

BLESS THEM, O LORD

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CHAPTER 1 BLESSINGS...TO THOUSANDS OF GENERATIONS

In the beginning God created heaven and earth...as dwelling place for His human family. Man and woman He created them. To love one another to such an extent that they would be prepared to commit to one another before God and man. To love one another so much that they dance as one to the music of love playing between them. In order that, if children would be born to them, they could grow up in the security of a house filled with healthy intimacy where there is room to grow and develop into human beings that understand and live out their God-determined roles.

The Bible is full of this. Listen to the following texts:

- Genesis 1:26-28: "Then God said, "And now we will make human beings; they will be like us and resemble us. They will have power over the fish, the birds, and all animals, domestic and wild, large and small". So God created human beings, making them to be like himself. He created them male and female, blessed them, and said, "Have many children, so that your descendants will live all over the earth and bring it under their control. I am putting you in charge of the fish, the birds, and all the wild animals."
- Genesis 2:18, 21-25: "Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to live alone. I will make a suitable companion to help him...Then the Lord God made the man fall into a deep sleep, an while he was sleeping, he took out one of the man's ribs and closed up the flesh. He formed a woman out of the rib and brought her to him. Then the man said, "At last there is one of my own kind – Bone taken from my bone, and flesh from my flesh. Woman is her name because she was taken out of man. That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united with his wife, and they become one. The man and the woman were both naked, but they were not embarrassed."
- Exodus 20:5,6: "Do not bow down to any idol or worship it, because I am the Lord your God and I tolerate no rivals. I bring punishment on those who hate me and on their descendants down to the third and fourth generation. But I show my love to thousands of generations of those who love me and obey my laws."
- Matthew 19:6: "So they are no longer two, but one. Man must not separate, then, what God has joined together."
- Ephesians 5:28-30: "Men ought to love their wives just as they love their own bodies. A man who loves his wife loves himself. (No one ever hates his own body. Instead, he feeds it and takes care of it, just as Christ does the church; for we are members of his body.)"

If there is at least one place where this can be true, it is in the lives of Christians. Being a Christian means after all that God made you new from the inside with the life of Jesus in you. On top of that He gave His Spirit to come and live in your body, to work out the details of God's plans in your life and your relationships. If you would allow Him to...

It is as simple as that. In this way God wanted to bless people...down to thousands of generations...generation upon generation upon generation. But when we look at our own lives and the lives of others around us we see, instead of blessing...so much pain and chaos.

As in the Jerusalem of old. Jeremiah 6 sketches such a scenario for us. Let's have a look at it for a moment:

- Jerusalem, dwelling place of the living God among men, is under siege, from all sides. As a result of so many openings in their armor, one sees only wounds and sickness (v.7). Look around you and you see the same things in many marriages and families. Today we would say: "the lives and relationships of Christians are in just as much pain as the non-believers around us!"
- The tragedy is that God doesn't want it this way (v.10). He is constantly spelling out to His people that there is a different way of doing things. So few actually listen though. God's Word and His guidelines, according to such people, are old fashioned and out of date. Therefore they rather follow their own ways, like those around them in the un-believing community.

- The result is that people lose their homes and their marriages and families are destroyed (v. 12).
- Other things, like money, become far more important to them than their relationships with one another and with others (v.13).
- All around them all sorts of quick fixes are available, just like today. Ministering to one another is so superficial and shallow that demonic strongholds and attacks beneath the surface go undetected. People are just not prepared to search their foundations for the root causes and mistakes.
- Therefore the call in verse 16: you are standing at a crossroads. It is time to make a decision again as to where you are going from here. It is time to discover your Biblical heritage and God's plans through which He wants to bless you and your descendants again. Choose to commit to living accordingly.
- Naturally there will always be those – even among believers – who choose to carry on as is. But this is their choice. You, instead, choose life!

Our Heavenly Father wants to give us peace and rest. Also for our souls. He wants to bring an end to us having to fight for our little place in the sun. A place you can be yourself, as God created you. Where there is mutual respect, acceptance and where we can lovingly serve one another.

Most of us were raised in families where for many generations people held onto Christian traditions and values. Today I realize that there is a wealth of wisdom in God's guidelines in His Word. There is a heritage imbedded that God intended for our descendants, and us; a heritage of life, peace and blessings.

But for one reason or another most of us did not understand it clearly.

Therefore the chaos:

- Just look at the high divorce rate of 66%
- The hundreds of abortions daily
- Hundreds of incidents of assault, molestation, rape and violence every day.
- Just look at all the single parent families and children rebelling

So much pain, so much pain, so many lonely people. How many young girls, for example, leave their parental homes in a wounded state, just to become involved in rebellion in the great big world out there, with a man who says he loves her. She gives herself to him in an attempt to hold on to him, before marriage. And becomes pregnant, just to experience him dropping her like a hot potato. Then an abortion follows, as a short-term solution to the problem, and she finds herself, a lifetime later, having to live and struggle with the feelings of guilt, pain, and shame. In pain and hunger she struggles through life, just to be caught in the next cycle of pain.

It is time that we break these cycles. That we choose to teach people that there is another way and another solution. That brings real peace. It is time to choose God's solution; to choose the formula for success contained in Psalm 1.

But how do we practically bring people there? For me the solution lies in that at the very least in our own midst, as a family of believers, we should choose to serve one another according to God's guidelines. Off course many of us made mistakes in the past and did things differently to what God intended. But it is a new day. God's forgiveness is there to help us start over again.

I have seen thousands of children, young people and adults became whole again where communities of believers started ministering God's Biblical principles to one another. They became free to be the people God intended them to be when they started tasting Biblical truth and love again. People become whole where others commit to be family to them and to call one another to responsibility when necessary.

Tell me, are you willing to walk God's road? Then choose to make a difference with your words and actions towards your children, spouse or family members as well as others. Negative words destroy people. Let's choose instead to bless people.

CHAPTER 2 BLESS YOUR CHILDREN

A practice in Jewish family life that regularly touches my heart when I read about it in the Bible is where a Jewish father blesses his children. There are many examples of this in the Bible. Go and look at the following passages for example:

- Genesis 12:3 – “I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all people on earth will be blessed through you.” In other words the father literally acts as God’s ambassador where he speaks to his children. No wonder parents’ words make such a huge impact on their children – be those positive words or negative words!
- Genesis 27:27-29 – “So he went to him and kissed him. When Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he blessed him and said, “Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed. May God give you of heaven’s dew and of earth’s richness – an abundance of corn and new wine. May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you. May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed.”
- The whole of Genesis 49 where Jacob blesses his sons
- And then the gripping passage in Mark 10:13 to 16 where Jesus blesses the children

You should understand what this means in this context: It is literally like speaking a prophetic word over the lives of these kids, which has a huge impact on the rest of the life of this child.

It may sound hefty, but yet we see this every day around us. Almost in every counseling talk, or every camp, in conversations with believers, it strikes me how the words and actions of authority figures, especially parents, can influence someone’s whole life. In a positive or negative way.

Where we are now busy discussing God’s intention with the marriage and family, I believe, we have to recognize this. God intended for mothers and fathers, with their words and actions, minister life and blessing to their children for the rest of their lives.

I believe that part of this blessing is that they should be God’s mouthpiece to help the child discover that a living God has a unique place and a unique role for each of us to play in events and the lives of people. And that he/she is a unique, special person, like no other before or after him/her.

This discovery somewhere along the route of a person’s life that there really is a living God, and that He created me to be special, with an own identity and calling...with a destiny on this earth, is deadly important for each person. This makes the difference between a life where one merely just exists and survives from day to day, and a life where you excitedly look forward to each day because I know and experience that I make a difference.

This brings me back to God’s plan where He himself leads two people, man and woman, who belong together, to each other to learn to love one another. To love each other so much that they want to take a vow before God and the community in the marriage. To perhaps have children, in whose lives they become God’s instruments to bless those children in His Name, even before their births, by loving them unconditionally.

The tragedy is that parents sometimes are instruments in the hands of evil that minister death to their children. How many children do not afterwards tell of events where on so many occasions their parents told them that they are useless, worthless and no good.

In Isaiah 1:6 we read the following: “From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness only wounds and welts and open sore, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil.”

I know this word was directed at Israel, but when I read these words, then I think of so many people around me who deep down, beneath the shiny exterior, who are in pain from head to toe. Not that they easily admit this to others. Sometimes it is solely the Spirit of God that can reveal it. But the pain is there and the sad thing is that much of it happened in the parental home.

Friends, few of us understand clearly what is written there in Ephesians 6: That we are engaged in a spiritual war every day where an invisible enemy strategically chooses to use people as his instruments and mouthpieces to sow death, destruction and pain where he can. Because we are not intent on this, we subconsciously allow him to use us to hurt one another, and yes, our children, with out words and deeds and to inflict such wounds that some of them literally walk and live in the dark of those words and deeds for years.

I believe that the enemy wants to do three things in people's lives:

- He wants to prevent them from ever discovering the Living God and in the process discover and enjoy their God-created uniqueness
- He wants to keep them away from that place where God can use them in a unique way
- And in the process he steals their joy of life and blessings, which are their part in Jesus Christ.

God's intention with people is to bless them abundantly. After all, He gave His Son to become man and die for this after all. In order that through Him we can know the true God, and can learn to know and love ourselves and in the process taste and experience life in all its abundance.

God is like a battery that wants to serve power, life and grace to people in all sorts of ways. Especially to His own. The enemy can never prevent or control this. What he does do is make the "cables" through which God does this clog up – as is sometimes the case with your car battery. If the terminals are clogged up, the power cannot flow properly, and it seems as though the battery is dead. But it isn't.

God love you and He constantly wants to make you aware of His love and His unique plan for your life. But the enemy manages to use God's messengers, who can help you and is supposed to bless you in discovering your identity and calling, to instead wound and destroy you.

To be loved sometimes has to be described with a couple of verbs in order for it to become really practical for us. To love is to serve another and their deepest needs in order that through our eyes that person can discover who they are and why they are here.

The child who constantly hears, through words and actions, the following from his parents: "We love you so much. You are so precious, so unique, unlike any other, we are so excited to see where and how God is going to use you in this world and in the lives of others", his life will just be different and less painful than the child who constantly has to hear that there isn't really a place for him or her.

When God therefore tells Abraham in Genesis 12:3: "I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" it also means that God wants to use Abraham as His instrument to bring blessing and life to his descendants and theirs in turn.

This is what should happen in each of our homes. But this is also what should happen in our family of believers. After all, we are also one big family in this area. Also here we need to be available to be God's instruments in each other's lives, in order that we can be of great blessing to one another.

I want to close: a friend of mine recently emailed me this important insight into the importance of family love. He told me of a poem by a black man that he read in which he portrays his life on his mother's back while she rhythmically works in the land with a pick. He smells her

sweat, hears her humming and heartbeat. When he gets thirsty, she swings him to her breasts and where he drinks all the mother's milk he wants...then she swings him back onto her back where he can quietly fall asleep...

When this intimacy between a child and mother and also father is missing, the important foundation of love is not laid. This can cause that all the other kinds of love, agape, phileo and Eros, which we experience later on in life, disappear into a bottomless pit. It is as though these people have an insatiable need for love in their lives. Their yearning, without ever really finding anything, is for God's love, or for the love of friends or a spouse.

But nothing satisfies. Unless of course, the bottom is put back supernaturally. These examples we know as well: where God, through the working of His Spirit, renews people so completely when they accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and also as Healer, that everything became new.

Otherwise we find these people where they aimlessly wander among idols, or other people and sexual partners, without finding fulfillment.

CHAPTER 3 TELL THEM YOU LOVE THEM

The Living God who we serve, wants to bless our socks off. To the thousandths generation. Generation upon generation upon generation. This is the bottom line and nothing can change this. After all, it is written in hundreds of places in the Bible. Let me quote a couple of verses:

... Genesis 12:2,3 – “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse”.

.. Psalm 115:12,13,18 – “The Lord remembers us and will bless us: He will bless the house of Israel, He will bless the house of Aaron, He will bless those who fear the Lord – small and great alike...It is we who extol the Lord, both now and fro evermore.”

.. Psalm 128:5 – “May the Lord bless you from Zion all the days of your life; may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem”

.. Psalm 129:8 – “May those who pass by not say, “The blessing of the Lord be upon you; we bless you in the name of the Lord.”

.. Romans 12:14 – “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”

.. James 3:9 – “With the tongue we praise (or bless) our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God’s likeness.”

The Hebrew word that has been translated with “bless” is the word “barak”. This word can mean “bless, greet, salute, praise, kneel before, congratulate and worship” in different contexts. In different contexts it can indicate how:

.. God blesses people by giving them a physical or spiritual gift.

.. People praise or honour God for His grace, for who He is and for what He does.

.. People bless themselves because they are obedient to what God tells them to do

.. People bless others where they act as God’s mouthpiece in someone’s life and minister life and truth to that person.

Something that is closely connected with this is the “glory and honour” that God builds into each person when He creates them, which you and I have to recognise and respect.

Hebrews 2:7 talks of this. Listen to the following passage: “You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honour”.

Every person has value as a human being. I want to use two words to indicate that worth: Identity (which is the answer to the question: Who am I?) and “destiny” (which is the answer to the question: Why am I here?). God gave each person a specific uniqueness and calling. It is a unique and intrinsic value God creates into a person which we need to respect about that person in our actions towards and our words to that person.

It is clear to me that the primary unit through which God wants to do this, is the family or household. Within the context of family or household we need to minister to one another in such a way that man and woman, and children, can become more and more aware of how wonderfully different God created them. It is there that we need to help one another discover our own identities until we get to a point where we can honestly say: How wonderfully You created me, Lord! But it is there that we also need to help one another discover why we are here on this earth, how and where God wants to use us with our own unique gifts and personality. Then we are a blessing to one another.

This “being of blessing to one another” inside the family unit, can happen in various ways:

- Through meaningful affection
- Through meaningful communication and what we say to one another
- Through meaningful communication and our body language and tone of voice through which we help one another experience his/her worth
- Sometimes the Lord also uses us in each others lives to give each other a prophetic word with regards to what God is still planning in that person’s future
- And through a commitment to always be a blessing to one another

By blessing each other, we are empowering one another to more completely, meaningfully and more joyfully be the person God intended us to be. It is like a farmer who carefully plants flowers or vegetables in plastic tunnels, who with great care gives each plant the exact right mixture of water and nutrition each day according to a finely formulated program to give the plant what it needs for optimum growth and production.

The farmer is blessing these plants. Can you imagine now, if this farmer, instead of the right mixture of water and nourishment (blessing), gives this plant a dose of raw acid each day!

When we look at these two opposite scenarios, we see what the Bible means by “blessing” and “curse”.

Let’s apply this to the practicality of our every day lives: I know from personal experience how we often want to encourage and motivate our children to reach their full potential, and not realise that in the process we are actually communicating to them that that which they have already achieved is not good enough in our eyes. Or, even worse still, that as a person they are not good enough. Think about your own life, and what your own father or mother unintentionally communicated to you, without them ever meaning to.

The same thing can happen between a husband and wife in the marriage. Let me generalise by saying that as men we often focus on the facts of the matter to such an extent that, in our conversations with the female sex, we do not really hear what is really important to them, namely their feelings and needs, and their “being”. This is when we hear our wives tell us: “but you just don’t understand, this is not what it is about for me!”

As Phil McGraw always puts it: “Men usually just don’t get it!” How often do I not offer my wife hundreds of solutions to a problem when she tells me about something just to hear that a solution is not really what she is after, but rather an acknowledgement that I “hear what she is feeling and experiencing”.

“Blessing” or “curse” is therefore all about how and what we communicate to people. And whether, in different Biblical language, we succeed at really making another experience how much we love them.

Like I said last time, we can so easily and unwittingly become an instrument of the invisible enemy in the sky, and communicate to people that they do not really matter as people. Or that their feelings or opinions are not really important enough to listen to. We do not always communicate this just through what we say. Experts reckon that only 7% of what we communicate is through what we say, while 93% of our communication is about how we say things, (55% through body language and 38% through tone of voice.)

How many misunderstandings do not happen because we are not sensitive to this! So many times I have had to confess to my wife: Love, have I hurt you? I really didn’t mean it that way. I did not realise that with that which I said and the way in which I said it, I made you feel as though your feelings do not matter. Please forgive me.

The same thing towards my children. I have had to admit so many times that I totally steamrolled them with the facts without respecting them and taking their feelings into account.

God wants to use us in each other’s lives as His mouth, His hands and arms. He gave us two ears and one mouth, so that we would really learn to listen to one another before we speak. And for this reason it is really important to ask His Spirit in us to take complete control of us in order that our words and actions can testify to the fruits of His Spirit working in us, and the life of Jesus, in our lives.

When they experience the “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22, 23), they will know that we love them as they are.

CHAPTER 4 OUR CHALLENGE IS TO TREAT EACH OTHER WITH THE NECESSARY HONOR

It is so easy to get excited about a champion. But to see the champion in everyone...to treat each person with the same love of Christ...for that we need God's grace. This is what the Spirit of God wants to work in our lives. (Gal 5:16-25)

Let me talk a bit about the concept of honor in the Bible. In Psalm 8:5 we read the following being written about man: "You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour." The same concept is used in Deuteronomy 5:16 where it is written: "Honour your father and your mother, as the Lord your God commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the Lord your God is giving you". Also in the following verses in the New Testament:

- Romans 12:10: "Love one another warmly as Christian brothers, and be eager to show respect for one another."
- 1 Peter 2:17: "Respect everyone, love your fellow-believers, honor God and respect the Emperor."
- 1 Peter 3:7: "In the same way you husbands must live with your wives with the proper understanding that they are the weaker sex. Treat them with respect, because they also will receive, together with you, God's gift for life. Do this so that nothing will interfere with your prayers."

God put a Mordecai in Esther's life to say to her in Esther 4:14: "...and who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" Which in turn caused blessing to spill over to the whole of the nation, as written in Esther 8:16: "For the Jews it was a time of happiness and joy, gladness and honour."

In James 2:1 to 9 we find James warning believers not to judge people according to their outward appearance, because "...if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as law-breakers."

This is indeed a modern picture! After all, we live in a world that "honours" people for how much money they have or because they are seen as "successful". Accomplishment is all-important, what can you do and what have you already done? What can we write in our CV's? The world honours and salutes people on the grounds of what they have achieved. Think for instance about our sport crazy schools and businesses that are willing to pay good players millions to play rugby or golf. As long as they win, for the moment they stop winning all their achievements of the past are immediately forgotten and their very own supporters slate them.

To respect or honour someone as a human being is to attach a high value to him or her, to see them as important and to therefore make time and room in your life for them. James motivates us after all, not to make the basis for our honour and respect the material wealth and achievement of people, but rather who they are as people. It should be about their identity, their unique personality, their gifts, needs and way of doing things.

How many sons do not farm with their fathers on a family farm for years without the father ever really knowing who his son really is or what he is really about? That there might be a passion or yearning in that son's life for something other than being a farmer.

So often we only focus on our children's achievements. We constantly try to change them, to get them to do things our way because we think we know that it will be best for them. The tragedy is that they then experience not being good enough as people. And that is why so many teenagers rebel, or experience feelings of rejection, or turn into perfectionists or people pleasers. All in an attempt to get the honour that they feel they cannot get in any other way.

We also do this to our spouses. How many husbands do not often feel that they are just not good enough? Something that happened in the past is thrown back at them time and time again and never does a time arise where forgiveness is unconditionally served them. Or how

many woman do not feel that they are just slaves who need to ensure that the meal is always prepared and the house is clean without feeling honoured as a woman and without ever experiencing their needs being understood or met.

Every person wants to feel valued.

.. The man feels valued when he feels that he contributes something. If, for instance, he can get involved with something that can make a difference and will have a specific influence in the long run. Or when he is showered with responsibility because people see him as accomplished and worthy.

.. A woman, on the other hand, finds her security where she is loved unconditionally for who she is without having to change or having to do something to deserve this love. She wants to know that she is loved for who she is and that this will not change.

We bless people when we make them experience that we love them for who they are. That their value as people lie in their person, in who they are. God wants to use us to love the people around us in this way. To love them with an unconditional acceptance and allowance for them as people exactly as God created and put them together. When we manage to do this, they experience blessing. When we fail at this, they experience us “cursing” their beings and it is as though we are constantly pouring acid on their hearts and lives.

In Biblical language, to bless people means to honour and respect the image of God, to respect the unique identity of that person and God’s plan and intention with that person. It means that we should be part of that person’s support group helping him or her discover who they really are and why they are here on earth and do it within an atmosphere of love, unconditional respect and acceptance.

On the other hand the invisible enemy does everything in his power to literally curse and destroy people. He does this in three ways:

1. To destroy the identity and uniqueness that God created every human being with in any way possible (like trying to please everyone around you all the time and doing everything they tell you to do).
2. By driving you out of that circle which God intended to use to protect and bless you, like your family, parental home, marriage, family of believers, work, town or country.
3. By stealing your inheritance – that which God wants to bless you with – like children, finances, ministry, security for your old age, relationships with others etc.

The more I look at how God built certain guidelines and protective measures into the Jewish community in the Old Testament, the more I become aware of the fact that God wanted to bless people through their parents and parental homes in all facets of their beings. Parents literally carry the key that can unlock the door to a meaningful and blessed life for their children, whether it’s a successful marriage, family relationships, business life, ministry, health and finances. But on the flip side, often that which happen in the parental home, like the disobedience of parents to God’s guidelines and way of doing, can, like acid, damage or even destroy the lives of children in many ways and in many areas of their lives.

We often discuss service and ministry. It seems to me that our biggest ministry is to bless our spouses in marriage, and our children – if God gives them. It’s like someone said: The biggest gift I can give my children is to love my wife so much that they see and experience it every day. And if, on top of that, I love them in their uniqueness in such a way that they experience that every day, then I have served people in the Name of Jesus in the most important relationships as a human being, and then people would see that I am a follower of Jesus.

Yet, I am so aware, while discussing these things, of the number of people who experienced pain and acid (curse) instead of blessing as a result of events in their past at the hand of people who should have blessed them. It is for this reason that it is so important that we should help one another deal with this pain in a meaningful way in order to get closure and move on from it. AN “OPERATION CLEANSING” is needed.

Sometimes we get so academic about salvation and deliverance, that it becomes necessary to get practical and give one another methods to help ourselves, as well as others, resolve this pain we suffer.

Strange, sometimes very tragic and traumatic things happen to all of us. We cannot change anything about that. What we can change however is how we deal with these things.

.. When you were born, you were created unique in ability and capacity, with a unique God-given mission to make you experience self-fulfillment.

.. On your journey through life up till now, you had certain learning experiences that made an impact on who you are, and it changed you

.. These things that shaped you, (i.e. how you see yourself), are external factors that can be summarized in 10 events, 7 critical choices you made and 5 influential people who shaped your life along the way. Some of these external factors either positively or negatively influenced who you are and how you see yourself.

.. What's important is how you internalize these external factors by your specific reaction to it:

- You decided who or what was responsible for what happened to you, and who was to blame
- You gave yourself, or your actions, a certain etiquette or label
- You started talking to yourself in a certain way – your “internal dialogue”
- In this way you started creating certain repetitive messages that you prophetically repeatedly to yourself
- In the process you formed specific fixed opinions or beliefs about yourself and others (and these became the foundations or tracks within which you started thinking and living)
- Although you cannot change these 10 important events, the 7 critical choices or the 5 influential people, you can, at this stage of your life, evaluate your internal reaction and change it where necessary.

CHAPTER 5 RECONSTRUCT YOUR LIFE – A PLAN

Romans 12:2 speak of the fact that we should allow God to “renew our minds”.

This is the nucleus of this reconstruction process:

.. Rethink the external events that contaminated your life (which caused you to lose sight of who you are in essence)

.. Contemplate which internal reactions recently poisoned your life. It is here that cleansing is needed in order that your life and quality of life can improve.

Life is like a chain consisting of different links made up of your internal instincts (your thoughts, feelings and reactions) to things which poisoned you and which now need to be healed.

OPERATION CLEANSING

Allow at least an hour for the first of these exercises, which God wants to use to deliver and cleanse you.

.. Step 1: Isolate the most important, decisive moments in your life and your reaction to it, which is poisoning your life.

.. Step 2: Start evaluating your internal reaction to these events. How did it influence your life? How did it influence your faith? Did it damage your self-confidence? Who do you blame for what happened? What does your internal dialogue sound like with regards to this? As a result, what do you believe?

.. Step 3: Start testing this internal reaction against the truth. The tests are as follows: Is it the truth? Is it to your advantage to cling to this idea/attitude for the rest of your life? Is it good for your health? Does it help you get what you want out of life?

.. Step 4: Replace it with an Authentic, Accurate, and Different Reaction. Replace that which causes you hurt with something that from here on will serve you or help you get where you want to be.

.. Step 5: Decide what the minimum is that needs doing in order to get closure on this matter.

Let's make it practical:

THE CLEANSING PROCESS

1. Find a quiet place. Consider that life is a chain that consists of a series of events, circumstances and reaction to circumstances and events. Identify the single most poisonous factor in your life (event, moment, choice or person). Write a short description of this thing. We are now going to trust the Lord to, through His Spirit, remove the poison caused by this thing from your system once and for all and to renew your thoughts around this issue.

(Romans 12:2)

2. Evaluate your own reaction to these events. Write the reaction down: Whose fault was it? How did this influence your internal dialogue? How do the names and labels you gave yourself after these events influence your life? Which repetitive “recordings” did you create as a result? (About yourself, about men and women, about life etc?). What did you start believing as a result of this?

3. Start testing it against the 4 criteria for truth: Is it the truth? Is it to your advantage? Is it advantageous to your health? Does it help you get what you want or deserve?

4. Come up with a better, more accurate and different reaction/solution. At the very least you should stop taking the blame or responsibility for things that weren't your fault. And start changing your internal dialogue. And the “names” need to be replaced with the truth rather than the lies that you have believed up to now. And the “recordings” and “beliefs” should be changed, because it is making you ill. Start writing down an alternative by taking an A4 sheet of paper, rotating it horizontally and dividing it into two columns. In the left column you then write down your current opinion and in the right column the alternative or truth.

5. Identify and carry out the minimum effective reaction or action (MER) that is necessary to help you get “closure”. Part hereof is to offer forgiveness as a gift of grace to a party that did you an injustice. This doesn't mean that you are accepting what happened as all right, it is also not something you do because you feel like it. It is a choice you make on behalf of your own well-being.

May God use it to teach you to experience your "redemption and deliverance" on the grounds of the death and resurrection of Christ through the working of the Spirit in you.

In this way you are healed to such an extent that you can love and honor yourself and others.

CHAPTER 6 WALLS OF PROTECTION

Within the walls of protection of the people who love us, you and I are blessed. There our God-given identity can develop and are we launched on our life destiny.

Everywhere in the Old Testament there are examples of these walls of protection God built into the typical Jewish family and society. Walls of protection that became part of the Jewish culture and way of doing.

The typical modern Afrikaans- or English marriage and family lost something of this protection God intended for them. Just think about what people think of the marriage as a lifelong commitment between two people to love one another, or about the role of quality time together as a family.

According to God's intent, children were to be born and raised within the walls of a typical covenant Jewish family where they were loved unconditionally. There they experienced the love of parents and a family, as well as the knowledge of a secure future. Built-in cultural habits and laws helped them to discover who they really were and where they were going.

This is something most of our modern families has lost somewhere along the line. With the result that we find people at the age of thirty or fifty who don't know who they really are and where they are going.

It is as if the enemy has robbed us of the things God intended to bless us with.

In Ps 139:13-17 we read the following: "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!"

God has a plan for each of us. To use as an illustration: I love aeroplanes. When I see one of these giant Airbuses, I see a majestic piece of mechanics where every piece was planned in detail in order to fit into the destiny of that aeroplane, namely to take off with hundreds of people on board, to fly thousands of miles to some far-off destiny and to land safely.

You and I were planned in much more detail. Part of this majestic plan was to put people around you to love you and care for you and to launch you on your life destiny.

Our modern society and its demands on people often prevent people to make a choice to make quality time for healthy relationships with other people around them, their marriage partners and their families. Everybody is just trying to cope and healthy relationships with people are low on their lists of priorities. Which causes the father to be absent, and reliable family members to be non-existent.

It is like a city without walls. Previously, when a community of people starts living together and an economically successful community life comes together, all kinds of strange and obscure characters are attracted to town. What these communities usually did then was to build a thick wall around such a town. With a lot of benefits for the community inside the walls. The least of which was that only a few soldiers were necessary to protect the town. But when there were holes in the walls of such a town, every man was turned into a soldier to protect his own. That meant energy and time. And when that was non-existent, it is no wonder that the enemy could come and take and kill as he liked.

In Isaiah 58:12 we read the following: "Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings."

I believe God is calling us again to rebuild the walls of protection to ensure that people will be blessed again as God intended them to be.

This means that people will need to discover and commit themselves to God's purpose for the marriage and family to be walls of protection again...

- Where children, even before their birth, can be blessed
- Where they can be named with a name that tells something about their destiny on earth, as the name of Elijah for example. Elijah means Jahwe is God. He was God's instrument to tell his nation during the reign of Ahab that only Jahwe is God, and not Baal.

A family is more than just a few people living together under one roof. When one man and one woman promise one another in a covenant to love one another till the end, it becomes a spiritual reality which are honored even in heaven. Walls of protection are built to be the cushion to protect and bless them and any children that should be born.

Do you remember when Jesus were referring to the strong man in Mat 12:29 where He said: "Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house."

Jesus was busy teaching how to expel demonic spirits where there are different ranking spirits with which to deal. What you need to do, is to first deal with their "chief", the strong man, and then the rest will be easy to overcome.

But this is also the way in which the enemy operates when he comes to plunder your family. His purpose is to devastate and destroy your marriage, children and grandchildren. In order to do that he starts with the strong man. The husband is the strong man to the wife, and both the parents are strong men to their children. So, when they are out of the way, the rest is easy.

Can you understand the tragic implications of this truth when you look around you in our modern society? You see it happen when a young man or woman risk to have sex without the protection of a marriage. Or when the walls of protection crumble during a divorce with all the pain and struggle as a result of that.

I want to end with a word of consolation. I believe God is busy calling together a generation of men and women who will repair these walls of protection again. The way in which He is doing it, is by first healing them from the pain of their past, and then starts using them to build new, healthy relationships for the future. He said he came so that we can have life in abundance.

But we need to commit to be part of this generation. So that we, as part of God's new faith family on earth, will be people who are be a blessing to their generation and the generations to come.

CHAPTER 7 BEFORE I WAS BORN, YOU WERE BUSY WITH ME!

In Psalm 139:13 to 18 we read: “You created every part of me; you put me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because you are to be feared; all you do is strange and wonderful. When my bones were being formed, carefully put together in my mother’s womb, when I was growing there in secret, you knew that I was there – you saw me before I was born. The days allotted to me had all been recorded in your book, before any of them ever began. O God, how difficult I find your thoughts, how many of them there are! If I counted them they would be more than the grains of the sand. When I awake, I am still with you.”

Where does a Jewish child learn these truths? Or, closer to home: Where should our children discover the living God who has a detailed plan for each of our lives? Where do people truly discover their own uniqueness and destiny, or the purpose of their lives?

Seems to me that the answer is quite simple: God’s plan is that it should be in the family and parental home that children should discover that there is a living God who is the Father of all fathers...

...Who loves them just as they are, but who loves them too much to leave them as they are
...Who wants to touch their lives and who wants to lead them into dimensions of life and joy they otherwise never would have known

...Who step by step wants to lead them and who wants to teach them the secrets of living life to its fullest...teach them about healthy relationships...with themselves, with others, with creation, but also with Him.

God’s plan is that it should start in the family, where a father and mother start ministering the truth to that child that there is a living God, even before the birth of that child ...that they, to use the words of Psalm 78, will be committed to telling them for the “next generation” in the most effective way known to them about the things that changed their lives as parents forever.

It is wonderful to meditate upon the fact that a detailed blueprint for each one of our lives has been lying in the filing cabinet of God’s heart from even before the creation of the world. That for generations God makes the paths of certain men and women cross, that He makes them marry and become parents to a specific child. Who in turn can be the parent to another child in a following generation.

... All this without ever interfering with the freedom of choice of individuals or ever treating them as puppets.

... This is even more wonderful when one realizes that this all happens amid sin, injustice and broken relationships.

... All in order to bring the right genes together which will eventually form the exact DNA structure to form a unique you or I.

Just think about the child Jesus as a human being. Matthew 1:1 to 17 illustrates how God the Father put together the unique human body and personality of His Son, Jesus Christ over the ages. Just have a look at whose photographs are hanging in the gallery of His ancestry. There is a Judah-Tamar combination, and a David and the woman from Urea. Not exactly people we would have chosen to be the great -grandfather and grandmother of the one intended to be the Messiah of the whole world.

Perhaps there are a couple of photographs of your ancestors that you would also like to erase, or perhaps it is even a mother or father figure who isn’t what they should be. Or who might not have been there. But our God is a remarkable God who let’s the unbelievably best be born from the dismal worst. You and I are examples of this.

Even amid the utmost gloom God will and can bless people. It is who He is. His blessing was also present where we were still babies. There He wanted to use a mother or father as His loving hands to care for us – even if He had to use an adoptive mother or father. He wanted to use their home and family to make us feel treasured in order that we could blossom and grow in the cotton wool of their love, to be the best we can be. He wanted to use them as

the mirrors to notice and encourage our uniqueness every day. He wanted to use them to minister life to us. They had to be the instruments through which we became aware of the Living God and His love for us. They had to tell us, even before our birth, about Jesus Christ, the King and Lord of the whole world, who loves us so much that He gave His life for us in order that we can truly live.

Or think of a Moses, who would grow up and be educated in the most heathen and demonic of parental homes on earth at the time – that of the Faro of Egypt. The teachings of his own Jewish mother during the early two to four years of his life would form the groundwork for his later life. It would become the foundation to everything that he believed about himself, about God and God's plan for his life and his people.

No wonder the Jesuits say: Give me a child until the age of seven and after that you can have him!

In the life of Jesus the man, it happened within an ordinary Jewish family. The Scriptures do not tell us a whole lot about it. What we do know is that He was born amid a lot of gossip about His earthly parents. After all, Mary became pregnant before she was lawfully married to Joseph. Joseph and Mary knew the truth, however, about Jesus, about God's plan for His life. When He was eight days old they prophesied over Him when they took Him to the temple according to the Old Testament stipulations, and when they told the priest that the baby boy who had to be circumcised should be named Jesus. (Luke 1:59) It is after all what the angel told him to do in Matthew 1:21: "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sin."

A couple of weeks later Jesus was taken to the temple again as the firstborn son of his earthly parents to be "...presented to the Lord..." and to offer the required sacrifice for him. (Luke 2:22) There the priest blessed him with the Covenant blessing off the Old Testament. And there an obedient old man, Simeon, and the prophetess Anna also blessed him further. (Luke 2:25).

Even though His parental home was simple and His earthly father was a carpenter, we read that Jesus was raised in a typical Jewish family setup and served love, food, specific religious rituals and celebrations. To such an extent that we read in Luke 2:40 that: "The child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him".

We come across Him again at the age of twelve, when, in keeping with the Jewish custom, He goes to the temple with His parents for His Jewish bar-mitzvah, where He gets the opportunity to read out loud from the Hebrew Bible in front of the men in the temple, and is welcomed into the circle of men as an adult. (Luke 2:42)

In Luke 2:52 we read: "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." In modern language it means that Jesus developed in body and mind as a typical teenage boy inside the walls of protection of a typical Jewish family who merely did what God expected of them. To, in the process, get to know His heavenly Father and to take up His unique position as unique person with a unique destiny with increasing confidence.

Let me return to our times and our world. The challenge that we are given by God is to start repairing these walls of protection around our marriages and children in our families. This practically means that each mother and father, as Christian believer and follower of Jesus, must again before God and in front of the mirror and before one another confess: We belong to God, we are God's helpers, we are pieces of God's puzzle there to fill and heal emptiness in beings. God made your and my paths cross because He wanted to bless us while we love and minister to one another like we ourselves should be loved and ministered to.

There before one another, we should also confess to one another that in the past, instead of blessing and love, we rather ministered acid and the wrath of hell to one another. In order to start anew and dance the love dance of marriage with our spouses to the beat of God's stipulations and guidelines.

If God gave us children, we will have to go before them, before God and before one another and confess that we might not have been God's instruments of blessing in their lives. And ask for forgiveness. In order that we can start again to love them and each other and to minister to one another like God intended it.

CHAPTER 8 MARRIAGE IS INTENDED TO BE A BLESSING

God is ready to bless people, especially His people, with blessings greater than we could ever imagine or ask for ourselves. Listen to what is written in Ephesians 3:20: "Now to him who is able to do immeasurable more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work in us..."

This is the God that we serve. This is His heart. Through his principles He created the opportunity for this to happen.

Our challenge is to obey His principles for our lives, for relationships, for marriage, for the family...and to honor them, because through our obedience we open the door that allows Him to enter and make us experience the abundance of His blessings.

But the opposite is also true: Where we follow our own heads, or merely do what the whole world around us is doing, we open the doors for the invisible enemy to steal, destroy and kill.

This is true for every aspect of our lives, but especially for the marital union and the family which we are currently discussing. For this reason I would like to focus on God's guidelines for blessing surrounding marriage, and especially for young people and those about to get married.

Listen to some passage from New Testament Scripture in this regard:

. 1 Corinthians 7:8,9: "Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion."

. 1 Corinthians 7:35, 36: "I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord. If anyone thinks he is acting improperly towards the virgin he is engaged to, and if she is getting on in years and he feels he ought to marry he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married."

. 1 Corinthians 6:18-20: "Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."

When I look at what is written about marriage in the Bible and how God laid down certain principles to protect the institution of marriage because He intended it as a way of blessing people, I realize that marriage is far more than what we can see with the mere eyes and understand with our minds. My prayer is that God will help us as the new generation to understand something more of the spiritual dimension of marriage in order that our children, their children and we ourselves can treat it with greater respect and honor.

In Genesis 2:22 to 24 we read the following: "Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man." For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."

"And they will become one flesh" is off course more than just the union of bodies. We are more than just our bodies. We are spirit, with soul, living in a body. Which to me indicates that sexual intercourse is far more than just physical intercourse or the satisfaction of a sexual need. God's intention is that it should be part of a complete union, a giving of one to another, a surrender and uninhibited loving without holding back between one man and one woman and their entire being inside the protective walls of the marriage.

Only inside the marriage does God want to bless us with this. Disobedience to this, in any way, would be like pouring acid over yourself and your partner.

The tragedy is that most people only discover the damage after the fact...that a part of their being was sacrificed and that they opened a door for pain and destruction. I would like to offer some consolation by challenging you to choose God's path of blessing for you for the rest of your life, despite your wrong choices in the past. Therefore choose to go before God, confess your sin, accept God's gift of forgiveness in Christ Jesus, turn around, make reparations where necessary and start walking Gods road of blessing in obedience.

For a teenager or young person this would practically mean that I must decide that my body is holy and that it is no one's toy. I have to decide that sex only belongs in marriage and therefore I have to choose to abstain until then. It will also involve seeking an open, honest relationship with your parents, also around your relationships. Decide to honor your parents as God's instruments to bless and protect you until you get married one day. Choose to ask for their advice and guidance and contemplate it seriously.

For married couples this means a choice to live fully as man and woman inside the protective walls of the marriage and to enjoy it to the full. Choose to love one another to the fullest and do not hold anything back. Do not use that which God intended to be a blessing between the marital walls, as a weapon against one another. Bless one another; love one another as followers of Jesus, according to the guidelines of your Lord and King.

The "becoming one" of a man and woman inside the marriage, which culminates in the act of lovemaking, circles out to all aspects of one's being. No wonder our Heavenly Father and Creator, who created us in this way, gives as guideline for His people that if they want to experience the full blessing in marriage, they should choose to marry a believer. In order that we could really be a blessing to one another, and to our children in turn.

Not that I am saying that God cannot or won't bless you if you are married to a non-believer. Off course He can and will. But in the light of the Word I have to say: Know that there can be so much more blessing if you can worship the same God in spirit and in truth. Trust God for the salvation of your husband or wife.

CHAPTER 9 INSPECT AND CLEANSE US, LORD, FOR THE RIVER TO FLOW!

I believe that an undisciplined sex life is one of the greatest stumbling blocks in the spiritual lives of men and woman. (Just read Matthew 5:27-32 and I Corinthians 7:1-7 in this regard.) Over the years Satan has developed many effective methods of tempting believers and to bring them to a fall in this area of their lives. We should, therefore, not be ignorant in this area. (2 Corinthians 2:11).

Yet many Christians live as though they are immune to his attacks and plans. But we have to realize that each one of us has an old-nature with desires and urges that the powers of evil can use to trap us.

Statistics tell us that over 80% of Christians over the age of twelve struggles with this at one time or another. Therefore we must inspect what the Word says about this:

- In Genesis 2:24 the Hebrew word “dabaq” means “to cling to”, to become one in sexual communion in body, soul and spirit.
- In Ephesians 5:31 the Greek word “proskollao” literally speaks of “a gluing together” which points to this intimate union between body, soul and spirit with a permanent partner within a marriage. It is only inside the safety of such a matrimonial relationship that one experiences the necessary security, intimacy and joy. There one will truly experience caring, ministry and renewing of body mind and spirit. A good, satisfying marriage is the best thing that can ever happen to you! It contains security, joy, satisfaction and happiness. But then, within the protective fences of God’s plan for your life and where we were married as virgins and are faithful to one another.
- 1 Corinthians 6:16-18 indicates that sex works in the same way the shutter of a camera during physical intercourse. The shutter of a camera opens and captures all in focus on film. This means that during sexual intercourse we open our body, soul and spirits up to the body, soul and spirit of our partner. No wonder Paul says that becoming one with a prostitute means that we open ourselves up to the previous sexual partners of that person and demonic spirit-and soul-partners! We therefore do not only run the risk of physically contracting AIDS, we also run the risk of contracting spiritual AIDS in this way! God’s plan in the Word around marriage is friendship, which leads to an engagement term, which leads to marriage vows between two people who experience that God intended them to be husband and wife for the rest of their lives. During the friendship and engagement phases we have the opportunity to spend time with God and that person to really get to know that person to spirit, soul and body. We get to know each other’s interests, build a relationship with the other person’s parents, family and friends. But there we also discover what is going on in the spirit and soul of that person: Who are the spiritual partners in that person’s life? Is there any witchcraft, astrology, alcoholism or drug use that has a hold or influence on that person. In order that we can get rid of it once and for all.

Isn’t love enough then? So many people ask me this. No, because sex isn’t just a physical act. Soul and spirit transfer takes place during sexual relations. What goes on in my spirit flows to yours and visa versa. All that you are, you share with me in this way.

For this reason Biblical deliverance and forgiveness is so important before marriage. The blood of Jesus washes and cleanses us to body, soul and spirit, of all the rubbish of our pasts.

Therefore, allow God to cover your spirit and soul-baggage with the blood of Jesus.

Otherwise the skeletons and ghosts of the past might start haunting you before long! Let Him free and restore you to share in the full abundance that He has in mind for you (Eccl 9:7-9).

Life doesn’t work without God. Sin always has built-in consequences. When you sin, hell will catch up with you heaven above you will become like bronze. So many young people today

are grungy, bored and without any zest for life because somewhere along the line they became involved in sexually active. Without the protective fencing of marriage. Like animals they literally tried to satisfy sexual urges and in the process lost their pride and self respect. Therefore they feel unfulfilled and insecure. Instead of seeking and obeying God's plan, many of them then try to quiet this hunger with drugs and alcohol. Just look at the lives of most "glamour"-figures and stars: famous, stinking rich, but addicted to alcohol and cocaine.

Any temptation to do something that involves unfaithfulness to your partner entails feelings of guilt that can destroy your life. Along with it you destroy all that is precious to you: your relationship with God, with your body, with your husband or wife, and your children. Everything suffers: your health (proverbs 7:23) and your finances! Therefore the question is: Is it really worth the pain and effort?

We are all susceptible, (Romans 12:3), therefore, guard against it!

CHAPTER 10 BLESS ME, LORD!

What do we mean when we pray this prayer? What do we expect when we trust the Lord to give us a “harvest” in our lives this year? How does the living God, our Father in Jesus, bless His children?

Let’s page through the scriptures and read the following verses together:

- Genesis 12:2,3 – *I will give you many descendants, and they will become a great nation. I will bless you and make your name famous, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, but I will curse those who curse you. And through you I will bless all the nations.*
- Exodus 23:25,26 – *If you worship me, the Lord your God, I will bless you with food and water and take away all your illnesses. In your land no woman will have a miscarriage or be without children. I will give you long lives.*
- Deuteronomy 11:26,27 – *Today I am giving you the choice between a blessing and a curse – a blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today...*
- Deuteronomy 28:8,12 – *The Lord your God will bless your work and fill your barns with corn. He will bless you in the land that he is giving you...He will send rain in season from his rich storehouse in the sky and bless all your work, so that you will lend to many nations, but you will not have to borrow from any.*
- Psalm 29:11 – *The Lord gives strength to his people and blesses them with peace.*
- Psalm 67:1 – *A song of Thanksgiving - God be merciful to us and bless us; look on us with kindness, Selah*
- Acts 3:26 – *And so God chose his Servant and sent him first to you, to bless you by making every one of you turn away from his wicked ways.*
- Romans 10:12 – *This includes every one, because there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles; God is the same Lord of all and richly blesses all who call to Him.*
- Galatians 3:14 – *Christ did this in order that the blessing which God promised to Abraham might be given to the Gentiles by means of Christ Jesus, so that through faith we might receive the Spirit promised by God.*
- 1 Peter 3:9 – *Do not pay back evil with evil or cursing with cursing; instead pay back with a blessing, because a blessing is what God promised to give you when he called you.*

Fascinating!

It seems really important to me, especially as we are currently really searching for God’s heart, for His strategy for our own practical situation and the challenges we face, that we shall find clarity about what it is we are trusting God for; how we believe He is going to bless us. At the very least in order that we know when we have received, so we can thank Him.

God wants to bless His children. Part of the life of abundance that Jesus came to earth to establish and give to us as children of His Father, is abundant blessing. And blessing in many forms:

- God promises to provide for His children in the every day needs of their lives (Matthew 6:25-33). Therefore, if this is not happening, or there is lack, we need to go before God and find out why. Ask Him what is happening. Maybe your priorities are wrong. Maybe evil has found an opening or area to rob you of the blessings God has intended for you. Maybe you are making or following your own plans, and are picking the rotten fruit thereof. Maybe you are picking the fruit of wrong choices in the past, or the guilt monster is devouring all the blessings that God wants to bless you with on a daily basis.
- God promises to not only provide for our daily needs, but to provide abundantly in order that we can also be a blessing to others. In order that we can tithe comfortably in the lives of the spiritual leaders God is using in our lives to bless and equip us spiritually (Gal 6:6; Ephesians 4:11-16); but also in order that we have extra to give where is needed –

be it to other believers in our congregation that are in need, (2Cor 8 and 9; especially 9:8), or to others in need in the community at large.

- God promises to protect us. He promises to protect us against the attacks of the invisible powers in the air. He wants to protect our health. Our finances. He wants to protect us against deceivers who come to us with empty money making schemes, or who wants to involve us in projects through which the enemy wants to rob us of the blessings God has intended for us. Therefore God gave you His Spirit to live inside you 24 hours out of 24 and to lead you and give you the power of distinction. Therefore He intended for you to intimately be part of a family of believers, part of His Body here on earth, a support group who can pray with you and help you seek the face of God before making big decisions in your life.
- God wants to bless you by daily leading you in the light of His Word through the working of His Spirit. Therefore you must make time to study that Word and to meditate on it, because you will hear the Living God Himself speaking to you. By the Word He will give you advice and guidance, to bless you. By the Word He will restore balance in your life when you start working like a slave. He will address you when money becomes your boss or driving force, or your security. The Truth of the Word sets you free. It is one of our weapons against the attacks of evil (2 Corinthians 10:4 and 5) and can protect us from straying (2 Timothy 3:16,17). If you learn to obey and believe this Word, it will bless you. It will protect you and free you from fear and worry. It will protect you against unnecessary debt. It will deliver you from materialism and stinginess. Yes, it can set you free to really enjoy also that with which God wants to bless you financially.
- God wants to bless you by ministering to you through the gifts of the Spirit where we meet with other believers, be it in larger gatherings, like most congregations experience during their Sunday services, or in smaller gatherings in homes or cell groups. Therefore Hebrews 10:25 challenges you to never neglect these meetings.
- It may surprise you but God promises in His Word that he even wants to bless you in the heart of those times that it is night in your life, where you are struggling with temptations, or are being persecuted by people because of your faith, or amid pain and fear. James is so sure of this that he challenges you to celebrate especially in these times. (James 1:1-8). God promises after all that He uses every moment of your life, also the times of pain and when you cannot make sense of what is going on in and around you, to prepare the stage and atmosphere to allow only the best to happen in you, for you and through you. (Romans 8:28).
- The heart of the New Covenant is that God wants to deliver us, as people justified, made righteous and freed in Jesus, through the working of His Spirit. Another word, more easily understood by most of us, is "healed". Jesus gave His life on the cross for this. The fact that He rose from the dead, is our proof that satan and His powers were totally defeated. Therefore Jesus, as the Anointer with the Spirit, gave us His Spirit to live in us. If He really is the One controlling our lives, if we are open and sensitive to His guidance and work, He wants to bless us by giving us the full package of healing of spirit, soul and body. We can visualise this by means of the following picture. With our re-birth God gave us a new heart, but now we have to train and practice under our Instructor, every day in order that this new heart can reach and serve every other area of our body with this life-giving new blood and oxygen, with new life, in order that we can experience the abundant life that God has intended for us.

Do you hear this? God wants to bless you. Choose to believe this. Choose to say, repeatedly, to yourself: Every day I will see more and more how abundantly God blesses me and my people with the cream of His blessings!

CHAPTER 11 BLESS US, LORD!

Listen to this wonderful verse in Psalm 86:17: Show me proof of your goodness, Lord...

And then the verse in Ephesians 1:3: Let us give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! For in our union with Christ he has blessed us by giving us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly world.

Visualise what is happening here in your mind: That in the heavenly store rooms there are stacks and stacks of parcels containing blessings that are already yours as a child of the living God because you are in Jesus.

Some days we are our own worst enemies! There, alone, in our own company, the old flesh rises up from the cellar and give us the worst advise there is, let us think the most depressing thoughts, and there we nurture and make the sickest of sick plans.

Therefore, I believe, God invites us to get quiet enough before Him that HE can talk to us through His Word and the working of His Spirit. Therefore the Bible urges us never to neglect our fellowship with other believers. We need to be there in order that God can minister to us through the gifts of His Spirit through other believers.

When God really is the one speaking in the ministry/sermon, people and lives can really change and heal. This, I believe, is what's happening right here...now as the Living God wants to talk to you further about how He wants to bless you today.

Outside, the world denies that God wants to bless us. There they teach us that we have to rely on ourselves for what we want in life. If we want to have enough for tomorrow and the day after, we have to plan and provide for it ourselves. God doesn't feature in this planning.

The motivating factor that they employ is fear. Fear for what is to come tomorrow. Fear for sudden illness, fear for retirement, and fear of not having enough, fear of crime, fear of death. And when they have us scared enough, we buy whatever they are selling to us.

In this way Christians are also misled. Let me tell you a couple of the lies that many of us have started believing in this regard:

- We have started believing that there is security in working for a big company or well-established organisation.
- We have started believing that a good pension fund or enough annuities, will provide sufficiently for retirement
- Some of us believe that a more expensive company car means that I pay less tax and is therefore more affordable for me
- We believe the bank when they tell us that if our joint salaries, are sufficient, my wife and I can take out a bigger loan

The list is endless. The reality is that because so many Christians believe these lies, the experience very little of God's blessing in their lives. They love God, want to serve Him and give more, but financially they do not experience God's blessings, and are suffocating. The more they suffocate financially, the bigger their debt becomes, the more stress they experience in their marriage and families, and their health starts to suffer.

Therefore I believe that part of God's blessing in these days, part of our return to the correct position –in order that God can bless us as He really wants to- is to minister the truth to one another pertaining to these issues. The truth sets us free so we can really experience God's blessing in its complete form.

Let's turn to Matthew 25:14-30 and let me share with you some of this truth that has started setting me free in this are of my life:

- Matthew 25:14 confirms that God is the only Owner on this earth. Everything belongs to Him and Him alone.
- Everything we have is entrusted to us, and therefore we must use it according to the true Owner's instructions.
- Therefore I must use it towards the responsible care and provision for my family and myself.
- Therefore I must acknowledge Jesus and His kingdom before all else in my life (Matthew 6:25-33; John 10:10b). Therefore I chose to set everything up in my life, also my handling of finances, in order that it may be in line with the Textbook of life, God's Word, for my life. Therefore I have chosen to search and serve the Kingdom of God and the will of God also for my financial situation.
- Matthew 25 teaches us that the Living God gave each of us talents/gold coins. To me it seems that this refers to at least three things in our lives: Spiritual gifts, ordinary talents and other resources that God makes available to us.
- The spiritual gifts God gives us are supernatural abilities that His Spirit gives to followers of Jesus to minister prophesy, healing, supernatural faith, words of wisdom or words of knowledge to one another. Our calling is to be just there if and when God needs us to be use as an instrument in His hand.
- To each of us God gave special talents and abilities. This includes things like a sharp brain, exceptional creative talents, entrepreneurship, physical attributes and social skills like having empathy with people in need or to be able to communicate well.
- God has made available different resources to each of us. This includes things like money, inheritance, mineral resources or contacts (people who cross your path).
- Therefore it is my belief that part of our challenge before God is to combine these three things in our lives and to pray for synergy (where 1 plus 1 plus 1 will be far greater than 3). Therefore I believe we must pray to God for a greater sensitivity for the working, voice and leadership of His Spirit. We must chose to not cause the Spirit of God distress because of disobedience in our lives. He wants, after all, to lead us and use us and do bigger and bigger things "through" us, things bigger than we can ever think or pray. So that all, and you, can know that God Himself was at work here, and HE can receive the glory.
- God has a specific plan for each of us that is unique and special. We do not have to search far for it. All we need is to do what our hand "finds" to do.
- Off course there will come a day of reckoning, and this doesn't necessarily have to wait till we are before the throne of God. This can happen in part where you and I take our lives into consideration again before God and honestly ask ourselves how effective we are in the various areas of our lives, and what exactly is going on in these areas.
- Therefore I believe, part of our search for God's blessing is to be sure of what we do with the money we receive. After all, God blesses us on a regular basis with a measure thereof. What do you do with it? And be more practical. Go and sit down and honestly write up all the debt you have and how much you are paying towards the interest-monster. In all probability it is so much that you think you cannot "afford" to tithe, let alone give "extra" offers where God orders you!

We have such a need for God's blessing and protection. We have such a need for God to teach us to be free from our debt and how to live debt free from hereon. But how do I get free?

Start by confessing to God that you believed so many of the enemy's lies regarding your finances (personal and business).

Take responsibility for the wrong choices you made in the past and ask God's forgiveness in the name of Jesus.

Ask Him to help you give the first step on a new path to get out of this jungle. Sit before God, sensitive to the leadership of His Spirit, and work out a plan that you can follow to get to your destination. Seek the help of wise mentors in your community of believers.

Then do in faith and trust that which you decided to do while you trust God's promises pertaining to this.

God has dreams for your life and wants to open doors for you – such plans and dreams that you wouldn't believe if someone had to tell you about them.

When God helps you pay off your accounts and debts, He is busy blessing you. He is busy freeing you because you were a slave of everyone you owed money to. And let me tell you from my own experience, when you are set free here, you are really free! Ask anyone who has had to go and sit before a bank manager or lawyer because of unpaid debt!

Ephesians 4:17 tells us after all that we shouldn't give the devil a gap in our lives. How many sleepless nights do we not experience because we do not responsibly manage and spend that which God gives as a blessing in our lives! How many hours do we not pray for God's help, and then blame him when He doesn't help in the way we think He should help! While our Father experiences heartache because you, His child, sits in bondage as a slave, out of a lack of knowledge or as a result of disobedience.

Therefore Romans 13:8 tells us: "Be under obligation to no one, the only obligation you have is to love one another".

Don't borrow. Do not make debt. But also don't allow that someone owes you money. Seek God's will. Trust Him to provide. In His time and way. Stop being impatient a person of little faith.

Remember Psalm 81: *"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt. Open your mouth and I will feed you. But my people would not listen to me; Israel would not obey me. So I let them go their stubborn ways and do whatever they wanted. How I wish my people would listen to me; how I wish they would obey me! I would quickly defeat their enemies and conquer all their foes. Those who hate me would bow in fear before me; their punishment would last for ever. But I would feed you with the finest wheat and satisfy you with wild honey!"*

CHAPTER 12 SHOW ME YOUR PLANS FOR MY LIFE!

Part of God's blessing in our lives is that He shows us His picture, His plans for us.

Let me immediately say: When this happens, you start changing, your way of thinking changes...about God...about yourself...about the future...about what is possible and what is not. As Romans 12:2 puts it, your thoughts are "renewed"! In modern language: your paradigms shift and your head turns!

This past week the Lord so impressed this in my own life and the lives of a bunch of spiritual leaders, that I really want to share it with you. I would like to show you at least two passages that illustrate this. Lets turn to Genesis 37 and also to Hebrews 11.

- In Genesis 37 God shows Joseph "the pictures" He has in His heart for Joseph's life. No wonder the young Joseph and his family struggle to merge the picture God showed him, with the realities of his position as son of a Jewish farmer!
- In Hebrews 11 we find a "photo album" of Old Testament believers who, at some point in their lives received Word from God that changed their lives. When God started sharing with them what was in His heart for them, they started seeing things that they themselves, and others, couldn't see with their "human" eyes. But eventually that Word "turned" their heads and brought them in line with God's planned destination for them, with God's heart for them in that season of their lives. It helped them make the right choices, and helped them persevere amid difficult circumstances, but also enabled them to expect big and challenging things from God in faith because they knew where God was taking them.

Sometimes we are met head-on by the challenges, crises and realities of our lives ...and we do not have the answers and cannot see the light. But then God ministers to us with a Word about what is currently in His heart for us, and suddenly everything seems so clear and simple.

Let's turn to Ecclesiastes 3 and read verse 1 to 15. Let me quote a part of verse 11 to you from the Amplified Bible: "He also has planted eternity in men's hearts and minds (a divinely implanted sense of purpose working through the ages which nothing under the sun but God alone can satisfy)..."

Sometimes God stretches us, increases our reach...makes us reach further than we ever thought possible. Not to break us, but to force us out of our comfort zone...to lead us to that that is in His heart for us now. After all, God has a very specific purpose each of our lives. He is heading somewhere specific with us and He will not be satisfied until we are in line with that purpose for this season of our lives.

What a blessing! Therefore I believe that faith is nothing more than seeing God's Word for your life and getting in line with that.

Sometimes we desperately search for God's specific plan in our life, and do not know exactly where we are heading. But deep down we know that what we are currently doing, that with which we are currently busy, is not what we will be doing for the rest of our lives. It is merely a step on the way towards our purpose.

Therefore, many of us are experiencing a desire to search for God's face during these times, to fast and spend time in prayer searching for this Word, for God's heart and where God currently wants us.

There are many signs that God is "stretching" you. Test these against your own life.

Maybe you feel that you do not really fit in there where you currently are. You feel out of place and out of your depth. Maybe you are wondering whether you shouldn't start over somewhere else, or do something new. But don't just stop everything you are currently busy

with. What you are feeling might just be a sign that God is busy with you...that God is making you unsatisfied with the comfort zone you have settled into and is challenging you...creating a hunger and a thirst in you for knowing what is in His heart for you. Until you know exactly what it is God wants you to do now, stay put; don't even dare make a move.

Maybe God has already shown you a new destination. Maybe you already know that God wants you to start moving in a new direction and maybe you already know which direction that is, but you are surrounded by people voicing resistance. Remember, when God tells us something, it rarely sits comfortably with us or those around us. It will mess things up and make them appear out of place. But it is then that we will experience a peacefulness inside ourselves that is beyond comprehension. A feeling of confidence and peace that He is busy with us, that He is in the situation and that He is busy leading us to where He wants us. It keeps us on our knees...helps us stay sensitive to the voice of God and His guidance in all matters.

Often we are sure that God spoke and we gave the steps we were meant to, and then everything goes wrong! Then we start wondering and having doubts about whether it really was God telling us what to do...These are the times that the knowledge you have about seeing God's heart for you, gives you peace, a confidence that amid all the chaos, you are doing the right thing. That you are heading where God wants you to go. It is this knowledge that carries you through the dark and misty days along the way. Keep going, don't give up hope. God will make the mist dissipate and will give you the answers to all your questions.

I believe we are in a new season. A season in which God is going to reveal His glory through showing signs and doing wonders. He is going to do supernatural things, out of the ordinary, against the grain of what we perceive as normal. I believe that we need to be sensitive to the way in which God wants to do things, and how He wants to use us in doing them.

Therefore I believe we can expect that God is going to bless us during this season with supernatural creativity. He is going to enable us to think outside the normal parameters, and outside the normal way of doing things. This only happens when we really start seeing and hearing what is in God's heart. It makes us realise that God wants to give us so much more than what we currently have. When we really start "seeing" what is in God's heart, we are raised up to "heavenly places", in the spirit seated next to Jesus so that we can look down at things from a heavenly perspective. This allows us to make room for our Almighty God, in all His greatness, for whom nothing is impossible.

Then we will, like an Abraham, a Joseph or a Moses...(you complete the list), speak God's words. We will speak prophetic words in situations, in our own lives and the lives of others, by repeating what God said about where He is heading with us during this season.

What is in God's heart for your life? Where is He heading with you? Why did He create you uniquely and has He walked such a special route with you up until now?

God is awakening a new generation of people who know what is in God's heart for this season. Only that which is in God's heart for you, and nothing less, will make you really happy and content. Only that.

Therefore I challenge you today to seek it. Pray that God will reveal it to you. Go and spend time alone, fast if need be, but get quiet enough before God to hear and see exactly what this is.