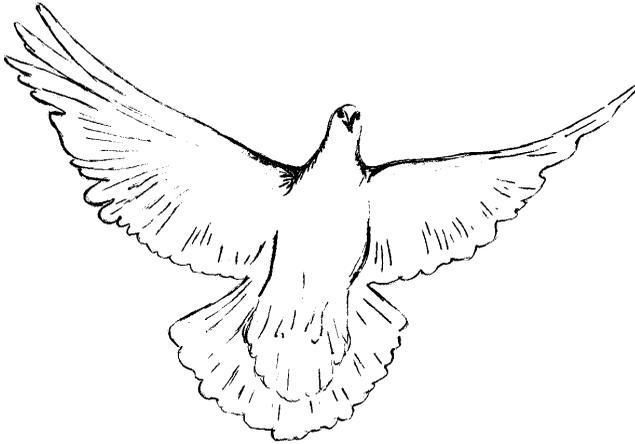


The Spiritual Man



By Simon Coward

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Cover picture by Hanne Thomas.

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Introduction

“The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.”

Romans 8v19

This book has been on my heart for so many years and yet the time had never been right.

I realise now as I look back that I was not ready, that the Lord needed to teach me a lot more lessons about myself and more importantly about Him. As a child of God I had knowledge, but without its application lacked wisdom that a grown up son would have. I assumed I knew more than I thought and needed the Lord to do a greater work in me to prepare me for the task of passing on this message.

Does that mean that I have now made it? Not at all, indeed as I write this I am more aware of my failings than ever before, however God in His grace has given me a glimpse of the direction I need to be going in, He has educated and disciplined me in ways I did not think possible and has proved Himself in my life in ways I would have not believed. It is those glimpses that I hope to share with you in this book.

Not that I have already obtained this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

Philippians 3v12

What do you want?

*"What do you want me to do for you?" "Lord I want to see," he replied.
Luke 18v41*

As Jesus approached Jericho a blind man was sat at the side of the road begging for money so that he could feed himself (Luke 18v35-43). This man was going about his life in the only way he knew how. His problem was obvious, he could not see. As Jesus came along he realised there was a chance of a new life, a life of sight, a life of being able to see the things of this world and he knew it would be life changing. As he cried out many rebuked him, told him to be quiet, to stick to what he was doing, but this man wanted more. Instead of bowing to the crowds wishes he cried out even louder knowing his only hope of sight was in Christ.

So Jesus' question to this man might seem very strange, "What do you want?" Surely it would be obvious but Jesus wanted to hear from the man the desire of his heart. He wasn't asking for money, for bread or provision, he wasn't asking for pity or an easy life, he wanted to see and that sight could only come through Jesus. That sight would also come at a cost, yes it was a free gift, but the cost would be a complete change in his life. No longer could he sit at the side of the road begging, no longer would people pity him and supply his needs. If he could see he would have to work, he would have to take responsibility in the world that he wanted to see.

If we want to be spiritual men and women, very often our biggest hurdle is understanding that we are blind, that if we are honest we cannot see God's ways and that we are often just stumbling around in the dark bumping into things and asking others to help us and show us the way. It's that moment of honesty when we confess that we need help and we want to see, not just for the moment, to enjoy the pleasures of the spiritual life before returning to the old ways of the flesh, we need to have a desire to see and to continue seeing with all the costs and changes that may mean, we need to have our heart set on the Kingdom of God and the Lords ways.

The question we need to ask ourselves is "What do we want?" Is our heart set on things above or on the things of this world? If we are honest what is the priority in our life?

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
Luke 12v34

It's so easy at this point for us to deceive ourselves, to tell ourselves that the Father and His Kingdom are first in our lives when actually the main focus of our lives is on us and the things of this world.

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.
Colossians 3v2

If we truly want to move forward into the spiritual life that God has in store for us through Christ, then we need to set that as the goal for our life and cast aside the things of this world. We cannot serve two masters; we either serve the Lord and follow Him or follow the ways of this world, the desires of the flesh. It comes down to what our heart is set on, is our heart's desire for the Lord greater than our desire for the things of this world because that will steer our course. Is the Lord the treasure we desire, is that what we really want? Many came to Jesus and said they wanted to be His disciples and yet as soon as the Lord tested them they went away. Luke 9v57 - 62 tells us of some of the things that caused men to fall away, some of them don't seem unreasonable requests and in themselves they are not, but in each case the heart, the most pressing desire in the person's life was not the Lord. If we want to walk according to the spirit we need to set our sight on the Lord, put our hand to the plough and keep going making a straight furrow in the soil of our lives.

Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the Kingdom of God."
Luke 9v62

A heart after God?

"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."

Psalm 51v10

We are led by our hearts; The desires of our heart affect our lives and the direction we go in. We will make all sorts of sacrifices to gain the desires of our heart. I recently met a young man with a most incredible camera, it was worth many thousands of pounds and I asked him how he could afford it. He said it was quite simple, he didn't drink or smoke, he didn't go out and he lived with his parents driving an old car. He had set his heart on buying this camera and that was the level of sacrifice he was willing to make to get it. He had been totally single minded in the desires of his heart. For him, that camera was worth more than the sacrifices he had made to gain it.

Sadly as Christians we are often far from single minded towards God, we would like to be spiritual men and women but it's not fully at the centre of our heart, other things pollute our heart and so it is not fully fixed on the Lord and when our heart is polluted so are our lives, we are divided seeking the things of God, but in a way that fits around the desires of the flesh. If we really want to grow in the Lord and His ways, we need to have our heart fixed totally on Him and to start to throw off the things that hold us back.

...let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith...

Hebrews 12v1-2

At this point we have to start to be honest with ourselves, how much do we want to be a spiritual man? At what cost to the flesh? Because there will be a cost. We live in an age of "instant". We want to have some special formula, a simple routine that will instantly get us to our goal. We don't want to put the work in now; we would like to borrow so that we

can have the results now and pay for them later. However with God there are no short cuts, we need to look at the Word of God and do it.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

James 1v22

If we want an example of the true spiritual man then the only perfect example was Jesus and Jesus accepted that there was a cost to doing the Fathers will.

If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

Luke 9v23

Here Jesus is showing us the true way of the spiritual man, it was His way, the way of true worship, not the modern version of worship, of songs sung to the Lord, but the worship of being a living sacrifice. The worship that we find in Romans 12v1, offering our lives, denying ourselves in worship of God. It was the path that Jesus walked:

But made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross.

Philippians 2v7-8

This was the path that Jesus walked; he led the way in showing how we should truly live before the Father. The apostle Paul knew this when he wrote:

Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

1 Corinthians 11v1

Paul knew that Jesus was the true example of a heart after the Father, a true example of how the spiritual life should be lived. That is why Paul didn't call people to follow him, he knew he was not the answer; instead he fixed his eyes on Jesus, and called others to do the same. He looked at

how Jesus lived and died; he looked at the heart of Jesus and could see the heart he wanted.

Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

Matthew 19v21

Jesus is not always easy to follow, there will be a cost to pay, and it's the purification of our hearts. In the tabernacle when gold was used it was not any gold, it was "pure" gold. Gold that had been through the refining fire many times until all the rubbish and impurities had been removed, gold, that as it became pure, became softer and easier to mould. As we allow the Lord to refine us, to remove from our hearts the things that are not of Him, we too, like that gold can be moulded and used by the Lord.

We, like the rich young man in Mark 10v17-31 need to examine ourselves and see what our heart is really set on, we may fool ourselves that our heart is fully set on the Lord because we are obeying certain religious rules and regulations, but how often our real heart desire is for ourselves and the things of this world. The rich young man was happy to obey the commandments that Jesus quoted to him, but Jesus missed one out.

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this, 'Hear , O Israel, the Lord our God the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'"
Mark 12v29-30

The young man was happy to obey all the commandments that didn't affect the true love of his life, his wealth. He had everything right except God was not first in his heart. The first commandment starts with loving the Lord with all our heart. If our heart is not in it then neither will be our soul, mind and strength. They will be following the desires of our heart.

Understanding the Spirit

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Genesis 1v27

It is one thing to have our heart set on being a spiritual man, but if we do not understand what a spiritual man is, how can we become that person? We need to know what we are aiming at.

Let's start by looking at how we are made up. As a person we are made up of body, soul and spirit. It's often hard for us to grasp how they work together and we really need God's revelation, but let us try to break it down into simple parts.

The body is probably the easiest. We have a physical body. It's the bit that interacts with the world around us through our various senses.

The next bit, the soul; In many ways it's the mind, the thinking, the reasoning, our personality, the part that makes us a person rather than a physical machine.

Finally we come to the spirit and in many ways the simplest way to think of our spirit is in the same way we think of our physical body, but instead of it being influenced by the things of this world, it is influenced by the spiritual. In the same way the physical body senses the things of this world, so through the spirit we sense spiritual things.

Although distinct, each part works together and form one individual. We can separate their roles in the same way we can distinguish the different role of our kidneys and liver, but they are part of the single person.

So imagine our lives if we lived solely according to the body. We would be walking along and our body would get hungry. We would then react by brute instinct and get food. It would not bother us if it belonged to someone else, we would just feed the need, the desire of our body, the

flesh. If we wanted sex we would just fulfil our desires with another person with no regard to how they felt or their relationships with others. We would just live our lives fulfilling our desires. Peter describes this type of life in 2 Peter 2v12 *They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct...* They live according to instinct and the ways of the flesh and sadly, the further away from God we go, the more like these brute creatures of instinct we become.

We might think that is a bit extreme, however the truth is often painful. If we live according to the flesh with no desire for the Lord, then that type of life will be the result. It is literally godlessness in our lives. When man died in the Garden of Eden he did not die physically but spiritually. Because he was now spiritually dead he walked according to the flesh losing the spiritual relationship with God. The first thing he recognised was he was naked. Before his spiritual death Adam and Eve walked according to the spirit focusing on their relationship with God. Once spiritually dead the physical instantly started to take precedence in their lives. They recognised their separation from God and tried to hide their spiritual death behind their own works, making clothes from fig leaves. Mankind has spent thousands of years separated from God, often hiding behind good works but still living a life based on the desires of the flesh at the cost of our relationship with God. Romans 1v24-32 sums it up very well.

They are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.
Romans 1v31

Without Christ in our lives that is the way we walk. We seek out the things that please the flesh.

When we become Christians we are born again, not in a physical way, but spiritually. The Holy Spirit enters us and regenerates our spirit. New life is born into us that enables us once again to sense the things of God. Our spirit desires to be fed in the same way that our physical body desires food.

However in the middle sits our soul, the decision maker and it has to decide which one gets the priority. A simple example is when we wake up in the morning. Our body cries out for breakfast while our spirit also cries out for its spiritual breakfast, the Word of God. Which one do we listen to, which gets priority? Is it the spiritual or the physical? If I feed my body I become physically stronger, if I feed my spirit I become spiritually stronger. At this point we see which one rules our life. In this simple example we can see so easily what we are bowing down to and what our priority is. To go without food puts the body in submission to the spirit. We are saying that the spiritual is more important to us than the physical needs of the flesh; our mind is set on the spiritual. That does not mean that we should starve ourselves but it is a matter of priority, is it the spiritual or the physical that takes precedence in our lives?

Once we start to understand these things then we start to understand what is guiding our lives. Are we walking according to our flesh or our spirit?

What is driving our lives?

*So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all of these things will be given to you as well.
Matthew 6v31-33*

Let us start to look at our lives, what are we seeking after, what is it that drives us? Is it the kingdom of God or the things of this world? As Jesus said, the 'pagans' run after the things of this world. Who are the 'pagans'? Those that do not know God and who live according to the flesh, driven by worldly desire.

Let us start by looking at the most simple of things, food! Do we spend more time feeding our spirit or our body? Does it take longer to eat our breakfast than we spend reading scripture in the morning? If physical breakfast takes longer then we quickly see that the flesh has priority over our spirit. We will go out physically strong but spiritually weak.

How much of our day do we spend focusing on the things of this world and the needs of the flesh rather than the things of God? Does God get priority?

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.
Acts 2v42*

The early church led by the Holy Spirit had repented from the ways of the world and turned to the ways of God and here we see the result, a life where they devoted themselves to building up their faith, feeding their spirits through good teaching, fellowship with each other, fellowship with God in prayer and the breaking of bread, remembering always the death of Jesus on the cross. Notice it says they "devoted" themselves to these things. It doesn't say that "when they felt in the mood" they did these things. They devoted themselves, it was their hearts desire to grow in

these things and in the Lord. The spiritual came first and as a result they saw signs and wonders and moves of God in their lives (Acts 2v43). So often we want to skip straight to signs and wonders, we want the things of God but not God Himself. Our desire is to have the blessings of the kingdom without the kingdom life.

When something was devoted to the Lord it was fully given over, it was a sacrifice and that is something that so often in our lives we like the notion of, but the reality is far from our hearts.

Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship.

Romans 12v1

Sacrifice is not easy, but it is following in the footsteps of Jesus who offered His whole life as a sacrifice to the Father. His whole life was about doing the Father's will; Jesus describes it as His food, His spiritual nourishment. Jesus lived a life where His flesh was in total submission to the spirit, it was a life where He literally picked up His cross and followed where the Father led Him.

Sadly in this day and age so many of us now live a half hearted Christian life dominated by the needs of our flesh, instead of our devotion to the Lord showing through sacrifice we pamper it like a spoilt undisciplined child. "I don't feel like it", "I'm too tired," have become the cries of our lives. What is tired and does not feel like it? The flesh or the spirit? Which of these are we following? These things can come as hard truths, but as we ask ourselves these questions we start to see just how much time we spend concentrating on the physical, the flesh, rather than the spiritual, the things of God.

We need to learn to fix our eyes on eternal things (2 Corinthians 4v18), to realise that the things of this world are fleeting and although looking good for the moment, only lead us away from the Lord. In the Garden of Eden Eve saw that the fruit was good for food, pleasing to the eye and good for getting knowledge (Genesis 3v6). She was fooled by the serpent into

chasing after the things of the flesh not realising it would lead to spiritual death, her eyes got dragged from the ways of God. The saddest thing was that God had already provided Adam and Eve with fruit that was pleasing to the eye and good for food (Genesis 2v9). If they had just kept on obeying the Lord they could have continued to live off the fruit of the land. How often do we do the same, chase after short term physical gain to then face long term spiritual loss?

In our lives there should only be one ruler, Christ. He is our example, Christ likeness should be the goal of our lives. Jesus didn't make excuses; He didn't complain to His Father that He was too tired to pray as it had been a busy day of ministry. Instead He made time, He forced His flesh out of bed early and went up on the mountain to pray, to spend time with the Father, to prepare Himself spiritually for what lay ahead.

*Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.
Hebrews 3v1*

*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
Hebrews 12v2*

What are our eyes and thoughts fixed on? What is the desire of our hearts? Is it the Lord or the things of this world?

To fix our eyes means to make an effort, a conscious decision to look to the Lord, to look at the spiritual. It is so easy to drift into the things of this world and take our eyes off the Lord. A simple example of how easy it is to drift is the way we greet each other when we meet. "How are you?" we ask. What is the response we get? It will almost always be a physical response. "I feel good", "I am not too well" or "I have this problem". In all of those answers we have gone straight to the flesh and the conversation then flows into the things and ailments of this world. Our eyes are dragged off the spiritual and on to the physical; we look at the issues of the flesh rather the blessings of the God in our lives. It's a simple

distraction from the Lord but one that is repeated in our lives day after day. Let us always remember that our enemies' goal is to remove Christ as the centre of our lives and instead get us to focus on the things of this world. The Lordship of Christ in our lives is something Satan fears above all else.

Prayer Life part 1

One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.

Luke 6v12

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

Mark 1v35

Prayer is our lifeline to the Father; It is our spiritual communication with the one we love. It is where we share our thoughts, our needs and burdens with the Father and where He then speaks into our life giving us His peace, His joy, His directions, His council and revelation. At least that is what it should be. Let us start by asking ourselves a very blunt question, how much time do we give to the Lord in prayer, how desperate are we to get time alone with the Father?

When I met my wife she worked shifts in a care home, it meant that many days she did not finish work until after 10pm. However, because I loved her I wanted to spend time with her. I would ride my motorbike 8 miles to her house and then walk from her house to meet her from work. To enjoy the 10 minute walk back from her place of work to her home before saying good night and riding back home. It was a lot of effort for a very short time together, but such was my love for my wife that it was worth it. Did it matter that it was late at night? Not at all, it was worth the effort, love makes the effort.

Sadly in this day and age, prayer has been moved out of the centre of the church. In many churches, the prayer meeting has gone and instead we have worship. Singing praises to a God that we cannot be bothered to talk to or listen to. Prayer is about entering the presence of God; it is the way to the Father, our spiritual communion, the relationship for which Jesus died on the cross. The way into the presence of the creator of heaven and earth, yet so often we treat it with contempt and when we treat prayer

with contempt we treat God with contempt. We claim that we love Him, but then we don't have the time for Him. So what are we doing instead?

Our response is that we are busy, that we have other things to do, other things that are more important than communion with the Father! God knows what we have to do in our daily lives, but we need to recognise the things that we do not need to do; the things that take the place of God, be it the television, the internet or just the material things of this world. Are they more important than God? Do we spend more time talking with our friends than with God? Do we spend more time on Facebook than with God? Do we spend all our extra time doing overtime so that we can invest more in the things of this world and so have no time left for God? These things that are taking our time are all worldly, they are all of the flesh, they are not of the spirit. Our flesh has led us into setting them up as idols, be they made of wood, metal or circuit boards, we have set them up as idols because they are more important than God. In themselves they are not sinful, but when they take the place of God they have become our focus of worship. As we have allowed the flesh to lead us instead of the spirit, our focus is dragged off God and onto the things of this world. We may not be bowing down to them but we are certainly putting them in a place of worship.

Jesus had a busy life, He was surrounded by people all the time and He really had to make an effort to get His times of prayer, getting up early, going to bed late, missing out on sleep He was crucifying the flesh and allowing His spirit to lead Him in the ways of God.

Let us be honest, prayer is often not easy. When we try to pray the enemy throws everything against us because he knows that if we pray, if we are in relationship with God, hearing and obeying Him, then we are a mighty adversary in this world; that is why the enemy throws everything at us. Have you noticed that when you try to pray it feels like your mind is invaded by the things of this world? So many things come into our mind to distract us from the Father. Now think about those things invading your mind, how many of them are spiritual and how many are worldly things? It is amazing what enters our minds, the shopping, problems at work, television, the list is endless, however each one is of the flesh. Each one is

there to get us to focus on the physical and not on the spiritual. We often talk about spiritual warfare, but this is a very real example of the battle and how the enemy uses the weaknesses of the flesh against us.

Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Jesus Christ, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.

Colossians 4v12

Once we understand this we can start to take action, we often have to force ourselves to focus back on Jesus and the cross, it's a battle, but it's a battle the Father wants to strengthen us in and help us to win. The question we have to honestly ask ourselves is do we want to win? Do we consider the prize worth training for? Would we rather give up and slump down in front of the television or a good book? Prayer may be a battle, but it is a battle worth winning, when we bring prayer into our lives we bring God into our lives. If prayer is on the outside then so is God, a relationship without communication is not a relationship. Imagine a marriage where a husband and wife do not communicate with each other, it may be a marriage by law, but it's little else. So with us, if we claim to be Christian, a follower of Christ, how are we getting our instruction, how are we communicating with the one that we claim is Lord of our life?

If we do not have time to be with the Lord we are too busy! Something needs to be thrown out of our day. We can moan and say that everything is essential, but if everything is more essential than time with God then can we really claim to be a Christian? It may be a sacrifice to lose something from our lives that we like; maybe it will mean missing our favourite television program or some other part of our day that we keep just for us. That however is the meaning of sacrifice; it is the true act of worship, of bowing the knee to the will of God and putting Him on the throne of our lives.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship.

Romans 12v1

Prayer Life part 2

Even when we get to prayer the battle is not over. The enemy has another clever tactic. Once again he gets us to focus on the flesh, the things in life that are short term and of this world. How often the little prayer life we have is focused totally on our physical needs. There is nothing wrong with praying for our physical needs, but is that the main focus of our prayer lives?

For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.
Matthew 12v34

The desires of our heart shows by the words that come out of our mouth, our words are an outlet of our hearts desires. Many people think that they can change their desires by changing their words, but even if we kept our mouth shut the desire of our heart has not changed, we need to change the desire of our heart, to make God's will the desire of our lives.

When Jesus taught His disciples to pray one of the first things He said was "*Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*" (*Matthew 6v10*). It is so easy to get wrapped up praying for the needs of our physical kingdom that we lose sight of God's Kingdom. Just as Jesus gave His disciples lessons in prayer so we need lessons too. A good example to learn from are the prayers of the apostle Paul.

Let's start by looking at a few of the apostle Paul's prayers.

...our prayer is for your perfection.
2 Corinthians 13v9

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you a Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us

who believe.

Ephesians 1v17-19

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 3v16-19

I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.

Philemon 1v6

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ - to the glory and praise of God.

Philippians 1v9-11

...we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

Colossians 1v9-12

As we look at these prayers we see that they are all focusing on the spiritual. Paul's prayers for his fellow believers did not consist of requests for their health, wealth and happiness. He was seeking for them spiritually, asking God to give them a greater knowledge of Himself so that their

relationship with God would grow and they would live a more Christ like life. Paul knew the priority in the Christian life and that priority is to know God better. As we grow closer to God, so our faith in Him grows, our confidence in his ability to provide grows, but most of all we become stronger in our relationship with Him. Paul wanted to see spiritual growth in the life of believers that would bear fruit and bring glory to the Father.

The other focus of Paul's prayers was for the growth of the Kingdom of God, his desire for boldness for others to share the good news of Jesus as well as boldness and strength for himself to do the same.

Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Ephesians 6v19-20

Paul is asking for the strength and boldness he needs to preach the Word of God. It can be so easy to think of Paul as a bold preacher, however he had learnt to be bold through being in the Lord and that was his prayer, that the Lord would work through him and give him the words he needed. There is no point having church outreach without prayer. If we want God to move in someone's life it needs to be a move of the Holy Spirit in their lives, not us manipulating the flesh. We just need to overcome the flesh and declare His Word as the Lord requires allowing Him to do the rest. We see in this request that Paul is asking to be lifted up above the confines and restrictions of his prison cell. He knew the work that God had called him to and was asking for the strength to finish it, even though it was that message that had landed him in prison in the first place.

If we want the power of God in our lives and in the life of our churches, we need to seek Him in prayer and seek first the things of the Kingdom.

After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. Acts 4v31

Prayer Life part 3...listening

The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

1 Samuel 3v10

To serve the Lord we need to know what He wants us to do and the only way to find that out is to listen to His instruction, the problem is that we are not good listeners. How much of our prayer time is spent talking to God compared to listening? So often I hear Christians say that God does not speak, but I think the problem is at our end, there is something wrong with our ears.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Revelation 3v13

If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.

Mark 4v23

The Lord desires to speak into our lives, but so often we are too busy speaking to listen. If I was able to meet a member of the royal family it is normal protocol for them to speak and ask questions and then for their guest, me, to answer. They speak and are listened to because they are royalty and I as their subject wait my turn. How much more with the King of Kings should we wait for our turn to speak, how we need to hold our tongue and allow the Father to speak into our lives through the Holy Spirit. All too often there is no time in our prayer lives or even in our church services for the Lord to speak, we are far too busy making all the noise and we expect Him to wait in submission to us.

When Samuel was taught to listen to God, he was taught that he was to be the listening servant, to have his ears open ready to hear and then do the will of God as He spoke to him. He lay down in a quiet place away from disturbances so that he could hear clearly what God was saying. He was also willing to wait on the Lord, not to rush things, but wait patiently for Him to speak. Is that the picture of our communication with the Lord?

Sadly we think of prayer as us babbling on to God, telling Him what needs to happen and how it needs to be done. We explain our plans and expect Him to get on and bless them. It starts to raise the question of who is the servant and who is the Lord? Does God need my advice on how to run things? Surely as a servant I am just here to be available to Him when He calls me!

Our prayer life would change as instead of explaining our plans to God we allow Him to explain His plans to us. Then instead of feeling detached from God's plans we would know His will in our lives and the direction He wants us to go in. We would not be relying on others to lead and guide us but on God Himself. Does that mean that we should not listen to others advice, not at all; however we need to be hearing from God for our self. We cannot have a Christian life where we expect others to be going to God for instruction for us all the time. It is so easy to go to a more mature Christian or the Pastor of the church and expect him to have a word of instruction for us. If we are in relationship with God, we need to be going direct to the Father; We need our spirit in communion with the Holy Spirit. We can still check with others to confirm the Word the Lord has spoken to us. Indeed we should, but it should be the Lord's Word into our hearts. That way, when things get tough we know we are following the Lord rather than blaming someone else for their poor advice.

Imagine a marriage where the wife only hears from her husband via a messenger, she never listens to him directly. What kind of marriage would that be, what kind of relationship? Yet for so many of us that is how we try to run our Christian life. The bride of Christ needs to learn to listen to the groom.

If we want to be true spiritual people of God there can be little that is more important than hearing the instruction and teaching of the Lord. If we want to be truly "Spirit filled" then we need to be filled with the teachings and Words of God in our life. The Holy Spirit was given for this purpose.

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you in all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell

you what is yet to come.

John 16v13

So what steps do we need to take to hear God? Do we have that quiet place where we can take time to listen? Maybe it's a room, maybe a walk or a mountainside? Each of us are different and living in different situations, but if we truly want to be led of the Spirit we will make time and find a place. Moses spent 40 days and nights on the mountain waiting on God, but from that time came a set of instructions that would guide Israel for years to come and that still provide instruction to us today. If we really want to see change in our life then the only way is going to be by sitting at the feet of God and listening. There are no short cuts, no time savers, it is a case of fixing our eyes and thoughts on Jesus and giving God the time He needs to speak into our lives.

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Psalms 139v23-24

Prayer - The Spiritual Man

*I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way.
Acts 24v14*

Jesus was the ultimate example of what a spiritual man should be. As the Son of God, He knew the Father better than anyone else in history, yet He still had the need to pray. Jesus is the example we need to follow, if we like Paul claim to be followers of God, following the Way, then we need to understand that the Way is the way of Christ. He is our example, our direction, the physical representation of all that we should aspire to and we see in the life of Jesus that prayer was at the absolute centre of His life. When there was no time for prayer because the day was busy, Jesus made time. He crucified the flesh and got up early to go up the mountain and He missed out on rest and went out late again to find time to be alone with the Father. For Jesus, the Father was everything, to be in the Father's presence was everything He wanted. Not just to petition Him, but to be with Him and to know His will.

*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father
except through me.
John 14v6*

When Jesus died on the cross He made a way for us to come to the Father. For the first time we could come to Him free from the burden of sin. That is what Jesus died for, that we can come to the Father, that we can be in relationship with the Father, yet we ignore Him! Why would we want eternal life with the Father if we do not want to spend time with Him now? If I have no desire for the father now then eternity is going to be a very difficult time because if we cannot be bothered to spend an hour or more with the Father today, then how are we going to cope twenty four hours a day for eternity? Jesus has made a way by His blood on the cross yet we spurn that sacrifice and ignore the way He has made. For us, Jesus is not the way, the Christ like life, the true spiritual man is not the life we want. We need to be honest with ourselves and start to

look at what we are really saying when we cannot be bothered to pray, when we cannot find time for God.

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"

Mark 1v35-37

Here we see Jesus in a very busy period of ministry; People had been bringing the sick and demon possessed until late at night (Mark 1v32) and Jesus had ministered to them. For most of us a good night's sleep would be the order of the day to prepare ourselves for the crowds the following morning. Yet Jesus ignores the crowds and goes straight to the Father. The disciples can see the crowds and think this is it, this is revival, let's start the healing, the laying on of hands, but Jesus, He knew He could do nothing in His own strength and slipped away to spend time with the Father. He did not allow the pressure of ministry or even the pressure of His close friends to remove Him from the presence of God. It's interesting to note that the disciples knew where to go looking for Jesus because they lived with Him day after day they saw His routine, they knew He would be praying somewhere. Sadly, at this time in their lives they did not understand the importance of that time with the Father. For them, they looked at the crowds, the potential congregation, the wonders, the miracles and that was their focus. Jesus through His life was showing them the way, the direction they needed to be going in, not by running to the crowds, but running to the Father.

It is so easy, especially for those in ministry, to be dragged away from our time with the Lord to minister to others. We forget that it is the power of God that ministers to others, God moving in and through us in ways that we do not understand. How easy it is to fall into the flesh, to think that we know more than God, to think that we can build the church through our own efforts.

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his

disciples."
Luke 11v1

It is interesting that this event does not take place until Luke 11. It's about halfway through His ministry and His disciples would have seen Him pray many times when finally, the revelation comes to one of the disciples that this is the centre of the spiritual life of Jesus. The disciples had been with Him over a year by this point when finally they started to understand the way of Jesus. As I look back at my own life I see how often I stepped out in the flesh, action but no prayer. I see the times I have been too busy in the flesh and missed being the spirit led man of prayer I should have been. May the Lord forgive us for throwing aside the way to the Father to spend times entertaining ourselves with the things of this world.

If we truly want to be the spiritual men and women that God wants, then we need to take that route to the Father that Jesus made through His blood on the cross. We can sing Gods praises, we can teach about Him through His Word, but if we don't spend time with Him, what have we become? Have we become those who worship with words, yet our hearts are far from Him? Why would we not want to spend time with the Father if we claim we love Him?

Jesus made the way to the Father for us and He lived as an example of the way, of how we should live.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12v2

The Word of God

*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.
Psalm 119v105*

Let us think for a moment about this verse, what is it that is a guide? "God's Word"! God's Word, His instruction, His ways, they are the things that we need to illuminate the path on which we are walking, to show us where to place our feet and guide us as to where the dangers lie. They are a guide for the immediate future, the situation we are in as well as lighting up what lies ahead. Yet sadly today, the Word of God lies idle. It's as if it is too much trouble to pick it up and read. Instead, we settle for a second hand interpretation of the Word, we read what someone else has written or said rather than going to the Word for ourselves. What a danger we put ourselves in, for we finish up playing a spiritual game of Chinese whispers. The first person hears from the Lord and then passes it on to the second who reinterprets it and passes it on to the third, but with each passing a little is added and taken away. We need to be constantly going back to the original, we need to pick up our Bibles and read them.

The Bible, the inspired Word of God is written down for our daily usage. Sadly, the fact that it is so easily available may be why we treat it almost with disdain. Many years ago I was out on evangelism in Kenya in quite a remote area. In my naivety, I thought I might be the first to preach in that area until I walked up to a small hut to share the gospel with a young man. He quickly welcomed me in and it soon became obvious he was a Christian and quickly the subject turned to the Bible. I asked him about his Bible and he explained he did not have one, but it was OK because there was one in the church and all he had to do was walk over there to read. I asked him where the church was and he took me outside and pointed at a hill many miles away and said the small building on the top was the church; he went there every day to read the Word of God! I felt humbled in his presence.

Today many do not seem to be able to find the time for the Bible, there is time for television, Facebook, Twitter and Youtube, yet the Bible seems to

be stuck on the shelf. Instead we rely on a quick Bible verse in some study notes or sent to us via an email. Spiritual fast food instead of a good well prepared meal.

Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

Joshua 1v8

The Word needs to be central in our lives; It is one of those tests that show us our spiritual health. When I was young my Mother would know when I was sick because I was off my food. So too, we can tell our spiritual health, if we are off the Word, our spiritual food, then we are sick and like a starving person will become weaker and weaker.

Jesus Himself showed us the way; He knew the Word of God. As a youngster He was asking questions about it in the temple (Luke 2v46), as He grew it was obvious He had a full grasp of the scriptures and knew them well. As He was led out into the wilderness in Matthew 4v1-11 Jesus quoted the Word of God at Satan, He knew the truth on which He stood. Again we read:

The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

Luke 4v17

Jesus knew the Word well and although He was the Son of God, He had put time and effort into the studying of the scriptures. If Jesus needed to do it, how much more do we need to read the Word?

It's easy to make excuses, but we can hardly be serious about wanting to be led by the Lord if we will not read His instructions. If we will not eat the food God has put before us how do we expect to grow into strong men and women of God?

Revelation from God

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you a Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

Ephesians 1v17

The Word of God is crucial to our spiritual health and like Jesus showed, it is something we need to have an understanding of, but again the danger is to fall into the ways of the flesh; to treat the study of the Bible as an intellectual exercise rather than a letter from a heavenly Father who is more than willing to explain it's meaning. We need the Holy Spirit to reveal the meaning of God's Word in our daily lives, not only teaching us about the Word, but its daily application into our lives.

If the Bible could only be understood by intellectual study, those who grew most spiritually would all be the most intelligent people. Sadly this is often far from the truth; it is so easy to be led by our intellect, our own ability to learn and understand that blocks the Holy Spirit from being able to reveal things to us as in our pride we think we know what God has not yet explained to us.

But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of this world to shame the strong.

1 Corinthians 1v27

In our pride we believe we are strong and understand the things of God, building up our box of doctrine and placing God in it, limiting Him to what we think He can do and only believing He can work within the box we have placed on Him. In our pride we think we have the ability to learn about and understand God. How easy it is for us to become proud and hard hearted, creating a situation where it becomes very hard for God to reveal new things to us because we already think we know it all. In a sense we stop listening because we think we already know. We need to learn the lessons of James, to come humbly before God and ask Him to give us His wisdom through the Holy Spirit, it means we must be open to being

wrong, open to the idea that we do not know it all, that there is so much more that God wants to reveal to us.

If any man lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

James 1v5

We need to learn that so often, our wisdom and knowledge is not the wisdom of God. It is the wisdom of this world and that far from being led by revelation from God, we are led by the logic and worldly wisdom that we have accumulated over the years.

Revelation from God means that we are going to have to surrender our intellect and humbly come to the Father in prayer with a teachable heart asking Him to explain things including the Word. It also means that we are going to have to listen, to wait on the Lord, something that does not come easily to us in the Western world where we want instant everything. We have lost the ability to wait patiently on the Lord and to wait as long as it takes. So often we are in a rush when God is teaching us patience, a spiritual fruit that is missing in so many of us today. How often in our rush for an answer do we miss the very lesson that God is trying to reveal to us.

"If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."

Mark4v23

There is so much more that the Holy Spirit wants to reveal to us if only we will take the time. The most exciting times of my Christian life are when I have been alone with the Lord and the Holy Spirit has been teaching me from scripture, literally explaining the Word to me. It is like sitting at the feet of Jesus and hearing Him teach, explaining spiritual truths in ways that I can understand and grasp. I have been blessed over the years to have experienced many things of God, I have seen and experienced miracles of healing, God's provision, people getting saved and many other things; yet that moment alone with God, like a child sitting with his father, have been the most precious times of my Christian life. It is those times when God is so real, it is as if you can reach out and touch Him.

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

John 16v13

So often we can chase round after God looking for revelation, rushing from one meeting to the next, one speaker to another. We need to learn to stop relying on revelation from others and learn to rely on the revelation that comes through spending time in the presence of God. May God forgive us our pride and open our eyes to the truth that He so much wants to reveal to us.

A Spirit of Holiness

When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgement.

John 16v8

The perfect example of a spiritual man was Jesus. He walked totally according to the spirit, He was not led astray by the desires of the flesh and as such sought to bring glory to the Father through His life and obedience. As part of that obedience He lived a sin free life, a life that was totally set apart to the Fathers purposes and demonstrated true holiness.

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Romans 14v17

So often we can reduce holiness to a set of laws, reducing it to a set of commandments and rules that we obey and as a young believer, those rules are a good start, the simple obedience of the ten commandments is a good place to begin our journey to holiness. However, the Christian life cannot be broken down to a set of rules. If we are truly led by the Holy Spirit the Holy Spirit will start to reveal to us the true attitude of our hearts, the rebellions and the hard heartedness that stops the Father being able to do His work in us in the way that He wants, to make us more like Christ.

If the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin and righteousness, how much more should we, the children of God, be convicted of those same things? As we draw nearer to God and come into the light, the light reveals the areas of our life that are not up to God's standards, the areas that He wants to transform. It's a constant process and why at times we feel more sinful as we grow in the Lord than when we first got saved. It is the Holy Spirit showing us the things that need to change that we may be more fruitful, more Christ like, becoming the true son or daughter that God desires, the sons and daughters that creation has waited for (Romans 8v19).

That sin free walk of holiness should be the true fruit of the spirit in our lives. Far greater than a set of rules it is having a constant ear to the leading of the Spirit, an understanding that sin is disobedience to the Father, rebellion against His ways

For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God.

Romans 8v13-14

It is so easy for the flesh to rise up, for us to look at others and their issues and problems, to point out their sin and rebellion, when so often the Father is using them as a mirror to show us our own issues. Rather than looking at others, we need to look at Christ, to look at His life and measure ourselves against Him, allowing the Holy Spirit to convict us of the inner attitudes of our heart, that when changed by the power of God will produce a heart of Christ within.

Holiness, the setting apart of our lives for the purposes of God should be a priority in every spirit led man or woman. If there is no desire for holiness, if there is no conviction of sin, then we have to ask ourselves if the Holy Spirit is dwelling and working within us. This battle is one that we will fight to the end of our lives; it was a frustration that the Apostle Paul faced when he talked about the battles he faced in Romans 7v21-25, the ongoing battle between his spirit and his flesh. It's not a battle we need to be ashamed of; it is a battle that should be in each one of us as the Holy Spirit leads us into the depths of holiness.

Holiness has almost become a dirty word in this modern age, bringing up images of rules and regulations that bind us; but the holiness that God wants in our lives is a holiness of freedom, a holiness of freedom in the Holy Spirit, a heart felt desire to live a life that brings glory to God, not because I have to or want to earn a blessing, but a holiness that is a hearts desire out of thankfulness for what the Father has already done for me in Christ. A holiness of life that is a Spirit led act of worship with the desire to bring Almighty God the glory He so deserves for all He has done for us.

Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship.

Romans 12v1

It is so easy to sing songs and raise our hands to the Lord in praise. How much harder is it to bring that sacrifice of praise, that sacrifice of a life set apart for God. A sacrifice that has true cost to the giver, for a sacrifice without cost is not a sacrifice at all.

Fruit of the Spirit

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. Against such things there is no law.

Galatians 5v22-23

So often Christians are accused of hypocrisy, their lives do not match their words, it is as if in every man there is an inner knowledge of how we should act and so often we fall short; but how often is it the actions that fall short or the heart behind the actions? It is so easy to fall into a set of rules that we use to guide our lives rather than letting our hearts be transformed by the work of the Holy Spirit within us.

The fruits of the Spirit are us becoming more Christ like; it shows in our lives, our minds being transformed into the likeness of Christ, it shows the ways of God have taken root in our heart and that spiritual heart is now starting to lead rather than the flesh, the sinful man.

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

John 15v4

The fruit of the Spirit comes from time spent in Christ; it's us learning to walk in Him at all times, to seek Him at all times. How easy it is to return to the ways of the flesh when we face trial or tribulation and for our actions to destroy all the words of our mouth. In those times of trial it is our anger, our bitterness, our aggression, our fear and lack of control that display the true spiritual walk within.

As we see the example of Jesus walking in obedience to the cross we see a man who was walking totally in the Spirit, having a peace from God because He knew He was in the will of God despite all that was happening to His flesh. We see a peace of heart and self control even when undergoing false accusation and a punishment that He did not deserve.

We see Jesus living out His teaching as He prayed for His persecutors as He hung dying on the cross (Luke 23v34). We see our Saviour with joy in His heart (Hebrews 12v2), despite being in the worst of situations. How we need the Holy Spirit to transform our hearts and minds and through that, our lives!

It was on the cross that Jesus accomplished everything the Father had tasked Him to do, not by miracles and sermons or knowledge of the scriptures, but by a life that demonstrated what a real spiritual walk looks like. So often we clamour for the miraculous, the spectacular and successes of this world, when the real success is in a servant heart that is led by the Spirit, walking in the ways of Jesus.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me you evildoers!'"

Matthew 7v21-23

The fruit of the Spirit is far more than our outward ministry; it is the fruit of being in union with God Himself, of spending time with Him, allowing ourselves to be transformed by Him. How often we want God to work through us without the true desire to serve, we want God to use a dirty vessel that we are unwilling to have cleaned for His purposes. Our unregenerate minds think and work in the ways of the world instead of the ways of God, walking according to the ways and the ideas of this world, instead of standing in faith on the way that God has shown us.

In the garden of Eden, man was blessed and told to eat of the fruit of the land and the seed bearing plants, that was to be mans food (Genesis 1v29). Today more than ever we need a generation of men and women of God who are living a Spirit led life, bearing spiritual fruit that others can see and eat from, that they may experience the truth and power of Christ in their lives.

That fruit does not come from intellect or education, it comes from spending time with Jesus, it comes from allowing Him to show us His ways and move in our hearts, having the desire within for His life to be the pattern for ours. God does not force it on us; instead He offers us His ways so that any sacrifice we make to go His way is freely given just as Jesus was freely given for us. How it must grieve the Father as we dishonour the name of Jesus as we walk in the ways of this world.

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realised that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

Acts 4v13

May our words and deeds show that we have been with Jesus.

The Way Ahead

"Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my father who is in heaven. Many will say 'Lord, Lord', did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?"

Then I will say to them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

Matthew 7v21-23

I find these verses some of the most concerning in scripture, the picture of people doing great things in the name of the Lord yet never knowing Him; it comes towards the end of Jesus' great Sermon on the Mount, a message that turned the teaching of the day on its head. Where Jesus explained that obeying the rules was not enough, God was looking for hearts after Him; hearts that would be seeking first the kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6v33), lives that would be concerned with the spiritual more than the physical. Jesus warned of the dangers of living according to the flesh, of relying on the things seen and done rather than the desire of the heart within, the dangers of seeking first to please the desires of the flesh rather than walking in the way of the Spirit.

To walk according to the Spirit does not come easy, it isn't something that happens in a few minutes, it's the fruit of a relationship with God, a relationship of obedience to His leading that leads to learning and growing in Him. So often we fall into the trap of thinking that the Lord's leading is for the benefit of others, that as we obey Him, souls will be led to the Lord. Yet how often we miss the point that the Lord leads us on into new pastures so that we can learn to trust Him in each new circumstance that He brings into our lives. Developing fruit in our lives that will sow seeds far greater than any message we can preach.

If we truly want to walk in the Spirit, to walk in the way God wants us to go, then there is no better example than Jesus Himself, to follow Him and His teaching.

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'"
Mark 12v29-30

Jesus started with a work of love, a work that started from the heart, and from that heart worked through the soul guiding the mind which in turn led to the body, the physical strength. If we want God to move in our lives then we have to have our hearts set on Him, to "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (Matthew 6v33); to be the ones who truly hunger and thirst after righteousness (Matthew 5v6) and who set the Lord before all things.

We live in a world where the pampering of the flesh comes first, where we try to change from the outside in, changing our circumstances to alter the way that we feel. How we need to seek after the heart of Jesus, to be the one who would forsake the pleasures of this world to the point where He had no home in this world because His eyes were fixed on the Father with a love that was truly spiritual, a love that went far beyond simple emotions that give to get back. Jesus displayed true love, the love shown out by action.

*Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.
You are my friends if you do what I command.*
John 15v13-14

Do we consider God a friend? Do our lives show us as friends of God or mere acquaintances? What are our thoughts, our eyes, our desires fixed on?

How much are we willing to lay down for the Lord? The example of the early apostles is of a group of men who would follow the Saviour, even though it would mean laying down their lives for Him. In Acts we read of Stephen, of Paul, of Silas, men who did not look at the losses of the flesh, but would give themselves totally to God's will, men who had sought after God and truly walked according to the Spirit.

Jesus' greatest act was not a miracle or a raising from the dead, Jesus' greatest act was in total surrender, a total surrender that opened the way of salvation to all men. For us, that act of surrender needs to start now, we need to set our hearts on the Lord, we need to have a love of the Lord that is greater than the love we have for ourselves. Our desires need to be set on Him first, only then is He truly Lord in our life.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2v5-11

May the Lord help us and strengthen us through His Holy Spirit to take our eyes and thoughts off ourselves and the ways of this world and help us to fix our hearts, our eyes, our thoughts and our strength on the ways of God. That we too may know the true joy that comes through knowing the Father and the joy of bringing glory to His name.