



HEADING TO THE LIGHT

REFLECTIONS FOR LENT

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REFLECTIONS FOR EASTER

1

HUMILITY

**'GOD BLESSES THOSE WHO REALISE THEIR NEED OF HIM,
FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS GIVEN TO THEM.'**

Matthew 5:3

THINK

What do you need? Right now, what do you need? What have you felt you have needed in the past – is it the same as what you think you need today? What will you need tomorrow? Is there a difference between what you need and what you want?

PRAY

“God, please help me as I think about this scripture and read these notes. I ask that you show me from your word how you would have me think, speak and act. Please guide me through your Holy Spirit.

READ

Humility. Wow. I struggle with this . . . but, that is what makes it a good place to start! How does stuff happen in my life? I try my best, I have to achieve, be a success – you know BE someone! Do you ever feel like that? No one else is going to be me – I can be proud (at times too proud) of who I am and the way I am. We all reckon ourselves sometimes. A guy called Jerry Bridges wrote an amazing book a few years ago called “In Pursuit of Holiness”, he said something that really made me stop and think. He said, “When

we sin, we are more disappointed and hacked off that we have failed than that we have grieved the heart of a holy God.” Woah! That’s me. I do that with my sin all the time. We live in a cynical age – which makes it doubly hard to be humble. To not want to GRAB the credit which we think is ours. I have sometimes thought – wow, if I had written a worship song that was sung all over the world . . . wow, what would that be like? I would find it hard not to say, “Yeah, I wrote that!” I wouldn’t be able to help myself. Even writing this

. . ., I could go off on one. Young people all over the world reading stuff I have written sobbing as my powerful turn of phrase has them choking on their pot noodle, people coming up to me in the street saying, “did you write that devotional bit on humility?” Please, Ali . . . will you sign my bible! *None of that is good (!)* – but it is so easy to get into this way of thinking.

Basically, humility is about being broken before God. Unless we are broken – life can't come out and LIVE. It is true for seeds falling to the ground and it is a spiritual truth for us (Jesus talks about it here: John Chapter 12 verse 24) We think we can DO this thing called Life ourselves. That

is the greatest sin – that we won't let God be God. We could make a list of our sins (how long would that be) the stuff we do – but, at the heart of the problem is our heart attitude. We can't do anything without our creator – can't do anything without God. We can sing songs like “you must increase – I must decrease, Lord” (which is John chapter 3:30) – if we **do** this – we don't DISAPPEAR. We don't become robots . . . we just become more completely and more fully who God created us to be. In Jesus we discover life in all its fullness (John 10:10). The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who know – but for the amazing love and grace of God – they have no right to be there.

DO

So, we are starting our journey towards Easter and the Cross.

Right now, as we kick off – why not acknowledge again (or for the first time) your need of God.

Be open during these few days to all that God might want to say and do.

REFLECTIONS FOR EASTER

BE REAL

'GOD BLESSES THOSE WHO MOURN, FOR THEY WILL BE COMFORTED, GOD BLESSED THOSE WHO ARE GENTLE AND LOWLY - FOR THE WHOLE EARTH WILL BELONG TO THEM'

Matthew 5: 4-5

THINK

Have you ever lost something precious?

How did you feel?

What did you do?

What would bring you comfort (great food, your favourite onesie, a shoulder from a friend?)

PRAY

Dear God, open my eyes and my heart to experience your love and compassion today.

READ

Have you seen that bit in Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade? (No, no the bit watched by every youth group up and down the land as Indy takes his 'leap of faith' across the huge chasm on the invisible bridge . . .), the bit before that: '*only the penitent man will pass*'. The penitent man . . . Kneels before God! Indy gets it just in the nick of time before his head gets scythed off. He kneels, acknowledges his place. We don't use words like 'penitent' which means to mourn . . . And - we don't really use words like 'mourn' either!

The best example of what Jesus is on about (how can you be joyful while being poor in spirit and mourning?) is in Luke 18. Here a Pharisee looks up to God and says, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men - especially that smelly sinner over there" - well, that's what he meant! This may have been true as HE looked at it - yet, to God, his fine clothes were rags; his white robes filthy - though he didn't know it. Then, we are shown another man. He stands a way off - he was so troubled by his sin that he couldn't look up (he dared not). Conscious of

the sin within he cried out, "*Oh, God, be merciful to me - for I am a sinner.*" There are people who live their lives and say at the end of them, "I don't regret anything." - how sad is that? Nothing at all? Some days I regret getting out of bed! Yet, more than that I think we need to know what we have lost - just as we need to be broken.

The Bible talks about those who "sow in tears, reaping in joy" - do we mourn with tears for ourselves? For our generation? For the world and the mess we are making of it? Why are

there more wars happening around the world now that at any time in human history? In the film Mars Attacks Jack Nicholson, playing the president of America asks, "*Why can't we all just get along?*" The truth is - without Jesus we can't - and that alone is a reason to mourn for our world. It doesn't end there. We can fall into the 'everlasting arms' of our God. Yes, we need to get real about our world, about our own sin - our own mess - we need to cry out to God for we need Him! We are poor and we are lost - yet, with Him we will find comfort, joy and peace.

DO

Examine your heart today. It isn't wrong to feel bad about the sin and pain in our lives - we need to come to the healer, Jesus - who binds up the broken hearted.

Tell God what has been going on, get into repentance and put things right.

FILL UP

**'GOD BLESSES THOSE WHO ARE HUNGRY AND THIRSTY FOR JUSTICE,
FOR THEY WILL RECEIVE IT IN FULL'**

Matthew 5:6

THINK

What do we fill ourselves with?
What do we long for?
What are you longing for right now?

PRAY

Lord help me to see the difference this week
between what I need and what I want –
help me to be hungry for the right things.

READ

Vanilla Coke! Do you remember that? Impossible to find now – I have searched everywhere. Reminded me of ice cream floats when I was little. I loved them. I love vanilla coke – it could become an obsession (if I could find any!!) But, they fill a want – not a need.

I do need water though. I don't need a vanilla coke. Brother Yun, an amazing Chinese Christian whose story is told in the book Heavenly Man, went without food and water while in prison for 74 days! Yeah, right – nobody

could do that. Jesus only managed 40 and He is the Son of God. I've no way of knowing for sure what happened with Brother Yun, other than he has lived an amazing life in pursuit of God. He understood something about where to go for the strength he would need to survive prison. I have never been under that kind of pressure – I don't know what I would do – what would you do? God was sufficient for Brother Yun – I however, stub my toe and my whole day is a disaster. I have nothing to wear in my wardrobe full of

clothes, I am spoilt for choice when it comes to breakfast but don't fancy anything, I am lost if I can't put my hand on my iPad or my iPhone or my Kindle . . . or my etc. You get the picture. We can have so much that we actually have nothing. Materially "full up" while spiritually starving. The richest man in the world was asked, how much money would be enough money? His answer was, "*a few thousand more*". However much he had, there would always be the need for more.

Yet, we can spiritually coast along and give God the dregs of our day. Everything else crowds in and crowds Him out. The Lord of life, who gave us His life – has to wait His turn. The key part of this verse for today is the second part – they will receive it in full. None of this other stuff fills me up. It just isn't enough.

A few years ago, I tackled the Three Peaks

Challenge. Climbing Ben Nevis (in Scotland), Scafel Pike (in England) and Snowdon (in Wales) in less than 24 hours. I was half way up the last mountain, Snowdon, with my lungs bursting and my legs burning and my head throbbing – I was longing to eat something. There was a mars bar in my bag. Just a mars bar. I had promised myself that I wouldn't eat it until I had reached the summit. That drove me forward. I really wanted that mars bar. I was going to wait. I imagined myself biting into it. The chocolate . . . the caramel!! When I did reach the summit, I peeled the wrapper off slowly and took a tiny bite. It was MAGNIFICENT. The BEST mars bar I had ever tasted.

There is a little verse that goes with our reading, it is tucked away in Psalm 34 verse 8. It says, "TASTE and see that the Lord is good. Oh, the joys of those who take their refuge in Him!"

DO

This week – where will you get your joy from? Where will you take refuge? What will you fill your life with?

Where you KNOW you have a need – and it is a right one – will you trust God this week too fill you?

Practice waiting for the Lord: when we are seeking Him and His Kingdom,
His righteousness – the promise is that we will be filled.

SHOW MERCY

**'GOD BLESSES THOSE WHO ARE MERCIFUL,
FOR THEY WILL BE SHOWN MERCY.'**

Matthew 5:7

THINK

How hard do you find it to forgive people?

Have you ever let someone off when they have hurt you (whether or not they have said sorry)?

Is there anyone who makes you so mad you would cross the street to avoid them?

Is there anyone mad at *you* right now?

PRAY

Lord, speak to me this week about mercy.

Help me to receive your mercy – but also to show it.

READ

Have you ever played the game “mercy”? Broken someone’s fingers? Lived with a “claw” from that game that lasted three days when you were 12? Well, if we think of grace as getting what we don’t deserve – then mercy is about not getting what we do deserve. The purpose of the game mercy is to inflict pain on someone else – so much so, that you keep going with your fingers locked with your opponent – trying to get them to give up by – well – basically, hurting them! Its not a kind game (and I don’t recommend it).

God is totally different – He is not trying to wring

us out, cause us pain until we scream for mercy – and then watch us suffer anyway.

I am always a bit gobsmacked when I read the story of Jonah. Yep, I know he is a prophet and God calls all sorts of people to do His work and speak for Him – but Jonah. This guy is so into himself he says “no” to God (instead of heading off to Nineveh as instructed, he heads in the opposite direction); when God changes his direction and gets Him there – Jonah delivers the message God has for the people of Nineveh and then goes to get a birds eye view so He

can watch the fireworks as God burns Nineveh to a crisp! Jonah is a pretty unique book as it is the only story in the Bible where a major plot point turns on the actions of a worm! God gave Jonah a plant to shade Him from the sun. Jonah is devastated when the plant dies (the worm) and – it appears – equally devastated when God shows mercy. Jonah is so hacked off that his plant is dead he can't raise a cheer that a whole nation is saved!

So often, we can be completely absorbed by OUR issues. The things that really concern only our life. The only things that really count are the

things that are happening to US. We can hold grudges about the most ridiculous of things (some for so long, we can't really remember why we hate so and so . . . we just . . . DO!)

The truth is – but for God's mercy, the threatened fate of Nineveh is the threatened fate of us ALL. We can read it in black and white in Romans, "*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" Yet, through Jesus we have a way back to our Father God. We can be forgiven and restored to right relationship.

WE ARE SHOWN MERCY!

As we approach Easter, one of the most amazing verses in scripture is often in my mind – Jesus is on the Cross, the crowd having saved a sinner and condemned the perfect lamb of God. Yet, in His anguish what does Jesus do – call down fire from heaven? Curse and swear? No, he says this, "*Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing.*"

Wow. There is nothing to say to that – just wonder at God's mercy.

DO

How much more then should you and I show mercy – especially when, if we are honest, a lot of the time we are talking about trivial stuff.

Is there anyone you need to show mercy to this week?

DESIRE PURITY

'GOD BLESSES THOSE WHOSE HEARTS ARE PURE FOR THEY WILL SEE GOD.'

Matthew 5:8

THINK

What do you day dream about the most? If you could do anything right now what would it be? If your thoughts were shown on a cinema screen would you happily sit and watch them with over a bowl of popcorn with your mum?

PRAY

Lord, show me as I read and think today about purity - where my heart and my thoughts need to be cleaned up. Help me to be honest with you about the things I struggle with.

READ

OK, this is not easy. In fact it is really tough. There is no special formula or plan that will keep you pure in heart, mind and body. Although in the passage it says "heart" it means our whole "being" so includes mind and body as well. What is on our minds will affect our heart and our attitude to ourselves, to others and to the things we value.

Everything starts with a thought. If we THINK about something often enough then it will become an ACTION; and ACTION repeated

often becomes a HABIT; our HABITS build and shape our CHARACTER and our CHARACTER – who we "are" will determine our DESTINY. All that from a thought!

An amazing guy called Alex Buchannan once shared something on the whole "thought life" thing. He said this,

"YOU CAN'T STOP A BIRD FLYING PAST AND DROPPING A TWIG IN YOUR HAIR – BUT YOU CAN STOP IT BUILDING A NEST."

It is pretty unlikely this would actually happen.
The way my hair is, the bird doesn't need to go and get twigs – its already an unruly mop of straw! Anyway this picture reminds me of the bit

in 2 Corinthians 10:5 where Paul says, “We take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ.”

DO

It is a question of obedience. It isn't easy – but it does boil down to what we want more – whether or not your life is founded on Jesus. Apathy and indifference only weaken our stand – we will only find a pure heart in Jesus. The more time we spend with Him, the more we will become like Him.

Make spending time with Jesus a priority this week and try and remember Paul's reminder to take “captive” every thought!

MAKE PEACE

**'GOD BLESSES THOSE WHO WORK FOR PEACE,
FOR THEY WILL BE CALLED THE CHILDREN OF GOD.'**

Matthew 5:9

—THINK—

Where and when do you find yourself feeling at your most peaceful? What brings you peace? What churns you up inside and makes you anxious? How are you feeling about the week ahead?

—PRAY—

Lord, help me to be someone today who brings peace – whether at home, school or work, when I am with my friends and with others. Help me to be at peace in your presence.

—READ—

“I AM LEAVING YOU WITH A GIFT — PEACE OF MIND AND HEART. AND THE PEACE I GIVE ISN'T LIKE THE PEACE THE WORLD GIVES. SO DON'T BE TROUBLED OR AFRAID.”

John 14:27

We will find it impossible to be peace makers if we have not experienced the peace of God for ourselves. Sometimes I feel that strife, anguish and fighting follow me around – like I can't escape it. Do you ever feel like a kind of nervous

energy? You have to be doing something but you don't know what? Do you ever go into an empty house and the silence kills you, so you just have to turn on the TV or the radio – even if you aren't going to listen or watch. You lack peace.

Peace is not just an absence of war or conflict. It is something deep and real itself. In fact, just the absence of war does not mean there IS peace. There can be the appearance of peace on the outside – but, inside – something

is raging! Like, if you get squeezed by circumstances, a situation, something that is said about you – what comes out then? What comes out of you? Our place of peace shouldn't be confused with lying on an empty beach, palm trees swaying; a huge cocktail with a little umbrella in one hand, the other lazily drawing circles on the sand . . . our peace comes not from a place, but from a person.

That person is Jesus. With Him, all the pretending, all the effort of “being” all the stuff we think matters, all that stuff that gets us down or winds us up – He knows it all! We can be completely ourselves in His presence, when we experience His perfect peace it stays with us. We take it where we go. Being a peacemaker is not about doing things to bring about peace for others. As we are at peace, we bring peace.

— DO —

Turn off your mobile, tablet, TV, computer, games console.

Seek that peace with Jesus.

Ask Him to fill you with His peace.

REFLECTIONS FOR EASTER

LIVE LIFE

7 + ONWARDS!

'GOD BLESSES THOSE WHO ARE PERSECUTED BECAUSE THEY LIVE FOR GOD, FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS THEIRS. GOD BLESSES YOU WHEN YOU ARE MOCKED AND PERSECUTED AND LIED ABOUT BECAUSE YOU ARE MY FOLLOWERS.'

Matthew 5:10-11

THINK

Which verse from the beatitudes has spoken to you the most?

As we get to Easter, if you imagine yourself at the cross – what would you say to Jesus right now?

PRAY

Thank you Jesus for this time with you, help me to see you in a fresh way this Easter. Thank you for your love for me and the World that took you to the Cross.

READ

This is the CRUNCH for the disciples. If you read all the way through the Beatitudes, as we hit the last “God blesses you” you may notice something different. Up until this point, as Jesus is saying, “God blesses THOSE WHO” I can imagine the disciples nodding their heads and saying, “Yes, Lord – absolutely, couldn’t agree more – God blesses those who are poor, and mourn and are weak and pathetic and useless . . . “ Then Jesus shocks them out of their sandals and says, “Blessed are YOU” – Jesus is saying “all this applied to YOU. It is all very

well nodding your heads guys, but this is where the rubber hits the road, this is where we see if you want to be counted with me as one of my followers, or if there is a point where it is going to get too tough . . . “

How often have I sat in a church service and thought, “YES Lord, James does need to hear this message. He needs to become more like you Lord, less up himself, less arrogant – not like me of course Lord, I sorted all that out when I was seven.”

It costs being a follower of Jesus. YOU may get persecuted for being his friend. YOU may be challenged about your faith, YOU may need to stand up for what you believe – yes, YOU!

We need to give ourselves up to the Lord. His purposes, His will, His desires. Then we will be completely HIS. We may be persecuted – but wow – just as verse 10 says, “the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.” We can shift the emphasis there too and say “the Kingdom of Heaven is

OURS.” To be counted in with Jesus makes it worth it.

Jesus goes further, be happy about it, be very glad – for a great reward awaits you in heaven! How do you respond to this? As we come to the end of these reflections and see the cross – are you going to look ahead, as Jesus did when he endured the cross for us? For a while now – we might have suffering, we must endure for a time – but, wow – one day . . . one day . . . WOW!

DO

Go and LIVE your LIFE for Jesus. This is not a “do” that isn't about a bunch of tasks you can tick off a list. It is about entering in fully to what has already been “done”. We have been set FREE.

Go with God into what tomorrow brings, free to be the person that you were made to be.

The Holy Spirit helps us and guides us, trust Him to be with you.

