

NT

A pattern for life
in God's House

David:

Lover of God's people

A friendship for the kingdom

Finding your way around the Bible

Praying for one another

Mark's Christ

Issue 2 2014

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From the Editors' desk

The following thought struck me the other day during my morning quiet time. Fullness of joy; remaining ('abiding') in Christ;¹ godliness;² bold service for Christ;³ and holiness⁴ – these are all positive things. They are what every Christian surely aspires to. The very mention of them in a list like that is motivating. It's interesting then, that they are all directly linked to discipline and obedience in some of the key Bible sections in which they feature. Obedience and discipline don't have the same ring to them as the former things which we listed, do they? But they are the foundation of every good thing in the Christian life.

In this issue of NT, you'll be thrilled to read of people who have grown spiritually through knowing God's comfort in some of life's deepest experiences; you'll meet others who are boldly stepping out in innovative ways of serving the Lord; you'll hopefully be fascinated with the beauty of the Lord and the possibility of enjoying it to the full. We also continue our focus on the life of David: this time with a look into his special love for God's people and his relationship with Jonathan. There are delightful lessons for us in both these articles. We can't help but be impressed by the obedience and discipline seen in David as a youth. This included his prayer life, evidenced in the wonderful collection of psalms which we have in our Bibles. Fittingly, included in this issue – in our series on 'one anothering' – you'll find an article dedicated to prayer. Enjoy!

References: (1) John 15:10-11 (2) 1 Tim. 4:7 (3) 2 Tim. 1:7 (4) Heb. 12:10

Brian



The beauty of the Lord

Edwin Stanley, Aberkenfig, Wales

*What is your beloved more than another beloved,
O most beautiful among women?*¹

is the probing question asked in Song of Songs. The woman then launches into a profound description of the man her soul loves – a description that is so full and passionate that these friends respond: *Where has your beloved turned, that we may seek him with you?*²

It begs the question as to whether we would be able to describe our beloved Lord Jesus with such passion and love to those who ask *a reason for the hope that is in you.*³

So what does this woman see in her beloved? She begins with his splendour and glory, for he was *radiant and ruddy*;⁴ that is, he was dazzling like the sun and flushed with warmth and passion.

When Jesus was transfigured on the holy mount, His *face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.*⁵ John writes: *In him was life, and the life was the light of men.*⁶ In Genesis 1, God said, “*Let there be light,*”⁷ which was His answer to the darkness that *was over the face of the deep.*⁸ God Himself *alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see.*⁹ The Lord Jesus is the essence of the dazzling splendour of the holy light of God, and He has been revealed to those who believe in Him. He shines upon us¹⁰ and we bask in the light.

What is our Beloved like? He is dazzling with the splendour of light, but it is not a cold light; it is rosy with the heat of blood in the face, flushed with warmth. Light and love are combined.

In the Song, the woman realises her beloved’s elevation above all others for he is the chief, the one marked out by a banner. (The flag bearer which would indicate the presence of the ruler or leader.) She says, *his banner over me was love.*¹¹

The love of God and the light of God, two glorious truths of the gospel, are both brought to men through the Lord Jesus Christ where the glory of God is to be found *in the face of Jesus Christ.*¹²

And what He is in glory, He is in grace.

Psalm 45:2 (NASB marg.) says:

*You are fairer than the sons of men;
grace is poured through Your lips...*

The woman of the Song continues with her description and she is captivated by her lover’s head. It was of the



finest gold,¹³ pure and refined. No impurity or blemish was seen in him for he was the principal ruler and leader of his people.

Nebuchadnezzar was told that he was the head of gold and the king of kings, but he would be deposed; his glory would pass to another and his memory would fade away.¹⁴ Not so with the King of kings and the Lord of lords; for Him there will be no decay and no passing. He is eternal in character and power.¹⁵ Here is the One who holds all authority, being the principal ruler and the only potentate – the captain of our salvation¹⁶ (i.e. the chief leader; the prince; the one who takes the lead in anything and so affords an example; a predecessor in a matter; pioneer; the author¹⁷).

It’s little wonder, then, that we should be captivated and enthralled by the beauty and power of our Saviour, Friend and eternal Lover. But are we? Only time spent with Him will enable us to grow in our appreciation and love for the One who saved us and called us to Himself.

References: (1) Song of Songs 5:9 (2) Song of Songs 6:1 (3) 1 Pet. 3:15 (4) Song of Songs 5:10 (5) Mat. 17:2 (6) John 1:4 (7) Gen. 1:3 (8) Gen. 1:2 (9) 1 Tim. 6:16 (10) Eph. 5:14 (11) Song of Songs 2:4 (12) 2 Cor. 4:1-6 (13) Song of Songs 5:11 (14) Dan. 2:38 (15) Rev. 19:16 (16) Heb. 2:10 (17) Thayer’s Greek Lexicon: *archēgos*

Bible quotations from ESV

David

Lover of God's people

Geoff Hydon, Mount Forest, Canada



“Love is not a feeling; it’s an act of your will” is a phrase popularised in lyrics by Don Francisco.¹

Perhaps that’s going a bit far, for surely love includes emotional aspects. A husband who tells his wife that he has no feelings for her would be unlikely to convince her he really does love her! Love will include the will; it must. But feelings are important too.

God has displayed amazing determination and affection in continuing to love His people, even when they engaged in idolatry. The metaphors in Hosea’s account leave this beyond doubt (see especially chapter 11). God went well beyond a typical emotional response when He appealed to His rebellious people to return to Him. Here we might say that, although the term ‘God’s people’ has been subject to varying definition by Bible scholars, for the purpose of this article it is used to describe Israel under the old covenant and now the children of God in new covenant relationship to God.²

If we are going to examine together the matter of David’s love for God’s people, we will do well to keep in mind God’s own love for them. We should find similar characteristics. This will be helpful, for there are no Bible references that simply say outright that David loved Israel. However, actions speak louder than words, and there is no lack of evidence of David’s love.

Shepherd love

David had a shepherd’s experience and a shepherd’s heart, and he brought these to his leadership of Israel. God Himself emphasized that.³ How would we evaluate David as a shepherd? Well, from 1 Samuel 17:34-36 we learn what David was prepared to risk in order to save one of his lambs. We might almost have sympathy for the lion or bear that faced the shepherd David when looking for its lunch! Israel’s shepherds were expected to do all they could to rescue one of the flock from marauders; as far back as Jacob’s day we learn that shepherds were accountable to pay for losses from the flock.⁴ And that was still true in the experience of Amos,⁵ when production of part of the animal retrieved from the lion might go some way to satisfying the shepherd’s accountability. The words of the Lord Jesus Christ provide the clearest Bible statement we will find on this subject. He said, “... *the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.*”⁶ We might take those words for granted. However, His statement reverses the normal course of things, where the sheep ends up laying down its life for the hireling shepherd who had absconded! Therefore, it would be an exceptional shepherd who would be ready to risk his life for the sheep. Such love for

If we are going to examine David's love for God's people, we will do well to keep in mind God's own love for them.

the sheep is clearly seen in the heart of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd. And we can see it pictured in David, too, for on momentous and numerous occasions he was prepared to put his life on the line for Israel in his many military campaigns,⁷ and in his afflictions.⁸ It is noteworthy that (guilty) David sought to deflect punishment from Israel onto himself alone, seeing them as sheep.⁹ Thus we conclude that David loved God’s people, as a good shepherd loves and makes sacrifices for his sheep.

Shepherds of the flock of God today are held to this same standard, as may be deduced from the Lord’s words to Peter the shepherd-to-be.¹⁰

God, who is David’s shepherd,¹¹ desires that His people will grow spiritually, hence those He sets as shepherds over them should feed them and guide them. His people need knowledge and understanding so that they will discern and choose properly between good and evil. David’s shepherd love for Israel can be seen in the counsel he provided to them, in keeping with God’s desire for them.¹² If love was to be measured by popularity, then David’s love would have scored high;¹³ but popularity can be ephemeral, while truth and integrity are lasting qualities found in David.¹⁴ This care for the people of God is beautifully summarized in 2 Samuel 8:15 *So David reigned over all Israel; and David administered justice and righteousness for all his people.*

Even in the formative years of his earlier rejection, the people he led would have loved him for his willingness to hear and resolve their concerns and befriend them.¹⁵ It is

noticeable that when Absalom sought to win the hearts of the people, he no doubt imitated what his father had done for them, but evidently without his father's selfless devotion.¹⁶ And imitation remains our Enemy's frequent tactic.¹⁷

Loving obedience

The apostle John clarifies another point applicable to love for the people of God. He says: *whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments.*¹⁸ These are challenging words; our love for the Father is indeed reflected in how we treat His children and true love for the children of God will always be evidenced in actions that comply with the Father's will. If our actions towards fellow Christians would cause us to depart from doing the commands of the Father, then we have failed in our love for those people. Here then is another test we can apply to David. His love for God is surely undisputed and, if so, we should see it expressed in relationships with those belonging to God – relationships governed by adherence to God's commands. We may take into account some of David's failings, where his actions were not in accord with God's commands. But God's summary of his life was that he was a man after God's own heart, who would do all His will.¹⁹ If God loves His people, then a man after God's own heart must too. And so must we.

Love for enemies


It is well known that the Lord Jesus commanded us to love our enemies.²⁰ Sometimes our enemies are not the faceless opponents from far away; they are among one's Christian brothers and sisters. It is a real test of our adherence to Christ's commands to love those who show enmity to us. David's restraint in relation to King Saul is exemplary (recounted in chapters 18-31 of 1 Samuel).

It may also be true that a key test of a society is how it treats its minorities and the vulnerable. Did not David set an excellent example in his treatment of Mephibosheth, the crippled grandson of the man who had for so long sought to kill David?²¹ Mephibosheth was not summarily punished for his family's involvement in hatred of David. Instead David's love was expressed in the words: *"is there yet anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness..."* Saul was of the tribe of Benjamin and David was of Judah. But David did not pursue rivalry; he strove to bring the opposing tribes together. His strategies and tactics in this respect could fill another article! Here we need only note that David's love for the people of God resulted in this objective of securing unity, and especially in their worship of God.²² The world is rife with strife, especially internecine rivalries; who can unite them in love? Our love for the people of God should be reflected in actions that promote unity.²³

Readers wanting to pursue this analysis of David's love for God's people may refer to the love descriptions in 1 Corinthians 13 and apply them to the record of David's dealings with Israel. The objective in all this is not an academic exercise, but discovery of things that were *written in earlier times ... for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*²⁴

References: (1) From his album Holiness, 1984 (2) Ex. 6:7; 19:5; 1 Pet. 1:1-2; 2:9 (3) 2 Sam. 7:8 (4) Gen. 31:39 (5) Amos 3:12 (6) John 10:11 (7) e.g. 1 Sam. 17:37,50; see 2 Sam. 19:9 (8) See 2 Sam. 22:5ff; Ps. 22 & 69 (9) 2 Sam. 24:17 (10) John 21:15-17, and see 1 Pet. 5:2-4 (11) Ps. 23 (12) See Jer. 3:15 (13) 2 Sam. 3:36 (14) Ps. 26:1 (15) cf. 1 Sam. 22:2 (16) 2 Sam. 15:2-3 (17) 2 Cor. 11:14-15 (18) 1 John 5:1-2 (19) Acts 13:22 (20) Mat. 5:44 (21) See 2 Sam. 9 (22) 1 Chron. 13:1-4; 22:17-19; ch.28 (23) 1 Cor. 1:10 (24) Rom. 15:4

Bible quotations from NASB



David loved God's people, as a good shepherd loves and makes sacrifices for his sheep.

A friendship for the kingdom

Stephen McCabe, Belfast, N.Ireland

From 1 Samuel 18 – 2 Samuel 1, we see the friendship of David and Jonathan form and deepen. There is a lot that we can learn from it – it was a friendship that was so much bigger than just the two who were directly involved in it.

In fact, it was a friendship that had impact on a nation. It was pivotal to God's purposes for His kingdom, in bringing David to the throne and the blessings that flowed from that act to God's people. The blessing of David's throne will be felt forever in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.¹ We are considering an extraordinary friendship.

He must increase; I must decrease

When they meet,² Jonathan is immediately drawn to David's charisma, having probably been witness to his remarkable feat in overcoming Goliath by God's power. It is recorded twice in the opening verses of their story that Jonathan loved David *as his own soul*.³ And so he made a covenant with David, in which he gives David his own robe, armour and weapons. What a wonder that the then crown prince of Israel so willingly conveys his rights and claims to the throne to another. Don't miss the significance of this moment – Jonathan is acknowledging that the future of the kingdom lies with David, the man destined for the throne. Jonathan's actions here suggest that he knows that God will work mightily through David, and he is glad to be part of God's purposes. David must increase; Jonathan must decrease.

The relationship of Jonathan to the Lord's anointed king is very instructive for us. We are drawn to the Saviour, as Jonathan was to David, because by faith we have seen Him overcome the enemy – we have understood and accepted what He has done for us in the giving of Himself at Calvary for our redemption. Though we have not seen Him, we love Him,⁴ because we understand that He has first loved us!⁵

As subjects in His kingdom, we should constantly seek to acknowledge the Lord Jesus as king in our relationship with Him. There should be nothing in our life of holding on to our own robe, our own armour, our own weapons – rather, we gladly hand these things over to the Anointed One, who holds all rights and claims to the throne. We surrender our status, our self-righteousness (perhaps a robe to us, but filthy rags to God⁶), our self-importance and pride to Him. We surrender our own mechanisms of defence, whatever they may be (anger, denial, intellect) – the spiritual armour He provides is better.⁷ We surrender the ways in which we would wound others – the spiritual weapons He provides are better.⁸ We give ourselves over to the Lord's Anointed.

Why? Because, as Jonathan recognised when he met David, and as John the Baptist recognised when he met the Christ, "*He must increase, but I must decrease*".⁹ This is the man to whom the throne belongs, and we love Him.

Delighting in Him

When Saul would have put David to death because of his jealousy (see NT 01/14), Jonathan warns David and intercedes for him to the king, because the Bible says that *Jonathan, Saul's son, delighted much in David*.¹⁰

Delight in the Saviour should fill the life of a disciple! As the Psalmist delighted in the law of the LORD, meditating on it day and night,¹¹ as the bride sits down with great delight in shadow of the bridegroom,¹² so we should delight in God's Word and in spending time with the One who is the Word become flesh. If our primary source of delight is Him, why would we look for satisfaction elsewhere? Cultivate your delight in the Lord's Anointed, and let us each strive to know more of Him and of God's purposes, leaving the elementary doctrine of Christ, and going on to maturity.¹³

Speaking well of Him

In his intercessory conversation with King Saul, Samuel records that *Jonathan spoke well of David*.¹⁴ It is a lovely commendation. Jonathan makes the point to his father that David's deeds have brought good to him.

Do we seek to speak well of the Lord Jesus to those who would wish Him, or His kingdom, harm? To everyone we come across, whether in action or word, we should represent Christ well to them – mindful that we can be *ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us*.¹⁵ We have a good news message for people about the Lord Jesus – His mighty deed at Calvary has brought good to those who will receive Him.

Full obedience to Him

David was eventually forced to flee from Saul, but still his friendship with Jonathan shines strongly through as he and Jonathan plan for David's survival. In helping David (by letting him know Saul's thoughts on David and whether he should return or escape), Jonathan was again acknowledging that the future kingship of Israel lay with this man – not with his own family. In fact, in the eyes of his father, Jonathan had shamed himself by *choosing the son of Jesse*.¹⁶ While making their plans, Jonathan says to

David, *“Whatever you say, I will do for you”*.¹⁷ His willingness to be obedient to the Lord’s anointed is again something that we can learn from. Shouldn’t those words be whispered in our quiet times, as we search the Scriptures for His instruction? Then, by the help of His Spirit, we seek to carry out His will for our lives of service, even if it means bearing shame for His name.

Extraordinary love

Of course, Jonathan dies a tragic death on Mount Gilboa, alongside his father, at the hands of the Philistines.¹⁸ David’s lament for Jonathan is touching:

*“Jonathan lies slain on your high places,
I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan;
very pleasant have you been to me;
your love to me was extraordinary,
surpassing the love of women.”*¹⁹

Many have sought to read more into David’s words than is really there in terms of his relationship with Jonathan. Hebrew cultural and linguistic scholar Robert Alter has stated that these attempts are unconvincing, and that the bond between men in the ancient Israelite culture may often have been stronger than love between men and women.

In Jonathan, David had a friend that stuck by him in extreme hardship; one closer than a brother.²⁰ Let us seek to emulate Jonathan’s extraordinary love to the Lord’s anointed – his willingness to decrease and give up ‘self’, his delighting, his efforts to speak well, his obedience – in our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Concluding thoughts

Looking at the broad sweep of Israel’s story arc, we can conceive of the deep friendship between David and Jonathan as to the benefit of the kingdom of God and the fruition of God’s plans for Israel – within a generation Israel would be at the peak of her powers, in favour with God and men, and with David’s son on the throne. Jonathan’s loyalty and friendship with David had a significant role to play in that, by God’s grace.

Similarly today, it is great when we can have deep friendships that are ‘for the Kingdom’. In churches of God, we should never seek to ‘go it alone’, but we should actively seek out and develop friendships that will further God’s work.

How wonderful that, in the churches of God, we can have friendships for God’s kingdom (ultimately for the King), that transcend national boundaries and endure lifelong. We pray that God would use such friendships to accomplish His own purposes for the Kingdom, as He did in the case of David and Jonathan! The most important of those friendships will be with the One on the throne to whom we have surrendered ourselves – great David’s greater Son, the Lord’s Anointed, the Lord Jesus Christ.

References: (1) Is. 9:7 (2) 1 Sam. 18 (3) 1 Sam 18:1,3 (4) 1 Pet. 1:8 (5) 1 John 4:19 (6) Is. 64:6 (7) Eph. 6:10-17 (8) Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12 (9) John 3:30 (10) 1 Sam. 19:1 (11) Ps. 1:2 (12) Song of Songs 2:3 (13) Heb. 6:1 (14) 1 Sam. 19:4 (15) 2 Cor. 5:20 (16) 1 Sam. 20:30 (17) 1 Sam. 20:4 (18) 1 Sam. 31:1-4 (19) 2 Sam. 1:25-26 (20) Prov.18:24

Bible quotations from ESV

*It was a
friendship that
had impact on
a nation.*



One-anothering

Praying for one another

Gareth Andrews, Melbourne, Australia

*You also must help us by prayer...*¹

Daniel is very well known as a man of prayer,² and for good reason. The regularity, context and content of Daniel's prayers are a great example to us as to when, where and how to pray.

Daniel knew, too, the help of being prayed for by others. When their lives were threatened by the King, he brought his three companions together and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning their plight – in effect, to pray for their very lives.³ We can only imagine what that time of prayer together must have been like! God answered their prayers during the night, and we should note that Daniel responded immediately with praise and thanksgiving.

Similarly, when Peter was in prison and his life was in danger it is recorded that earnest prayer was made to God by the church – a time of collective prayer extending into the night.⁴ Their prayers were answered so unequivocally that, when Peter arrived at their door, they couldn't even believe it at first.

Of course, praying for one another should not be limited to times of extreme danger or need, and Paul says that we should be praying regularly in all ways for all people: for peace, salvation and knowledge of the truth: *First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*⁵

So praying for all people is good and it is pleasing to God. How much, then, are we especially burdened to pray for our fellow brothers and sisters whom we serve alongside in faith and love? Paul, again, wrote to the saints in Ephesus: *For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.*⁶ In one flowing sentence Paul then shows us what he prays for them: that they might gain a deep and progressive enlightenment into God's purpose and provision for them.

At the end of this letter, too, we see the central importance of prayer with putting on the whole armour of God. Do we appreciate that in all circumstances, we should be *praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer*



You also must help us by prayer...
(2 Cor. 1:11)

*and supplication ... with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints?*⁷

Paul's commitment and purpose in praying for all the saints is recorded in many of his letters. Likewise, we see this great man of God, like Daniel, requesting and valuing the prayers of others too.⁸ Are we able to share our deepest needs, fears, and even sins, with each other?⁹ It's surely not easy at times and it does require an effective relationship with each other built on faith, love, harmony and humility. If we are to have the blessing of this union of prayer we must not judge one another and we must practise forgiving, encouraging, and loving one another.

The Lord Jesus showed the disciples that the basis of our prayers is "*Our Father ...*".¹⁰ With a greater sense of wonder and appreciation for our adoption and the love that God has shown for our fellow brothers and sisters, our prayers for each other will be transformed from a 'religious' or business-like list of repeated requests into earnest prayers of petition, marked with preparation, perseverance and praise.

References: (1) 2 Cor. 1:11 (2) Dan. 6:10 (3) Dan. 2:18 (4) Acts 12:5 (5) 1 Tim. 2:1-4 (6) Eph. 1:15-21 (7) Eph. 6:16-19 (8) Eph. 6:19-20; 2 Cor. 1:11 (9) Jas. 5:13-16 (10) Mat. 6:5-13

Bible quotations from ESV

The rights and wrongs

The Duck Dynasty Debacle

Martin Jones, Toronto, Canada

Duck Dynasty is an unlikely, but wildly popular, US 'reality TV' show about the madcap life of a redneck family from the Louisiana backwoods; unlikely, perhaps, because the family are devout Christians who wear their faith on their sleeves (or should that be bandanas?)

With their Christianity so evident, it's perhaps no surprise that when Phil Robertson, the clan patriarch, was interviewed by GQ magazine recently, he was asked a question about it. A golden opportunity, surely, to present the gospel attractively and biblically?

The question "What is sin?" seems innocuous enough. It's a question that could, perhaps, be answered by a small child with a few weeks of Sunday School under their belt. But it's such a key question that certain answers can badly misrepresent the gospel and needlessly turn the questioner off Christianity entirely. For that reason, just the opening sentence of Phil's controversial answer provides some important lessons for us about how not to witness: "Start with homosexual behaviour and just morph out from there."

So how would we answer GQ's question?

The first key is to ensure that we base our answer on the Biblical definition and meaning of sin. 'Homosexual behaviour' is not actually what sin intrinsically is, it is only one of many, many symptoms of it; just as having a high fever is a symptom of influenza. That's not to say, of course, that homosexual behaviour is at all acceptable to God – but the root meaning of the word sin is 'to miss the mark', God's mark or standard – and that applies to all human effort and behaviour.

The second key is to make clear what the root cause of sin is. To imply that all sin starts with homosexuality is wide of the mark! James 1:14-15 says that *each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed ... then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin*. As Jesus said, it is what comes from the inside that makes us unclean.¹ The root of sin is in our hearts in such things as pride, lust, greed, selfishness, envy – in fact the laundry list of items laid out in Galatians 5:19-21. A wise gardener does not deal with dandelions by trying to contain thousands of floating seeds; he knows the most effective action is to focus on the roots!

The third key is to state that sin brings the same issue to every human being, regardless of their sexual orientation. To focus on one particular sin, and target one particular section of society, risks alienating some and perhaps lets others think that they are off the hook. (It's even worse when the particular sin is selected because of an apparent personal distaste for the sin involved – Robertson also



made comments about homosexual vs. heterosexual intercourse which cannot be published here because of their coarse and explicit nature). What we need to focus on is God's objective view and evaluation of sin, not our own subjective one. Look again at the seemingly unprioritised list of Galatians 5 and find items that perhaps much more commonly beset us. Why focus on homosexuality and overlook jealousy, rage and selfish ambition?

Robertson's comments certainly hit the headlines and attracted a lot of criticism from sections of the media and society. However, some Christians have praised his bravery for standing up for what he believes, whereas his family has defended his right to free speech under the US constitution, excusing his language on the grounds of his life experience. Is this valid? After all, Paul was known for his '*parrhesia*' (a Greek word meaning 'frankness of speech') and 'calling a spade a spade'.

As citizens, primarily, of heaven, Christians need to be wary of utilizing earthly rights as a means to justify their conduct. We have heavenly rights, but they come with heavenly responsibilities, including being "*shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves*"² and *speaking the truth in love*.³ In addition, standing up for what we believe is not necessarily the same thing as proclaiming what God actually says in His Word!

The way we stand up and/or proclaim is also important – we need to be conscious of our audience and tailor the way we speak accordingly, remembering we are now ambassadors who are a new creation with a new way of acting and speaking!

References: (1) Mark 7:15 (2) Mat. 10:16 (3) Eph. 4:15
Bible quotations from NIV

Methods of Bible study

Finding your way around the Bible

Karl Smith, Kirkintilloch, Scotland

Bible study can take many forms. We may want to follow a character or look up the references to a particular incident. Perhaps we want to find help on a particular aspect of living such as overcoming temptation, relationships or knowing the joy of the Lord. Perhaps we want to find guidance on scriptural teaching affecting aspects of our church life. The person of the Lord Jesus Himself is an especially rewarding subject to research. He Himself is our lovely example and we treasure everything about Him. We will never run short of things to meditate on about Him and this will fuel and enrich our worship too.

The Bible is a big book. If we want to know what the Bible as a whole says about a particular issue, it would take too long to start each time at Genesis 1:1 and go on to Revelation 22:21, stopping each time we came across the subject in which we were interested.

There are, however, tools that can help us here. A **concordance**, for example, is like a dictionary, but it lists each time every English word is used in the Bible. You can get them for most Bible versions. Before the days of computers, men like Dr James Strong and Robert Young did painstaking work to provide these invaluable tools that are still in use today.

Even these, however, are only a springboard. The Bible might discuss the topic you are interested in without using the particular word for which you happened to search. Say you wanted to study the Lord Jesus' teaching on prayer. Simply looking for 'pray' in a concordance, you might conclude that the Lord's upper room ministry in John 14-16 only speaks about the Lord Jesus praying, but doesn't give any instruction for us. You'd miss out on three or four key passages on the subject, just because the word itself is not used, including such gems as, *"Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it."*¹ Also a person may be referred to without his or her own name being used.



Many Bibles have **cross-references** in a column in the middle of each page. A small letter above certain words corresponds to the same letter in the column, where you will see a list of verses. These have been compiled by scholars to point to other key passages where a place or person appears. Sometimes they show other places where broadly the same concept is being dealt with so that we can compare different parts of the Bible by theme. We must, of course, be careful to note differences as well as similarities between verses connected in these ways. The cross-references provide a valuable resource for study inside our Bible editions themselves without turning to lots of reference books. For more extensive help on where to find things, we might invest in a topical (i.e. by topic) dictionary of the Bible or similar book.

Some study tools such as commentaries on particular books, or on the Bible as a whole, give interpretations from Bible students. These can be enormously helpful as we can turn to a verse that is puzzling us and find what others have thought about it. It is worth saying, however, that it is best to study a passage thoroughly yourself before turning to someone else's interpretation. The Holy Spirit has promised to "... guide you into all the truth"² and so we ask that He may do this each time we sit down to reflect on the Scriptures. Even the most scholarly commentaries can consciously or unconsciously reflect the preferences or denominational bias of the writer. Get a range of views rather than reading just one commentator all the time.

If you are interested to know what has been published in the churches of God on a particular passage topic over the years, *NT* and its sister publication *Bible Studies* are now searchable online. As with the concordance, you may need to type in more than one phrase to get the best out of this. Other booklets address specific topics that might help your study. Seek and you shall find!

References: (1) John 14:13-14 (2) John 16:13

Bible quotations from ESV

Universalism

Who will be saved?

Brian Fullarton, Bathgate, Scotland

This doctrine of universalism, propagated by Origen (185-254 AD), makes the claim that every person who has lived in this world, all through its existence, and no matter their way of life and belief system, will ultimately be eternally saved.

Additionally, even angelic beings, who sided with Satan in his rebellion against his Creator, will somehow receive forgiveness and thereby avoid eternal punishment, despite the severity of their sinful actions. The principal logic behind these beliefs is that Christ's sacrifice was a sufficient remedy, and that surely God will be more glorified in saving everyone than in letting Satan be victorious in securing the eternal punishment of multitudes.

Such assertions, of course, run counter to what is clearly and unequivocally emphasised in God's own Word. Moreover, the above logic is faulty, because it presumes we may know better than God, who is all-knowing. Since God is holy and absolutely sovereign, His choice as to who should benefit from Christ's sacrifice is both just and right, and beyond question by His creatures.¹ Old and New Testament scriptures indicate that, in His wisdom, God has provided salvation on His own terms, and will be glorified in the outcome.

He looks for the action of simple human faith, and the acknowledgement of His absolute authority in, and assent to, what He says and asks for.

Unequivocal testimony

All earth-born people are classified in God's Word as rebellious sinners estranged from God: they are *all under sin*.² The Scriptures speak unquestionably as to how God will enact His judgement upon those who have openly rejected His will and warnings; they are numerous and we cite but two to validate our understanding and conviction of God's verdict and retribution upon unrepentant human beings and also sinning angelic creatures:

(1) *in flaming fire taking vengeance on those (i.e. people of this earth) who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.*³

(2) *For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment.*⁴

Universality of the Gospel

There can be no doubt that salvation is available for all who repent of their sin and place simple trust in the person and atoning sacrifice of Christ. The offer of

mercy, forgiveness, and reconciliation is open to everyone, without exception or exclusion.⁵ Christ has paid the ransom price for the redemption of the human soul, but only those who believe in Him are the beneficiaries. Those who don't, forfeit that promise of pardon and put themselves under the righteous condemnation of a holy God.⁶

The will of God

Some have asked, "Does God get what God wants?" noting that 1 Timothy 2:4 indicates God wants all men to be saved. This scripture is quite accurately translated in the NKJV – *who desires all men to be saved*. The underlying Greek word '*thelo*', translated 'desires' here, indicates the mind and will of God being along a certain direction and Him doing something to achieve the best result without enforcement. (An alternative Greek noun, '*thelema*', not used here, is often translated 'will'; it has to do with the determinate and unchangeable decree of the Almighty which, no matter what, will be brought to fruition). God's desires extend not only to the salvation of souls but also the meeting of just requirements. It is therefore instructive to see that God here uses the word for desire rather than talk about a pre-determined conclusion. God will indeed get what God wants, and His justice and mercy will be perfectly satisfied!

References: (1) Rom. 9:15-16,22-24;11:33 (2) Ps. 14:1-3; Rom. 3:9 (3) 2 Thes. 1:8-9 and see Rev. 20:10,15 (4) 2 Pet. 2:4 (5) Acts 20:21; John 3:15-16; Rom. 10:11-13 (6) 1 Tim. 2:6; John 3:18; 1 John 5:12

Bible Quotations from NKJV



Christ in the Gospels

Mark's Christ

Craig Jones, Toronto, Canada

I don't know about you, but when I read through a book in the Bible, I'm interested in the story that's being told, in the teaching that's being expounded, in the pictures that are being painted by the writer and in the 'so what?' That is: how is this meant to impact my life?

I rarely find myself stepping back and looking at the book in terms of its overall structure, style; its use of cultural literary devices or idioms, and trying to discern the specific intent of the writer where that may not be stated in the book itself.

When it comes to reading the Gospel of Mark and how Christ is presented in it, I find myself just immediately drawn into the simple, yet highly engaging, narrative of the life and death of the Lord Jesus. Mark loses no time in setting the scene, but just plunges straight into the action, from the time the Lord Jesus commenced His ministry. In the first chapter alone we have the Lord baptized, disciples called, countless demons cast out of people, the impact of uniquely authoritative preaching, Peter's mother-in-law healed, a leper healed and the Lord's popularity rating soaring through the roof! And that pace and tone seem to be maintained as you read on. These are among the reasons that make the Gospel of Mark a great recommendation for new believers, in introducing them to the person and work of Christ in a thoroughly engaging way.

Most biblical commentators, ancient and modern, seem to agree that for those who are able to step back and view the gospel in terms of overall structure and theme, it primarily presents to us Christ as a servant. I'm more than content to accept that analysis and on the basis of it, to appreciate that the Lord's own words in Mark 10:45 provide the focus of the Holy Spirit's intent in moving Mark to write as he did: *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.* Interestingly, this verse is almost in the middle of the gospel, as if the whole account hinges on this astonishing and humbling truth.

In a scene that was subsequently to be played out again in the upper room, as related in John's Gospel, the context of Jesus' profound declaration was the argument that the disciples were having as they accompanied Him to Jerusalem for the last time. It was started by James and John seeking the places of honour at either side of the Lord in His glory. Naturally, the other disciples were not best pleased with the brothers and, characteristically, the Lord turned it into a teaching opportunity. The Lord had



demonstrated His divine power time and again;¹ His ability to know people's very thoughts;² His authority to forgive sins;³ His mastery over nature itself⁴ and given a glimpse of His majestic, heavenly glory.⁵ All of this, and more besides, amply proved that He was indeed the greatest of any who had walked the earth, that He truly was the Son of God and if anyone deserved the highest honours either on earth or in heaven above, it was He!

Yet in breathtaking humility, He declared that His mission was to be the servant of God and indeed of humanity. This was not mere aspirational hyperbole, for the Lord went on to prove it through His death on the cross and in the process, as John Newton beautifully expressed it, paid a debt He didn't owe for those who owed a debt they couldn't pay.

'This is our God, the Servant King;
He calls us now to follow Him;
To bring our lives as a daily offering
Of worship to the Servant King.'⁶

References: (1) Mark 1:34 (2) Mark 2:8 (3) Mark 2:10 (4) Mark 4:39; 6:48 (5) Mark 9:2-3 (6) Graham Kendrick

Bible quotations from NKJV

Knowing God's comfort

An interview with Doreen Seddon, Liverpool, England

Doreen, thanks for agreeing to share with us some personal recollections surrounding your husband Jim's homecall. We know you only do so in the hope that the Lord may use them to help others. But before that, will you please tell us something about your recipe for what seemed to be a very happy marriage?

Yes, Jim and I had been together for 52 years – 54 if you count our courting days. We felt strongly right from the beginning of our relationship that the Lord had brought us together and we loved to read the Scriptures and pray together. Jim used to ask the Lord regularly that our hearts might beat as one in love and service for Him. Throughout those years we had taken as our special scripture, *For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end.*¹ When difficulties arose, we would remind each other of these wonderful words. The Lord, as you say, blessed us with many happy years together, and although we let Him down on many occasions, He was always there for us.

Now will you tell us a little, if you can, of the painful time when Jim was taken from you?

Jim took ill during late evening, and the doctor who visited sent for an ambulance at 1 a.m. At the hospital, Jim was taken into the high dependency unit. When I returned home, the text on the Golden Bells Calendar recalled the words of the Shunammite woman. Leaving her only boy dead on the bed, she ran to the home of the man of God. In reply to the questions: "Is all well with you ... with your husband ... and with your son?" she was able to reply: "*All is well.*"² What faith this woman had, and I felt the Lord was telling me that whatever happened, 'all would be well' with my Jim.

The following day Jim asked to see the grandchildren. They all came to visit, and although he was very poorly, he lifted his head from the

pillow, and looking at the youngsters, he said: "Put Jesus first in your lives and everything else will fall into place." He kept repeating these words, and this affected us all profoundly. My family and church friends were a great comfort to me in the days immediately after Jim's death.

As time passed, how was it?

There comes a time after the funeral that you have to get used to being on your own. The pain inside is so real, as is the longing to see Jim and to talk to him again. I am sure that many have been through something similar. I often wept before the Lord, and felt His presence near me on these occasions. Every time I opened my Bible, I seemed to hear the Lord telling me how near He was in verses such as, *but as for me, it is good to be near God.*³ Then one Lord's Day morning, an elder in my church led us in ministry from Isaiah 61: *He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted ... to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.* I suddenly realised that, although I was sad, the Lord wanted to bring something good out of this experience.

Did you take any practical steps in that direction?

From then on I had a deep longing to talk to the mothers from the toddlers' group. They had been a big part of my life for some years, and had sent me lovely cards and flowers over this period. I knew I could use the opportunity to thank them and maybe the Lord would help me to tell them of my faith. I made them all a bookmark with the Lord's words, "*I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.*"⁴ A few weeks later, one of the 'grans' asked me if she could talk to me about the verse I had given them. She told me how when she got home she had asked her



husband to find their old Bible to check if Jesus really had said those words. When they found it to be true, the words seemed to sink into their hearts. They had lost a little girl of three many years earlier and had never got over the loss. I was able to assure her from the words of David, who said when he lost his baby son, "*I will go to him, but he will not return to me.*"⁵ She seemed to be comforted. From the many conversations I have had with her, I feel both she, and her husband, believe and are trusting in Jesus.

Doreen, thank you very much. Do you have a final thought for our readers?

One morning I was reading in Psalm 32:10, "*The LORD's unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him.*" I thought of God's love being like a blanket, and realized that when I feel sad or lonely, I should pull His blanket of love closer around me.

References: (1) Ps. 48:14 (2) 2 Kin. 4:26 ESV (3) Ps. 73:28 (4) John 11:25 (5) 2 Sam. 12:23

Bible quotations from NIV

Early heresies

Gnosticism

Andrew Dorricott, Hamilton, Canada

A slight variation in path, even by a degree or two, will lead to an increasingly large gap between your initial course and the course you are on. Satan knows this and is looking to knock people just slightly off course, as that will lead them farther and farther away from the Lord. God also knows this and thus urges us throughout Scripture to stay close to Him in faithful and loving obedience.

Gnosticism is a very spiritual (notice the lower case ‘s’) religion, and on the surface may seem to share some common ground with Christianity, but further understanding will quickly dispel any notion of similarity.

Gnostics believe in a superior being who is perfect and pure; they believe in a fall, and as a result, a tendency towards sinful behaviour; and they believe that a life on earth is a temporary existence, with the aim to ultimately be in ‘heaven’ with this greater being. It is suggested that Gnostics in fact considered themselves to be Christians, but based on God’s Word we cannot possibly come to that same conclusion. It’s not long before we realize that what may have started off as slightly off-course may as well be miles and miles away from the one true course to God.¹

What is Gnosticism?

There are several nuances and variations of the Gnostic doctrine which can make it confusing and difficult to define. ‘*Gnosis*’, a Greek word meaning ‘knowledge’ is where the name comes from. A deeper meaning of *gnosis* is ‘special knowledge’. It is not merely theoretical or intellectual knowledge, but it is about actually experiencing this special knowledge – in order to understand god, one must experience him. It is this special knowledge that supposedly leads to salvation. The central point is that we are bound by the physical universe (matter) until such a time as we gain this special knowledge and are released from this curse.

Their view of god is that he is so pure and perfect that he couldn’t possibly associate himself with the physical universe – he had to distance himself from us (this is a far cry from what Scripture tells us²). As a result he created ‘emanations’, or divine beings that were less than god himself. From these lesser beings came an evil god. People are believed to be ‘droplets’ or ‘sparks’ of the same essence as god, but trapped in physical bodies by the evil god who created the physical universe as a way to imprison souls from ascending back to the pure and perfect god.

The goal is to escape the physical universe, which is evil, yet we are blinded by ignorance as to our real identity.



They believe that god wants to draw these ‘sparks of the spirit’ back to himself and so he sends a spiritual redeemer to teach these ‘sparks’ about their true identity as being of the essence of god, and their true home which is with him.

According to Gnosticism, Jesus was this divine redeemer sent to awaken the spirits and help them acquire this experiential knowledge, thus beginning their homeward journey. To Gnostics, Jesus was not God incarnate, for that would necessitate a blending of spiritual and physical which is an unacceptable view since it is the physical universe itself, including our body, which is evil.

What does the Bible say about it?

A more formal and systematic expression of Gnosticism doesn’t really occur until the 2nd century, however many New Testament writers warn about some of the early signs of this heresy. Paul writes to the church in Corinth about the pursuit of knowledge saying, *knowledge puffs up, but love edifies*.³ He also warned those in Colosse, *Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ*.⁴ The pursuit of knowledge, as the world or other religions define it, is used as a point of contrast against the simplicity and accessibility of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus. Even back in the times of early Christianity, the quest for knowledge has been a tool that Satan has used effectively right into today’s times to distract us and lead us astray.

John clearly lays out how we can discern between truth and heresy; *By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God*.⁵ By denying Christ as the Son of God, God in human flesh, Gnosticism clearly places itself in the latter category, it is not of God. New Testament writers continually reaffirm the truth of Christ as being the very Son of God, no doubt encountering the origins of Gnosticism as the Gospel spread into Greece and farther reaching nations.

How does it show up today?

Gnosticism is still very present in today's age, although it may go by other names or appear to be more subtle in its approach. Religions such as Mysticism, Kabbalah, Astrology and Alchemy all have very strong ties to a Gnostic worldview.

In recent times the Gnostic Gospels have again been the source of great debate, and many times these are taken either at face value or hearsay without much of society bothering to validate what is presented in them. Some of the more popular ones are The Gospel of Judas, The Gospel of Thomas, The Gospel of Mary, The Gospel of Truth and The Gospel of The Lord. While some of these bear the names of the Lord's apostles, or other eyewitnesses to Christ's life on earth, they are not written by these people. They are written decades if not centuries, in some cases, after all eye-witnesses had died.

A very popular book, The Da Vinci Code, published in 2003 really pushed the Gnostic Gospels into mainstream thinking and acceptance. It again raised the erroneous notion that Jesus was married (to Mary Magdalene) and had a family, and actually believed in a fertility cult as the true religion. It took on many of the themes presented in the Gnostic Gospels by rejecting Christ as deity. It sparked a lot of controversy between religious groups as well as further intolerance of the Apostle's Teaching. A survey done in 2006 showed that 17% of Canadians felt that the death of Jesus was faked and that He married and had a family – ideas again made popular by The Da Vinci Code. The impact of the heresy of Gnosticism is far-reaching, and just as threatening to the Word of God today, as it was to the early churches of God and the spreading of the true Gospel.

In referring to the accuracy and authority of the Gnostic Gospels, Ben Witherington, a professor of the New Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary said: 'Before we turn to these documents, it is important to state a crucial principle of historical study: It is always more likely that those sources that come from eyewitnesses or those who were in contact with eyewitnesses will provide us with the best data about an ancient person than



documents that were composed several centuries later, as were the Gnostic Gospels. There would need to be clear and compelling evidence corroborated by several later sources for us to take the word of later documents that Jesus was married. There is no such evidence, even in the Gnostic Gospels.⁶

More importantly, Scripture tells us that we are not to add to or take away from Scripture⁷ because it is God-breathed and perfect.⁸ Even before these 'gospels' are opened and read, they are in direct opposition to what Scripture says. Anyone who suggests that they are supplementary to Scripture likely doesn't have an understanding of either the Gnostic Gospels or the Holy Bible.

How should we respond?

Even Satan used the Word of God, albeit incorrectly, in an attempt to trip up the Lord.⁹ In a similar way, Gnosticism seeks to use elements of the Christian faith, but change them to suit a differing view, rather than change the view to fit what the Bible teaches. It is Satan who is trying to get you even one or two degrees off course, by appealing to your desires and to the changing of social norms and pressures. If anything, the rise of Gnosticism in the days of the early church as well as its presence today should drive us deeper into the Word of God and cling to the faith which was delivered once for all to the saints¹⁰ that we might see even clearer the truths about our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. One degree off course may as well be 180 degrees off course. Thankfully, by the grace of God, our salvation is not dependent on some hard to achieve secret knowledge of ourselves, but is dependent on (and realized by) the fact that we are known by Him,¹¹ and that He loved us first.¹²

Paul warned Timothy about those that are *always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*.¹³ He then exhorted him, *But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*.¹⁴

Let us take heed to the writings of John as he passionately and lovingly wrote to believers as 'little children':

*Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.*¹⁵

*And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.*¹⁶

References: (1) John 14:6 (2) Jas 4:8a (3) 1 Cor. 8:1 (4) Col. 2:8 (5) 1 John 4:2-3 (6) The Gospel Code, p.32 (7) Deut. 4:2; Rev. 22:18-19 (8) 2 Tim. 3:16 (9) Mat. 4:1-11 (10) Jude 1:3-4 (11) Jer. 1:5 (12) 1 John 4:19 (13) 2 Tim. 3:7 (14) 2 Tim. 3:14-15 (15) 1 John 2:22-23 (16) 1 John 2:28

Bible quotations from NKJV

Mission

Prospects in Musselburgh

Joanne Hutchison, Paul Fisher & Paul Merchant, Scotland

When you are at a church service, is the sermon too long, with long words you don't understand, hymns about strange 'Bread of heaven' and then your concentration wanders and you feel excluded rather than included?

For people with a learning disability, their experience of church services is often like this. If you find things difficult to understand; if you can't read; or if you do take time to respond and later some folk avoid you after the service: then church is not inclusive, welcoming and relevant. It is exclusive, confusing and irrelevant.

What is Prospects?

Prospects is a UK Christian charity with the mission to share the Christian faith with children and adults with learning disabilities. Every two weeks, Musselburgh Church of God runs a Prospects group for half a dozen adults with learning disabilities with three leaders.

Who attends your Prospects group?

Gerry is a wheelchair user in his 30s and lives with three other adults in a house with 24/7 care. Gerry values the friendship of the Prospects group and enjoys the familiar songs. He now contributes a short prayer during prayer time.

Elaine is in her 50s, lives with her elderly mother and has a learning disability and some autistic behaviours such as persistent questioning about the dates of meetings for the next three months, recounts in detail her activities of the previous week and at every meeting insists on her favourite song, 'Heaven is our Home'. Elaine has progressed in her prayers to not only praying for herself, but for others too.

What happens at a Prospects group?

The usual evening programme includes refreshments, news, gentle seated exercise, songs, teaching and drama, prayer and grace, and finishes with more refreshments. At the start we share our news of the past two weeks, and then we sit in a circle and have some gentle exercise as we all hold tight to a large red stretch sheet and bounce a ball around. We always start our singing period with a 5-word song 'The Father Himself loves you' which is our way of affirming God's love for us at the start of the meeting as we walk around singing and signing with fingers and hands or playing our percussion instruments.

In the 20 minute teaching programme, we have a short Bible reading, explain the story and then enjoy a drama or stick pictures in scrapbooks to compile a book as a teaching tool and memory for each person. Our teaching themes have included a series on 'Objects in Jesus' life'



using tool box, bread and wine, coat, fish, a Bible, a bottle of perfume, a cross. Themes are linked to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus to maintain the simplicity and repetition of the gospel.

Our prayer time is deliberately quiet and reflective, when we sit in a circle and light a candle to create a calm atmosphere. The candle is like our fragile, flickering faith giving a little light and warmth in our world. We use 'echo prayers' whereby each short sentence of the prayer is repeated by everyone. In this way group members learn to pray, the speaker is kept to short sentences and it keeps prayers brief and relevant. Now all the adults with learning disabilities contribute to prayer time which is an encouraging sign of spiritual development. And Gerry is quick to blow out the candle after! We close the session by standing in a circle as we say the grace of 2 Corinthians 13:14 together. The Prospects meeting starts with a song about the Father's love and closes with a grace from Scripture.

Why is Prospects important?

In his teaching about Christ's church, the apostle Paul uses the example of the human body to describe it. Everyone in the church has a different function but we are all of equal value. We need to be interdependent in order to keep healthy. *On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable ... But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other* (1 Cor. 12:22-25 NIV).

The Prospects group is able to respond to the spiritual needs of people like Gerry and Elaine allowing mutually indispensable gifts to be exercised. Many assume it will require specialist skills and unusual expertise. Rather, it requires people who can be accepting, be friends and be simple in sharing Jesus and the truth and love which lie at the heart of our faith.

(Names of attendees have been changed.)
Further info. www.prospects.org.uk
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