more. I imagine that my Heavenly Father watches over me with never-ending love in His eyes and tells me that He is so sorry, but this is the measure with my name on it. You see my friend, God always stays true to His promises.

### **You can upgrade**

If God has said that He will give to us with the same measure that we have been giving to Him, it also means that I have an amazing opportunity to upgrade my measure.

If until now I have been giving with a teaspoon measure every time I give to God - with either a small or a big measure - I can easily and suitably increase my giving. As I increase my giving, I will also increase the capacity of my particular measure (my container). The question before you today is, what is the size of your measure in God's closet

BE GENEROUS

in heaven? You might feel that your measure is sufficient, but only time will tell. It will soon be revealed whether or not your measure is sufficient. The next time when you have a need, God is going to walk over to His storage closet, open the doors, look for your name, and take the measure with your name on it and \_\_\_\_\_ start giving back to you. Will it be enough for your needs at that moment? \_\_\_\_\_

The more you give, the more you will receive.

The good news is that if you think it might not be enough, you can upgrade your

measure. You might ask how I can upgrade my measure? The answer is simple, give with a greater measure than you have done before. The more you give, the more you will receive.

Elsewhere in the book of Acts we read that:

“...it is more blessed to give, than to receive.”<sup>108</sup>

This means that I am in a unique position to release blessings upon myself. How do I do that? By giving.

I do believe that God meant what He said. If He said it is more blessed to give than to receive then that is exactly what it is. He also says in another place that:

“...for God loves a cheerful giver.”<sup>109</sup>

All these actions - the actions of giving, of releasing peace upon us, of experiencing joy - are ones we can do something about, and for

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<sup>108</sup> Acts 20:35.

<sup>109</sup> 2 Corinthians 9:7.

some reason only God will understand, are directly connected to our generosity.

Looking at the above-mentioned verses and concluding that it is possible for me to influence the size of the measure that will be used to give to me in return, means that I can increase my giving with the expectation that God will provide accordingly.

I am by no means an advocate of the prosperity theology. God can do what He wants, in whatever way He wants. I merely want to share with you my personal experience in my journey with God. You can decide whether or not you like the principles that I share. You might feel encouraged to implement and try these principles in your own life and then also reap the benefits from it.

Or you might have the attitude of apathy, assuming that it will never work for you, or that it is contrary to your theological orientation. Whatever your approach, understand that these are my own experiences. I have experienced God in this way in my life.

My wife and I learned very early on in our walk with God, that for us to continue to enjoy His financial blessing on our ministry and lives, we needed to be financially generous all the time.

### **The principle of first**

I previously mentioned how I was convinced that giving a tithe of my income to the church was an Old Testament<sup>110</sup> concept and that we are now New Testament believers and followers of Jesus in the new dispensation. We are free from the bondage and the curse of the law.

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<sup>110</sup> Malachi 3:10.

You might agree, but let me take a moment to talk about the principle of **first**.

This has to do with the first fruit. Right at the beginning of the Bible, we encounter the story of Cain and Abel.<sup>111</sup> Some of you might be familiar with the story. Cain and Abel both brought offerings to the Lord. The Bible teaches us in Genesis chapter four that Cain brought some of the fruits of his land and that Abel brought some of the first-born of his sheep as a sacrifice to the Lord. Cain's offering was not accepted but that of Abel was. Outraged, Cain killed his brother Abel, and after being confronted by God, falls under God's curse.

Did you ever stop and wonder why God was so unfair? Why did God accept the offering of Abel but not the offering of Cain?

The Bible says in Genesis four that Cain brought some of the fruits of his land, but Abel brought the firstborn.

If we look at later Mosaic law, it corresponds with the desire of God to have the first fruit. God was never satisfied or impressed by the leftovers. When our Father in heaven made a way for the world to be reconciled to Him,

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God was never  
satisfied or  
impressed by the  
leftovers.

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God gave His one and only Son, Jesus Christ, to reconcile the world to Himself. God gave His first, and as Lord and King, He deserves the best and not the leftovers.

Note that Cain and Abel brought an offering from their labour to the Lord. This was the natural thing to do. Mankind understood this even before the Mosaic law existed. *Giving the first portion to God is not instituted by the Mosaic law, it was an action and attitude that existed even*

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<sup>111</sup> Genesis 4.

*earlier.* It is, therefore, wrong to conclude that the concept of giving your tithe and offering to God is an Old Testament concept originating from the Mosaic law and that after the resurrection of Jesus we are no longer under the law, and therefore not obliged to give our tithe and offering. The concept of giving our first to God existed even before this and is still one God honours.

You see my friend, God willingly gave His one and only Son, His first-born.<sup>112</sup> In the same way God expects us to give what belongs to Him - the first fruit. The offering of Cain was not accepted because it was not the first fruit. The offering of Abel was accepted because it was the first fruit.

If you were a farmer under the Mosaic law, whether or not you were in agriculture or livestock, the first fruit of your flock or crop belonged to God.<sup>113</sup> In a practical way, this meant that the first born of everything, whether or not it was male or female, was to be offered to God. The law stated that the first born of each animal that opened the womb had to be sacrificed to God. The law continues to explain clearly that in the case of a ritually unclean or unholy animal, such as a donkey, a holy animal, such as a lamb, had to be sacrificed to redeem the unholy animal, if the farmer intended to use the unholy animal. This implied that you had to sacrifice a lamb in the place of the donkey. If the farmer did not intend to use the firstborn of the donkey, he had to break the neck of that donkey.<sup>114</sup>

The first born belongs to God, and the first fruit belongs to God. There is no way to get around this. God is never satisfied with the

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<sup>112</sup> John 3:16

<sup>113</sup> Exodus 34:19.

<sup>114</sup> Exodus 34:20.

leftovers. Yet, when we look at our financial contributions on a global scale, we have to hang our heads in shame. The followers of Jesus Christ do not give their first fruit to God - in this case, to the church.

The principle at work here is the principle of **first**: the first belongs to God. But how does this relate to my personal finances?

### **Making it personal**

If you are in the fortunate position of receiving a regular income, perhaps weekly or monthly, your first fruit should be given to God. You might ask, but how does my first fruit look if I am a person receiving a fixed income?

For the sake of our conversation, let us assume that you receive US\$1,000 per month for services rendered to a particular business. You happily take the envelope with the cash in your hand and go home to share the joy with your family, thanking God that you have an income to sustain you. What we as Christians usually do is to make sure that all our commitments are paid from the US\$1,000. You would take a certain amount to pay for your rent and perhaps the lease on your motor vehicle, then use a certain amount to buy food and pay for some utilities. This leaves you with an amount in your hand, and only then would you decide what to give to God.

Because you are a Christian thinking biblically, you do believe that you need to give to the church. You look at what is left in your hand, and thinking of expenses that still might occur during the following days, you decide how much you will give to the church. You might drop a few coins into the basket or put a few notes in an envelope, and give it to the church as your tithe, knowing very well that it is not your full ten

percent. Besides, you believe that we are not under the law and since God understands your situation, He surely doesn't expect you to give more than you are able to!

This is where we as followers of Jesus usually make a mistake. This is the wrong attitude towards generosity. *My commitment to being generous, and to giving God what belongs to God, starts before I begin to spend my salary each month.* When I receive my monthly salary I ought to go home, thank the Lord for what He has given me, and before paying any bills or spending any of the money on myself, I take my ten percent or twelve percent or fifty percent from the envelope and put it aside for my offering on Sunday. I then use the rest to live on. This is basically what **the principle of first** implies, meaning that what belongs to God, belongs to Him first.

Allow me to share with you on a very personal level what Petro and I do in this regard. I do not share this because I want to make you feel guilty, or show you how holy and pious we are, but because I want to encourage you to trust God and implement this principle in your personal life.

### **Taking stock**

When I learned that it was more blessed to give than to receive, we took stock of our giving. This is a very easy exercise to do. If you are married, you can do this with your spouse. If you are single then it is an exercise you do by yourself. Looking back at the past twelve months, write down the total amount of your income. What has been the total income you have received, whether from your employer or any other business ventures that you were involved in?

## BE GENEROUS

Then write down how much money you have given to the Kingdom of God. It might have been directly to your church, or to a missionary or a mission agency, or to some sort of charity of your choice. I always encourage my friends to firstly give their tithe and their offering to the church. Of course, they may also want to give more to whatever charity or agency of their choice.

Now take the first number that you wrote down and compare it to the second number. You can now calculate what percentage of your annual income you have given to the Kingdom of God. This very simple exercise will show you immediately how much you have given in the past year. This served as a wake-up call for me and my wife. Although we thought that we were generous people and believed in giving, we were struck by how little we actually gave to the Kingdom of God.

My goal is to encourage you to begin to be generous in your giving towards the Kingdom of God. Hopefully, you are a member of a Christian community. Your responsibility as far as your general generosity is related, is towards this community.

As you give to your Christian community, this particular community will decide how to distribute the income received to impact the Kingdom of God. This can happen through evangelism programmes, mission outreaches, mission participation and support, helping the poor in your community, paying the salaries of workers in the church, and the general upkeep of the facilities used on a regular basis.

In the beginning, our giving was less than five percent and happened sporadically, as we saw fit and felt led by God. Our commitment was to increase this figure. We wanted to test God on His Word. Was God

truly going to provide in all our needs if we gave Him what belonged to Him? Would God truly supply all our needs if we would give Him the first fruit of all that we received?

### **The challenge to increase the giving**

As a couple, we felt we had enough faith to at least stay committed to our five percent that we were giving at that stage. However, we wanted to do it every month. After a few months of this commitment, we were blessed to see how God continued to supply what we needed. At the end of one year, we were both convinced that in order to expand our faith we had to increase our giving. Besides, the Lord clearly states in His Word that it is not possible to outgive God.

We increased our monthly giving by two percent and then later to ten percent and that is where we remained for a while. As time passed and we saw the way God continued to supply our needs, we wanted to stretch our faith even more and increased our giving to twelve percent. God kept on giving! I have to confess, at times it was difficult to keep to this commitment, sometimes I questioned or tried to negotiate with God, knowing that He would understand if I could not keep to my commitment. I never wanted to make it a legalistic issue. For Petro and me it was always a principal issue of being obedient, trusting God, confessing God as our only source, knowing that He would always provide. We were committed to give to God what belonged to Him, in this case the first fruit of all our income.

Later on, we opened a separate bank account and because we receive donations and gifts from different individuals and churches throughout the month, we were committed, at the end of every month, before we paid our bills and ministry expenses, to transfer the twelve

percent, the first fruit, to our giving account. We would then utilise our giving account to support other missionaries and the church.

Today, Petro and I are giving away twenty percent of our monthly income! It has become a joyful occasion every month for us to sow back into God's Kingdom. We have never gone to bed hungry, except when we were fasting. We have never lacked anything we need. As full-time missionaries, the Lord always supplies the needs that we have.

This principle has worked for us for the past thirty years of ministry. At the beginning of every year, we are challenged to increase our giving. If the Lord has been faithful to provide for us in the past year, would He then not also continue to do so, as we keep on giving more and more back into His kingdom? If you had faith to give to God the first fruit every month for the past year, you cannot continue to give the same amount the following year. You have seen God's faithfulness during the previous year; it stretched your faith, and increased your reliance on Him. In the following year you have to increase your giving in order to increase your faith. This is why we are committed to increase our giving every year. It is an exciting journey of faith. The Bible encourages us to walk by faith<sup>115</sup> and it also says that we are pleasing God when we walk in faith. This is our goal, to continue to walk in faith and keep God as our main source.

### **Start according to your faith**

I would like to encourage you to make a commitment to give to God, not the leftovers, after you have paid all your commitments, but the first fruit that belongs to Him.

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<sup>115</sup> Hebrews 11:6.

God has put us first, we are the crown of His creation, we are the apple of His eye. You are not God's second choice.

You are His first choice! By giving your first fruit you are only coming into line with God's attitude towards you. Will you put God first in all aspects of your life? He has made you the first. It is the right thing to do. I believe we have no other option except to give our first to Him. This is the way we show Him that we love Him.

You might think that I have no idea of the challenges that you face in your particular situation. You are right. Your situation and circumstances are very different from mine. I have learned that our loving Heavenly Father is the same yesterday, today, and forever.<sup>116</sup> I have learned that God loves His children<sup>117</sup> and He is absolutely committed to taking care of them. The question is will you trust God enough to give to Him what belongs to Him? Or, on the contrary, will you keep on taking and stealing from God what belongs to Him? I have decided in my life to give to Him what belongs to Him, and I have reaped the benefits of this commitment over and over again.

### **There is life in giving**

In the land of Israel there are two large bodies of water. In the northern part of Israel, not far from the border with Syria, is the Sea of Galilee. This lake is connected with the second lake, the Dead Sea, a few hundred miles to the south, through the Jordan River. The Sea of Galilee is a vibrant body of water, rich in all sorts of freshwater

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<sup>116</sup> Hebrews 13:8

<sup>117</sup> 1 John 3:1, Romans 8:39.

fish. To the south is the Dead Sea, below sea level, with no exit for its water. There is hardly any living organism in the Dead Sea. You will not find any fish in this body of water, which is highly concentrated with minerals and salt.

I want to use this as an example to explain how a body of water that both receives and gives, like the Sea of Galilee, is a vibrant, living body of water. Compare this to the Dead Sea that only receives water through the Jordan River, and is a dead body of water, without any outlet.

This is a good example to us. For us to receive, our hands have to be open. You cannot take hold of what God wants to give you with closed and clenched hands. To receive, you need to open your hands. The opening up of your hands implies that you will also give. This brings us back to the spiritual principle we studied in Luke.

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You cannot take hold of what God wants to give you with closed and clenched hands.

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“Give, and it will be given unto you.”

**There is a blessing in generosity!<sup>118</sup>**

I do not know about you, but I need all the blessing of God in my life. I do not want to go through life under a curse. I have been set free from the curse, through the life that Jesus gives me. I can live in this blessing, and as an outward expression of this blessing, my generosity will release more blessing, not only on my own life, but also on the lives of those who I am generous towards.

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<sup>118</sup> 2 Corinthians 9:6

You can decide to implement this very important principle of generosity in your own life or you can decide to ignore it. The choice is yours. All that I can convey is that in our lives and ministry, the principle of being generous has been blessed many times, as a principle that God honours and keeps because of His love towards us.

### **It all belongs to God**

I need to clarify that my motivation for generosity is not driven by my desire to receive numerous blessings from God. This idea would fringe on the teachings of the prosperity gospel, of which I am not a supporter.

The reason why I am generous, the reason why I believe that I need to have an attitude of giving in my life, has to do with the fact, the knowledge and my awareness that all I have belongs to God.

The day that I committed my life to Jesus Christ, I gave up the right to all that I have. I was a sinner, deserving of death, eternal punishment and eternal separation from God. When God stepped into my life, He redeemed me completely.

The new life that God gave me was a life that was encapsulated by Jesus Christ Himself. The day that I committed my life to Jesus and confessed that He is the new master of my life, I gave up the right to my life. In giving up the right to my life, I also gave up the right to all my possessions. Everything I have, everything that I hold dear, belongs to God, through Jesus Christ. In return, God has given me a new life, a life that I will never lose again. God reconciled me with Himself

through His Son Jesus Christ. The very fact that I do not stand in enmity towards God anymore and that as a human being I have gained direct access to my Heavenly Father, has motivated me to give up the right to all that I have.

Flowing from this principle, to have an attitude of generosity implies that I am only giving to God what belongs to Him. I have no right to the contents of my wallet, or the amount in my cheque account. I have no right to the ownership of my vehicle, my house, even my marriage and my children. It all belongs to God. If it all belongs to God, how can I return to God what already belongs to Him? It does not make sense to approach life in this way. The way Petro and I approach life is from the foundation, the truth, the reality that all we have belongs to God, and that we are just a channel, a conduit, through which His blessing flows to those around us.

It is a futile exercise to debate the whole theological approach of giving your tithe and offering to the church. The fact that we even think of debating or talking about this, or even differing on this issue, only shows that we do not understand that all we have belongs to God. My approach every month when I sow the twenty percent, is to thank God for allowing me to use the other eighty percent to meet my own needs. Every time I thank God that He has given so much to me and allowed me to be a steward of what He has entrusted to me. The truth is that everything belongs to Him and that is why my wife and I have decided to be generous, without any strings attached. It is not just about the money!

## **Baby steps**

Perhaps you recognise that you need to work on this principle, but don't know where to start. Start with baby steps. Start today. If you are married, discuss this truth with your spouse and come to an agreement of what you will give from today. You might consider yourself poor. Maybe you have only one chicken and a few eggs. What about giving the first egg to God and living on the rest? You may be fortunate to have a lot of possessions, a very large bank account, and have no need for anything in your life. Take stock of what you have and realise that it all belongs to God. Would you be willing to give it away to the Lord? I want to encourage you not to delay any longer; make a commitment today, and start giving what belongs to God.

I have seen in our life and ministry that when we have experienced serious financial needs, we have increased our giving. Usually, the enemy will come and attack our commitment to be generous. He will give us all sorts of bright ideas of why we should not be generous in the darkest moments of our lives.

## **Continue even in the darkest moments**

One such season in our lives happened in 2020. The world was held paralyzed by the Covid-19 pandemic. The world economy was, and still is in shambles and people are losing their jobs. This led to an unfortunate chain of events, where giving to the church was greatly hampered. In turn, our financial partners - churches and individuals - were under increased financial pressure and it was no surprise when some of our partners indicated that they could not keep up with their

financial commitment towards us and the ministry. By the middle of 2020 we had already lost twenty five percent of our monthly income. It did not look good and we came under increased pressure to reconsider our personal giving. Besides, we reasoned, the Lord would surely understand!

As Petro and I prayed and discussed this, we felt challenged to keep to our monthly commitments and cut back in other areas of our life. We decided to make personal sacrifices instead of cutting financial support to missionaries we personally support. We kept on giving our twenty percent.

By the grace of God, new financial partners joined our ministry and some who could afford it increased their giving. We were blessed to see that by the end of 2020, we had regained all the losses from that very difficult year. What's more, for the first time in years, we closed the year with a surplus that could be carried over to the following year. This was unusual and it happened in the most difficult year we had ever experienced.

This is such a strong testimony of how God continued to provide, even in the times we experienced a loss in financial support. I do believe that our commitment not to cut back on our giving, directly resulted in God moving in the hearts of individuals to increase their giving and come on board as new financial partners.

*It is not possible to outgive God.*<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> <https://billygraham.org/devotion/we-cant-out-give-god/>

The natural reaction is to guard what we have for a coming ‘rainy day’. However, when you increase your giving during the dark days, you send

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In our lives, when the pressure has increased, we increased our giving as well.

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a very clear message to the powers that be, that you will not be ruled by finances. In our lives, when the pressure has increased, we increased our giving as well. Every time we have seen that God comes through in ways we could never have thought possible.

### **A generous ATM**

Some years ago, during a time that we spent in South Africa, we were very low on finances in our bank accounts. I remember how one afternoon I went to an automatic bank dispenser to withdraw the last money from our bank account. As I punched in the numbers, I asked the Lord to provide mercifully in the needs that we had. He had done it so many times in the past and I knew it was only a matter of time before we would see the financial breakthrough that we needed.

As the slot of the machine opened to push out the few banknotes that I needed, my eyes widened as I saw how thick the pack of notes was! I immediately grabbed this pack of money, put it in my pocket, took my card and briskly walked back to my car and locked the doors. I took this pack of notes out of my pocket and started counting. My surprise, or should I say my panic was huge when I realised that the bank had mistakenly given me 3,000 US dollars! I knew that I did not have that amount of money in my account. I started the car and quickly dashed back to my house to share this news with Petro.

Because I was expecting the bank to take money back from me, I thought it better to be proactive, and I called them immediately to tell them the details of their error. The person on the other side on the phone listened attentively, punched in the numbers in the computer system, only to inform me that there was no record of this transaction at that particular automated machine. Even though the person wanted to help me, it was not possible because it was not recorded.

In complete surprise, I put down the phone. I could only thank God for His provision. This kind of incident never happened again. In the years that passed, I've often thought it would be nice if the Lord would do this again! Understand that God is able to use whatever means to bless, provide and take care of you. If God could give me money that was not in my bank account and of which the bank had no record, how much more can He do to supply the needs that you have! We can never outgive God; we can never deplete the resources that God has got stored up for us.

Let us give with great joy and confidence knowing that God will always provide.

### **Making it practical**

So where do I start? Perhaps you are stirred by the stories in this chapter or you are encouraged to step out in faith and try this in your own life. Perhaps the Holy Spirit has moved your heart to start giving like you have never done before. I hope this will be the result of this chapter.

Here are some suggestions for you to consider as you 'step out on the water':

## THRIVE

1. **Pray** - If you have been someone who has not done this before, ask the Lord to help and guide you. Perhaps you need to repent of keeping back from God what was rightly His. This is a good place to start. The Lord knows our insecurities and the sins in our hearts, and He understands.
2. **Scripture** - Study the Bible on this subject. There are many portions of Scripture that can strengthen your faith as you start on this journey of generosity. Meditate on these verses and take a fresh look at the verses that I shared earlier in the chapter.
3. **Battle** - The battle is real! As you step out to increase your financial generosity, you will come under increased pressure. This is a spiritual battle. You will experience resistance, but press on - the Lord will give you the victory.
4. **Take stock** - Take stock of what you have been giving. Do the exercise as mentioned earlier in the chapter. What have you earned and what have you been giving? Be honest.
5. **Baby steps** - Start to give according to your faith. Stay committed and evaluate every year.
6. **First fruit** - Be committed to give the first fruit and not the leftovers. If you have already been giving, this would be a good place to start and stay committed to giving to God what belongs to Him.

*Be generous for it is the right thing to do.*

**Reflection:**

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1. Write down in your own words a definition of generosity.
2. In which areas of your life are you challenged to be more generous? Make a short list and then pray over these points.
3. Look at your annual income and financial giving: how can you increase your own giving?



## CHAPTER SEVEN

# BELIEVE IN OTHER PEOPLE

The first time I met Hussein I felt reluctant to engage with him. He was in his late twenties, had dark skin and raven black hair like only the Turks have. He was neatly dressed and had not shaved for at least one week, a very normal occurrence with Turkish men. Shaving is seen more as a weekly action than a daily activity.

### **Cursed by Allah**

Hussein had a disability due to complications at his birth. Doctors noticed his disability too late to help him. He had a scissored gait causing his feet to scrape the floor every time he walked.

His shoes and feet were always covered in dust. He did not move fast. If you wanted to walk with Hussein, you needed a lot of patience. There are two main streams of Islam within the Muslim religion in Turkey. The more conservative stream is known as *Sunni*. They see themselves as a pure form of Islam keeping to the five pillars of Islam. They dutifully attend mosque for prayers and regard the Quran as their only teaching on knowing God.

Then there is a smaller branch of Islam known as the Alevi stream. This is a more mystical side of Islam: Alevites need not attend a mosque; they congregate in small groups in houses and celebrate their religion

with songs and teachings by one of the elders in their group. This is the group of Islam that Hussein belonged to.

*In the Muslim faith, to be born with a disability is a sign of God's punishment and judgment on the family.* Disability is frowned upon and someone who has a disability is assumed to have been punished by God. It is commonly thought that such a person must be a terrible sinner, or that his family has sinned gravely, which is why God has punished them with a disability.

Whenever Hussein went out on the street, his very presence would shout out to everyone that he had been punished by God and that the curse of God was upon him. This stands in stark contrast to the traditional greeting with which Muslims would greet one another, the well-known “*Salaam aleikum*” meaning the peace of God upon you. In Hussein’s case, this had been replaced with judgement and ‘the curse of God is upon you’.

### **Accepted by Jesus**

It is therefore no surprise that Hussein felt like a reject in society. He was very disillusioned with Islam and decided that there is no God. He identified himself as an atheist. This did not mean that he stopped seeking after God. One day as he was paging through the daily newspaper, he saw an advertisement inviting him to order a free copy of the New Testament from Istanbul. The next day Hussein wrote to the office of the Bible correspondence course in Istanbul asking for a free copy of the New Testament. Two weeks later the New Testament arrived, and Hussein started reading through it. He was so captivated

by this new message of love and hope for eternal life through Jesus Christ, that he could not stop reading the New Testament.

When he finished reading the New Testament in the privacy of his room on fifteen December 2002, Hussein knelt next to his bed and prayed that God would forgive him of his sins and he invited God, through Jesus Christ, to indwell his heart. I know this because I saw the date that Hussein wrote on the first page of his little New Testament. Hussein had never met any other Christian and there, all by himself, he committed his life to Jesus. I met Hussein a few months later after we moved to Malatya. He was one of the contacts who asked for a visit from a Christian. Part of my ministry at that stage was to follow up on contacts who showed an interest in knowing more about Jesus.

### **What happened to trust?**

We live in a day and age that mutual trust has become anovelty. It is very difficult for people to trust one another.

The reason for this might differ from person to person and maybe we are discouraged from trusting other people because of past hurts. Possibly it is just the way that we were brought up by our parents, who constantly reminded us, "...do not talk to strangers..." Of course, this would also imply to not trust strangers.

I did not differ much from this traditional approach towards strangers. The first time that I met Hussein in Malatya in south-eastern Turkey, I had some misgivings about him. Our family had just moved into this city to start a new church plant project. We were the first ever modern-day missionaries in this totally unreached city of eight

hundred thousand people. We felt like pioneers, and indeed we were pioneers. We were breaking new ground in a city that was dark and veiled by Islam. A very conservative branch of Islam was firmly rooted in the city of Malatya.

### **We want to believe**

The story of Hussein intrigued me. I was blessed by his childlike faith in God. Because of our belief that people are the image-bearers of God, and that we should trust and love them as God loves them, Petro and I opened our lives to Hussein. We decided that we would believe in Hussein. We wanted to be part of God's plan to bless him. Everyone around Hussein believed that he was walking under the curse of God, but we knew that God loved him and wanted to bless him.

On several occasions, Petro would nurse his feet when he came to visit us. We gave him new shoes and took care of him. Later I employed him in my literature distribution company. I gave him a job and a responsibility to take care of our customers in the whole region. Hussein could not be happier: finally, someone had given him a chance and believed in and valued him. This completely changed his life. We saw the power of transformation in someone's life when we decided to trust and believe in him. Hussein was a classic example of someone who needed other people to believe in him. We managed to raise enough finances for Hussein to undergo an operation so that he could recover more mobility in his legs.

This operation was a huge success and with the aid of a walking stick, he could move much faster and with less pain after the surgery.

The meeting with Hussein transformed our lives and it also helped the life of Hussein and his family. This is a direct result of trust, a willingness to believe in someone and to give someone a chance.

### **Someone believed in me**

As a young police officer I was given the least important cases to investigate and prepare for court hearings. My responsibility as a crime scene investigator meant that I worked very closely with the detectives who were assigned to the different cases. As a new trainee, you would be exposed to a variety of crime scenes, and as your confidence and experience developed, the commanding officer would trust you with more serious crime scenes. My role as a crime scene investigator was to collect evidence, document the crime scene and present this as best as I could to the detective, and later the court.

My commanding officer was a lieutenant who gave me a very hard time. Sometimes I felt that he had no mercy on me. He would relentlessly grind me to do the best I could every time I visited a crime scene. If I did a job that was not on standard, he would send me back to do it again. After my initial two years of preparation and training in this special investigation unit of the South African Police Force, a day that started like any other, turned out to be one of the watershed moments in my career.

The normal buzz in the office was not different on this particular day. A telephone call came in and my commanding officer called me and told me to prepare to go out to a multiple homicide case. He was to accompany me and as we prepared and gathered our equipment to

go to the scene, he turned to me and said, "...this is your case." This meant that I was to be the responsible person, the lead person in this investigation. I was overwhelmed! This was my moment to prove that I could do it. The crime scene was horrific. A jealous husband had murdered his wife and her lover in their bedroom using a bread knife, while their six-year-old son was hiding in the next-door room. It was a gruesome scene. I did what I had to do and collected the evidence.

In the following weeks, with the help of the detective, I meticulously prepared the case to present it to the court.

My commanding officer was very impressed with my quality of work. I felt exhilarated! Finally, someone believed in me enough to give me responsibility. I did not disappoint. I lived up to his expectations, and showed that I could produce the high quality of work required in my unit. My commanding officer commended me on the fine work that I presented, and I felt like I was walking on "cloud nine."

This incident always remained with me. It was because someone believed in me and trusted me, that I could prove I was capable and worthy of their trust. How much more should I not live a life where I trust other people? In our years of ministry, this was one of the principles that Petro and I decided to live by. Within the Turkish culture there is not a lot of trust. In general people are very reluctant to trust one another. Suspicion is widespread, and conspiracy theories are the order of the day.

### **To trust or not to trust**

It is not unusual to find this lack of trust even within a family. People are usually deceived into believing Muslims trust one another

unconditionally. As someone who has lived among Muslims for more than three decades, I can confirm that there is little trust among Muslim people.

This is not very different to the lack of trust we find in our normal day-to-day life. In our ministry, we have decided \_\_\_\_\_  
to trust. This might sound naive, but we are very \_\_\_\_\_  
aware of the challenges and difficulties that this \_\_\_\_\_  
kind of approach opens up. Whenever a Turk \_\_\_\_\_  
walked through our doors, either at the office or \_\_\_\_\_

In our ministry,  
we have  
decided to trust.

our home, we wanted that particular person to know and feel that we trusted and believed in him. It was not unusual to be presented with a variety of stories as to the intention of their interest in the gospel.

In our work among Turkish people, we found that many Turks showed an interest in Christianity because they believed it would give them a foreign passport, job opportunity, or even a foreign wife to marry. This would be their ticket out of Turkey! If this was not their rationale there was a perception that foreign missionaries, like us, had a huge resource of finances that they could tap into to address their own financial needs. It was not unusual to be asked for money, a job, or even a foreign passport.

Turks also assume that they will not be trusted, which resulted in them spinning stories to gain our trust and to come across as genuine. When we met a new Turkish contact, we did not want to convey a feeling of mistrust. We wanted that person to experience that we believed in what they were telling us. We wanted this new contact to experience our trust.

We were very aware of the fact that we might get hurt when we trusted in this way, but for us, it was important to convey a hundred

percent trust. There were enough people in their environments who did not trust them, and we wanted to be different. We wanted to be Jesus to them. We wanted them to know that they could be honest and be themselves when they were with us. This also meant that we trusted them.

### **What is your number?**

I believe that people can sense your attitude towards them within the first few seconds that you encounter them. I decided whenever I met someone new to superimpose the number ten on their face. Of course, this is not a physical number written on a piece of paper that I stick to their face! It is all make-believe. When I talk about the number ten it means that on a scale of one to ten, I have decided to give you a ten, the best rating I can give you. The number one on this scale would mean that I loathe you as a person, I do not like you and I do not want to spend time with you. Ten would mean that I believe you are a wonderful person, you are someone that I like to be with and want to get to know better.

When I meet someone new, I have decided to treat this person as a ten. This person is someone special, someone I like and want to spend time with. I show my interest in this person by giving them my

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I believe that people can live upto the expectation others have of them.

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full attention when we meet. I value this person and will make sure that they feel valued.

I believe that people can live up to the expectation others have of them. If I give

you my trust, the responsibility is yours to live up to it. I give you the ball to play with. If you are going to drop the ball it was not because I did not trust you. It asks for an act of faith to put that kind of trust in someone you do not necessarily know. Yes, it can be a disappointment, of which I have experienced many.

*We are all flawed and imperfect, but when someone calls out the best in us, we often rise to that higher standard.* John Maxwell<sup>120</sup>

People can indeed hurt us emotionally. People can throw away the trust that we have in them, and step away from us.

### **You will get hurt**

I knew my co-worker Eric for many years as we laboured together planting churches in the south-east of Turkey. My friend Eric and his family lived in the city of Tarsus, the birthplace of Paul. There were two small communities of Turkish Christian believers that regularly gathered in this community. One day I received a call from Eric asking me to meet with him, and we arranged a meeting in one of the tea gardens in the city center of Tarsus. There in the beautiful lush shades of multiple oak trees, Eric waited for me with a young Turkish man. It was the first time that I had met Levent, with his very dark complexion.

For some unknown reason, I did not feel comfortable about Levent. I decided not to give in to my impression and tried my best to convey an attitude of trust and interest. Eric wanted me to meet Levent, who had

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<sup>120</sup> <https://danreiland.com/10-great-relationship-principles-ive-learned-john-maxwell/>

recently committed to following Jesus, because he believed that Levent could help me in my business. I had recently established a distribution company and I was focusing on the distribution of the Bible and other Christian literature throughout the east of Turkey. The ministry was growing and expanding fast, and I needed help.

Eric knew that I was looking for more help. To maintain our contacts and clients, I needed young locally-based Turkish men who would be willing to travel throughout the south-east of Turkey to follow up on our clientele and maintain the orders that clients would place to receive new Christian literature. Levent did not particularly have any experience in this area and was a new believer, but because I knew Eric and trusted his judgement, I decided to give Levent the benefit of the doubt and employed him as part of the team that would take care of our clients.

In the following weeks, as Levent became part of the team and received some training, I got to know him better and discovered that he came from a broken background and from a very conservative line of Islam. He was experiencing a lot of pressure from his family because he had decided to follow Jesus. This only encouraged me to spend more time with Levent to help him grow in his faith. As the months went by, my trust towards Levent grew deeper and I entrusted him with more responsibility. Levent never disappointed. This of course reinforced my trust towards him resulting in me giving him more responsibility. After a few years of us working together, we moved to another city in Turkey to establish a new branch office and to start with a pioneer church planting project in the city of Malatya. Initially, my teammate in Mersin took charge of the office we established. When my teammate

departed from Turkey, I decided that Levent would be the ideal person to manage that office.

I was convinced that after two years of training, discipling, and walking with Levent, I could trust him with the responsibility of managing one of our offices. This turned out to be a huge mistake! As soon as Levent was on his own, he started to wreak havoc within the company. He would not pay the bills. Eventually, electricity was cut off because it was not paid.

During my visits to the office, I would not realise anything untoward, because Levent arranged for an extension cable to run through the window to the office of a neighbouring company, from where he would secretly tap electricity and give me the impression that there was electricity in our office. Levent subsequently started to threaten our clients and customers with telephone calls, and this caused an unfortunate chain of events that eventually led to our deportation from Turkey.

After investigation and the subsequent murder of my friends many years later and the court cases that followed, it turned out that Levent was a secret informant for the security police. He had been an informant since the day I took him on board in our company. Levent knew all the inner workings of our operations, was part of our Bible studies and discipleship group, teachings, and training and was therefore a constant stream of information to the local authorities.

When I first met Levent, I placed a number ten on his forehead and decided that I would believe in him and give him a chance. Unfortunately, he did not live up to this responsibility. Levent decided not to walk in the trust that I gave him. Although I believed in him, he did not believe in himself.

I share this story with you because there might be an error of thinking that all is going to be fine every time we decide to trust someone. Reality shows a very different story. When we live a life of believing in other people we may very well be disappointed, but this is the exception to the rule and not necessarily the norm.

### **The wounds are real**

However, this is not for me to decide. This is for the person to whom I give my trust to decide. I don't want to be a blockage, a hindrance in the potential of someone else.

My dream is to help other people to achieve all that God has in store for them.

Under no circumstances do I want to block what God wants to do in the life of someone else. As far as it depends on me, my commitment is to help other people achieve this in their lives.

Many people I've met tell me that they have decided to never trust anyone ever again. If I probe a little deeper, I discover that this person was hurt by someone in the past. I think one of the most painful betrayals that one can experience is when your spouse is unfaithful to you. A broken marriage is no doubt one of the most devastating things that can happen in anyone's life. It destroys trust.

This is possibly the most intimate trust, and when it is broken it cuts very deep and leaves a big scar. Many people walk around with these open, untreated wounds that cause them to never trust again. Alternatively, you may have been betrayed by a business partner. You

may have experienced a very real financial loss because of the betrayal of a good friend.

I have been there too! I have been betrayed not by a business partner or a spouse, but by fellow Christian believers whom I trusted. This kind of betrayal goes deep and can damage one for life. If you are carrying a scar from a betrayal, I hope and pray that you can find healing and encouragement to trust again.

### **Rebuilding trust**

I am running the risk of creating an impression that it is acceptable to be a punching bag. When trust is broken, it is possible to repair it. The first step would be to ask for, and also to give, forgiveness. As believers and followers of Jesus Christ, we are aware that we need to forgive as the Lord Jesus has forgiven us.<sup>121</sup>

Forgiveness is something that can be offered and can be accepted in an instant. It is a matter of **choice**.

You can choose to forgive someone for whatever indiscretion was done towards you or somebody else. You can also decide to ask for forgiveness when it is needed. This act can be swift if you let it be.

Trust, on the other hand, is something that needs time to develop. The issue of forgiveness and trust should not be confused. Forgiveness is instant; trust takes time. It is quite possible that in certain situations, trust might never be rebuilt.

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Forgiveness is instant; trust takes time.

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<sup>121</sup> Ephesians 4:32, Matthew 6:14, Colossians 3:13, Matthew 18:21-22, Psalm 86:5, 1 John 1:9.

Do not be hard on yourself in these situations. It takes time to rebuild trust; however I would encourage you to be immediate in forgiving. In my encounters with the Turks, I have always decided to give the person in front of me the benefit of the doubt. I wanted to extend trust. However, when this trust was broken I was quick to forgive but needed time and space to trust again. In some cases, such as with Levent, trust was never restored. We ran out of time and Levent had no desire to mend the relationship.

### **Do not block potential**

When we do not believe in other people, we are blocking potential that is stored up in our fellow human beings. I am always encouraged by the attitude of Jesus Christ Himself. When we look at the people that Jesus surrounded Himself with, we see that this is a most unlikely group to present the message of the Kingdom of God to the world. As far as I am concerned, I would not have selected this group of people to be my disciples. I would have gone for more educated, influential and successful people.

We see that the approach of Jesus is very different. He calls ordinary people to follow Him and become His disciples. These are men that perhaps did not have any formal education: fishermen, craftsman, and even tax collectors.

They were not necessarily the cream of the community of the day, but still Jesus selected this group of people to walk, fellowship and be taught by Him for three years.

Jesus called Judas Iscariot to be part of this group of twelve disciples. Judas had a very unique responsibility in this group, he was

responsible for the day-to-day financial management of the ministry of Jesus. If anyone wanted to give finances to Jesus and His ministry, Judas received it. If the group of disciples needed accommodation or food, Judas arranged and paid for it. In today's terminology, he was the bookkeeper, the accountant, the treasurer of Jesus' ministry. He had access to a very important commodity, finances.

Yet, although Jesus knew what was in the heart of Judas, Jesus decided to trust him with this very important role.

If you are familiar with the New Testament, you will know how this story ends. Judas betrays Jesus for an amount of money, giving up the one who loved and trusted him. He turns his back on Jesus. Unfortunately for Judas, it did not end well: he died by committing suicide.

I'm always intrigued by how Jesus decided to trust Judas. He was God Almighty who knew the heart of every man, and most certainly He knew that Judas was going to betray Him. However, we never see Jesus taking away the responsibility that He gave Judas. He never judged Judas for what he was about to do or become. Judas had the confidence and trust of Jesus. The responsibility was on the shoulders of Judas to live up to the trust that Jesus bestowed on him.

I am convinced that if Jesus did not believe that Judas had the potential to develop into this trust, He would never have entrusted this responsibility to him. Yet, Jesus trusted Judas, although He knew that He was to be betrayed by one of His own. It is so easy for us not to trust other people. We believe that we might get hurt and consider this sufficient reason not to open our hearts to potential hurt. When we

look at the life of Jesus, we are challenged by what Paul writes to the Philippians, saying that we should have the same mind and attitude as that of Christ.<sup>122</sup> This speaks strongly and directly to me, challenging me to display the same trust and confidence towards people around me because Jesus loves and trusts them.

### **We are all guilty**

We read in the New Testament that the world is under the judgement of God because of sin. All of us stand guilty before God - the letter of Romans clearly states that all have sinned and we have all fallen short of the glory of God.<sup>123</sup> We deserve judgment, we deserve death.<sup>124</sup> Because of this predicament, Jesus came to make a way for us to be reconciled with God. The work that Jesus Christ did on the cross, and His resurrection from death, created a path for every human being to stand in a right relationship with God.

As believers, we are in the fortunate place right now where we can stand before God without condemnation. It is because of Jesus Christ that we have been set free from the power of sin and the guilty judgement that was on us. In the letter to the Romans, Paul writes that if we have faith in Jesus, if we stand in a personal relationship with Jesus, God looks at us with eyes of love, compassion and care instead of judgement. When God looks at us as human beings, He looks at us through the eyes of His son Jesus Christ, and this frees us from judgement.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Philippians 2:5.

<sup>123</sup> Romans 3:23.

<sup>124</sup> Romans 5:8.

<sup>125</sup> Romans 6:23.

I find it intriguing that so many fellow Christians who confess that they have a personal relationship with God, see themselves as having the right to judge other people.

Many times, we Christians make the mistake of judging our neighbour instead of loving our neighbour.

When someone approaches us that we do not know, it is very easy for us to be hesitant and reluctant to trust them. When we look at the life of Jesus, we see someone who decided to love and trust His fellow human beings. Even Judas, the same Judas who had a very special responsibility of taking care of the finances, was trusted by Jesus.

How dare we see ourselves as having the right to judge those whom we meet? Anyone who does not stand in a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ is already under the judgement of God.<sup>126</sup> Even more so, I as a Christian have no right to judge such a person. My assignment is to love; it is God's business to judge. If I would love and trust more, I might just be the catalyst in the life of a non-believer

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My assignment is to love; it is God's business to judge.

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that brings them into a relationship with God, where they will be free from judgement and reconciled with God through Jesus.

### **Will you trust again?**

I have seen the fruits of believing in other people. Although there have been moments of pain and disappointment, the moments of blessing,

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<sup>126</sup> John 3:16.

growth and fruit far outweigh the pain. Perhaps you are now ready to embark on this journey of trusting other people again, but there might be a hindrance that you don't know how to overcome.

*When you believe in someone, it helps them find an inner strength they didn't know they had. It strengthens them emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. And it helps them achieve their potential.*

Bob Proctor<sup>127</sup>

I want to take a moment and look at how we can overcome this hurdle of mistrust. When we do not trust there is usually a reason for it. In your past experiences you may have been disappointed by someone that you trusted, and you have been hurt to a degree that you promised yourself you would never trust again. You made a promise that you are bound to. You need to break the bondage this causes and step out of this mode and begin to trust again.

To trust again we need to first forgive. If I am correct in my assumption that you cannot trust because you have been hurt in the past, it means that you have to stop and look back into your past to the moment that you were hurt. Perhaps this was caused by a spouse who was unfaithful, or a good friend, or a business partner who inflicted financial damage on you. You need to forgive without compromise to enable yourself to move forward. There can be no healing until you decide to forgive.

May I encourage you to take a piece of paper and write down the names of the people that may have hurt you in the past? There may be

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<sup>127</sup> <https://www.proctorgallagherinstitute.com/18128/the-power-of-believing-in-others>

only one name or perhaps many names of people that inflicted pain on you because they did not keep their word or promise. You will forever be a slave to those names if you will not forgive.

As God forgave you through Jesus Christ and reconciled you with Himself through Jesus Christ, you must forgive those who hurt you and caused you pain. The Bible is very specific in Matthew chapter six that we should forgive. It is clear here that we can only ask for forgiveness for ourselves as we forgive those who have wronged us.

This is a profound statement in the New Testament, a statement that we often just glance over. This statement implies that if you do not forgive those who committed a wrong against you, you will not be forgiven the sins that you committed against God. I do not know about you, but I do not want to be in a position where God tells me, sorry my friend, I

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There can be no healing until you decide to forgive.

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cannot forgive you, for you have not forgiven someone else yet. I want to be forgiven and reconciled with God at any cost. I do not want to spend a single moment of my life alienated from my Heavenly Father. For me to walk in this intimate personal relationship with my Heavenly Father I need to forgive those who have committed wrong against me.

It is therefore important that you look at the list of names that you have written down and that you forgive each of these people for everything they did to you. Indeed, you might not feel like forgiving them, but I want to encourage you that it is not about the feelings you hold on to, it is about obedience to God. Articulate forgiveness; the feeling and the emotion will follow.

It might be something that you need to repeat a few times until that reality sinks deep into your spirit. The person that you are forgiving may

not even be alive today. May I encourage you to continue to forgive that person even if that person is not able to hear you or even face you? In forgiving the person who caused you hurt, you are stepping away from being a slave to that person. You are being freed to live your own life in Jesus Christ.

This will set you on a new course that will enable you to believe in other people again. The next time you meet someone new, put a ten on their face and you will start to believe in that person. You will give them a chance, you will be willing to be vulnerable because you know that Jesus Christ was willing to be vulnerable, even though He knew what was going to happen. As a disciple and follower of Jesus, you will live and walk in obedience to His example.

### **Making it practical**

I appreciate that you might be reluctant to believe in other people. I want to encourage you to consider the following steps as you journey into deeper trust towards those around you:

1. **Consider the Word** – Take a moment to meditate on the different Scriptures where Jesus trusted His new disciples and where Paul encourages us to have the same attitude as that of Jesus. The Bible is clear in commanding us to love our neighbour. If we love we will trust as well.
2. **Make a list** – As you consider your attitude towards trusting and believing in other people, identify certain people in your life who destroyed your trust. Write down their names on a list.

## BELIEVE IN OTHER PEOPLE

3. **Forgive** - Once you have identified those who broke your trust, pray through this list and forgive each one in the name of Jesus, for the hurt that was caused because of the breakdown of trust.
4. **What is your number** - Would you be willing to place the number ten on the next person that you see? Start by giving that person the benefit of the doubt and make them feel important. Decide to believe!

When you decide to believe in other people, it will bring new people into your life. These people will become a blessing to you. In my life I have lived by the commitment to believe in other people. I want to give people I meet the trust that they deserve. I want to allow them to be everything that God intended for them to be. I do not want to block God's plans in the life of someone I've just met.

**Reflection:**

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1. Is it easy for you to trust other people? Why?
2. Is there anyone that you need to forgive who broke your trust and hurt you in the past?
3. How does the attitude of Jesus towards Judas and also towards Peter, both of whom betrayed Him, influence you?





# EPILOGUE

We have come to the end of this book. I hope that the journey has been a blessing to you.

I trust that you have been encouraged to take the time to write down and clarify the vision that God has for your life. I know that this takes some work, but it will help you to stay the course for the rest of your life. You will not be thrown around by the storms of life that you will surely encounter.

Your vision will help you to turn your eyes to God as He is the only source that can help you fulfil a godly vision.

As you journey on this path you will be challenged by the status quo of the situation around you. May you have the courage and the understanding as to what role God wants you to play in challenging the status quo. Do not ignore those issues which God wants you to change. Have courage and go forward.

The problems you will encounter may discourage you on your journey. Do not be intimidated by this. Let the problems you face energize you. Let them fill you with a passion to step closer to God. Let your attitude towards your problems stand as a testimony to the faithfulness of God. He comes through every time in His own way. May your attitude take you to greater heights.

Do not forget to take care of yourself. If you really love your neighbour, you will love yourself first. Spend time with God, learn to hear His voice and obey that what He commands you to do. Take care of your body for it is the vessel on this earth that takes you where you need to work for God.

Never stop learning.

Value your relationships as you journey towards the destiny of God for your life. Believe in other people. Be the change agent of your environment. Jesus has invited us to be the extension of His body here on earth.

Be generous with that which God has entrusted to you. You will never be able to outgive God. It all belongs to Him. Share what you have even in the difficult times and do it with a heart full of joy.

I know, if you would follow and apply these principles you will make an impact wherever you are. But do not stop here. This is your moment to identify your own principles; write them down share them and start living by them.

The world is hungry for honest, vulnerable, godly people. People who demonstrate a total commitment to God and who can make an impact on the world.

This is what we have been called to, to glorify God in and through our lives. As we do this, it is God Himself, through His Son Jesus, that will change the world.

*May your life be impactful.*





# Making the most important <sup>128</sup> decision in your life

Have you felt the tug of God on your heart? Becoming a Christian is one of the most important steps you will take in your life. Part of becoming a Christian means understanding that everyone sins. The Bible says the price or penalty for sin is death. Read on to discover what the Bible teaches about becoming a Christian and what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

## **Salvation Begins With God**

The call to salvation begins with God. He initiates it by wooing or drawing us to come to Him.

John 6:44: *“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”*

Revelation 3:20: *“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in.”*

## **Human Efforts Are Futile**

God desires an intimate relationship with us, but we cannot obtain it through our own efforts.

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<sup>128</sup> Fairchild, Mary. “What the Bible Says About Becoming a Christian.” Learn Religions. <https://www.learnreligions.com/how-to-become-a-christian-701019>.

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Isaiah 64:6: *“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags....”*

Romans 3:10-12: *“....There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”*

### **Separated by Sin**

We have a problem. Our sin separates us from God, leaving us spiritually empty.

Romans 3:23: *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*

It is impossible for us to find peace with God through our own efforts. Anything we try to do to obtain God’s favor or gain salvation is worthless and futile.

### **A Gift From God**

Salvation, then, is a gift from God. He offers the gift through Jesus, His Son. By laying down His life on the cross, Christ took our place and paid the ultimate price, the penalty for our sin: death. Jesus is our only way to God.

John 14:6: *“Jesus told him, ‘I am the way, the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.’”*

Romans 5:8: *“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

### **Respond to God’s Call**

The only thing we must do to become a Christian is respond to God’s call.

### **Still wondering how to become a Christian?**

Receiving God’s gift of salvation is not complicated. The response to God’s call is explained in these simple steps found in God’s Word:

1) **Admit you are a sinner and turn away from your sin.**

*Acts 3:19 says: “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.”*

Repent literally means “a change of mind that results in a change of action.” To repent, then, means to admit you are a sinner. You change your mind to agree with God that you are a sinner. The resulting “change in action” is, of course, the turning away from sin.

2) **Believe Jesus Christ died on the cross to save you from your sins and give you eternal life.**

*John 3:16 says: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”*

Believing in Jesus is also a part of repenting. You change your mind from unbelief to belief, which results in a change of action.

3) **Come to Him by faith.**

*In John 14:6, Jesus says: “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.”*

Faith in Jesus Christ is a change of mind that results in a change of action - coming to Him.

**4) You may pray a simple prayer to God.**

You may want to make your response to God a prayer. Prayer is simply communicating with God. Pray using your own words. There is no special formula. Just pray from your heart to God, and believe that He has saved you. If you feel lost and just don't know what to pray, here's a prayer of salvation:

*Dear Lord,*

*I admit that I am a sinner. I have done many things that don't please You. I have lived my life for myself only. I am sorry, and I repent. I ask You to forgive me.*

*I believe that You died on the cross for me, to save me. You did what I could not do for myself. I come to You now and ask You to take control of my life; I give it to You. From this day forward, help me to live every day for You and in a way that pleases You.*

*I love You, Lord, and I thank You that I will spend all eternity with You.*

*Amen.*

**5) Don't doubt.**

Salvation is by grace, through faith. There's nothing you did or ever can do to deserve it. It's a free gift from God. All you have to do is receive it!

Ephesians 2:8 says: *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves; it is the gift of God.”*

**6) Tell someone about your decision.**

Romans 10:9-10 says: *“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”*

Welcome into the family of Jesus Christ.





# Your Part in World Missions

Operation Mobilization is an international mission organization with ministries in over one hundred and ten nations of the world. Founded in 1957, the ministry has grown from a handful of students to more than six thousand full-time workers from all over the world.

You may be asking where you, as a Christian, fit into God's plan for the salvation of the world. Here are a few ways in which you can become involved right now!

**You can pray** — Become informed about God's world. Ask for information about missionaries in areas of particular interest to you. Stand before God on behalf of your brothers and sisters on the mission field. Pray for more missionaries to be called and sent to reach the lost for Christ. Don't be surprised if God uses you to answer your own prayers!

**You can give** — God has given you the privilege of being responsible for a portion of His money. Decide how much you may keep for yourself, then use the rest to further God's kingdom. One way is to support foreign mission work.

**You can send** — Look around in your church or community. Seek out another who senses a call to become a missionary, then spur them on and encourage them to further seek God's direction for their life. Adopt missionaries. Give them moral support. Encourage them through letters, tapes or e-mails; let them know that you believe in them and in the work

## THRIVE

God has called them to do. Maybe you are in the position to offer them a place to stay or a car to use while they're on home assignments.

**You can go** — The Great Commission is a call to you, too! You can see the need. Why delay?

Contact us if you want to know more: [www.om.org](http://www.om.org)

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got things all sorted out; until, that is, God chooses to do a bit of his own sorting.

Within a few short years, Martin finds the life he thought he'd always wanted completely changed when, stirred with passion for the spiritually lost people in Turkey, he uproots his little family and heads to a new life in the Middle East.

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