



DAILY DEVOTIONS

A thought to comfort and encourage you



Light Lutheran Church

July 2026
Sunday 12th -Sunday 19th

This week's Devotions are by Pastor Greg Fowler

Pastor Greg lives in beautiful Redland Bay with his wife, Connie, where they enjoy the beaches, weather and outdoor lifestyle of south Brisbane. He serves as the college pastor at Faith Lutheran College, Redlands.

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REST

By Greg Fowler



Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matthew 11:28,30).

Read [Matthew 11:16–19,25–30](#)

We live in a culture that glorifies busyness. We often wear our exhaustion like a badge of honour, juggling careers, family obligations and endless digital notifications until our souls feel heavy and frayed.

Into this chaos, Jesus extends a radical, countercultural invitation: 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light' (Matthew 11:28,30).

In the ancient world, a yoke was a wooden frame joining two oxen to pull a heavy load. Typically, a young, inexperienced ox was yoked with a mature, stronger one. The older ox bore the majority of the weight and dictated the pace.

When Jesus invites us to take his yoke, he isn't offering a life of zero responsibility. He is offering a divine partnership; he steps into the yoke with us, bearing the crushing weight of our obligations, anxiety, guilt and need for control.

What burden are we carrying? Are we carrying the weight of others' opinions, financial worry or the pressure to be perfect? Tell it to Jesus. Be yoked to him while we uncouple from the world's frantic pace. We do not have to hustle to prove our worth; our value is already securely anchored in Christ.

Let's step into his rhythm. Spend time with Jesus in word and prayer. Speak to him about where we can surrender control and actively ask him to carry that load with us. True rest isn't found in an empty calendar, but in a surrendered heart full of grace.

Lord, I am weary from trying to do it all alone. I surrender my heavy burdens to you today. Teach me your gentle, humble rhythm and give my soul true, lasting rest. Amen.

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A THOUGHT TO COMFORT AND ENCOURAGE YOU



PEACE

By Greg Fowler

They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks ... (Micah 4:3b).

Read [Micah 4:1-4](#)

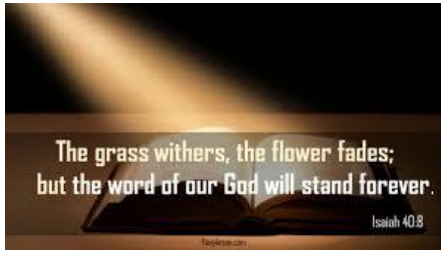
In Micah 4:3, the prophet paints a breathtaking picture of God's ultimate kingdom: 'They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.' This powerful imagery speaks of radical, divine transformation. God takes instruments of destruction and repurposes them for cultivation and life.

While this prophecy points to a future of global peace, it also holds a profound mirror to our personal lives today. We may not wield literal swords, but we often carry weapons that do just as much damage. A sharp tongue, a defensive attitude, a lingering grudge, or the relentless need to be 'right' in an argument are all weapons we use to protect ourselves or strike at others. Who among us hasn't struck out at another, driven by our own hurt?

God's invitation to us is to surrender these weapons. He wants to take our defensiveness and forge it into patience. He wants to melt down our harsh words and reshape them into encouragement. When we allow the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts, he transforms our relational battlefields into gardens of grace.

So, what swords are we carrying? Is it a resentment toward a family member? A critical spirit at work? Unsettled energy that often comes out as anger? We can lay that down; we can ask God to help us repurpose that energy into a 'ploughshare' – an intentional action that cultivates peace, such as offering encouragement, extending forgiveness or choosing to listen rather than retaliate.

Lord, forgive me for the ways I wield my words and attitudes like weapons. Transform my heart. Take my sharp edges and shape them into tools of your peace, love and restoration. Help me to live the grace you give me. Amen.



JESUS AS JUDGE

By Greg Fowler

Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent (Matthew 11:20).

Read [Matthew 11:20-24](#)

What an uncomfortable text. Jesus delivers a sobering warning to the towns of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. These were the very places where he performed most of his miracles, yet he pronounces woe upon them because they did not repent. Scripture is consistent in its witness; Jesus is our Lord who rules with grace. He is also the judge. While faith in Christ gives us security, Jesus as judge doesn't sit well with us. This passage highlights a profound spiritual truth: privilege brings responsibility. These towns had front-row seats to the kingdom of God, but familiarity bred complacency. They enjoyed the multiplied bread, the physical healing and the spectacle, but they refused the transformation of their hearts. They mistook God's patience for permission to remain unchanged. They refused the invitation of grace offered by God in their midst. Let's not get too self-righteous. We may not have walked the dusty roads of Galilee; however, we possess the complete Word of God, the indwelling Holy Spirit, the real presence of Jesus in the sacrament and a lifetime of answered prayers. We, too, can take God for granted. We can grow spiritually numb, treating God's daily mercies as entitlements.

How are our hearts? Are we taking God's blessings for granted? We dare not let familiarity with God's presence and blessing harden our hearts. The overwhelming grace offered to us by our loving God is the start of a renewed life. The joy of unconditional love is reason for praise and witness. May we live in your will.

Lord, forgive me for the times I have taken your grace for granted. Soften my heart. Keep me from spiritual complacency, and help me to respond to your daily mercies with repentance and deep, abiding gratitude. Amen

GENTLE POWER

By Greg Fowler



Say to Daughter Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey' (Matthew 21:5).

Read [Matthew 21:1–9](#)

Just a few days before his arrest and crucifixion, Jesus orchestrates a deliberate, prophetic entrance into Jerusalem. The crowds, buzzing with Messianic expectation, anticipated a political liberator riding a mighty warhorse to violently overthrow Roman rule. Instead, Jesus arrives riding a lowly donkey and a colt, perfectly fulfilling Zechariah's ancient prophecy of a gentle, peace-bringing king. This was not a display of earthly, coercive power, but a profound, countercultural revelation of divine humility and grace.

The crowd's response to this humble king was immediate and extravagant. They cut branches from the trees, spread their own cloaks on the dusty road and shouted, 'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' In first-century culture, laying down a cloak was an act of deep reverence and total submission. It was the ultimate way to honour a king, essentially rolling out a red carpet of personal sacrifice and vulnerability. They were publicly acknowledging his absolute lordship over their lives and their city.

Yet, how is our welcome? Do we want his blessings without his lordship? A true relationship with Jesus requires us to do what that ancient crowd did: lay down our 'cloaks'. This means surrendering our pride, our ill-founded self-belief, our carefully guarded future plans and our obsession with how others see us at the feet of the humble king.

What 'cloak' are we holding onto too tightly? Is it our career trajectory, a strained family relationship, our financial security or a hidden habit? A deep grace-filled relationship with Jesus is not merely shouting, 'Hosanna'; it is the daily, practical and sometimes painful act of laying down our personal rights and preferences to make way for Jesus. Martin Luther called this daily returning to our baptism. It starts with God's adoption, and we return to his gentle, restorative grace.

Jesus, you came not to be served, but to serve, riding in humility to secure our salvation. Forgive me for the times I have tried to dictate the terms of your rule in my life. Today, I return to my baptism. I acknowledge your grace, which gives me forgiveness, identity and life. Hosanna in the highest! Amen

GENEROSITY

By Greg Fowler



For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted (Luke 14:11).

Read [Luke 14:7-14](#)

I can't help but feel this parable is more relevant today than ever. Jesus identifies a familiar human tendency at a Pharisee's dinner party: people jockeying for the places of honour. Is this all that different to judging each other by how many social media views we get? In a culture deeply obsessed with status, reputation and public recognition, securing the best seat was a primary way to validate one's self-worth. Jesus, however, interrupts this social climbing with a radical, counter-cultural invitation.

He advises his listeners to intentionally choose the lowest place. This is not a manipulative, reverse-psychology strategy to get promoted, but a profound reflection of a genuinely humble heart. Jesus reveals the divine economy of honour: 'For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.'

The world's ladder to success is built on self-promotion, networking and demanding recognition. But in the kingdom of God, the pathway to true honour is paved with humility. When we stop fighting for the spotlight and willingly serve, we align ourselves with the heart of Christ, who 'made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant' (Philippians 2:7). God is the ultimate host, and he reserves the highest places of honour for those who do not demand them.

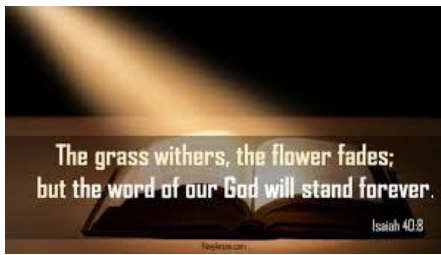
Today, we face countless subtle opportunities to 'exalt ourselves'. It happens when we fish for compliments, take undue credit for a team's success at work or curate a flawless, exaggerated image of our lives on social media. It happens when we feel bitter because our actions go unnoticed.

Jesus tells us to fear not. Simply serve where there is need. Our God sees us and will elevate us at the time that is right for the kingdom. Praise God for his wisdom and timing.

Lord Jesus, you are the ultimate example of humility, leaving heaven's glory to serve us. Forgive my constant striving for human recognition and my fear of being overlooked. Give me the grace to serve joyfully, trusting that you see me, you value me, and in your perfect timing, you will lift me up. Amen

GREAT INVITATION

By Greg Fowler



Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full' (Luke 14:23).

Read [Luke 14:15–23](#)

I love receiving invitations to special events. In the electronic age, it's delightful to get a paper invitation in an envelope. It says that the event is special and my attendance means something.

In the Parable of the Great Banquet, Jesus tells of the greatest invitation. A master prepares a lavish feast, but the originally invited guests make a series of trivial excuses – a new field, some oxen, a recent marriage. Rather than cancelling the celebration, the master's response is breathtakingly expansive. He first sends his servant into the streets to bring in the poor and broken, and then issues a final, urgent command: 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full' (Luke 14:23).

This verse reveals the *relentless, pursuing* nature of God's grace. The 'roads and country lanes' represent the margins of society, those who feel entirely outside the boundaries of religious or social acceptance. The master's instruction to 'compel' them is striking. The original writer does not mean physical coercion or force, but rather a passionate, persuasive urgency. It is the kind of love that refuses to take 'I'm not good enough' or 'I don't belong' for an answer.

God's heart is not satisfied with a partially empty banquet hall. He desires a full house. The gospel is not merely a passive, polite offer; it is an active, relentless pursuit. The king of the universe is passionately committed to ensuring that every seat at his table is occupied by those who will experience his lavish, transforming grace.

God is calling us to the roads and country lanes of our own lives. Who is the coworker who feels like an outsider? Or the neighbour going through a silent crisis? The estranged family member who believes they have blown their chance at redemption? We testify to the grace that lovingly, persistently and warmly invites them to come in. Praise God for his relentless grace.

Lord, give me your heart for the lost and the hesitant. Forgive my comfort and complacency. Make me a bold, persuasive agent of your grace, actively inviting others to the abundant feast of your love, so that your house may be full. Amen

A THOUGHT TO COMFORT AND ENCOURAGE YOU



GOD'S PROVISION

By Greg Fowler

You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly. The streams of God are filled with water to provide the people with grain, for so you have ordained it (Psalm 65:9).

Read [Psalm 65:\(1-8\)9-13](#)

Today, we are all concerned about the welfare of our world and the threats posed by climate change and loss of biological diversity. While humanity hasn't always treated our home well, Psalm 65:9–13 paints a breathtaking, poetic portrait of God as the ultimate caretaker of creation.

We read of God watering the earth, enriching it abundantly and softening the soil with gentle showers. He doesn't just provide the bare minimum for survival; he actively 'crowns the year with [his] bounty', causing the hills to be clothed with gladness and the valleys to be mantled with grain. The passage culminates in a beautiful personification: the very meadows and valleys 'shout for joy and sing' in response to their creator's faithful care.

These words speak directly to the anxieties of the human heart. Apart from existential threats, we live in a world that constantly whispers messages of scarcity, urging us to worry about our finances, our futures and our families. Yet, this psalm reminds us that God's provision is not an afterthought; it is his ordained design. Just as he restores the earth, he intimately knows and cares for the furrows of our lives. He is actively working to bring forth spiritual and physical fruit, even in seasons that may currently feel dry or difficult.

When anxiety strikes, either because of a threat to the world or fear of our personal future, we look to our Creator, who promises to provide our needs beautifully. We bring our concerns to God, knowing he answers prayer and is concerned for our welfare. We look with eyes of faith at how God answers prayer and fills our lives with abundance. Praise God for his faithfulness!

Heavenly Father, thank you for faithfully caring for every detail of my life. Forgive my worry and scarcity mindset. Open my eyes to see your abundant provision, help me to respond with joyful gratitude, and give me a generous heart to share your blessings with others. Amen



A THOUGHT TO COMFORT AND ENCOURAGE YOU CONSIDER THE HOLLYHOCKS

By Colleen Fitzpatrick

Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop – a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown (Matthew 13:8).

Read [Matthew 13:1–9,18–23](#)

Today's reading reminds me of a picture that I have seen many times illustrating this story. It is of a man resting a basket on his hip. He is walking along a path and throwing seeds onto the ground. It's quite a contrast to the large machinery used on farms these days, in which our paddocks are vast and trees are removed. Land is used efficiently, with efforts to ensure plenty of good soil is available for crops to thrive and for machinery to access it as it ploughs, sows and reaps.

I used to admire hollyhocks in other people's gardens. Then some seeds arrived in our yard, and I welcomed the hollyhocks as they grew and flowered, bringing colour and height into our garden.

Hollyhocks have a very efficient seeding habit – all of those pretty flowers end up as seed pods, and hey presto! We now have hollyhocks popping up and growing throughout our backyard. They are growing in the lawn, in cracks in the cement – wherever they land, they seem to grow. I've also seen how they grow taller with the more rain we have.

The hollyhocks spread despite my lack of dedication to gardening. They arrived through no effort on my behalf – maybe through the good graces of a passing bird or a wind over which there is no control.

The seeds grow where they land – even when the environment provides minimal space or food. They adapt to their situation and grow, producing flowers and more seeds. Do you see the connection?

The spread of God's word does not rely on my efforts. The Holy Spirit moves without any direction from me or you, working in people's hearts and bringing them closer to God. Maybe our role is to encourage the spread of God's word and of the good news of the gospel, which is a bit like a gardener preparing soil, fertilising, providing water in the dry season and doing everything to encourage plants to grow – rather than pulling them out of the ground or mowing over them, which may happen in our garden from time to time.

***Holy Spirit, help us to do what we can to help – not hinder – the work that you do.
Thank you for not being solely reliant on our efforts to bring God's love to life. Amen.***

Colleen Fitzpatrick is retired and lives in Adelaide. She enjoys reading, writing and drinking coffee with her husband, John, and their friends. Colleen and John enjoy regular fitness classes, particularly when they include opportunities to throw frisbees.

Sermon for Proper 10A

The Text: Matthew 13:1-23

It must have been a spectacular sight to see Jesus teaching such large crowds.

Picture Jesus there in the boat telling parables, and the people spread along the bank of the lake, sitting in a natural amphitheatre, right down to the water's edge, all with a view of Jesus, as they sat and listened to his teaching.

However, since Jesus taught in parables it made it difficult to know what he was really saying hidden within the contents of the simple story about a farmer casting seed for planting.

Some would not have understood what Jesus was saying. I imagine some having heard the parable would have immediately misheard what he said. Perhaps their minds were so preoccupied with their own busyness; anything Jesus said was quickly enveloped by their own thoughts. So, while they thought they were hearing what Jesus said, and were agreeing with him, they really only heard the thoughts of their own hearts. They had turned Jesus' word into a justification for their own ideas; forgetting what he really said, they were led away on a trail of their own misunderstanding. These are they in the parable who are the seed sown along the path.

Then some would have heard what Jesus was saying, and would have become very excited by what was heard. They would have been empowered and filled with passion; convinced that they were going to leave that place as disciples for Jesus. Nothing was going to hinder their new life, now that they had heard his powerful word. Although they left the lake having never felt better, their joy and passion is short-lived.

The very word they heard and believed that would make everything "all good", brought them opposition and persecution from others. Then they began to doubt their feelings, that perhaps this word was not the cure-all they expected. They had no answers for the difficult questions of life; the questions of suffering, the questions of hardship, the questions of pain, and the other things that didn't quite add up as they lived their new lives in the Word.

So rather than enduring the persecution and opposition, from within their own hearts and from outside, their emotions led them away from the powerful Word of Christ. One day they were doing it for Jesus, the next they were doing it tough. They climbed to a religious high but fell into a religious depression. These are they in the parable who received the seed that fell along rocky places.

Others who heard Jesus' word didn't give it any thought because they were too concerned with other things. Their minds suffocating in a sea of churning worries; will it rain, what will I eat, what will I wear, will someone take my possessions, how do I make more money and become successful?

Or even if it is not the worries of material things, they got so churned up on how they might do the right thing to be accepted by the preacher who sat out in the boat, that they just gave up.

So overwhelmed by the mountain of work they expect of themselves they just give up and are swallowed by their own existence. These are they in the parable who received the seed that fell among the thorns.

The seed also fell on good soil and yielded a crop one hundred, sixty, and thirty times what was planted. Those who heard his word veiled in the parable, and understood it, are these people. These people are the stalks of grain that stand up in the seed, firmly rooted in the Word of God. There is no doubt that we all want to be the good seed planted in good soil, none of us want to die like the seed that fell on the path, the rocky ground, or amongst the thorns.

So, which seed, and soil combination are you? Are you the seed on the hard path? Does the Word of God have trouble penetrating your hard exterior? Do you have trouble hearing and understanding it?

Are you the seed on rocky ground? Are you passionate for Jesus when your emotions are whipped up, but floundering in the everyday hardships of life? Do you only want to hear the feel-good things and not the stuff that stirs and confronts the truth of your sinful inner being?

Or are you the seed amongst the thorns? Is your hearing of God's Word constantly choked out by your necessity to be successful, wealthy, and healthy? What is more important to you: God or your job or your income? God or your car? God or your family? God or your property? Is it easier to miss church, to overlook God, than to miss something else?

Then again some of you might find that you are a combination of seed on hard, rocky, and thorny places. You see yourself struggling with a mixture or all of these things. Regardless of whatever the combination, we all yearn to be the seed and the soil that produces more. We all want to be healthier soil, to have better understanding, endurance, and persistence in God's Word. Just like the crowds that sat and listen to Jesus by the lake, we too sit and hear his Word here today.

People of God, who struggle with the hardness, rockiness, and thorniness of the heart, the secret of this parable is simple. We are called by Jesus with one phrase, "*Whoever has ears, let them hear.*" (Matthew 13:9)

This verse ends the first part of the Gospel we heard today, but then a piece was skipped to hear the explanation of the parable. It's in this middle section we find some answers that flow into Jesus' explanation of the parable.

10 The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" 11 He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. 12 Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.

13 This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. 14 In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. 15 For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.'

16 But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. 17 For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

(Matthew 13:10-17NIV)

It is important for us to know that the disciples came and questioned Jesus about speaking in parables. Jesus says that the secrets of the kingdom of heaven have been given to them but he also goes on to explain the parable. This tells us that Jesus knew that much of what he had said had even gone over the disciples' heads. They too were hard ground, rocky ground, and thorny ground.

So if we and the disciples are hard or rocky or thorny ground, and we desire to be the good soil on which the seed falls, we can ask ourselves how a farmer might prepare unsuitable soil for a bountiful harvest. And we are returned to Jesus' words, "*Whoever has ears, let them hear.*"

A farmer ploughs his paddock, he works the good soil, and he receives a good harvest. This soil if left uncultivated will become thorny and hard over time. And stony ground cleared of its rocks can leave rich organic soil. And similarly with us we too need to be cultivated and worked by God into the soil he desires for a rich harvest. God does this with his Word, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in the mystery of the Gospel spoken and proclaimed, entering the ear, and working the heart of the hearer.

The disciples returned and received an explanation of the parable, and therefore allowed themselves to be cultivated by God over and over again, removing their hardness, their rocks, and their thorns, so that through them God continues to gather his harvest even today.

Because you want to endure in Christ, because you want peace in the presence of God, and because you value your salvation more than your earthly life, hear the Word of the Lord! Return, repent, receive! Let the Word of the Lord enter your ear and cultivate your heart. God desires to make you a part of his bountiful harvest.

Jesus says, "*Whoever has ears, let them hear.*" Amen.

Sermon – Proper 10A

Isaiah 55:10-13

In Australia, as with other countries, it is not unusual to experience times of drought. There are periods when the land is desperate for rain. The creeks stop flowing. The rainwater tanks, dams and reservoirs get low and the earth becomes dry and hard. At such times it is natural for us to turn to our heavenly Father and ask him to send rain upon our land. You may have noticed that even media identities, who have previously professed no faith in God, start speaking about the need to pray for rain.

This might seem hypocritical to us, but it doesn't stop God from demonstrating his mercy. He does send the rain – on the just and the unjust alike. And as soon as the rains come we are confident of the impact it will have on the land.

Experience tells us that our gardens will be instantly revived—in a way our manual watering can't seem to replicate. Experience tells us that it will produce the growth needed to feed livestock and the moisture required to nourish the crops. Experience tells us that this rain will not return to the heavens without *watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater*.

Do we have that same confidence when it comes to the ability of God's word to produce results? We trust so readily that rain will naturally produce growth and life when it comes. But what about the *word that goes out from the mouth of God*?

What about the promise from God that as with the rain that he sends, his word *will not return to him empty, but will accomplish what he desires and achieve the purpose for which he sends it*? God is responsible for sending both his rain and his Word. We see that his rain does not fail to provide us with physical blessings. God wants us to also understand that his word likewise will not fail to bless us.

So why do we (generally speaking) find it so hard to make 'getting into the Word of God' a priority in our lives? Why is it that family and personal devotion times get edged out by so many less important activities? Why don't we have the same insatiable hunger for God's Word that the new Christians in China have, for example? The Bible Society tells stories of how people spend weeks writing out the Bible by hand so that they can have their own personal copy. We have a level of access to God's Word that people elsewhere in the world can only dream about.

There are probably all sorts of reasons why we don't pay God's word as much attention as we should. But perhaps one of the reasons is that we know only too well that God's Word can change and challenge us.

The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to tackle the things in us that are not aligned to God's will for us. Maybe we don't always want to be confronted in this way.

Mark Twain, who wrote *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, once said, '*Most people are bothered by those passages of Scripture*

they cannot understand; but as for me, I have always noticed that the passages in Scripture which trouble me most are those which I do understand.'

It is not the obscure passages of Scripture that confront us. It is the ones that put the spotlight on our attitudes and actions that don't measure up to God's standards that make us feel uncomfortable. So we can choose to avoid too much contact with God's word—insisting that we can make our own decisions about what is right or wrong. Or we can submit to a higher, more objective authority, and allow ourselves to be shaped, prodded, pushed, broken, challenged, changed and recreated by God's Word and Spirit. In this case we give up the right to shape our own destiny.

You may have heard the story of Ivan the Great, the Tsar of Russia. A marriage was arranged for him with the daughter of the King of Greece. In order to marry her he needed to become a member of the Greek Orthodox Church.

A priest was dispatched to Moscow to instruct Ivan in Orthodox doctrine. Ivan learned the catechism in record time and made his way to Athens to be baptized into the Orthodox Church by full immersion, as was the custom.

500 of his personal palace guard accompanied him and asked to be baptized also. The Church assigned 500 priests to give the soldiers a one-on-one catechism crash course. The soldiers, all 500 of them, were to be immersed in one mass baptism. However, there was a problem. The Church prohibited professional soldiers from being members; they would have to give up their commitment to bloodshed.

After some hasty diplomacy the issue was solved. When it came to the day of the baptism, the soldiers were led down to the water. As they were baptised each soldier drew his sword and lifted his arm high overhead. Every soldier was totally immersed - everything baptized—**except** his fighting arm and sword. This arm alone would be released from the obligations of membership in the church.

There can be no such compromises when we submit ourselves to the Word of God. When we engage in God's Word we engage with God himself. We don't select which part of our lives we allow God to access. We don't pick and choose the type and level of influence we want God to have on us. We submit ourselves to his authority, guidance and wisdom. We submit ourselves to the power of God's word to achieve his purposes in us and to accomplish his desires for us.

The writer to the Hebrews said the *Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight* (Hebrews 4:12-13).

It is a dangerous business submitting to the word of God. It has the power to kill all sorts of things in us. But it also has the power to bring to life God's plans and purposes for us—to accomplish what he sends it to achieve.

So we approach God's Word with the understanding that we are not its master. God invests himself in his word so we come to it with humble, willing and listening hearts. We seek God in prayer before we read his word, as we read it and once we have read it, knowing that he wants to bless us through it.

We approach God's word with trust, knowing that what he wants to accomplish in us through his word and Spirit is better than the things we would accomplish on our own.



God's thoughts and ways are not our thoughts and ways (Isaiah 55:8-9). He has access to a fair bit more knowledge and wisdom than even the wisest and most knowledgeable among us. And God grants us access to the depths of his wisdom as we explore his Word and immerse ourselves in it.

We trust also that God is true to his promises. God has demonstrated in the past that when he says that something will happen—it has happened.

God's Word might seem to demand much from us—but he doesn't demand anything that he hasn't first put himself on the line to accomplish. God is not like a general who stays at the rear while he marshals his forces. God places himself at the frontline of our struggles and takes upon himself the sacrifices that are required.

Earlier in Isaiah we hear how God promised that his servant would take upon himself our infirmities and sorrows (Isaiah 52:13-53:12). The Old Testament people who heard this promise didn't see it fulfilled in their lifetime. But we know that servant turned out to be his own Son. Jesus suffered and died in order to accomplish this Word of God – taking our infirmities and sorrows upon himself on the cross.

The Word of God does produce results. It does shape, prod, push, break, challenge, change and recreate us by the power of God's Holy Spirit. Every time we encounter God's word; as we read it, listen to it, study it and reflect on it, we do so with the knowledge that God himself has sent it to us for a reason. His word will not depart from us without having achieved something good in us. It won't depart from us without bringing his blessings to the world in which we live. Amen.