

W@W021

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Read Mark 2:21-22 *No-one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. And no-one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins. (NIV)*

The DIY boom has receded! Experience in 'doing it yourself' has produced homes that look like building sites and many spouses have had enough. Even the DIY superstores have now included a service to 'do it for you'. But we still like to think that we can patch up our moral and spiritual state. Christmas congregations add a sprinkling of Jesus to their unbelieving hearts - perhaps in the hope that He will be a fix-it through the festive season.

Jesus and his hearers knew that a patch of unshrunk cloth will tear way from old clothing as soon as it gets wet. It just won't work - in fact, it only makes matters worse. Likewise the hardened goatskin that expanded with last year's fermenting wine will burst, and then all the wine will be lost.

The religious mind can only think of patching things up. Some take the best patches from many religious leaders and hope that life will be eternally watertight. No! Jesus speaks about making everything new. What is needed is a root and branch transformation: and only Jesus can make that happen. When He does - it is obvious! So why not be radical, and speak gospel truth to people who are fed up with failed patches?

Prayer: *Dear Lord, I am sorry when I make Your new life look like a failed DIY project. Please help me to let You change me from the inside, and then please fill me so that Your life and joy may be irresistibility obvious. For Jesus' sake. Amen.*

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Read Mark 2:23-24 *One Sabbath Jesus was going through the cornfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some ears of corn. The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" (NIV)*

Ever felt you are being watched? It is a simple fact that Jesus and His people are more noticed than you think. If you are learning how to live the Jesus way - people will definitely be watching.

Religious people are often the most critical. Religion, outside of Christ, always invents rules that God had never intended ... because it is easier to make up little rules we might be able to keep, than to submit everything to God. So when Jesus and His disciples did not obey religious micro-rules, the press were out, snapping at His heels.

When unbelieving moralists start to be critical, be encouraged - at least it will spark the conversation. Although moralists come in all shapes and sizes - they all sincerely believe that they can be good by keeping the rules. Sincere but wrong! We can never be good like that, because we will even break our own rules - let alone God's.

That is why we need Jesus, who loves us as we are and wants to save us ... from a life of spiritual and moral failure (despite all our little rules and good intentions). It is a challenging message to give to our friends, but it is the only one that will get them into His Kingdom. So when the negative comment comes, let it spark the Jesus-conversation that could change somebody's life for ever.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, help me to think and talk above the level of religion and what we do - to speak about Jesus and who He is. For His Name's sake. Amen.*

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Read Mark 2:25-26 *He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." (NIV)*

When you are challenged about right and wrong, the Bible is the only sensible reference point. The best way to deal with opinion, is with God's word. That was what Jesus did when He was challenged about not keeping religious rules.

Jesus referred them back to King David, who they revered. 1 Samuel 21:1-6 tells the story of hungry fighting men who were given consecrated bread that was reserved for the priests; and Jesus agreed that it was the right thing to do. God's purpose in giving the law was to protect people, not to starve them but as is often the way, religious people cannot see the wood for the trees ... and the more obsessive the religion, the blinder they get. Blind about how wisely protective God is.

When your friends offer a religious opinion - take them seriously ... and discuss what the Bible says. You will be surprised how much colleagues will respect what you say, when they know where it comes from. Try talking with your Bible open - even showing them the verses that will address the matter face on. You may not win an argument but it will speak volumes about how you know what God does and does not like.

It might be the first time that they have thought of reading the Bible. But when they pluck up courage to read it for themselves, God will speak to them too.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, please forgive me for being ashamed of your Word; fearful that others might see my Bible open. Help me today to choose to answer questions from the Bible rather than from my opinion. In Jesus' Name, Amen*

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W@W024

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Read Mark 2:27-28 *Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." (NIV)*

Normal people feel tired at the end of the day. We are supposed to! Despite the corporate eagerness to outdo colleagues in how long you stay at work, we are not designed to be perpetual motion machines. Only God can carry on for ever with the same energy and accuracy. So thinking that we can - amounts to idolatry.

Jesus made two big statements in this passage: about the purpose of God's rules, and who has the right to define what is right.

Secularists may think that God is trying to spoil everybody's fun. Religionists may think such spoilt fun is the payment to earn God's favour. But Christians know, or should know, that when God speaks He does so for our good - because He loves us. Working 24/7 is neither God honouring nor productive in the long run. One day off in seven for worship and recreation is God's way to keep us healthy. Ignore this, and suffer (as will others close to you).

The bigger statement is that as Jesus was God in a human body, He had the right to define His own instructions - and also to refute the false interpretations so loved by those who are missing the point. That is why the gospel narratives are so good at cutting through the mists of philosophy and religion. How about challenging a friend this week to read one of the Gospels.

Then let Jesus speak for himself!

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, thank You that Your Word is designed for my good. Help me to take advantage of every blessing You promise by choosing to do what You say. Give me the courage to stop to listen to You, so that You can define my day and help me to encourage others to let You do the same. In Your Name, Amen*

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Read Mark 3:1-3 *Another time he went into the synagogue, and a man with a shrivelled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shrivelled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone." (NIV)*

Jesus was nobody's fool. He knew the inside of everybody's motive and the schemes that they were cooking. He knew why they had come to church - not to learn from Him but to find a reason to kill Him. They were waiting for their chance to pounce.

Jesus knew the pack was out to get him but, unafraid, He chose His moments deliberately to confront His accusers. This was not for fun, or ego, but as proof that He had the power of God that they lacked (as He did with Satan in the wilderness).

Nothing secret here: in full view of seething opponents, Jesus selected a disabled man. The man had everything to gain if he was healed, but Jesus had everything to lose ... and that is really the whole story of the gospel. Jesus loses everything so that we can gain everything.

Interestingly, Jesus still sets up those moments when He is going to confront the cynics and bless the hopeless - and He may want to involve you. So, when He sets up the encounter, don't shrink back!

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, thank You that Jesus always knows the right time to show His power. Help me not to be afraid when you allow things to boil up around me; and help me to be Your agent of truth so that Your power may be seen. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

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Read Mark 3:4 *Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent. (NIV)*

Like the law of gravity, all God's laws simply express how His creation (both physical and moral) is designed to operate. They clearly define what will work and what will not. But like multiple layers of paint that hide the original of an old masterpiece, petty rules (that 'gold plate' God's original instructions), lose sight of what God originally intended.

So Jesus needed to separate God's objective for the Sabbath, from wrong ideas that God never intended. His opposers claimed that healing people on the Sabbath was wrong - because it was 'doing work'. By starkly contrasting life-saving with 'manslaughter by neglect', Jesus forced them to see the foolishness of their legalism.

There comes a point in every argument when there is nothing more to say. When that happens, people usually start to think ... which is a very good thing! Serious thinking cannot begin until prejudice is exposed as a dominating wrong habit.

So don't be worried when it all goes quiet; as false assumptions fall away and the truth will become self-evident. It is then, and often not until then, that your friends will start to think about what God is saying.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, help me to be straightforward about what is true, so that my friends and colleagues will hear Your voice above the cultural din - and think about what You are saying. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

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Read Mark 3:5-6 *He looked round at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus. (NIV)*

God does not watch benignly as people resist His truth. Yes, He certainly loves them, but He is angry at their sin and distressed by their stubbornness. The Bible says that such people are storing up God's wrath.

Jesus turned away from the rebellious religionists (as He always does), to the disabled man - now standing in front of everybody. Jesus now commands him to do the impossible - and he does! The man's hand is in pristine condition and full working order.

Mark shows us two different reactions at the same time. Stubbornness in the unbeliever, and faith in the man who was healed. At the same time, Jesus revealed that the hand of God has two responses: wrath as well as mercy, judgement and salvation. Which side applies ... well, that depends on our resistance or obedience to God's Word.

You would have thought that the crowd would cheer: but alas, disobedient (even though religious) hearts get harder; and so those who should have known better, plot His death - and unwittingly their own.

So, when friends or family, colleagues or clients get angry at your desire to please the Lord - do not be surprised. Nothing personal, to you: but very personal to God. Just make sure that you don't become like them ... it is easy to blend in with the crowd.

Prayer: *Dear Father, please help me to understand the opposition that Jesus faced so that I will not be shocked when it happens to me. Help me to hate wrongdoing, but love those who are trapped and disabled by it. May Your merciful command to repent be heard by those I know and care for. In Christ's Name, Amen.*

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Read Mark 3:7-8 *Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed. When they heard all he was doing, many people came to him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon. (NIV)*

The gospel story is a moving one - literally! Jesus moved to call disciples ... they moved from their jobs to follow Him ... and Jesus kept on moving, (Mark keeps using "immediately" or "the next day" to indicate the dynamic movement in Christ's ministry) and crowds of ordinary people covered large distances to keep up with Him.

So while Pharisees and Herodians were plotting to kill Jesus, He was training His disciples to move to where God would speak.

Missionary stories in Acts show that every move away from violent hatred was a new opportunity to speak the truth of Jesus, and let Him demonstrate His power. Indeed, without aggressive antagonism, the Apostles may not have moved so far or fast - and the gospel may not have been heard or obeyed in many places.

One reason (and this is not the only one) that hostility is allowed, is so that we will move on. It prevents us feeling comfortable and being inert. We always need to advance in endurance and faith, and opposition might be the spur to trust God more where we are; but could it be that the threat of relocation or redundancy might be a divinely appointed new ministry opportunity? Don't get trapped by adverse circumstances or aggressive people - Jesus wasn't: it may just be the nudge you need to move into new service for Him.

Prayer: *Dear Father, help me not to be phased by hostility. Teach me in what new way You wish to demonstrate Your power and truth through me. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

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Read Mark 3:9-10 *Because of the crowd he told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him, to keep the people from crowding him. For he had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him. (NIV)*

It may have been the crowd that pushed Jesus to the water's edge, but it was the command of Jesus to prepare the boat, which set the stage. Sound reflects well from water onto the surrounding hillside - so the very problem that would have crushed and submerged Jesus became the opportunity for a bigger solution.

Success in business as in ministry can be as paralysing as failure. Both can bring us to a grinding halt. But with Jesus, the barriers were just spring boards. It happened all the way to the Cross - and even there, the end of His life simply became a whole new beginning.

There is no doubt that Christians should attract many who need help. But once you are known to listen in wisdom and act in grace by God's power ... people will come or phone or email. They will do so because there may be no other God-salted heart in their little world. The pressure, though, can be so great that you might not know what to do.

If you think you cannot cope - don't panic. God knows, and He has just the right solution to save the day and multiply the ministry - trust Him!

Prayer: *Dear Lord, forgive my faithlessness as I see more ministry that I can cope with. Thank You for providing wisely for me to serve You - and that more people may be transformed by your truth. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

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Read Mark 3:11-12 *Whenever the evil spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." But he gave them strict orders not to tell who he was. (NIV)*

Although priests and politicians could not work out who Jesus was - evil spirits had no such problem. These fallen angels still knew that ultimate power was not in their hands or Satan's: the arrival of Jesus announced that their days of evil were numbered.

If Jesus had just been a prophet or teacher, the demons would be unmoved. Instead, they were distinctly agitated. They could plainly see that Jesus had the full authority of God. Even so, they taunted Him (as Satan did in the wilderness) right up to the Cross - although they had no idea that He would rise again to defeat them finally.

However, the powerful word of Jesus was enough to silence the mocking voices. It was just raw authority. God had spoken, and there was nothing more to say.

Even today, such unexpected things come out of people's mouths that we say, "What's got into them?" The answer should be obvious. It is Jesus alone who can change all that ... which is very good news indeed for those whose terror seems to live inside them.

Prayer: *Father in Heaven, thank You that Jesus has all power and authority. Help me to trust that His Word is the end of evil oppression. So when evil is too great to handle - help me to speak in the Name of Jesus. For His Name's Sake, Amen.*

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Read Mark 3:13-15 *Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve - designating them apostles - that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons. (NIV)*

There is a time to pull back from work and ministry - to be with Jesus. On this occasion, the retreat from the pressures of serving, healing and teaching may have been misunderstood by the disciples. Perhaps they hoped for a day off ... instead it was a sort of graduation. So soon after their initial call to follow, Jesus now appoints them as apostles.

Some use the words 'disciple' and 'apostle' interchangeably, but they are different. Disciple means 'pupil' and apostle means 'sent one'. Sent - as an ambassador, or representative of the company. Again the key is in the authority of Jesus. If He had not commanded them to go in His Name - they could have no power against evil demons. But with His command (like the police warrant or military commission) they had the same authority that Jesus had. They never lost their responsibility to be disciples (being with Him, to learn from Him) but, in addition, now could also act on His behalf.

The two key areas of ministry were preaching (to announce Jesus and invite people to believe in Him) and exorcism (to signal that Satan is not all powerful - on the contrary, Jesus is infinitely stronger).

Some Christians think that the call of Jesus begins and ends with a prayer of commitment and infusion by the Holy Spirit. That is the start: after that - we become disciples. We are at the beginning of a training course with our tutor, Jesus. Soon it becomes clear that we are also being sent out as His messengers. Although this can sound scary, the key to confidence is the authority of Jesus ... it was He who called us to come to Him, and He will teach us all we need to know (through the Bible). That way, we can go out into an unbelieving world and announce that He is Lord.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, help me to understand my responsibility to learn from You. Please let me know Your personal authority as you send me to act on Your behalf, that I may have confidence in Your strength and wisdom. For your Name's sake. Amen*

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Read Mark 3:16-19 *These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means Sons of Thunder); Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. (NIV)*

When Jesus chooses people, He does not make mistakes. But what new start-up company would have chosen this lot?! Fishermen without high school education, a corrupt civil servant, a religious bigot and the betrayer-in-waiting.

Jesus did not call them - or indeed you - because of the skills you can offer to His business. He just called them and then taught them a whole new business. What Jesus could see was how those people would be able (by His power) to contribute to His Kingdom, even if they could not see it at the time. Strangely, even Judas had his place; his disloyalty had a crucial part to play.

How different are most HR policies at work and even in the church. When you interview potential staff, what do you look for? If the willingness to learn and the commitment to loyalty are not there, you will regret the appointment - however glowing the CV. But if they are there - you can train them in the skills as you go. Jesus knew even more than that because He sees the end from before the beginning, every appointment is made with a specific purpose.

How often do we divide people into those who we think might make good Christians, and others who might be best described as hopeless causes?! We are wrong to do so. Jesus calls those He wants to use and He knows just how to get them operational. If that were not true, what hope would there be for us!?

Prayer: *Dear Lord, I know that if You can call and use me, then You can make anybody ready to worship You with their lives. Help me to see people as You do, not just where they are but where they can be through Your transformation. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

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Read Mark 3:20-21 *Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind." (NIV)*

The busy-ness of Jesus' schedule took the laid back Eastern style by storm. Stories got back to Nazareth; and Jesus' family, out of concern for Him, came to bring Him back to the safety of their home.

There is a time and place to refresh the body and mind, but this was not it. Jesus was about to teach about His relationship with Satan - it was a pivotal moment. What Jesus was to say needed to be heard by the religious leaders. It was vital that the moment was not lost or interrupted.

Have you ever noticed that, at a critical moment, spiritually blind people try to pull us away from the gospel agenda? They have no idea what they may be disturbing. Although apparently they mean well, really they are being used as pawns in the game of disrupting spiritual ministry. Unwittingly they are seeking to salvage death from the jaws of life.

Never forget that as a Christian, you are in a spiritual battle. The shop, hospital, school or workbench is never spiritually neutral. You are there to bring glory to Christ, while others are conditioned to do the opposite.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, help me to discern when the voice of friends or family, urging me to rest, is of You - and when their well intentioned pleas are being used to pull me off track. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

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W@W034

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Read Mark 3:22 *And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons." (NIV)*

Nobody could deny the amazingly powerful miracles that Jesus was doing: even those whose authority was upset by Him. What they did not like was the implication that He had come from God ... or, worse still, that He might be God, Messiah. That would have been the end to their power and self-importance.

Satan does have a lot of power - hardly anything compared to God - and then only 'by permission'. However, evil power is much stronger than human power. So, would it be possible for demonic power to lie behind the miracles of Jesus? Look at the evidence: the only evidence is of people healed, released, rejoicing and trusting in Jesus ... hardly works of demonic darkness!

They were so determined to find fault with Jesus that they invented a daft idea - that Satan could get Jesus to do drive out demons. Preposterous!

The ability of spiritually blind people to miss the point is staggering. Don't get upset with them; just keep on explaining that Jesus can only be God in a human body. That is where all the evidence points!

Prayer: *Dear Lord, thank You that Jesus is the only true light in the darkness. Help me to love those who cannot grasp who You are, and help me to speak and live so that they might see the evidence of Jesus in my life. In His Name. Amen.*

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Read Mark 3:23-27 *So Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables: "How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. In fact, no-one can 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. (NIV)*

Although you cannot argue a spiritually blind person into seeing the light - you can use reasoned arguments to explain the weakness of a false position.

The essence of truth is that it all stacks up and makes sense from whatever angle you view it. The hallmark of error is that inconsistency is exposed under cross-examination.

Jesus examines their logic and finds it to be full of holes. How can Satan drive out Satan? As He uses an illustration about breaking into and entering a house, it is obvious. You cannot plunder the powerful resident unless you can take away his power.

That was why Jesus came, not just to save those trapped by Satan but to demolish his power base. Do you think that fact has dropped off your radar? Much of our defeatedness is because we forget that where Jesus reigns, Satan cannot. Enter the powerful presence of Jesus, and exit the false authority of Satan. That is what will happen when your family and colleagues receive Christ ... and what a release that will be.

Prayer: *Dear Father God, thank You for this passage that assures me that Satan's power is bound in the presence of Jesus. May I always trust my Saviour and not be intimidated by the supposed strength of evil. In Jesus' Name. Amen*

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Read Mark 3:28-30 *"I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin." He said this because they were saying, "He has an evil spirit." (NIV)*

This is a puzzle verse to some Christians, who wonder if they have committed the unforgivable sin. The context helps us. Jesus has been accused of using Satan's power to exorcise demons. Of course that was not true. His rebuttal is strong, using simple analogies to show that the idea is ludicrous. Most would have left it there, excusing it as just a joke. But it was not just a laughable mistake - it was a deliberate denial of everything that Jesus was.

Now, blasphemy (in its many shades and shapes) is not good, not at all. It takes the sacred things of God and spoils them ... failing to give God the glory for what He has done. But, as people realise their error and repent, even that can be forgiven.

But to say that the power in Jesus is from Satan, was a blasphemy too far. Having clearly seen and heard the Son of God - such a conclusion was to deny the holy fellowship of the Son with the Spirit of God. It does what Jesus refused to Satan in the wilderness - it claims that Satan has all power: persist in believing that - and there is a big problem.

The rise of paganism, witchcraft and occultism preaches the same fake gospel. It is not just laughable - it is perilous in the extreme.

Prayer: *Dear Father, help me to be bold to proclaim Christ especially where strange spiritualities seduce the minds and hearts of my friends. May I be full of grace to win them and full of truth so that the error may be seen before it is too late. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

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Read Mark 3:31-35 *Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you." "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." (NIV)*

Families are very important to God. The Bible says that every family derives its special qualities from Father God Himself. So, when Jesus apparently disowns His mother and brothers, what is going on? Is He disobeying the 5th Commandment?

In one sense, parental honour has to do with their authority as being "in loco Deo" (in place of God) ... a child needs parents who faithfully instil truth and reject error; and they do so as agents of God.

However, with Jesus, the command chain worked the other way. It was He who spoke the authoritative Word of God because He was the Word of God. However good Mary may have been, she certainly got it wrong on this occasion as she came to rescue her boy from His 'delusions'.

The true family of Jesus are still marked out by their willingness to do what God wants. Although God's Will should be faithfully transmitted by our parents - they cannot define it or make it up. It is Jesus who has the right to do that. While we have a duty of honour to our parents, we have a higher duty to Jesus. Where obligations conflict, it is the voice of Jesus that is in control of the situation.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, I know I am called to honour my parents and value my family. But when Your voice calls me to a different way, please help me to obey and to explain with simple clarity and good grace. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

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Read Mark 4:1-2 *Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered round him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said:... (NIV)*

Again, Jesus was teaching. Although Jesus did many miracles, they could never, by themselves, be His story. In the previous chapter religious people thought that Satan was the source of His power - so even His miracles could not describe Jesus. Liberal and false thinking easily develops when you make your own interpretation of what an action means. That is spiritually so inept. Clear definition requires a verbal explanation.

It was never enough for Jesus to do miracles; it was only through His teaching that the crowd could get the 'reason to believe' in Him. The messages (including parables) had two great defining purposes. First, He was recognised as speaking with authority. Secondly, He did not just say what was right, but He was the only person who was always 'in the right' - the only righteous person who could legitimately invite personal faith.

The crowds wanted to see and hear: the disciples needed to be taught. It was the 12 picked men who were to play such a special role after Christ's travelling ministry - Judas to betray and disappear, and the 11 others to be filled with the Spirit and lead the church after Pentecost.

Leadership training is critical to the growth of the church and Jesus is still selecting people who get instructed again and again. We never stop learning until we meet Him face to face. There are lessons to learn today from your Bible reading.

Prayer: *Father in Heaven, thank You for wanting to instruct me. Help me to be a good learner and keep an appetite for regular instruction. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

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Read Mark 4:3-4 *"Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 14-15 The farmer sows the word. Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. (NIV)*

As we start the 'parable of the Sower', the first word is for us, "Listen!" How often do we skim read the Bible because we think we know it - perhaps a little arrogant to assume that God has nothing more to say to us. Speed-reading is useless when it comes to understanding the Bible. So, just for a moment, slow down and let the words come alive. Pay full attention and get a clear understanding!

But sowing or scattering the seed poses practical difficulties. The key to a good crop is placing the seed in good soil. However, most of us cannot tell in which heart the seed will germinate. So we have to 'broadcast' (a term originally used for flinging out handfuls of seed) God's Word, without necessarily knowing where it will lodge.

Although the seed has full growth potential - it does not do well when constantly trodden on. In the heavy traffic of life many of our work mates will scarcely notice God speaking to them. And Satan is a master crow in swallowing truth that is left unattended.

Should that stop us broadcasting? No! Most of us cannot use a radio or TV station (although your internet account today is a sort of broadcast) but we can speak/write/email God's Word, give tracts, post notices, have verses on our notepaper and greetings cards. Best of all is when we speak God's truth into each situation, and show that it is not just our idea, but we have got it from the Bible.

When we speak gospel truth, seed is lodged. So keep on sowing!

Prayer: *Dear Father, thank You that Your Word is powerful. Help me not to be afraid or tired of letting Your truth be known - especially with busy people who trample on anything in their way. Thank You for this encouragement. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

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Read Mark 4:5-6 & 16-17 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. **16-17** Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. (NIV)

Early response to the Gospel does not say everything. No root, and the shoots will soon die off.

The great need of the 21st C church is to have well rooted Christians. Many believers hop from Sunday to Sunday to get their next nourishment. Time to invest in God's Word is skimmed, and mid-week meetings may be pushed off the agenda as home or work take precedence. It may be that the office Christian Fellowship or local church midday Bible Study could save the day. However we do it, we have to take time and effort to be rooted in the Lord. Change the analogy - starve the baby and is it any wonder that it fails to thrive!

Trouble and persecution come all too easily - without the Word to instruct our hearts, we will give up. So we must take every opportunity to drive that priority into our daily and weekly schedule. The calendar alarm on the mobile phone or PDA can help discipline the day. For some, a train or bus means an open Bible. For others, lunch and coffee breaks are deliberately taken with another believer in order to read and pray together. Even these devotionals could be a starting place. Who knows, they might be the beginning of a workplace fellowship!

Are we content to casually witness to the love and power of God, but are frightened of a more careful follow-up? Any golfer knows that the power of the shot is in the intention to follow through the swing well. We need encouragement. How about thinking and planning how to involve God's people together on a regular basis at work? It is good practice for leading a discipleship group back home or even a regular one-to-one Bible study with a new Christian.

Prayer: *Dear Father, thank You for those who invested in my spiritual growth. Can I be of use to help someone else? Or do I need to put down deeper roots myself? Please show me how to be more securely rooted in Christ. For His sake, Amen*

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