

The Parable of the Lost Sons – Part 2 The older sons – Luke 15v11-13 &v25-32

¹¹ Jesus went on to say, “There was once a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to him, ‘Father, give me my share of the property now.’ So the man divided his property between his two sons. ¹³ After a few days the younger son sold his part of the property and left home with the money. He went to a country far away, where he wasted his money in reckless living.

¹⁴ He spent everything he had. Then a severe famine spread over that country, and he was left without a thing. ¹⁵ So he went to work for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him out to his farm to take care of the pigs. ¹⁶ He wished he could fill himself with the bean pods the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything to eat. ¹⁷ At last he came to his senses and said, ‘All my father’s hired workers have more than they can eat, and here I am about to starve! ¹⁸ I will get up and go to my father and say, ‘Father, I have sinned against God and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer fit to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired workers.’” ²⁰ So he got up and started back to his father. “He was still a long way from home when his father saw him; his heart was filled with compassion, and he ran, threw his arms around his son, and kissed him. ²¹ ‘Father,’ the son said, ‘I have sinned against God and against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son.’ ²² But the father called to his servants. ‘Hurry!’ he said. ‘Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. ²³ Then go and get the prize calf and kill it, and let us celebrate with a feast! ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found.’ And so the feasting began.

²⁵ “In the meantime the older son was out in the field. On his way back, when he came close to the house, he heard the music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him, ‘What’s going on?’ ²⁷ ‘Your brother has come back home,’ the servant answered, ‘and your father has killed the prize calf, because he got him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸ The older brother was so angry that he would not go into the house; so his father came out and begged him to come in. ²⁹ But he spoke back to his father, ‘Look, all these years I have worked for you like a slave, and I have never disobeyed your orders. What have you given me? Not even a goat for me to have a feast with my friends! ³⁰ But this son of yours wasted all your property on prostitutes, and when he comes back home, you kill the prize calf for him!’ ³¹ ‘My son,’ the father answered, ‘you are always here with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and be happy, because your brother was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found.’

Mindfulness

We grew up with hardback ladybird children’s books that were easy to read and understand but really informative too. When I was 8 I loved my book on understandings maps. Then there were books like How it works: The Motor Car. Recently Ladybird have published spoof ones for adults. The one I had for Christmas was How it works: The Wife. For example one page said “When a wife feels sad she eats chocolate. Chocolate makes the wife happy. But eating chocolate makes her worry about her weight and her skin which makes her feel sad. Still there’s always chocolate !”

I got my son the Ladybird book of mindfulness. One page says “Leanne has been staring at this beautiful tree for 5 hours. She was meant to be in the office. Tomorrow she will be fired. In this way, mindfulness has solved her work-related stress. !” But I gave him that book, because he is actually very good at living in the moment and enjoying the present, without worrying too much about what’s going next. He would pull me up if I wasn’t doing that, such as being on holiday then talking about his exams, or the next holiday. To be honest I needed that. I need to be more mindful

Jesus was definitely on a mission when he was on Earth, and in his last period he certainly knew the cross was waiting for him. That said, he seemed very good at making the most of every day whatever challenges came his way, he seemed to rise above them, and be having fun at the same time. He was probably the ultimate champion at mindfulness.

Yet for us, it’s true of me, even in situations where we have the power to make our own decisions, and enjoy our circumstances, we can feel trapped and sad, and generally a sense of being lost. This is not at all what Jesus wants for us.

The Pharisees ‘should on’ Jesus

Luke 15, one of my favourite chapters, starts by saying

One day when many tax collectors and other outcast came to listen to Jesus, the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law started grumbling’. “This man welcomes outcasts and even eats with them”. (Luke 15 v1-2)

It was another gloriously mindful day for Jesus, as he is teaching the people in the open air, and he cast his eyes lovingly around the big crowd. It certainly wasn't the normal punters that turned out to hear Rabbis. There were hated men that collected taxes for the Roman occupiers, there were ladies who earned their money selling their bodies, and no doubt there were those that enjoyed the service of these women. Plus others that had just given up trying to follow all the Religious laws. They were all just labelled sinners.

The religious rulers went to great lengths to ensure that they did not break God's law as revealed in the 10 commandments, by making many extra laws that if kept would keep a good buffer zone between you and breaking the Law. These were interpretations of the law written down in their Talmud, but in their minds these interpretations had taken on the same status as God's revelation in scripture. They had become religious laws in their own right and many were crazy laws. You could spit on a rock, but not on soil because that made mud which could be a building material, so was classified as working. You could not put false teeth in on the Sabbath. If they had just kept to these laws themselves that would have been fine, but they tried to make sure everyone did this daft stuff too. You 'should do this', and 'you should do that'. If not, you're a sinner !

On this day the religious rulers had popped up amongst this cast of common folk and outcasts, and were directing their laws and complaints in the direction of Jesus. "Look at him" they accused piously, "He **should** not be welcoming these outcasts, he **should** keep his distance from them, he **should** definitely not defile himself by eating with them!"

One year, I heard the Canadian Salvation Army speaker Danielle Strickland, at the Christian festival Spring Harvest. She talked about her friends that would say to her 'Dani You should do this' or ' Dani you should not do that'. She said she would reply to them, 'Don't **should** on me'. She can listen to God's voice and decide herself what was right each day, make her own decisions, and did not need to be manipulated or trapped by the expectations of others.

In Luke 15, the Pharisees are 'should-ing on Jesus'. He casts his eye over these two contrasting groups of people, the outcasts and the complaining religious leaders. Very different, yet Jesus could see similarities, they were both lost in their own way. The Pharisees and the teachers of the Law were regularly in God's House, i.e. the synagogues and the temple, and yet failed to see what God was doing through Jesus. They failed to see the love of the Father God expressed through his only Son. Partly because of their poor leadership and the heavy burden of their expectations on an individual, the outcasts had given up on God and his laws and had morally strayed a long way from what God had intended for them. However, these outcasts to society were now showing an interest in God once more, drawn into his love by the person of Jesus.

Jesus responds with a trilogy

Jesus faces his critics, and tells a trilogy of stories about the lost. In the Old Testament the most common images of God were military ones, my shield and defender, my refuge, my strong tower etc. But Jesus uses more personal images and describes God as a faithful shepherd, as a diligent woman, and as a good father. In the first parable the sheep is lost far away on the mountain side, just like the outcasts had wandered far from God. The woman had lost her dowry coin close at home, just like God had lost his religious rulers who would not accept the new move of God's love through Jesus as relevant to them. Then he emphasises these two points again by telling probably the best short story ever, in which there are two sons that are lost to their Father, one lost far away and one lost to him in his own home.

A troubled family

Jesus tells of a landowner, a farmer, a nobleman, who has slaves and servants and two sons. Most people in his village would no doubt have envied him as he was well off. But he didn't have what he really wanted and that was for his two sons to return his love, for them to love him like he loved them.

One awful day, the older son hears that his younger son has asked his Father for his inheritance, which is like going up to him and wishing him dead. This would not be something even thought about unless the

Father was ill, dying or dead. But he felt as healthy as ever. The older son, knew of his younger brothers request. How does he respond to the shocking behaviour of his younger sibling?

The first thing an older son would normally do in that situation would be to loudly refuse the split up of the inheritance, and his share, whilst his Father was still in good health. He would show unending loyalty to his Father and oppose the request of his brother and any thought that such a request could even be considered. ". It was normal for the oldest son to have a double portion, so the younger son wanted his third share". The culture would expect the Father to explode with anger at this request, and discipline the boy severely for the cruel implications of his demands.

When there was a break down in family relationship, which is evident here, between Father and younger son, then the middle eastern tradition would be for a third party to step in and help heal the relationship. This reconciler would be selected on the basis of who was the closest in relationship to those that were at odds. In this case, the village would be wanting the older brother to take up this role as would have been their custom. Even if the older brother hates his sibling, he would still carry out the reconciliation process for the sake of his Father. However the older son remains silent on this matter, indicating a refusal to intervene. He then also benefits from the transaction, and accepts the early ownership of his two thirds share of the inheritance. This indicates that he too had a poor relationship with his Father, not loving him in the same way that he was loved by this good man.

So the property is divided between them. However neither son, has the right to dispose of the property whilst the Father is still alive. Yet this is still not enough for the younger son, and he wants not only possession of his inheritance, but disposition rights, which he is not entitled too whilst his Father is alive. Shockingly the Father agrees, the land is sold, and loaded with cash, the younger son goes off to the far land, cutting all ties with his family. He was now indeed lost to his Father, and his older brother seems only too happy to let him go.

Unhappy with his lot

What was left of the business now belonged to the older son. He was its sole owner and entitled to all the profits. The Father still had the right to live off the proceeds whilst he was alive, and his son must make sure his Fathers needs were met, but what was left of the business was now all his.

Yet Jesus pictures the older son, as one that is not happy with his lot. He is working out in the fields every day, and may well be exhausted by the days end. He probably had to lose some hired workers, or even a slave or two that he had become fond of, because the farm was smaller now with less work. He no doubt led in bed exhausted after a normal day, thinking about what fun his younger sibling must have had that day, and got more and more annoyed about the seeming injustice of the whole situation. His brother was no doubt doing all the things that he would have loved to have done.

We have here a son who is not mindful of his own true situation. He is comparing himself to a slave, or hired servant, because he works as hard as they do. Yet he is their master, he owns the business, the profits are his, the decisions are his. He has much to be thankful and happy about, and yet he feels trapped, he feels sad and angry.

The younger sons fate.

The first part of the parable focuses on the younger son, on how he blows his inheritance, and reaches desperation point where he is herding pigs and slowly starving. Then he finally comes to his senses, thinking of how much better off his Fathers hired workers were than he was. He suddenly realised how wrong he had been, he had sinned against his God and his Father, would return home, make his confession and ask to be taken back as a hired worker, so he could start earning the forgiveness of his family and his village. The Father who knew his sons well had fully **expected** his younger son to lose all his money, and he was keeping a look out for him everyday in case he returned. When he did see him, the Father runs to the edge of the village, before anyone else can get to his son, throws his arms around him and kisses him, to show he is fully forgiven. So over whelmed by his Fathers love, the younger son realises that his Father has accepted him back as his son, and to ask to be a hired servant instead would only insult his Father

again. So overjoyed at this sons return, he dresses him as a guest of honour in a ceremonial robe, and plans a spontaneous party for the village to see that the prodigal is welcomed back into the family as a beloved son.

Party music in the air

The older son was out in the field. On his way back, when he came close to the house, he heard the music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him, 'What's going on?' ²⁷ 'Your brother has come back home,' the servant answered, 'and your father has killed the prize calf, because he got him back safe and sound.' ²⁸ The older brother was so angry that he would not go into the house; so his father came out and begged him to come in (Luke 15v25-28)

We pick up the story of the older son again as he is returning to the village from a day's work on the land. The farmers did not live in or by their fields in a remote location, but they would live in the village, and be part of village life. The elder son did not have a clue of what had happened that day, until he heard party music. What was this, there were no weddings plans for the week? He realises its coming from **his** house. He sees a servant and asked him what on earth was going on? He tells him. "Your brother is home. He's lost all his money to Gentiles. Your Dads so happy to have him home safe he has thrown this great party for the village, he's even ...", the man hesitates "killed the fatted calf".

How should the older brother feel in our story? Surely he should be pleased that some-one lost to the family, his own flesh and blood, is home safely. He is reunited with his lost brother. No - he is angry, he is seething. He couldn't care less about his younger brother. He'd gone away from home and disgraced himself, and saw absolutely no reason why he should be welcomed back.

Custom would require for the older son at a family banquet to take up the 'Master of ceremonies' type roll, receiving guests, ordering servants around, making sure everyone has enough to eat, and giving out compliments. But he refuses to go in and join the party. If he had a normal relationship with his family he would have been keen to join in the fun. Even if displeased, he should still have gone along with his Father's wishes, honoured his brother, and then argued with his Father in private about the matter. He no doubt stood outside the party slagging off his Father and his brother to anyone that would listen, making out how hard done by he was. This would have been seen as very insulting behaviour that would normally stir up anger in any Father that hears of this. It would be expected for the Father to discipline such a son, or at least rebuke him severely over his behaviour.

However for the second time in a day, the Father demonstrates unexpected and counter-cultural levels of love and humility, this time towards his eldest son. His Father comes out to him, and kindly implores him to join the party.

Complaints Complaints

But he spoke back to his father, 'Look, all these years I have worked for you like a slave, and I have never disobeyed your orders. What have you given me? Not even a goat for me to have a feast with my friends! But this son of yours wasted all your property on prostitutes, and when he comes back home, you kill the prize calf for him!' (Luke 15v29-30)

The son openly disobeys and challenges his Father in public, disgracing him in front of his guests. He does not even address him as Father, which in itself was a terrible insult. Then the son complains that he leads a servant life, and then he is not allowed to kill a goat and party with his friends when he wants to. We see in his words, that he has been living in his Father's house with the attitude of a slave rather than that of a son. His complaint announces that he does not include his father, brother, and family friends as friends of his own, and that he has his own completely separate friendship group. He says he has never disobeyed his Father and yet is now arguing with him in public. His complaint is one that a servant may have if he feels underpaid – where is what I have earned?

It seems to me that that he never stepped up to the plate ! He should have fully taken on the roles and responsibilities of sole owner of the business, kept the books and made the important decisions. I remember starting my first leadership job, which was also my first job on a power station. I was Head of Design with

my own team of experienced Engineers. I had to lead them and take on the responsibilities. I couldn't behave the same way as I had done before. It seems though that elder son, had left his Father to carry on doing the owners jobs, whilst he stayed out in the fields doing what he had always done, a similar role to that of the servants and hired workers.

He now has this wonderful inheritance, before he should have had, and should have been making the most of this new opportunity and enjoying it. However he is implying that he is miserable with his Father still around. We can now see clearly, for the first time, the break down in the relationship with the older son and his Father. This is almost as serious as it had been with the younger son when he had left. The younger son had been open and honest in his disobedience, but the older son had harboured and concealed a 'slave mentality', and bitterness towards his Father in private.

As owner of the farm and business, which he had inherited fully, he was fully entitled to kill a sheep or a goat without his Fathers permission. He was just **not mindful** of the privileges he had everyday. He could have woke up one day, and said 'This is a great day and we have had a good start to the year, I think I'll kill a goat, give thanks to God for own fine life, open a bottle of red wine, and invite my friends round for a barbecue. I don't suppose he will want to join us for long, but I'll tell my Father what I am doing and invite him anyway. Would his Father have objected to doing this. Of course not, because he wanted good things for his son. That's what the older son could have done if he had not relegated himself to the status of a slave or servant, or if he had been properly mindful of his position in the family, and not cut himself off from them (i.e. by identifying with an exclusive friendship group outside his family).

The loving response

Even now, the Father does not force the young man, to go into the party and do his duties. He wants the son to please him out of love, not because of a sense of duty, or he has been ordered to do it. He overlooks the lack of being called Father, the rudeness and arrogance, the bitterness, the distortion of his situation, and the unfair accusations. He overlooks all of this and responds in love.

³¹ 'My son,' the father answered, 'you are always here with me, and everything I have is yours.

The word for 'Son' that the Father uses was an affectionate one despite the conflict situation. He assures him that everything he has belongs to this son, the returning of his younger brother does not change any of that. He may not have killed a goat for a celebration but he has been cared for and fed from the Fathers table every day of his life.

Recently I had been struggling with loss in some areas of my life, and become a bit inward looking and despondent. So at a conference on the Holy Spirit, I went forward for prayer, wanting to recommit myself again to sharing Gods love with others. The young man praying for me, got a prophetic word and said 'God knows all that you have lost and none of it was a punishment. Nothing can separate you from his love'. I then got this verse in my head from God too, which was 'You are my son, you are always with me and everything I have is yours'. I was feeling the weight of loss in my life from several different areas and God was reminding me that I belong to him, and his kingdom and all its riches are my inheritance'. It was a wonderful moment of affirmation for me.

Pause a moment. Imagine right now, that your Father in heaven, is saying that to you right now. 'Everything I have is yours - you are a much loved member of my family. My son Jesus is yours, his Spirit is yours to empower you and comfort you, all the wealth and riches of heaven are part of your incredible inheritance which you can dip into now. Everything I have is yours'.

It's an incredible thing to ponder, but I find it difficult to properly grasp this wonderful truth.

The Lost and Found party

V32 But we had to celebrate and be happy, because your brother was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found.'

The Father wanted to publically celebrate the return of his Son. By ordering the fatted calf to be killed for the banquet and not a sheep or a goat, meant that the Father wanted enough meat to be able to invite the community too, not just his family. The meat would not keep, and the fatted calf would feed a 100 people. The banquet and sacrifice of this special animal is what the Father would do only for a highly honoured and special guest. The joy of the son's homecoming was so great to the Father that it must be celebrated with the grandest banquet imaginable. In doing so, he desires to bring his son back into relationship with himself, his family and the whole community. Despite handing the older son the business, the Father whilst still alive was fully entitled to not only live off the land himself, but also feed anyone else he chooses from the land. So he was entitled to kill the fatted calf if he wanted to, even though it may have made a dent in the years profits that the older son would get

The Father continues to engage his elder son in a loving way. . He would have told him first had he been around, but there was no time to go out to him at the far fields, arrangements had to be made. These were extra-ordinary circumstances. I remember going to a 100th birthday where the birthday girl was given a bottle of champagne, and she said she would put it aside for a special occasion. It was politely pointed out to her that this was **the** special occasion, implying she wouldn't have any bigger than this, and the champagne was taken off her and promptly opened by one of her family.

One evening not long after his mother had died, a cousin, one of 9, was in a pub having a drink, and a lady a little older than him, came up to him. She said I am sorry to bother you, but I think you're my brother. He looked at her and immediately saw his mother's features in her, and said I don't think you are my sister, I know you are, and warmly embraced her. Unknown to any of us, she had been taken off her teenage mother as a baby by the authorities, and had never known the extensive family that she had including her 9 brothers and sisters. A party was quickly arranged so she could meet her family and celebrate this sister who had been lost for 60 years.

You do not celebrate the day to day existence of a child who is well, but if one is brought back for the brink of death, then who wouldn't want to party. My cousins threw a party when their sister was found.

In each of the trilogy of parables that Jesus tells in Luke 15 there is a party. In the first parable, the shepherd finds the lost sheep, he joyfully carry's it home on his shoulders, then calls together his friends and neighbours and rejoices with them. In the second parable when the diligent woman find the lost coin, she calls her friend over for a party. So likewise in this third parable, the Father on finding his son, gets together his family, friends and neighbours and has a great party.

Each one of us was made and designed to be in a relationship with our Father in heaven, and we get lost in life. Heaven is waiting for us to be found. The Prosecco, helium balloons, sparklers and the Party Cannon are all on standby! When anyone that has been lost to God is found, the party begins and heaven celebrates.

Sons and Slaves

The younger son was outwardly disobedient and already lost to his Father, and then got even more lost in a far-away land. The older son was inwardly disobedient, and already lost to his Father, even though he was in his Father's house and farmstead.

We see the younger son, the prodigal, realises he is lost and returns to his Father, only to be embraced by an unexplainable love that had always been there for him, but he had been so wrapped up with his own selfishness that he had never realised before that this love was there for him. He was going to offer himself back to his Father as good material for a hired worker. His Father already had slaves and hired workers, he didn't want another one. He wanted his son back, but not a son that complained about him all the time and just wanted him dead, but a son who would accept his love and love him back.

The older son had the full rights of sonship, and his full inheritance, and yet behaved like a servant, resistant to the love of the Father, and not at all mindful and thankful for everything he had.

The Father always loved his two sons and always would. It was a love that desperately wanted a close relationship with his sons, but a love that would allow them their own 'free will' to follow through with their personal decisions whatever the cost was to the Father. Even if a son wished him dead, it would not change the depth of his love for that son. Oh – what depth of love is this?

Fault 1 – Looking down on others

We have to remember that this parable is told primarily for the benefit of the Pharisees who are grumbling about the types of low-life that Jesus hangs out with. The younger son of course represent the Tax collectors and outcasts that they are complaining about. The Pharisees are represented by the older son.

They are all Jews, with the same ancestor, under the same law, and are all loved by God. The so called sinners may have chosen a bad or destructive life-style and gone along way from what God had wanted for their lives, yet in part this was the **fault** of the Religious rulers for not reaching out to them and helping them more. They were supposed to be the shepherds looking after their flock, but had been poor stewards of these wayward Jews.

However, these outcasts, like the prodigal, had come to a point of realisation that they had done wrong. They knew that spiritually they had been lost and needed to come home to their heavenly Father. It was through the all-inclusive ministries of John the Baptist and then Jesus that had led them to this decision. Yet the religious rulers had not only made no effort with them, they had deliberately ostracized them, and didn't want them back like they should have done. It's all grumbles and complaints, and 'shoulds' and 'should-nots', just like the older son.

What about us? What if you heard that some-one who had caused you great personal harm, had just become a Christian and was going to start coming to your church. Ouch. What about hearing that a hated and notorious criminal has come to faith in Jesus whilst in prison. They will receive the same grace, love and forgiveness that you have, that Billy Graham had. Who would find that hard? Why? Because in our eyes they have done far more wrong then we have, and in our eyes are less deserving. So like the elder son looking down on his younger sibling, and the Pharisees looking down on the outcasts, we can be in danger of looking down on others.

Perhaps we need a new series of Christian ladybird books to respell out some basic truths e.g. 'How it works: Forgiveness' ! Simple and easy to understand but very informative.

The truth is that none of us are deserving of God's grace and forgiveness. The Pharisees and other religious rulers despite their gargantuan efforts to achieve holiness, they were no more deserving than the Prostitutes and Tax Collectors, because they still fell far short by their own efforts of God requires to accept us into his presence.

Outside of any Christmas grotto is a line of children waiting to see Santa. Once Mum has paid the entry price, the children queue up to go into the presence of Father Christmas, and receive to them what is a free gift. They are not means tested. You bully your sister Joey, and Brittany you kick up a real fuss at bedtimes so sorry but no present for you two this year. Charlotte can have three instead because she's much better behaved!

We have no right to judge others, or look down on others, because we have all fallen short. Whoever we are, whatever we have done – we can come to the Father and receive our free gift of new life. Why because Jesus has already paid the entry price, by dying on the cross. We are all equal in his sights. Some are **not** more equal than others. He loves us all with the same intensity.

Fault 2 – Being Religious but not God-filled

The Pharisees were devout Jews that worked extremely hard to keep all the laws, and be an example of Godliness to the people, and held a lot of respect by many. However they were all about law and not life. They didn't reflect the love that God had for his people. They didn't want to listen to John the Baptist, or Jesus when they came with the Good News that the Kingdom of God was breaking through to Earth, and

God was drawing all men and women back to him. There was a new freedom in following Jesus which they were not mindful of. They did not want to see things any differently and compromise any of their defined duties and rituals. They may have **served** God dutifully, but they were denying themselves family status.

If we are not careful, we too can get so caught up in our Church rituals and routines that our focus can be on the Church and not on Jesus. So we end up serving the Church and we can become a servant instead of a son or daughter.

How do I know if I have become a servant in the negative sense? If you ask yourself why do I do what I do? Is it because others think that you 'should' do it, so you do. Do you do it because you think that's the sort of things Church people do. So you might turn up early every Sunday, put out the hymn books, sit through a talk by Kevin, then wash up the tea cups after the service. Then go home having done your duty for another week. These are all good things, and you can quote Galatians 6v9 'Let us never become weary of doing good'. But we can end up **doing** church, instead of **being** church.

Reject any notions of a servant mind-set, doing things for God because you have to. Instead accept the fact that there is nothing you can do to make up for the wrong you have done, and there is nothing you can do to make God love you anymore than he already does. It's all a free gift. Everything we do should be in response to that love, out of our love relationship with Jesus.

Yes Jesus has bought us at a price, and we do serve him. That's the right thing to do. However we should be doing all things because we realise how much Jesus loves us, and we want to do things that will please him, and not for any other reason. Our obedience to doing what is right for Jesus, should flow out of the love we have for him. We can find that difficult because we are not really mindful of how much he loves us and has for us. Perhaps we could do with a ladybird book on Christian mindfulness! Simple and easy to understand but very informative.

Seize the Day

Each day is a gift from God, but are we mindful of that. Have you ever said 'I'll be okay once I've got through Monday!'. The author of Ecclesiastes whilst somewhat on a downer, does implore the reader to seize the day (Carpe Deum), to enjoy the season you are in, make the most of every moment.

You are not here to survive, you are here to shine.

His Spirit has not come to enslave you, give you countless things to do with no sense of reward. Nor has his Spirit simply come to bless you, to lavish you with nice feelings and good things, but leave your heart mind and soul untouched.

His Spirit has come to transform you, everyday more and more into the likeness of his Jesus. He does this by **both** giving you opportunities to serve **and** blessing you, giving you generous gifts in the process.

It is a daily journey of discovery. Keep in tune with God throughout the day, listen to his gentle prompts and **you** decide what is best for your Christian walk, and don't let other people 'should on you'.

Before you start busying yourself in a day, stop and reflect on the gift of this next 24 hours, and give thanks for it. Pray 'Lord help me get into your agenda for my life today – lets do it'.

Everything you have is ultimately a gift from God, even your job. Some might not believe that! Don't rush through the day and miss all the best bits, like not seeing that wonderful piece of architecture you just walked past, or the countryside you've driven, or go indoors just before a glorious sunset. Snatch moments of quiet throughout the day, where you listen to God, what thoughts come in your mind, what does he want you to do. How can you best please him with your time, finance and energies, but at the same time enjoying the wonderful resources he has made available to you.

When you asked Jesus into your life, and started following him, you became adopted into his family, and there was a party in heaven. So remember that God loves you with a love that is beyond comprehension, and he comes to you each day and says 'All that I have is yours'. Wow !

The apostle Paul was a very driven man, perhaps not one you would think was given over to mindfulness,. Yet he tells the church in Philippians **“I’ve learned by now to be quite content whatever my circumstances. I’m just as happy with little as with much, with much as with little. I’ve found the recipe for being happy whether full or hungry, hands full or hands empty. Whatever I have, wherever I am, I can make it through anything in the One who makes me who I am.”** (Phil 4v11-13).

When you read about how many times he was beaten up, stoned, shipwrecked, and imprisoned then that attitude sounds like some-one good at mindfulness to me. Let's be the same with Jesus' help.

Concluding Prayer

I thank you that I am never beyond the reach of your Father's heart, your love and acceptance, whatever I have done wrong in my life. I recognise today that that is also true of those that have hurt me and who I have looked down. I am sorry Lord for those times when I have seen others as less deserving than myself. I am sorry for when I have nurtured unforgiveness to others. Forgive me Lord.

Help me take up my place as an adopted child in your family, to live as a son or daughter can, and not as a slave or servant doing things because we feel we should do, and not because we want to. Help me be more mindful of all the good things you have given me, and all the good things you want to give me, if I'll only ask you. Thank you for the gift of each day, and help me live each one to the maximum, being mindful of you and your provision and becoming more like you every day. Amen.