

# HE GAVE GIFTS - MONTH OF MISSION 2019



## 1. PITCHED HIS TENT

**Welcome** to our e-devotions for the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa's Month of Mission 2019!

*This year we are looking at chapter 4 from Paul's letter to the Ephesians in which he describes the church, its mission, how it is provided for and how it functions.*

As you read Ephesians 4 you will see that before Paul talks about the church, he speaks about the Founder of the Church: Jesus Christ who he describes as the "One who ascended and must therefore have descended."

It is this "descending" that we will consider in this first week of our e-devotions...

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John 1 is like the Overture at the start of a theatrical musical. An overture is the introduction and sets the stage and mood, but it also gives one some sense of the main moments of the story. John's prologue in ch.1 does this magnificently. Here are some highlights from the chapter as a whole:

- He opens with "In the beginning was the Word..." and we are taken all the way back to Genesis 1.
- We are reminded of John the Baptist who is Jesus' forerunner and gives the gospel story historical credibility. John the Baptist is also the one who reveals God's agenda for us - to be witnesses of the light.
- Jesus is introduced as the Light of the world, the God-revealer and the very life of humankind.
- He is the "un-understood" and "unrecognised" Messiah who was rejected by a corrupt and blind religious system.
- He transforms people bringing them from death to life - to being born of God.

But I want to concentrate on our verses for the day:

John has already told us that Jesus is the Word who is with God and is God. He has told us that Jesus is the light and life of humanity. *But there's a twist to this majestic tale:* The Son of God, magnificent and mighty, humbles Himself to *become flesh* - to enter Mary's womb, to be a "holy embryo", to dwell among us. Eugene Peterson translates this thought as "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood." The Greek Word used for "made His dwelling" is the word that was used to describe the building of shelters during the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles. It could be translated as "pitched His tent" or "set up camp" in our immediate vicinity.

One would think that moving into the neighbourhood would lower Him to our standards - that'd He'd be cheapened by His connection with us. But this is not the case: John declares that the "divine self-lowering" of Jesus actually exalts Him.

**And here's why:** Where Adam and Eve grabbed for more power, Jesus chose to obey God even if it meant humbling Himself and having less power.

Jesus obeyed His Father and, for our sake, He gave His life.

Jesus deity is recognised by John, not only because of His divine identity, but also because of His sacrifice.

But don't take my word for it... Read it as John said it! And then give thanks to our God and Saviour who moved into your neighbourhood and mine. (You can also read the Ephesians passage that is our basis for the whole month...)

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'" 16 From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. 17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.

EPH 4:7 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. 8 This is why it says:

"When he ascended on high,  
he led captives in his train  
and gave gifts to men."

9 (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? 10 He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) 11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

(John 1:14-18)

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## 2. GOD'S GIFT: ONE WHO CAME FROM HEAVEN...

It might surprise you to hear this, but not every person is a gift person. It has taken me time to learn how to open a present in an appreciative way. If one is not a present person, one may offend the giver by not expressing enough excitement and appreciation. I'm not talking about being false but rather showing gratitude. In the same way, it is important to pay attention to the gifts of God, to focus, to give thanks and to use them wisely.

One of the few verses I can remember learning in the Sunday School and probably the only one that took a hold of my heart was John 3:16. It begins as an expression of the character of God ("For God so loved...") Later when studying theology, I discovered that "Love" is a good place to start if we want to explore the character of God. In his first letter, John describes God's very nature as "love" (4: 16). In fact the very inner life of God, the Trinity, is a continuous and perfect expression of love.

The teaching of this verse does not stop there. It goes on to provide the focus, for this instance of God's love "For God so loved the world". Its hard to preach the truth of this verse among a people (the Church) who naturally think of themselves as the focus of God's love. The truth is, as the prophet Jonah discovered, God's love is much broader than we'd hoped. It extends to all who bear God's image and likeness. In addition, God's love is self sacrificing ("that he sent his only Son") and salvific ("so that whoever believes in him shall not perish"). Ultimately, God's love is reconciling ("but have eternal life"), restoring the home-life we share with God eternally.

This verse has been a gift to me and to many others.

Who knew what the effect of this simple memory verse would have on my life? Who knew what a gift it would be to me? I wish God's Spirit will continue to use it to shape me so that nothing, in the end, will be able to separate me from God's love. And for those of us who read over the gift of John 3:16 too quickly, there is a speed bump in verse 17. It turns out that God's motives were never to condemn but always to save. It turns out that this gift is for "re-gifting". I need to pass it on to someone else.

No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven--the Son of Man. 14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (John3:13-17)

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## 3. UNEXPECTED ADVICE... AND AN UNEXPECTED EXAMPLE.

Leadership is a pretty difficult thing to define if we look at the New Testament(NT). While the NT doesn't say much about the *definitions, functions* or *tasks* of leadership, it has a lot to say about the **character** of leaders. By and large, starting with Jesus and working right through the NT,

whenever the subject of leadership is addressed, it is almost always the character of the leader that is highlighted. The NT seems to take the view that if you have the right **character**, the *definitions, functions* and *tasks* fall into their proper place.

Nowhere is this truer than in this interaction in Mark's Gospel. Mark's Gospel presents Jesus as the Suffering Servant of God and, as we read through the Gospel, we see this demonstrated again and again. So, although the words Jesus speaks here are recorded in other places, this a typically Markan phrase.

The disciples are, yet again, arguing about status and position and Jesus sees an opportunity for a teaching moment to give them a lesson about what leadership is like in God's Kingdom. In the world, if you are the leader, then you leverage your authority to your own best advantage. But, Jesus turns the whole system on its head: "This is not how you should behave. If you say that you will follow me you must lead like I lead. Every time you find yourself in a position of authority must lead like this."

Some of you are sniggering quietly now because you're sure it won't work. You're thinking maybe this works in the rarified atmosphere of the church, but this doesn't work in the real world. But if we are followers of Jesus, then we are bound to follow Jesus not only on Sunday, but also where we live and work, as well as where we worship. Learning to lead like Jesus means learning to serve. Jesus is not arguing **against** leadership; nor is he arguing **for** passivity, but what Jesus is saying is that if you have authority, if you exercise leadership in any sphere, then you must choose to **leverage** the authority you have for the benefit of those who are **under** our authority. This works at home, in church or in your work situation.

Jim Collins, in his book "Good to Great" identifies great leaders as distinguished by their humility. Great leaders have a tremendous drive to get things done combined with a humility that draws people in their direction.

What a difference it would make in our homes, churches and workplaces if we listened to Jesus's advice... and followed it.

When the other ten heard of this conversation, they lost their tempers with James and John. Jesus got them together to settle things down. "You've observed how godless rulers throw their weight around," he said, "and when people get a little power how quickly it goes to their heads. It's not going to be that way with you. Whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. That is what the Son of Man has done: He came to serve, not to be served---and then to give away his life in exchange for many who are held hostage." (Mark10:43-45)

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## 4. HOW CAN WE SEE THE FATHER?

The One who *descended* came to reveal the Most High.

There is a poignant sadness to this conversation between Philip and Jesus. They've been together for three years and Philip still hasn't recognised that he's been experiencing the loving nature of the Father through the presence of the Son.

Yes, the Father is Mighty and Majestic. Yes, the Father is Holy and Awesome. And yes, the Father is the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe. But this power and majesty emanate from a central core. And what is that *core*?

A peep at an "Old Testament Philip", aka Moses, gives us a clue...

Moses asked to see God's glory, but God made it clear that he would be utterly overloaded by glory, so instead, Moses got to see God's Goodness - and got to hear about the *core* of God's magnificent being: "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness..." (Ex.34:6)

Philip was thinking glory, but Jesus had revealed God's *core*:

- Touching Lepers
- Cuddling children
- Freeing the possessed
- Liberating people from shame and pain
- Living day to day among the poor
- Sharing in our humanity and the "normality" of life
- Living His life for us

In a nutshell Jesus was saying: The Father's core and essence is what you have seen in me... That core is giving, caring, sharing, courageous, attentive, self-sacrificing LOVE."

May we look at Jesus and see more than Philip saw...

Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

9 Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? (John14:8-9)

## 5. KENOTIC LOVE (KENOSIS) IS SELF-EMPTYING LOVE. JESUS DID IT...

Every time I read this passage of scripture, I cannot help but ask the question: *What more shall I do to serve my Lord?* I am constantly overwhelmed by the idea of kenosis (self-emptying). This was the mindset that Jesus had, the same mind that should be in every believer.

Paul articulates this narrative of incarnation in the same manner as John's narrative of the Word becoming flesh, dwelling among us, so that we could behold his glory (John: 1:14). God the Son, out of love for humanity, dwelt among us, emptied Godself for us to be saved, redeemed and liberated. The Son shunned royalty and divine nature to take human nature - humility, in order to accomplish God's plan for humanity -- salvation/liberation. God, thus, made it possible for humanity to learn right attitude, right behaviour, and right mentality, as we emulate Jesus Christ. This love was lavished on all without discrimination that all should enjoy without fear and prejudice.

This kenotic love is a call for us to love one another the same way Jesus loved us. We are called to share the same DNA as Jesus, be able to forgive, to love, to express sympathy and be ready to put our lives at stake so that others may live. The Rev Dr Cowan, preaching at the closing of the UPCS 20th anniversary celebrations said, "Live simply so that other may simply live".

The self-emptying was done in space and time. God had been concerned about the situation that humanity was in. God had been concerned about hamartiological (sin) manifestations, as



human beings were effaced and abused. This happened in all the dimensions of life - spiritual, political social, economic and others. God was concerned about skewed relations among human beings, as some used others to achieve their own ends.

Christians ought to conduct social analysis from time to time and empty themselves, so that the "emptied" of society - the nonpersons may realise their human dignity and live as free beings. Salvation is about all of humanity being liberated. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old is gone, the new is here" (NIV). Through self-emptying, newness of life is realised. Love divine - love excelling is experienced fully when we are prepared to empty ourselves (including sharing of resources) for the impoverished and marginalised to feel fully human. Let us be grafted in Christ, so that we are emptied of the old. The new world order is a necessity -- a reconciled community. What more shall I do to serve my Lord?

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

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

8 And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to death--  
even death on a cross!

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,  
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11)

(Lungile Mpetsheni is the General Secretary of the UPCSA. A husband to Thandiswa, a father and a grandfather. Saved by the grace of God.)

## 6. AN UNEXPECTED DESCENT.

The two events, Christ's "descension" and ascension are the two bookends of Christ's life. While we are very familiar with and celebrate the ascension, we don't talk about His "decension"!

There are three interesting facets to His descent.

Firstly, we think of His descent in that He came from heaven to earth and went from earth to heaven. He came from glory to humility, and from humility back to glory. Paul describes this in Philippians 2: "He... 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..."

Secondly, when the Bible says that Christ "descended into the lower parts of the earth", it actually means that He really tasted death and went directly into the presence of God. Jesus said to the thief on the Cross. "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). As Jesus died, He said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46). Jesus also said, "It is finished" (John 19:30). Jesus would have not said these words if He was going to hell.

Thirdly, this refers to His descent into hell (the spirit's prison) to proclaim victory over the demonic (1 Peter 3:18--19). Some have suggested that this is Jesus' public ministry, casting out demons and proclaiming the kingdom. Others suggest that this happened at the time of Jesus' resurrection as He showed His power over spiritual and physical death. Either way the point is that Christ went to proclaim victory on the Cross. It is a message of victory.

Then Christ ascended so that He could fill all things. In John 14:20, Jesus made it clear that unless He went away, the Holy Spirit could not come. Because He went back to Heaven, each one of us has the Holy Spirit.

When Christ was here, He had the ability to teach, preach, show mercy, serve, lead etc. When He left, He took all of these abilities and passed them out among Christians. When He ascended, He gave gifts to men.

He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things".  
(Ephesians 4:10)

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## **7. BEFORE WE START ON THE GIFTS, REMEMBER WE ARE JUST CO-WORKERS WITH GOD.**

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians in this chapter, he wanted to clarify something which was unclear to them. Knowing that they were not spiritually mature, he addressed them about the kind of audience they were and referred to them as plants. He further explained that each and every one played his own role without interfering with one another. Three characters were mentioned, Paul, Apollos and God, the main character.

For the plants to exist, there must be someone to prepare the soil. That was done by Paul who said that the Corinthians were washed, sanctified in the name of Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:11). They were well prepared.

After that, they were supposed to be doing things differently from the way they were. This is a common problem which we have in the church today: People still live the life of this world. Some of the things done by Corinthians were those that happened weeks ago because among people who were involved in xenophobia attacks, killing of women and children and rape, were Christians.

After Paul did the basic job of planting, he left Apollos to do the watering, which means good news had never stopped being proclaimed. He was a means carrying on the building up the souls in faith and holiness and making them fruitful in every good work.

But, above all, there is someone whom they cannot do anything without, hence a "but" has been used. The involvement of God is always necessary. Paul used a strange conjunction "but" instead of "and." To use "but" he showed that the work done was not going to be complete without God. If he used "and" it would mean God is any other ordinary person among them but the fact that this "but" is used, he's not like any ordinary person.

Though each of them had his own duties according to the passage, we must remember that we are just co-workers with God. Co-workers means working closely with God. But God gives the increase. There is nothing we can do on our own. Whatever we do, we partner with God as Christians. He is the one who completes us. In this case, Paul and Apollos were not able to make the plants to spring up or increase the perfection. Our duty is to plant and water, cast the seed of the word, preach the Gospel, but all the success is from the Man above. It is He who only causes what we've done, to spring up and grow. It is he who gives it its increase, spreading, fructifying virtue and efficacy, because we are just co-workers with him.

I planted the seed, Apollo's watered it, but God made it grow. (1Corinthians3:6 )

## 8. APOSTLES: BARNABAS

For the next few devotions we're going to be looking at Paul's list of Spirit-empowered roles in the life and work of the church. He names Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists and Pastor-Teachers. (Eph4:11)

Today we'll be thinking about **Apostles**. Another description for an Apostle could be "Pioneer" or "Founder" or "Starter" or "Establisher." Some suggest that missionaries are basically Apostles, especially when they're initiating a new work.

An apostle goes where "no-one has gone before". They are entrepreneurial and can work well in new/unknown territory. They are creative and think outside the box.

In our reading there are two sets of pioneers. The first example is the men from Cyprus and Cyrene who crossed racial and cultural boundaries to reach out and establish a new group of believers. (We might also call them Evangelists.)

The other example is Barnabas who came to turn a group of converts into a church that would eventually become *the* sending church of the New Testament.

Look at Barnabas' attributes:

- Spiritually attuned: he could see God was at work
- Found his joy in the growth of the church
- Was an encourager who helped people to persevere
- A good man - ethical, consistent, reliable
- Full of the Holy Spirit (i.e. he was led and guided by the Spirit)
- Full of Faith: willing to trust God

An addition Barnabas was remarkable for his ability to think outside the box - when he needed help teaching the church, he found Saul/Paul (who no-one else was willing to take a risk on) and involved him in the discipleship of the church. This also showcases his humility.

In summing up: An Apostle or Pioneer joins up with what God is already doing and just helps to give it shape. We're here today because of Apostles who started churches and planted the communities that nurtured us.

Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. 21 The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. 22 News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 23 When he



arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. 24 He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

(Acts11:20-24)

## 9. PROPHETS: PRAYER AND FASTING

Our reading today shows how Prophets sent out the Apostles(Pioneers). But what is a prophet? Maybe the best quick description is that a prophet brings God's comment/guidance on current affairs. They need to listen to God. Let's see how this works:

### Introduction

In Mark 9:29 from the King James Version (KJV) We are told that a certain parent brought his son to the disciples so that they could cast out a demon that was torturing his child but the disciples failed lamentably. So, the man brought the child to Jesus Christ and He cast out the demon and the child was set free. Later the disciples asked Jesus why they failed to cast the demon. Jesus answered them: "This kind of demon comes out only by prayer and fasting".

### 1.Prayer and Fasting played a very important role in the life of Jesus

At every pivotal moment in the life of Christ, He found time to pray. In Mark 1:35, we are told that "very early in the morning before daybreak, Jesus went into a solitary place to pray." Praying was His lifestyle. Jesus prayed and fasted just before He started His public ministry (Matthew 4:1-11). He prayed before choosing His disciples (Luke 6:12). He prayed just before He was crucified (Matthew 26:36-46). Jesus prayed at the cross of Calvary (Luke 23:34).

### 2.The Church was born out of Prayer and Fasting

Before the Church was born, the disciples gathered in the upper room to pray and then in response God poured Out His Holy Spirit upon them in (Acts 2:1-13). Hence forth the Church was born.

### 3.The Church was sustained by Prayer and Fasting

The early Christians were in danger from the word go, but God sustained them in and through prayer and fasting.

### 4.Prayer and Fasting played an important part in the Early Church

"While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said: Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them". So. after they had fasted, they placed their hands on them and sent them off" (Acts 13:2-3).

### Conclusion

Do you pray and fast? When is the last time you prayed and fasted? Is prayer and fasting the forgotten discipline in the UPCS? Jesus started with prayer and ended with prayer. So, Child of God pray and fast.

In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. 2 While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." 3 So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts13:1-3)

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## 10. EVANGELISTS: LOOKING AT PHILIP

For the past three years, God has prompted me to pray for people, sometimes even visit people and this has been difficult for me. Even though I am naturally a "people person", every time God has prompted me to pray for the sick, call the sick and give them a passage, it has been one of my greatest challenges. I am glad, for the many times I have obeyed these instructions. At times I had to call people out of my comfort zone, at odd times, and these incidents have left me appreciating God speaking to me in this way.

The story of the Ethiopian eunuch presents us with a big challenge of how God directed Philip to one man the same way he had directed him to many people in Samaria. This prompting, to such a significant conversion, gives us a life lesson in the importance of personal evangelism. I believe every Christian has a responsibility to talk about Jesus with someone on a personal level.

The two lessons that stand out for me in this passage are Philip's obedience and the zeal the eunuch has for God.

When God commanded Philip to go to the desert road, he obeyed. It is amazing to see that through Philip's obedience, the Lord opened a door for this opportunity to evangelise. Do we often see the opportunities God opens for us? I have not always seen every situation with my prompting as opportunities to serve, however, I have now since thanked God when I received instructions and had to share only to realise that, this is exactly what people needed. In Philip we see "Spirit-led boldness," of course most of us claim we don't have it and so we can't share the Good News about Jesus, my challenge has been to see the, "spirit-led boldness" in the small voice that invites you to share Jesus with the most insignificant people and or the most special people around you.

The second lesson from the Eunuch is how ready he was for God. As we often worry about how people will receive the message of Christ, let us remember that hearts are prepared by God. Often when we share in obedience we will be surprised how people would respond.

Are you on fire for Jesus? Does it sometimes look difficult to make a difference for God? Now what is the point of this story? What stands out in this story is that a very unlikely candidate for conversion, the Eunuch, is found and converted through the supernatural leading of the Lord himself, and not through human planning (John Piper). Therefore today step up and share the good news of Jesus and follow God's prompting.

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road--the desert road--that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." 27 So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. 29 The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

30 Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

31 "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

32 The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture:

*"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,*

*and as a lamb before the shearer is silent,  
so he did not open his mouth.  
33 In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.  
Who can speak of his descendants?  
For his life was taken from the earth."*

34 The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" 35 Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. 36 As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" 38 And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. 40 Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea. (Acts 8:26-40)

(Tichaona Nigel Chikanya, husband to Savior and father to Deuel Chikanya, last served at Mowbray Presbyterian Church in South Africa and is currently serving at Eastwood Parish Church in Glasgow, a congregation in the Church of Scotland.)

## **11. PASTOR/SHEPHERD: HOW PAUL DID IT...**

*Today we're looking at the gift of the Pastor(Shepherd). This role is often seen in combination with the role of the Teacher (a careful reading of the original Greek text certainly implies this) but we'll look at "pastor" today and "teacher" tomorrow.*

There are some who might argue that Paul was an Apostle, but sometimes a Prophet, often an Evangelist and frequently a Pastor-Teacher. This is very feasible. Let's remember that these are *gifts* of the Spirit and not necessarily talents that are linked to our natural abilities and sweet spots. In 1Cor12:7 we read that gifts of the Spirit are given for "for the common good" and so it is very likely that as Paul moved between various congregations and settings, the Spirit empowered him to be whatever that community required.

We should never cling to a specific Spiritual Gift, but be humble and flexible enough to allow God to use us in different ways in different contexts and during different seasons.

The gift of being a Pastor (or Shepherd) is about nurturing communities. It's about finding the lost, healing the injured, building community, identifying dangers, motivating, equipping and motivating.

A Shepherd can fulfill her/his calling as a minister, an elder, a small-group leader, a pastoral carer and even on a one-to-one basis in the community. You don't need a title to care for people.

Paul was a faithful shepherd, he nurtured communities when he was with them and wrote letters when he was away from them. He nurtured Timothy and Titus and grieved over those who fell away. He embodies the key-characteristic of the Pastor/Shepherd: *care for others*.

In his letter to the Corinthians he lists the difficulties and challenges of ministry. He talks about persecution, shipwrecks, travelling, whippings, imprisonments and so on. But look at what tops his list in the reading below - this is his heart language...

*What about you?* Has God given you a shepherd heart to care for people? Our world is lonely and hurting and it needs Christ-centered people who will express the love of Christ in their settings. Will you step up and do it?

Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I do

not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?  
(2Corinthians11:28-29)

## 12. TEACHERS: SOLIDIFYING GROWTH

Barnabas was an encourager and a pioneer. Our passage for today shows how he got the church in Antioch on its feet. And it was a vibrant church! There was evidence of God's grace, there was numerical growth and they were a community ready to "remain true to the Lord with all their hearts."

This was the crest of the wave!! We'd expect Barnabas to ride it for as long as possible, but while Barnabas was a good Apostle/Pioneer, he was enough of a Pastor to know that the church needed a good Teacher...

Good **Teachers** help God's people understand God's word and apply it to their lives. Good teachers inform and equip God's people to live thoughtfully and meaningfully in a way that is consistent with their faith. Teachers lay foundations that people can build lives of service on. They interpret the scriptures in a way that helps others to read the Bible for themselves. Good teachers make us eager to learn more about God and about His Word.

Barnabas realised he'd reached his "leadership lid" - he'd taken the church as far as he could. He needed help and so he recruited Saul/Paul to teach the church.

This was a risky move: Paul could have been wolf in sheep's clothing or Barnabas could be "ousted" or "outclassed" by the charismatic Paul.

But this was a risk worth taking - and it bore great fruit:

- They became a community enthusiastically committed to learning and growing together over a long period of time.
- They became so Christ-focussed and Christ-centered that they were called Christians ("little Christs") and, while some see the name as a form of mockery from the pagans, others suggest the name meant "you look very much like the One you talk about."
- This congregation became the mission sending home base that provided support and backup for all of Paul's missionary journeys

Teachers can be preachers but not all preachers are good teachers... Preaching a sermon that people enjoy listening to is not the same as helping people to understand and apply the Bible to their lives.

We need Teachers in our Sunday Schools, Bible Study groups, Sunday Sermons and other places where people are looking for the answers to life's most important questions. We, like the Antioch members, should also be ready (and humble enough) to learn as much as we can... as often as we can...

...they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 23 When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. 24 He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. 25 Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.  
(Acts11:22-26)

### **13. A SPECIAL BOUQUET OF FLOWERS (GIFTS) TO BUILD THE CHURCH.**

When thinking about a meaningful gift for a special person the giver of the gift will carefully consider what kind of gift is appropriate or will be appreciated. If a bouquet of flowers is chosen as a gift, every flower included in the bouquet most probably will resemble something (favourite flower/s or memory) of the person the gift is given to. Flowers have a pleasant fragrance and add something significant to the environment where they are growing or where they are placed. Different flowers have different meanings and a bouquet of flowers has a blend of scents, like perfume or wine. The purpose of a gift could be multi-fold. The gift in itself carries a message to the person receiving the gift. It could be a message of encouragement, appreciation, motivation or celebrating a special occasion.

In Ephesians 4: 11-12 Christ Himself who is the head of the Church gave gifts to the church. He gave some to be prophets, some to be evangelists and some pastors and teachers. The purpose of these gifts to the church is to grow the saints in their walk with God, to build and edify the church for the sake of the Gospel. The church celebrates their victory in Christ by operating in these gifts that Christ so eagerly and willingly gave. Just as Christ loves the Church these gifts are to be shared freely and with this same love. Each and every believer has received a gift that should be exercised to glorify Christ! Just like every flower has its own specific scent and fragrance so every believer has been created to be a gift to the church and operate in their unique gifting as apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers. Every different scent (gift) is placed into a bouquet of flowers (the church), arranged uniquely just as God purposed and destined it to be!

The unity between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the foundation for Christian unity. Ephesians 4:13-16 emphasises this unity as the knowledge of the Son of God, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. When the people of God reach out to one another for the purpose of building and growing others in their faith in Christ, the body of Christ is lifted above petty disagreements. The focus is complete devotion towards God and the things on earth become strangely dim in the face of his glory and grace.

A special bouquet of flowers with a unique fragrance and blended scent is compiled with different flowers and different colours and uniquely unites to present itself in purity and with beauty. The body of Christ presents itself similarly uniquely united with different gifts and displays the glory and beauty of Christ!

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up... (Ephesians4:11-12)

(Natalie Angela Barnard serves the congregation at St Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Cape Town. Mother to Christian, mom in law to Angela and grandmother to Isabella (3 years old), who all live in England, Mother to Natascha and mom in law to Alexander who live in Switzerland. Natalie has a great passion for adventures which includes hiking, anything outdoors, camping, travelling and especially road trips, added new adventure is sailing, spending time with family and friends)



## 14. PAUL WAS INTERESTED IN PEOPLE AND HOW THEY SERVED THE LORD.

This week in the Month of Mission we answer the question: "What is the Church for?"

In today's text (Col 4:10-15) Paul takes time to pass on greetings from his co-workers to the churches in Colossae and Laodicea. There are 2 important things we can note in the way Paul does this. Firstly he mentions his co-workers by name, and secondly says who they are/what they do.

Aristarchus (a fellow prisoner), Mark (cousin of Barnabas) and Jesus (called Justus), are Jews. He acknowledges that these 3 men are a comfort to him. We can only speculate as to why they are a comfort to Paul (possibly shared Jewish traditions and practices?). Paul also mentions 3 of his Gentile co-workers, Epaphras (intercessor), Luke (our dear friend, the doctor), and Demas. He also sends greetings to the brethren at Laodicea and to a woman Nympha (and the church in her house).

In these verses Paul gives us a picture of a richly diverse church. This diversity is found in the individuals with their different roles, talents and abilities, their different ethnicities, and their different genders.

May we today take the time to reflect on the importance of each and every individual member of the church. Each and everyone of us has been called by name, by God into his church. And each individual member has been equipped to serve the church in their own special way. May God help us to celebrate this diversity and not to stifle it. May God help us to embrace this diversity and not to reject it.

My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.) 11 Jesus, who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me. 12 Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, 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. 13 I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis. 14 Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings. 15 Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. (Colossians 4:10-15)

(Shingirai Eunice Masunda is a minister of the UPCSA currently pursuing a PhD at the Protestant Theological University in the Netherlands.)

## 15. PAUL: A RELAY RUNNER

The Christian life is a calling, a calling not because of what we know or what we are, but a calling by God's grace. We are all called in our weaknesses so that His strength can come out. Timothy is here encouraged to be strengthened by the grace that is in Jesus Christ.

There was a time when Peter promised rather to die for Christ than to deny him and we all know that he failed because he was strong in his own strength. Had he been strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, he would have kept his promise. Ephesians 6:10 tells us 'Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might...'

We have God's grace which is a free gift from the hand of God and it helps us humans to regenerate and sanctify, to inspire virtuous impulses and to impart strength to endure trials and resist temptations.

When we have God's grace, we acknowledge and appreciate that whatever we are doing is not about us but about God and His kingdom. We are not in a game of competition but in a calling where we complement and mentor one another passing on the baton of faith to other faithful men/women.

The body of Christ suffers when the members serve as loners, unwilling to mentor others or learn from others. Timothy is encouraged to entrust what he heard from Paul to faithful men who will be able to teach others too. This should be our encouragement as well. His grace will give us strength in times of trials and temptations and will also remind us that we are not alone. We are not only surrounded by brothers and sisters in the faith but there also unseen witnesses who are cheering us to move on. Everything we are or have is a gift from God and let us all play our part in spreading the good news of our Lord and Saviour.

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.  
(2Timothy2:1-2)

(Jane Moyo Nyirongo, is a mother and grandmother, serving God with Garden congregation. Likes reading fiction stories, walking and gardening. Maybe that's why am in Garden compound! Shalom shalom!)

## **16. `WEAK` PAUL'S ROLE AS ONE WHO BUILDS UP THE BODY OF CHRIST**

It is interesting to read Paul's second letter to the congregation in Corinth. It is vivid that Paul had experienced some kind of tribulations, challenges and criticisms from the faithful in Corinth. In spite of all, Paul still shows his deep longing for reconciliation, peace, love and expresses his great joy even when this dissatisfactory situation was brought forth. Paul reassures them that he lives by God's power in his weaknesses.

Paul appears to be a confessional, humble, simple and unequivocal person to his brothers and sisters in Corinth. He boasts on his weakness and inabilities. In other words he places himself vulnerable before the faithful. Perhaps Paul boasting in his weaknesses was also a sign of wrestling with a thorn in his flesh to always realise the grace of God... (2Cor12:7). "We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong; and our prayer is that you may be fully restored" (2Cor13:9). In nutshell Paul's aim is the restoration, reconciliation and completeness of the faithful in their first love with Christ Jesus. Paul would find cause for joy in all these, if only the disciples whom he loves are strong with the strength of God. In the context of Paul we learn the mission of the church through God's grace and the participation of the believers in building up the body of Christ.

What is contrary in Paul's mission in relation to our context especially that Paul's mission starts by vindicating himself before God and His people? "When I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority -- the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down." (2Cor13:10). Here Paul is spiritually driven for the mission of the church and he does not

divert from his purposes. We may introspect ourselves in our context as to where we are in exploring the mission of the Church. The mission of the Church is to edify and restore rather than inflicting pain to the body of Christ.

We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong; and our prayer is for your perfection. 10 This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority--the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down. (2Corinthians13:9-10)

Wonke Buqa is married to Bongeka and blessed with a son Bukho (8) and two lovely dogs Chopper and Beyoncé. He loves academic research in theology and psychology, he enjoys aerobics, weight lifting and spiritual contemplation.

## 17. STANDING FIRM IN FAITH AND LOVE.

This week we are exploring the purpose of the church. Shingi Masunda introduced us to some of Paul's co-workers in building up the church, Jane Nyirongo reminded us that faith is the baton we pass to the next generation and Wonke Buqa urged us to build up and edify the body of Christ.

Today we will see how excited Paul gets when he hears that the Thessalonian church is standing firm in faith and love.

The church in Thessalonica did not have an easy birth. There was a wonderful initial response with Jews and Greeks responding very positively to Paul's message but then there was a backlash from the Jews who instigated a riot so severe that the brand new church leaders were arrested and forced to post bond (guarantee that they would not disturb the peace). This meant that Paul and Silas had to leave immediately. The enemies of the church in Thessalonica were so negative towards the church that they sent trouble-makers to disrupt Paul and Silas when they got to the next city.

And so Paul was worried about this fledgling church. Eventually he was able to send Timothy to see how they were doing. When Timothy reports back to him, Paul is so excited that he calls it "good news" (The Greek word is *euangellion* which Paul usually uses for "gospel") I don't think it is stretching it too far to say that for Paul, the Gospel was such "Good News" that it transformed lives.

What was it about the Church in Thessalonica that had Paul so excited?

1. They were strong in faith - they had weathered the storm of persecution and opposition. They trusted God.
2. They maintained love and affection for one another and for Paul and Silas.
3. They were standing firm in spite of opposition

This is the work of the church: To stand firm in faith and love. Take a moment to ask yourself these questions:

1. Does my belief in a loving God and Risen Saviour impact me daily and am I able to keep believing amidst the noise and negativity all around me?
2. Do I choose to reach out to those around me in conscious practical love, not giving in to the temptation to gossip, criticise, find fault and hold on to petty grudges?

3. Am I standing firm or is the rat race sucking me in? Am I maintaining holy habits and nurturing a vibrant faith or has my edge been dulled by the deluge of opinions and frenetic busyness all around?

What would Timothy find if he visited me and the congregation I'm in?

But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. 7 Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. 8 For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. (1Thessalonians3:6-8)

## 18. WE HAVEN'T ARRIVED, SO FOLLOW ME

"Follow me!"

In the text today, Paul writes to the Christians in Philippi, using what should be every pastor's motto: "follow me (as I follow Christ)" and if we can not say this, we need to face the changes required in our life.

Our focus is to be forward. Looking at the Commanding Officer who is Jesus Christ, and being obedient to His commands using our blood-bought lives for His glory. We should actively forget the past, both the good and the bad, for they distract us from the task ahead.

May we today take time to reflect on the importance of following Jesus Christ by:

- Examining ourselves to see if we are still in the faith(2 Cor13:5)
- Trusting God to give life to the dead and to call things that are not as though they were. (Rom6:17)
- Confessing our sins, because if we cherish sin in our hearts God will not hear us. (Psa66:18, 1John1:9)
- Being reconciled to one another (James5:16)
- Kicking any depression in our walk with the Lord (Heb12:12-13)
- Growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord (2Pet3:18)

There is a lot we need to contribute to the body of Christ.

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it, but one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining forward what is ahead. I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained. Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even on those who live as we do. For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is their same. Their mind is set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we are eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians3:12-20)

Godfrey Msiska is a minister of UPCSA, Lecturer and Head of School of Theology at Evangelical University (formerly Theological College of Central Africa).

## 19. DUAL REWARD OF MATURE PRAYER

Epaphras, probably originating from Colossae, was an observer of Apostle Paul and a preacher of the gospel, faithfully serving the Lord. He sends greetings in the name of the Lord to the Church in Colossae, we usually greet this way when we greet fellow Christians, it is a blessing. Epaphras shows a sincere and healthy affection for the people of the church.

We see his many and frequent prayers, that they might stand perfect in spotless righteousness, "Complete in the will of God"

Wrestling in prayer is not flippant prayer, but truly wrestling with the problems at hand.

This type of prayer brings us closer to God but at the same time, brings us closer to those we pray for as well, as we develop an understanding or an empathy for what they are going through.

This in turn brings, both us and the person we pray for, God's blessing. Its an intense form of prayer, a dedicated prayer.

As we gain maturity in prayer, we need to take the burden and the blessing on as well, the more constant and fervent our prayer life the more we mature in prayer, the closer our walk. Its not done for our own reward, but in our earnest prayer we are rewarded, and those who we pray for are as well.

Another important aspect of mature prayer is setting our hearts to obey, in a consistent obedience.

What we also need is sincere healthy affection as we pray, this sincerity is imperative to prayer. The enemy knows that when we don't pray, our growth with God is stunted.

Jesus prayed consistently. We can learn from his example of stopping to go off and pray, praying earnestly, full of affection, with true sincerity every time, wrestling with the problems at hand, coming back to lead and teach - stronger than before. This example Jesus set for us was used by Epaphras. His prayer life, described in this verse, is one of true commitment to God and those he is praying for in Colossae: A blessing to him and those he is praying for.

Our prayer walk is quintessential to our growth as Christians, but the reward in mature prayer is the blessing that is brought on those we pray for and the growth we experience through wrestling in prayer.

May God bless you as you walk closer and closer to Jesus.

Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, 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. (Colossians4:12)

(Rev Gregory Howse a servant of God , member of the Ethikweni Presbytery, is the minister in Port Shepstone, he is happily married to Anita and has two sons Malcolm and Angus and a Granddaughter Quinnevere)

## **20. SERVING, UNITING AND MATURING**

Paul lists ministry gifts that are imparted by Christ Himself to carry on His ministry in His church on earth. These gifts are partial expressions of His complete ministry. No one person has all these gifts, they are distributed among servant-leaders so that the body (the church) can benefit.



But let us move away from the gifts for a moment and ask ourselves "What is their purpose?" and "Why does God enable His people with these ministry gifts?"

The quick answer to this question is: *To prepare God's people for works of service.* It is vital that we pause before we read further. Have you digested this? What is the purpose of Pastor-Teachers, Evangelists, Apostles and Prophets? One thing: "*Prepare... God's... People... for... Works... of... Service...!*"

What could those works of service be? Anything that serves the church, community and world. You can pick up litter in the streets, help the homeless, visit the lonely, help at the SPCA, raise funds for a charity, teach children, assist at a clinic, do evangelistic outreaches, work for justice or the betterment of society or do anything that God lays on your heart that is of service to others.

We are not meant to be an end in ourselves. We are meant to make a difference. When we as a church become a serving force in the world then we will be answering our calling.

When we do this, there are three wonderful side-effects:

- It builds the church in quality and quantity.
- We find deeper unity because we are focused on the task instead of ourselves or each other
- We become mature as we become more like Christ (who came not to be served but to serve.)

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians4:12-13)

(Adapted from a message by Austin Dzeka who is a Church Development Evangelist serving in Zumoto, Masvingo)

## 21. BEWARE THE FALSE TEACHERS

[For this week our theme is "What does a healthy church look like?"]

Paul is on his way to Jerusalem where he will be arrested and dragged off to Rome. On the way to Jerusalem he stops at Miletus and asks to see the elders of the church in Ephesus because he cares deeply for this congregation which is in a bustling city full of temptations and pressures. It is poignant scene: they have traveled about 70km to get there, Paul gives them a rousing commissioning and heartfelt goodbye and their meeting ends with them kneeling together in prayer.

But it's Paul's warning about false teachers that is very instructive and sobering.

Using the image of the church as a flock of sheep, Paul describes the false teachers as "savage wolves" who will infiltrate the flock. No doubt Paul is referring to Jesus' warning about wolves in sheep's clothing and he recognises that the wolves will come "in among you" and "even from your own number".

Their *modus operandi* will be to "arise" (become prominent), "distort the truth" and "draw disciples away".

In this passage Paul does not clearly state the nature of the false teachers. From the bigger picture we get from the rest of Scripture, we know that the church in Ephesus was threatened by Gnosticism (which was a philosophical version of Christianity that downplayed Jesus' incarnation and emphasised the role of reason and rationalism). The church members were also constantly tempted by the sensual cults of the gods and goddesses of Ephesus. It is important to remember that there was a very violent riot led by Demetrius whose business in selling idols of the goddess Artemis was threatened by the growing church in Ephesus. (There's often a money motive behind false teachers.)

How should false teaching be resisted? Paul suggests a couple of things:

- Have caring leaders: Paul calls them to be *shepherds* of the flock. This is a well-known leadership image in both the OT and the teachings of Jesus.
- Recognise that false-teaching is subtle at first, but the marks of the wolves is that they don't care for the flock and that they will "arise". The Greek word here implies "rising to a position..." They also take advantage of leadership vacuums: "After I leave..."
- We have to be on our guard - we have to be vigilant.
- Leadership is earned through compassion and by going the "long haul". The longest time Paul spent with any congregation was with Ephesus and his ministry was marked with compassion and care.

The bottom line: a healthy church has caring leaders who are alert to false teachers who "arise", "distort truth" and "draw disciples away" from the truth.

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. 29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. 31 So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. (Acts20:28-31)

## 22.A CALL TO UNITY

[For this week our theme is "What does a healthy church look like?"]

When I do my marriage services, I like to quote the second chapter in Genesis, where a man is called to leave his mother and father, and go to become one flesh with his wife, so that the two will become one.

I also ask the question "Did God really know what he was doing, when he spoke these words?". I mean two completely different people, from different families and backgrounds, are expected to leave that comfort of what they know and go and be together for the rest of their lives! When put like that, it does sound crazy!

Perhaps even more crazy... is when you think about the church! Barbara Brown Taylor, when speaking about the church, once said "the church is just about the last place in our world, where people are united over one single idea, Jesus Christ. For Jesus attracts people from every background, every language, every political standpoint and so on."

If we focus on our differences we will go nowhere, and there will be no unity. We have been called to focus on what draws us together... Jesus. When we focus on Jesus, then suddenly we

have the ability to bring all sorts of people, with a variety of gifts, talents and skills together to build the Kingdom of God here on earth.

Perhaps God does know what He's doing after all.

For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder. (2Corinthians12:20)

Melanie Cook, married to her best friend Gordon. Proud mother to Joshua and Rebecca. Minister of St Giles, the church "who meet in a house".

## 23. WHEN WE DON'T GROW...

[For this week our theme is "What does a healthy church look like?"]

One of the things that hurts a parent is to have a child who does not grow. Babies need to be given special attention until they can walk and talk and so every parent is anxious to pass through this stage. When they don't grow, the disappointed parent is hurt because his or her expectation and preparations to see the child develop to further stages is in vain. The author of Hebrews at this point is one of such parents. He is worried about his audience who have become spiritually stagnant and are stuck at the basics of Christian teachings.

The author wants to teach his audience about Christ's eternal priesthood "in the order of Melchizedek" (v.10) but he cannot because they are spiritually sluggish. According to this passage, these people were not recent converts. They have been engaged in the Christian walk long enough now to be teachers of others. However, like babies who still need milk, they were not growing. This means they cannot understand the advanced spiritual teachings.

This is the opposite of what a healthy church looks like. When a church is planted, it is taught the basics about conversion: How one is born again, is introduced to the faith and the relationship that one now has with God. A healthy church, like a baby, is fed with these basic teachings and it grows to a point where solid food (difficult and deeper teaching about the Triune God) will be given to it. These teachings make Christians grow in Christ. At this point, one grows in faith and is able to understand Christ's righteousness, being able to distinguish sinful human nature and Christ's spiritual righteousness in order to follow Him.

There was a time when this faith was introduced to us, we were taught the basics and became part of the Family of God. This was necessary and it formed the foundation of our faith. Now is the time when we need to mature in Christ and be able to learn more about Him so that we accomplish His mission here on earth. Many do not understand Him; therefore, the church needs to grow and make others know Him as well.

Brothers and Sisters, we will never grow with milk. We need to advance in our mission by learning more truth about the Triune God and His righteousness for us to grow spiritually and join Him in His mission.

God bless you!

We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. 12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! 13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. (Hebrews5:11-14)

(Faresy Sakala, wife to Misheck, mother to Robson, Rose and Ronald and a minister at Trinity -- Gweru Presbyterian Church. Overwhelmed with duties, but I know that "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!")

## 24. ENDURING TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS

If you just read the start of this passage in the context of this week's theme (What does a healthy church look like?), you might think it would continue very differently -- "Consider it pure joy when... things go your way; when your church is growing; when there's plenty of money in the bank; when the Children's Church is packed; when there are too many volunteers and when congregants hang on your every word." Aren't these the things we think we should see in a healthy church?

Yet, what are we confronted with? Church membership that is stagnant or declining; stretched budgets where expenses exceed income; the Children's Church is dwindling or non-existent; there just don't seem to be enough people to keep the doors open and the lights on, never mind launching new initiatives and we wonder if anyone is really listening when we speak.

Fortunately, James gives us some hope, because he says that we should consider it joy when we face trials of many kinds because those trials actually test our faith. We might wonder why God would allow our faith to be tested, but, if you think about faith more as a muscle to be worked than as a quantity to be collected, then it makes sense. Muscles need to be stretched and stressed in order to grow and develop. If they are not used in this way, they atrophy and eventually stop working altogether. God wants our faith to grow strong, so what God does is to allow our faith to be stretched and stressed so that it grows strong.

The Greek word here is *peirasmos* which means an experiment, an attempt, a trial, a proving, and specifically, the trial of human faithfulness, integrity, virtue, constancy through adversity, affliction, trouble sent by God and serving to test or prove one's character, faith, holiness. This testing produces perseverance, a never-give-up attitude that is required of all those who follow Christ. Perseverance leads us to maturity and complete wisdom. It's interesting to note that when James instructs us to ask for wisdom, it's one of the few times in Scripture where we are told that if we ask for it, God will give it to us.

So the next time you face a tough situation, pray for wisdom and don't be surprised when God answers your prayer. As you prepare to bring God's Word to your congregation, teach in Sunday School, serve tea or welcome people at the door this Sunday remember that as you do what God has called you to do, God will be at work among you, doing the things only God can do: healing the sick, cleansing those who are covered in sin, setting prisoners free, bringing sight to the blind, helping the deaf to hear and the lame to walk.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. 6 But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. 8 Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do. (James 1:2-8)

[Thanks to our Moderator, Peter Langerman, who has helped out where one of our ministers was indisposed and unable to write for today.]

## 25. LOVE IS ALL YOU GIVE IN JESUS

**...but if I have no love, this does me no good. (1 Cor 13.3)**

Love is all you give in Jesus - love which gives and builds in Jesus.

Romance love has songs like "Ain't no mountain high enough -- to keep me away from you...", for warm, fuzzy feeling. Super-spirituality offers use of communicative gifts, noisily. Super-insight offers gifts of discernment for present and future, in vanity. Super-faith offers miracles in nature, super-generosity offers millions to welfare giving, and super-fanaticism offers even suicide blasts or self-immolation fires, which do no good. Love in Jesus gives new life to save.

**John 3.16**, "God so loved the world..." **Matt 5.44**, "Love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you...", **John 15.12-13**, "Love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no person than this, that someone lay down their life for their friends..." **John 19.30**, "It is finished" - these are the image behind **1 Cor 13.1-8**. Jesus in love for us died for our forgiveness, Jesus crucified, resurrected and giving the Holy Spirit to save, is the fullness of love.

Verse 12b "then we shall see face-to-face", means only the image of the resurrected Jesus is behind 1 Cor 13. Paul didn't write it to win a religious or philosophical contest, or as 'spirit of common humanity' wisdom literature. Hippy 'love is all you need' for self-centred harmony, tranquility, serendipity and withdrawal is not it. Only the love that saves is the love beyond ourselves which "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things", love that "never ends". Love is all you give in Jesus, the King of love.

1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. (1Corinthians13:1-8)

[Rod Adamson is married to Colleen 20 years, they have one daughter. They minister at George Presby [www.georgepresby.co.za](http://www.georgepresby.co.za) , within the APTsec 'Apostolic Protestant Theology Sector', see at APTsec under [www.resurrectlife.co.za](http://www.resurrectlife.co.za).]

## 26. THE CHURCH AND AGAPE LOVE

In the last decade, I have been privileged to serve on a mission field and became involved in various outreach ministries. The joy of making a difference in someone's life has been phenomenal. I guess the question one would have to ask after repeatedly doing something for that long is, "*why am I doing it?*"

Repeatedly doing something can easily become a legality that one ends up doing as routine instead of in devotion to the Lord. The Church at Ephesus had been doing good deeds and was working hard especially in keeping the Church free from heresy. In the process however, they fell into the trap of being legalistic and had lost the love they had at first, for God and the people -- Agape love. Agape love is the love that God showed us, that while we were still sinners God loved us and gave His only Son to save us (John 3:16). Born again believers have God abiding in



them through His Spirit and anyone who has the Spirit has the love of God in them and ought to love others (1 John 4:11).

Definitely, the Church must condemn evil. Conversely, when we begin to hate the person committing the evil deed, we have departed from the redeeming Agape love of God in Christ. The Church is also called to do good deeds. However, when we work so hard in keeping our ministries and programmes running, that we lose our devotion to Christ, we risk doing it, not out love for Christ, but as a self-satisfying duty.

Every church should desire to have Agape love if it is to be a healthy Church. The sin of forsaking Agape love carries with it a consequence. Christ calls the Ephesus Church to repent immediately and allow Agape love to flow through them once more or risk being cut-off. If they do not repent they will be like salt that has lost its saltiness, *"what good does it still have except to be thrown away and be trampled on by people."* (Matthew 5:13)

The earlier question was; *"why am I doing it?"* When we serve because Agape love flows through us, we will be fulfilling the purpose of creation -- we glorify God and enjoy serving Him out of the understanding of why we were created in the first place.

There is the danger though of Christians becoming such experts in the ministry that they serve with lack of devotion to Christ. There is a need to always maintain a proper balance between serving others and your intimate relationship with God.

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: 2 I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; 3 and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. 4 But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5 Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place---unless you repent. 6 Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.' (Revelation 2:1-7)

Elisha Gobvu an elder at Highlands Presbyterian church in Harare, Zimbabwe coordinating Mission and Outreach ministries. Married to Sandra and have been blessed with a daughter Priscilla and two sons Brendan and Bradley

## 27. BUILDING ITSELF UP IN LOVE...

[For this week our theme has been "What does a healthy church look like?"]

As a child of God, you have a very special relationship with other Christians. Paul's letter to the Ephesians pictures this relationship in two different ways. First, every believer is a member of the Body of Christ. Christ is the Head of His Body. His Body has many members, each of which is very essential. Paul says that every member of the Body must grow up and work together.(Eph. 4:15,16).

Second, the people of God are growing into a temple for the habitation of God. *"[You are] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit"*(Eph. 2:20-22).

If the Body of Christ is to become mature and the temple is to be built as a dwelling place for God, every individual Christian must be committed to building up each other. Edification is the biblical term for this process (Eph. 4:12). Evangelism leads to spiritual birth. **Edification** results in spiritual growth. The goal of edification is spiritual maturity and Christ-likeness. As each individual member does his or her part to build up the others in the Body, the entire Body grows up and becomes mature and healthy.

There are different ways to edify the Body of Christ. Many New Testament phrases with the words "one another" or "edify" suggest specific ways to build up one another.

For example, Paul writes: "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear" (Eph4:29).

We so easily speak to one another words that hurt, criticize, or tear down or words that are just plain useless. Rather, we ought to build each other up with words of grace. Words of grace are the right choice of words spoken at the right time with the right spirit. Words of grace minister to others and meet their needs. These words express love, encouragement, acceptance and affirmation. Which of us is not built up in our spirit when we hear genuine words like, "I appreciate you." "I love you." "God has used you to minister to me." "Thank you for your selfless ministry." "I have noticed the way God is changing this area of your life and I am rejoicing with you about it." Each child God has duty to the whole well being of the body of Jesus Christ. Paul implores you and I to be conscious of this assignment in this passage.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Ephesians4:14-16)

Teddy Zimba is Engaged to Rhudo Moonga, an is currently serving as a Church Development Evangelist (CDE) at Makeni Village Presybterian Transitional Congregation, Munali Presbytery, Lusaka Zambia.

## 28. THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH

[For the last week of the month of mission we look at some key concluding thoughts... Bonga Bosiki writes for us today...]

The church stands on a solid foundation which is imperishable. It is built on the foundation of God who created heaven and earth. This confession of Peter serves as an affirmation of Jesus as an integral part of Trinity. A church built on the Trinity of God is a place where Christians find the peace of mind, express their joy, increase their love and act passionately in building up the kingdom of God.

### **Peace of mind.**

Through Jesus God brings peace to the world. Jesus is the Prince of Peace. The church acts as a representative of the peace amongst humankind. At all times and in all situations, the church must be a champion peace. As a champion, she must sow the seed of joy in the midst of despair, hurts, discomfort and injustices. The Prophet Amos says, "but let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never failing stream"(Amos 5:24). The church then becomes a cooling place

for those who are hurt. The church is like a salt which makes the world a tasty place of hope. A church that spreads hope is a church that brings joy.

### **The church brings joy**

The Prophet Habakkuk says, "yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Saviour" (Habakkuk 3:18) The church that Jesus prayed for is an expression of joy in the midst of hurts. When the Christians are hurt in the world they know that there is a calming place, the church. It is in that church where broken relationships are healed, painful experiences are transformed and suffering and hardship are turned into abundance. When God builds the foundations of His church, He increases His love. Love, not hate, is the concrete foundation of God's church.

### **The church increases love.**

At the core of the church is God's love. "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John3:16) God wants humanity to keep on loving each other as sisters and brothers (Hebrews 13:1). Love is an anchor of God's kingdom.

### **The church acts passionately in building God's kingdom**

God builds the church on a rock called Jesus Christ. "If the foundations are destroyed, what can the just one do"(Psalm 11:3) The foundations are lowest load bearing part of the building. With Jesus being the foundation of the church, the church will not be shaken or moved by whatever whirlwinds of change.

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. (Matthew16:18)

Charles Bonga Bosiki is a chaplain at the SANDF and an Interim Moderator at BD Yanta Congregation in the Highveld Presbytery. He is married to Cordelia and is also an author and poet.

## **29. WE ARE ALL PART OF THE BODY AND WE ARE ALL VALUED AND NEEDED.**

Paul wrote to the Corinthians to address the issues that had divided them. The reasons given for the division of the church ranged from resurrection, Eucharist, marriage, baptism and spiritual gifts. In the section we are reflecting on, Paul is addressing the area of spiritual gifts and emphasizes that all are needed and all are important. There is no gift that is better than the other, there is no one who is better than the other hence our theme:

### **We are all part of the body and we are all valued and needed.**

In townships whenever there is a funeral, a red flag is posted by the gate to notify the people on the passing on of their beloved, and whenever there is a wedding a white flag is flown on the gate and all people within the area will come to either comfort or support. Men will be chopping firewood or digging the grave whilst women will be cooking and singing, whilst the elderly sit on their mats sipping coffee, strengthening the bereaved or blessing those who are to get married. All people have a role to play, they are so important such that no one feels left out.

The text for today emphasizes the idea that the church is made up of many parts as the human body which is comprised of many parts. When a part is missing, the body has to work hard to try

and compensate for the missing part. Paul emphasizes the idea that all parts of the body are valued and needed because they make the body complete and healthy.

In the book of Ephesians 4:3-4 there is a call to *"keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one spirit-just as you were called to one hope..."* Yet here we read how Paul reminds the church of Corinth that the foot cannot say "I'm not an eye so I do not belong to the body." This is a problem in the church today because many people have been neglected in the church because they do not belong to a certain race or tribe, class or they don't have critical skills that are spectacular like others.

However, today we are encouraged to remember that as God arranged all parts of the body and so has he arranged for us to have these differences. The reasons for those differences are not clear but what must make us value and need each other is the fact that as the body has many parts, those parts are valued, so must we value each other. As the parts make the body complete, so our differences complete us, because in our differences God makes the church complete and enables us to fulfill our mission.

Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body. (1Corinthians12:14-20)

[I am Pascal Sibanda, father to Musa, husband to Sandisiwe and a minister at Ntabazinduna UPCSA under the care and guidance of the Presbytery of Zimbabwe.]

### **30. TIMOTHY EMBODIES THE JOURNEY OF THE CHURCH**

I am the third Minister in a family of eight, and one day I and my brothers asked our father whether it shocked him that from one family three brothers are in full time ministry. His response was that it was not strange to him because his grandfather was an evangelist. Through studying the life of Timothy, we will discover God has given us a model of how to pass on our faith to the next generation.

Timothy was a young man when Paul revisited Lystra on his second missionary trip, approximately five years after the first. It may be that Timothy's family became Christians during that first visit. During those five years, Timothy matured in his faith under the spiritual guidance of his mother and grandmother. In Paul's last letter to Timothy, Paul notes the family spiritual environment in his last epistle writing, *"I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice..."* (2 Tim. 1:5).

Children mimic their parents' religious experience: they pray as you have prayed in their presence, they may raise their hands in worship when they see you raise your hands. Timothy was no longer acting a part as the "good" child, he had taken ownership of his faith, as Paul had seen the evidence of this faith in Timothy's actions.

Paul further instructs Timothy to follow the same model of transmitting faith to others as the model for maintaining healthy churches, *"And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others."* (2 Tim.

2:2) When the church stops to invest in the young people, the new converts and to disciple them to maturity, then the church becomes dependent upon those "patriarchs" of the faith and when they pass on, the church struggles to sustain its life and work.

Every church leadership should tirelessly work towards their own redundancy. Passing on the mantle to the next leaders who will become a rich resource when those in charge are indisposed.

Paul speaks of Timothy as a faithful person in this passage, the word describes someone who always does the right thing even when no one else is looking. This person will always be truthful and true. They're filled with integrity and will hold up their end of the deal no matter the sacrifice. In the N.T faithful may also mean one who multiplies their talents and gifting for the greater good. (Mat25:23). We need to multiply ourselves through the lives of others. We are called upon to be faithful in this cause, passing on our faith from one generation to the next through nurture, example, love and care.

For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church. (1Corinthians4:17)

[I am Richard and married to Aretha, and the LORD has blessed us with three kids, two boys Khumbo, Mbawemi and one girl Chimwemwe. I am serving at St. Columba's Presbyterian Church in Kabwe. I enjoy watching soccer and my team is Manchester United.]

## 31. A HEALTHY AND VIBRANT CHURCH

What's the first question that anyone asks you when they realise that you are part of a church? "How big is your congregation?" or "How many members does it have?" I was talking to my children's teacher recently about her church, and her first statement to me was that it was a small, family church.

But what are the signs of a healthy church? According to 1Thessalonians1:4-10, a healthy church is faithful, loving, welcoming, hard-working and broadcasting a message. When we think of healthy churches, we think of how many projects we have running, how much money we get in each month, how well the preacher preaches, and one article even suggested, that the sign of a healthy church was in the "plurality of elders"!

But Paul in addressing the people of Thessalonica, is commending them for their example. He tells them how people as far away as Macedonia and Achaia had heard about them (over 200km in an age of limited technology), how the word of their imitation of Christ had gotten around. That it was their actions that were speaking and not their words! Word had gotten out about how they welcomed anyone into their gatherings -- Can we say the same? Do we welcome the "sinners" as Jesus did? Or have we become an exclusive gathering? How the people had abandoned the dead idols to serve the one, true God -- Again, have we abandoned the dead idols around us? Are we only serving the one true God?

Our challenge today is to be like the church in Thessalonica -- that our actions be louder than our words and that we be known as the churches that welcome everyone, no matter their station in life, with open arms and that we serve the only true God, as we wait in joyful expectation of His coming.



For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. 6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. 7 And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. 8 The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia--your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, 9 for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead--Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath. (1Thessalonians1:4-10)

Ruth Armstrong, wife to Warren, mother to Lia, Sarah and Noah. Avid crocheter and runner. Serving at St Andrews Germiston.

## 32.CONCLUSION: OUR MISSIONAL GOD: THE CALL AND THE PROMISE

[Our Moderator-Elect, Siphon Mtetwa, provides us with the concluding summation of the Month of Mission - which, most appropriately, puts the spotlight on our Missional God...]

- **The Call:** It is the Lord Yahweh, the God of Israel and the God of Judah, the God of Africa and the God of the UPCSA who calls us in righteousness and who has taken hold of our hand. We are confident that we will not lose the way, as People of the Way, because it is OUR God who has made the Call. Our ministry has been wheel-aligned into God's Call and Will. We are not self-commanding soldiers, pulling in every direction we will for ourselves. We are a people who have been called, who have been led, who have been appropriately aligned.
- **The Promise:** It is the Lord Yahweh, who promises to be with us and lead us - the same God who divided the Red Sea for Israel to cross it on dry land; the same God who saved the three Hebrew boys (Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego) from the furnace; the same God who saved Daniel from the ravage of the lions in the den. It is the same God who expects us to live by the divine Code of Ethics, to do justice and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God. The God of Promises will lead us on the missional trajectory.
- **The Mission:** To become a Covenant People and a Light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, free the captives and get back to light those who are sitting in a dark dungeon. If our God is missional God, our missional direction through the Call and the Promise is sealed. May God bless the UPCSA!

This is what God the LORD says--  
he who created the heavens and stretched them out,  
who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it,  
who gives breath to its people,  
and life to those who walk on it:  
6 "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness;  
I will take hold of your hand.  
I will keep you and will make you  
to be a covenant for the people  
and a light for the Gentiles,  
7 to open eyes that are blind,  
to free captives from prison  
and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. (Isaiah42:5-7)

Rev. Siphon Mtetwa is the Moderator-Designate of the UPCSA, married to Xoli and with three kids and numerous grandkids. He is Minister at St. David's in Pietermaritzburg with the Drakensberg Presbytery. He is a poet and jazz lover.

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This brings our Month of Mission to an end. Thank you to all those who have contributed to what has been, I think, one of our most significant series yet.

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But at the end of the day the Glory, Praise and Honour belongs to our God whose missionality extended to the abundance of Creation, the giving of His Son, the outpouring of His Spirit and His sharing of His Mission with you and me!