

Welcome home!

The longer your journey, the more stirring these words feel. This booklet of letters extends God's gracious welcome. When you have wandered far from His secure embrace, snared by the lure of what does not please Him, it is so good to turn around and find you can indeed come home. The best news in all of human history is that Jesus came to bring us home. This message is great, good, and glorious!

This news is great because it is true! The shores of history are lined with wrecks of broken promises and dashed hopes. But the claims of Jesus stand, because He stands. The New Testament unfolds the horror of Jesus' abandonment. Crosses were designed to make death as long and agonizing as possible. He was broken by the cross, but He burst the bonds of sin, death, and hell. He lives. His resurrection is one of the best established facts in all history.

This is amazingly good news...almost hard to believe. How can the very God we offend give His best to bring us back? Why should the God we reject be rejected for us? For some reason we will never understand, God loves those who will not love Him. God in His goodness has made bad people like us good. This is the purpose of the cross. God's justice demands sin's penalty be paid. God's mercy declares He has paid it through the gift of His Son. Romans hung thousands of people on crosses. Yet there was something unique about Jesus death. An officer at the foot of His cross said, "Truly, this was the Son of God!" ¹ No other victim of Rome was without sin. Yet the enormity of sin was seen in His suffering and death for the sins of the world. Jesus was also a Victor over Rome. His Kingdom is more enduring, His Lordship is eternal. Through this very bad event God brought great good – forgiveness for sin – life from death – heaven, because He endured our hell.

This news is glorious! Paul, a man of considerable intellect and experience, said, "God forbid that I should glory, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ"² Of all the world's wonders, Paul found just one thing ultimately glorious. It seems the cross was a place of gory, not glory! Surely the misery was unimaginable. But His incalculable suffering achieved an eternal redemption. Paul gloried in the cross because it changed him. And as he lifted high the word of the cross he witnessed more change – deep within human hearts, through all spheres of ancient cities, and beyond the realm of established empires. Throughout eternity multitudes from every nation, culture, tribe, and language will give glory to their Lord Jesus Christ.

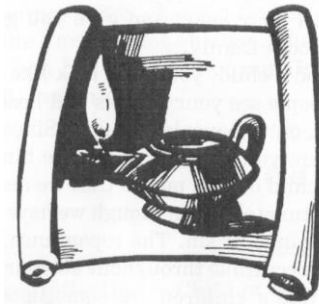
Before you read these letters for new Christians, are you one? Do you glory in Him? It begins as simply as the words of this prayer....

"Heavenly Father, I admit that I have gone my own way. I have offended you in my thoughts, words, and actions. I am sorry for my sins. Help me to turn away from them. Lord Jesus Christ, I believe that you died for my sins. You paid the penalty that I deserved to pay. Cleanse me from my sin. I rejoice in your resurrection and promise to follow you as Lord. Holy Spirit, I ask you to fill my life with your power and purity. I want to live in your strength every day, serving you for the rest of my life. Please come into my life merciful God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - that I may live with you forever. Amen."

¹ Mark 15:39

² Galatians 6:14

Letter 1



Dear Child of God,

Greetings in the name of God our Father and Jesus our Elder Brother!

I was so pleased to hear about the decision you recently made to follow the Lord Jesus. I want to write you a few letters to share some of what the Holy Scriptures teach about your new life in Him. I hope you have already made good progress in reading your Bible. (“Bible” is a Latin word that means “Book”.) It is our Father’s special book for us His children. In my letters I will make references to several passages in the Word of God. In these letters I am using the “Good News Bible” – one of many good translations of the Bible into English. I suggest you look up the verses I quote in your own copy of the Scriptures and study them yourself. (Look in the Table of Contents to help you find the books.)

Well how does it feel to belong to the family of God? The Apostle John said, “See how much the Father has loved us! His love is so great that we are called God’s children – and so in fact, we are” (1 John 3.1). How wonderful to think that God loves us as His very own children. Jesus says this relationship began with a “new birth” (John 3.3, 5) – the Holy Spirit has made us new people because of Jesus. God is our Heavenly Father and Jesus is our “elder brother” (Hebrews 2.11, 17). May this wonderful love fill your heart and give you great security in belonging to God’s family.

Now, as God’s child, you must look like a true family member. When people see your actions and hear your words, you should reflect our Heavenly Father. “Since you are now God’s dear

children, you must try to be like him” (Ephesians 5.1). Becoming a child of God means that we need to grow up and mature. Unfortunately, even though we have been forgiven of our sin, we continue to sin. The repentance, which began your new life, must continue throughout all your life in Christ. Because we are God’s children we sometimes receive His fatherly discipline (Hebrews 12.5-11). Such discipline reveals that we are his real children. We have a Father in heaven that cares what we do and say - because we are those who show Him to the world.

Good families meet together often – God’s family meeting is waiting for you. We are meeting in the fellowship of believers. There are all kinds of church meetings - many traditions and styles – the most important element is the presence of Jesus and His Word. The New Testament was originally written in the Greek language. Our term “church” is from two different words in Greek that mean, “belonging to the Lord” and “called out for gathering.” Thus, church people are called out from the world to gather together as an expression that they belong to the Lord. The only way to meet God is through Jesus, and the only way to know Jesus is through Holy Scripture. If your fellowship teaches this, you are in the right place. Your church should be where you can meet good believing friends, learn how to grow in your faith and service, worship and praise God, and study the Bible. One of the best ways of staying close to God is by being faithful to His family meeting (Hebrews 10.24, 25).

You can be confident God’s promises are true. Look at how he has blessed our brothers and sisters who have gone before, all around the world, all through the ages. Build your faith on the facts of His Word, not just your feelings. Feelings often change; God and His Word never change. “I the Lord do not change...The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.” (Malachi 3.6, Isaiah 40.8).

Welcome to the Family,
Your Brother in Jesus

For Further Reflection - Child of God

Salvation happens in a moment, becoming more like Jesus takes a lifetime. Reflect on and rejoice in the areas of new growth God is working in you!

What is one old habit you are eager to break? (Bring that specific need to God in prayer.)

Do you have a trusted friend to pray with?

Do you have your own copy of the Holy Scriptures?

Spend some time getting familiar with this book. Study the Table of Contents and familiarize yourself with the sixty-six books; thirty-nine in the Old Testament, and twenty-seven in the New Testament.

Are you looking for a fellowship of believers to call your spiritual home?

Letter 2



Dear Newborn Babe,

In my last letter I welcomed you into God's worldwide family in Jesus the Messiah. ("Messiah" is a Hebrew word, which means, "Anointed one" – the word "Christ" is a Greek word, which means the same thing.) You are a full member, but you are not yet a mature adult. Of course, I am speaking figuratively. Physically you may be full-grown. But recently you were "given a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1.3). So you recently became a spiritual baby. The Apostle Peter also wrote, "Be like new born babies, always thirsty for pure spiritual milk, so that by drinking it you may grow up and be saved" (1 Peter 2.2). Imagine a baby that ate nothing! We would soon weep over its death. Healthy babies need to eat regularly in order to grow. In the same way, you need healthy portions of God's Word, fellowship with God's people, and involvement in God's work. Have you ever noticed how a healthy newborn baby eats?

First he eats regularly – every few hours. You should enjoy reading Scripture several times a day. Get out of bed half an hour earlier to read the Word of God and pray. Before long you will have such a good time that you'll wake up one hour earlier, or more! Carry a small Bible with you to consume God's spiritual milk of the Word in your free moments throughout each day. Before you put your head on the pillow each night, make sure you have put your nose in the Book.

Second, a healthy baby eats with full trust. There are many things his young mind cannot fully understand. But in his mother's embrace all questions are put aside and he eats securely. God is

like a Gentle Shepherd who carries the young lambs in his arms (Isaiah 40.11). The Scriptures contain many deep truths. No follower of Jesus knows it all. Yet its message is fully clear. So read, feed, and enjoy in confidence. Seek out a more mature believer who can help to answer the difficult questions. Trust our Shepherd to carry you through the problems that are too big for man.

You will notice, thirdly, a newborn baby eats with zeal and enthusiasm. A sucking baby often makes a lot of noise! Are you excited about God's Word? Is the fire of new life in Jesus burning in you? Remember that salvation is a process of daily growth – every day of our lives. The Scriptures provide both the spiritual milk and the solid food through which we can grow and mature in Christ. God exhorts us to keep on growing, "Anyone who has to drink milk is still a child...Solid food, on the other hand, is for adults, who through practice are able to distinguish between good and evil. Let us go forward, then, to mature teachings" (Hebrews 5.13-6.1).

Growing with you in Him,
Your Brother in Jesus

For Further Reflection - Newborn Babe

When is the best time for you to read the Holy Scriptures daily?

Have you found some passages in the Bible you do not understand?

Make a notebook for your questions and ask an older believer about them.

As you listen to teachings in your fellowship, are you following along with your own copy of the Scriptures?

As you return home, study these passages again for yourself.

Letter 3



Dear Spirit-filled Follower of Jesus,

Have you received the Holy Spirit? Have you been baptized in the Holy Spirit? These are very important questions.

No person can be a follower of Jesus without the Holy Spirit. “Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him” (Romans 8.9). It is the Holy Spirit who convicts of sin, and gives faith in the Lord Jesus (John 16.8-11, 1 Corinthians 12.3). The Holy Spirit is a person. The Holy Spirit is God. He is the third member of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When we believe the good news of salvation, the Holy Spirit unites us to the Lord Jesus our Savior. Fifty days after our Lord Jesus rose from the dead, He sent the Holy Spirit to baptize his followers with power for worship and witness (read the wonderful story in Acts 1 & 2). Now when we receive Jesus by faith, we enter into that Holy Spirit baptism which occurred once and for all on Pentecost day – almost two thousand years ago. “All of us have been baptized into the one body by the same Spirit, and we have been given the one Spirit to drink” (1 Corinthians 12.13).

The Holy Spirit is mighty. Of course, He is God! Mighty deeds, miracles, healings, speaking in tongues are no problem for Him. Yet His greater work is to make us more like Jesus. When we were dead in sin, we were made alive in Christ. Salvation is nothing less than resurrection (Ephesians 2.1, 2), a new birth (John 3.3, 5), “and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3.5). It is in the wonder of salvation that we see His great power. His power has a transforming effect in us. We have a new nature. The Spirit of Christ in us enables us to be His witnesses – in all we say and do (Acts 1.8, 4.31). “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have

crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit” (Galatians 5.24, 25). We are called to “put off” our old nature and its sinful habits, and “put on” the righteous character of Christ, so we “do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4.20-30).

We need the Holy Spirit to fill our lives every day, every moment. We began our new lives by receiving the benefits of the Spirit’s baptism. We continue in Christ by continuously being filled with the Spirit. Paul told the Ephesians, “Do not get drunk with wine, which will only ruin you; instead, be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5.18). The drunkard is controlled by alcohol; he is under its directing power. Unfortunately, he can be destroyed by the strong grip of alcohol (read the funny story in Proverbs 23.29-35). By contrast, the believer is to be controlled by God’s Spirit – in body, mind, and soul. The command in Ephesians is continuous; “Be filled with the Spirit all the time.” What a marvelous power, and a faithful friend – he will keep you in His care. “God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Romans 5.5). All we need to do is ask in prayer, “Our Father in Heaven will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him” (Luke 11.13). Do not fear to ask, He loves to give good gifts to His children.

One in the Spirit,
Your Brother in Jesus

For Further Reflection - Spirit-filled Believer in Jesus

What are some of the character changes the Holy Spirit is working in your life?

How are you doing in that one habit you are praying to change?

Are you praying to be filled with the Spirit each day?

Letter 4



Dear Ambassador,

Does your title sound important? Indeed, as a Christian you are very important! The word “Christian” literally means “little Christ” in Greek. It was a name given to believers in Jesus, perhaps as an insult by the unbelievers, because they saw His followers behave like Him (see Acts 11.26, Acts 26.28, 1 Peter 4.16). As God’s ambassador you have an urgent responsibility to represent Him here on earth. Now that you belong to God’s family you are His representative, in all you say and do. It is not an easy task. Sometimes you will wonder why God doesn’t just take us home to heaven when we believe. It would certainly be much easier. In heaven our love will be selfless, our worship will be pure, and our service will be earnest – completely and perfectly! Then why doesn’t God take us there directly? Because there is one thing we cannot do in heaven – lead others to Jesus. This life is the time of opportunity for salvation. There is no second chance after death (Hebrews 9.27). Those who reject Jesus and His salvation in this life are choosing to spend an eternity apart from Him in hell. It is sad to say, but Jesus talked more about hell than heaven – because he does not want anyone to go there (Matthew 25.41, Mark 8.38, 2 Thessalonians 1.6-10). When we receive Jesus, we become citizens of a place filled with endless joy and blessing – heaven (John 1.12,16, Philippians 3.20, Revelation 21.3, 4). We cannot over emphasize the eternal importance of our decisions in this life.

Are you serving as God’s ambassador? An ambassador faithfully represents his head of state. The Apostle Paul said, “We are Christ’s ambassadors as though God himself were making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ’s behalf; let God change

you from his enemies into his friends!” (2 Corinthians 5.20). Paul extended a marvelous invitation; “Come to Jesus and receive God’s peace” (Romans 5.1). Jesus, our Head of State, gives us the power for service, “when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will be filled with power, and you will be witnesses for me...to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1.8). When you came to faith, God’s Holy Spirit entered your life (1 Corinthians 6.19,20, 12.3, Galatians 3.14). So the power of God Himself enables you as His ambassador. We witness for Him in all that we do – our belief and behavior, life and lip. May God help us to bring honor to our Sovereign. Be active in the work of witness, near and far, the whole world needs Jesus. Begin now by telling those you know and love about Jesus, especially your family (Mark 5.19, 20). Speak His Word and do His work, this is what it means to be His ambassador. It is a duty that brings great joy and satisfaction.

Yet be warned, some people are at war with the Prince of Peace. Some will hate you for telling them about His love. Do not fear. Jesus is always with those who go and make disciples (Matthew 28.18-20).

From the Embassy of the King of Kings,
Your Brother in Jesus

For Further Reflection - Ambassador

Take some time and write out your testimony of faith in Jesus. This will help you know what and how to share with others. Remember a testimony is about Jesus, the story of how He has worked in our lives. Are there some people you should send a copy to?

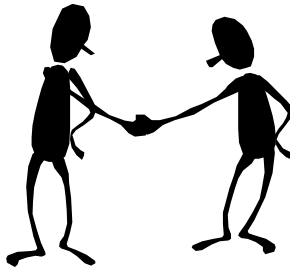
Think of three people you want to share the good news of Jesus with.

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Prayerfully plan the best time and way to do this. Share these hopes with a trusted friend who will pray with you.

Have you felt the pain of someone's rejection because of Jesus in you?

Are you praying for that person?



Letter 5



Dear Holy Temple

Greetings to you! By now you are realizing both the joy and the struggle of following Jesus. Be encouraged, God loves you and He is at work in you (Philippians 1.6). He always finishes His work.

The Old Testament describes God's temple as a place of great importance. David's son, Solomon, built the first temple. There was a second built after the Babylonian Exile by Zerubbabel. King Herod built a third during the Roman Empire. These physical structures had a spiritual message, they pointed forward to the Lord Jesus Christ (John 2.18-22). A temple is a place where we meet God; and we meet God fully and finally in Christ (1 Timothy 2.5). When we become believers we are spiritually "built into Him," we become "living stones" in God's great Temple (1 Peter 2.4-9).

I want to share three valuable lessons for our faith from this temple picture. First, we are to be morally pure. To be holy is to be separated from sin and set apart for God. Our bodies have become temples for the Holy Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 6.19, 20). It is our duty to take care of God's temple by resisting evil. Let Scripture and the Spirit guide your conscience to any areas of your life that do not bring glory to God's temple. Failure to seek after holiness may mean that we have not yet become a believer (2 Corinthians 6.16-18). "Without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12.14).

The temple also teaches us about the spiritual unity of all believers. One stone cannot make a building. Our small fellowships are each part of God's big temple, the household of faith. All true believers - from every nation, and many denominations, are living stones in the wonderful Temple of God – a growing, multi-tribal, multi-lingual, and multi-colored building! It is our belief in Jesus, as He is revealed in Holy Scripture, which unites us all together (Ephesians 2.20-22). Our unity is shown by our love for one another (John 13.34, 35). When people can see our unity they will be more convinced of the truth of our message about Jesus (John 17.20-23). God's Church, like Noah's Ark, contains "animals" of all sizes, shapes, and even smells! May God help us to live together in His love. Regardless of our natural, linguistic, or cultural differences the Holy Spirit is making all believers "one" in the Temple of God. So we must lovingly accept (Romans 15.7) and encourage (Hebrews 3.12-14) one another in Christ.

A third important truth we can learn is about our security in Christ. The temple is strong and secure, and so are we in Him. The Lord Jesus promised, "I will make him who is victorious a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will never leave it" (Revelation 3.12). Our confidence is as strong as the solid promises of God. His Kingdom cannot be shaken (Hebrews 12.28). May God help us to maintain moral purity, a loving spirit of Christian unity, and a firm confidence in His Word.

Firmly joined in Him,
Your Brother in Jesus

For Further Reflection - Holy Temple

What are the biggest moral challenges you face?

What routines can you change in your life to reduce these challenges?

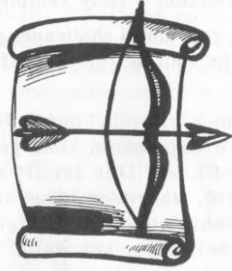
Have you found a church home?

Joining one local fellowship is an expression that you belong to the entire Body of Christ. Our family of faith extends around the world, wherever Jesus and His Word are honored. Make sure you build bridges between yourself and other believers, not walls!

Do you have some fears and doubts? What are they?

These are a normal part of the process of growing in our faith. Cast them upon God, He cares for you.

Letter 6



Dear Athlete in Training,

How are you doing in the Christian race? The Apostle Paul says we participate in the most important race. “I run straight towards the goal in order to win the prize, which is God’s call through Christ Jesus to the life above” (Philippians 3.14). Paul is picturing the competition of the ancient Olympic Games. Today we are in a race far more significant and earn results far more enduring.

Discipline describes the lifestyle of a good athlete. The path to victory is hard work. This is what it means to be disciples of the Lord Jesus. Part of our discipline is obedience. “An athlete who runs in a race cannot win the prize unless he obeys the rules” (2 Timothy 2.5) Salvation is to both “believe and obey” Jesus Christ (Romans 16.26). We must work to do what the gospel demands. This discipline requires determination. “So let us rid ourselves of everything that gets in the way, and of the sin which holds on to us so tightly, and let us run with determination the race that lies before us” (Hebrews 12.2). Many of our habits, thoughts, appetites, words, and actions are not pleasing to God. These must be completely rejected so that we may run freely in Jesus.

Following Jesus is not a sprint; it is a long distance marathon. Discipline demands endurance, “fast runners do not always win the race” (Ecclesiastes 9.11). The Lord said through Isaiah the prophet, “Those who trust in the Lord for help will find their strength renewed. They will rise on wings like eagles, they will run and not get weary, they will walk and not grow weak” (Isaiah 40.31). Notice the order – first soaring, and then running, and finally walking – walking is the climax! Sometimes in our Christian life we will soar on “eagle’s wings” of faith. Perhaps this wonderful joy accompanied your decision to become a believer. Sometimes

we need a burst of God's energy to run and not get tired, perhaps during a period of testing or challenge. God will give us what we need during such exceptional times. But much of our life in Jesus is not that exciting. We learn from this verse that most of our life of faith is ordinary, daily walking with God; long distance obedience in the same direction. That is why this verse shows walking to be the climax – the highest point of faith. It is great to have a wonderful spiritual “high” among the fellowship of believers on Sundays. But the real test of our faith comes Monday through Saturday, in our homes, schools, and workplaces. Do we walk with Christ every day of the week, every place we go? May God grant us this long distance discipline to have a steady, dependable, reliable, and faithful walk with the Lord Jesus.

A good athlete runs to win. “Every athlete in training submits to strict discipline, in order to be crowned with a wreath that will not last, but we do so for one that will last forever” (1 Corinthians 9.25). Our victory is through Jesus Christ, in Him we have the prize of eternal life “the crown of life” (2 Timothy 4.8). For the follower of Jesus, life is like athletic competition - the struggle, the hard work, the discipline, and the glory.

Stay in Training,
Your Brother in Jesus

For Further Reflection - Athlete in Training

Sometimes we can get tired and weary in our Christian walk. Take time to be refreshed by His Word and Spirit through worship and prayer.

What parts of Scripture have you come to enjoy the most?

Do the people you spend the workday with know you are a believer?

Letter 7



Dear Farmer in the Harvest,

What a joy to eat the sweet fruits of the summer harvest. The fruits are sweet, but the work is hard. Those who live in cities often do not understand the work of the farmer. But without their labors, we could not be fed! The Scripture uses the image of the farmer to describe the difficult challenge of following Jesus.

Farming is hard work. “The farmer who has done the hard work should have the first share of the harvest” (2 Timothy 2.6). Clearing the field, planting, weeding, and harvesting are all difficult tasks. In a similar way the Bible demands that we bear spiritual fruit of “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control” (Galatians 5.22, 23). This demands hard work. These righteous qualities are contradictory to our sinful nature. It is difficult to resist sin’s tempting power, especially if those around us are not following God. But the hard work of growing in God’s grace is not in vain. “So let us not grow tired of doing good, for if we do not give up, the time will come when we will reap the harvest” (Galatians 6.9). We will reap the harvest of eternal life.

Farming demands consistency. When we neglect our fields, even for a short time, the harvest may be lost. “Sow the seed in the morning, and at evening do not let your hands be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well” (Ecclesiastes 11.6). This verse teaches that we need to be creative, persistent, and consistent. Life in Jesus is filled with challenges and surprises, which we must endure with God’s help. Jesus also demands that we be faithful farmers

(Matthew 13.24-30, 36-43). The faithful believer is always tending their spiritual garden.

Farming requires wisdom. A good farmer needs knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge is correct information; wisdom is the right use of that information. There is much information about climate, soils, seeds, and plants that a farmer needs for success. He also needs wisdom to apply those truths correctly in the changing seasons and situations of life. The farmers “wisdom comes from the Lord Almighty” (Isaiah 28.23-29). We believers have much to learn about God and His Word. We are to be life-long students in His Kingdom. But God wants us to always put our knowledge to work. We really “know” something best when our life is changed by it; when people can see the truth lived out in us. “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (James 1.22).

Farming demands patience. You may work very hard, but you cannot make the plants grow. “See how patient a farmer is as he waits for his land to produce precious crops...You must also be patient. Keep your hopes high, for the day of the Lord’s coming is near” (James 5.7, 8). Salvation is a life-long process. So be patient with yourself, and with others. Patience is not laziness. It is a confidence to faithfully labor in hope, knowing the Lord of the Harvest is in control.

Co-laboring in the Harvest,
Your Brother in Jesus

For Further Reflection - Farmer in the Harvest

Are you ready for God’s harvest?

Are your loved ones ready?

Have you planted the seed of God’s word in someone’s heart recently?

Are you watering it?

Have you seen any growth?

Keep praying.

Are you growing in both knowledge and wisdom?

Letter 8



Dear Soldier in the Lord's Army,

Greetings fellow soldier! How is the battle? We followers of Jesus fight “against the wicked spiritual forces in the heavenly world, the rulers, the authorities, and cosmic powers in this dark age” (Ephesians 6.12). The Apostle Paul is saying that we are engaged in a spiritual struggle, a battle between God’s people and evil spiritual forces. Read how he describes this challenge in Ephesians 6.10-19. Notice carefully - our enemies are not people, “for our struggle is not against flesh and blood” (6.12). Remember that we are not enemies of people of other religions, denominations or traditions, but we oppose the demonic regime that has taken people captive to do evil works of darkness (2 Timothy 2.26). Paul explains that our weapons are spiritual virtues like “truth, righteousness, peace, faith, and salvation” – weapons of God’s love and grace.

Weapons of God’s love are not weak. Our Lord Jesus Christ holds all power and authority – in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28.18). The weapons He gives are “God’s powerful weapons” (2 Corinthians 10.3-5). Our strategy is to present God’s Word in the strength of God’s Spirit. His message is powerful (Romans 1.16). To some the message of Jesus Christ crucified appears foolish and weak, “but to those whom God has called...Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1.24). Weapons of hatred are certain to fail. Jesus said, “All who live by the sword will die by the sword” (Matthew 26.52). Our victory is certain because of Christ’s resurrection (1 Corinthians 15.57). Someday He will come back in victory, our fight will be over, and He will rule unrivaled (Revelation 19.11-21). Until that final day we struggle in confident hope.

A good soldier is under authority. He respects and obeys his commanding officer. He does not hesitate to carry out his duties. Jesus commends this quality in the Roman centurion (Matthew 8.5-9). Our commander is God and the Scriptures list His commands. "A soldier on active service wants to please his commanding officer and so does not get mixed up in the affairs of civilian life" (2 Timothy 2.4).

A good soldier is in authority. We are responsible for someone else. We have people over us, and people under us. God assigns our position, whether it is high or low. Our authority must never be abused, but always exercised in love. The greatest in the kingdom of God is the servant. Jesus sets a different standard from the world, saying, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – and just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20.26-28). Jesus is the perfect example of a Servant, washing the feet of His disciples, and dying on the cross for our sins (John 13.1-15). Under Him we are accountable to God. He holds all authority. In earthly wars, a minority of soldiers is on the "front lines" of battle. They rely on the faithful labor and support of the majority behind the lines to ensure success. Each of us has an important duty in the Lord's army. When we are found faithful in small duties, our responsibilities will be enlarged (Luke 12.41-48). Our world is waiting for the powerful – healing - love of God. "We will shout for joy when you are victorious and will lift up our banners in the name of our God...Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God" (Psalm 20.5,7).

Together in the Battle,
Your Brother in Jesus

For Further Reflection – Soldier in the Lord’s Army

Sometimes it is hard to remember that people are not our enemies, especially when they have hurt you. Are you praying for those who have made you their enemy?

Who is in authority over you?

Who are your spiritual elders and leaders?

Is there anyone you are trying to lead spiritually, someone who looks to you for guidance and encouragement?

We are in the battle together. Are you trusting your own strength, or God’s weapons?

Letter 9



Dear Refugee in Jesus,

Many thousands of people have been tragically driven from their homelands by war. An African proverb says, “When the elephants fight, the grass suffers.” Indeed countless millions have suffered the loss of families, homes, and possessions – becoming refugees of war through no choice of their own. But when you decided to follow Jesus, you chose a refugee status.

Scripture uses the synonyms “refugee,” “sojourner,” or “stranger” to describe part of our Christian life. These words explain the complete change in the believer’s relationship to the world. Jesus uses three phrases to describe this relationship in His prayer for us. “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world...they are not of the world...I have sent them into the world” (John 17.15-18). We may still live in the same house we did before we became believers, but now we “do not belong to the world.” In Him we have a new identity, and new ultimate, eternal home. So, according to these words of Jesus, we are “in” the world but not “of” the world. We are just passing through, but we are “sent into” the world as His refugees.

A refugee leaves one government and submits to another. No longer are we “kept in the dark by the evil god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4.4). God “rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us safe into the kingdom of his dear Son, by whom we are set free, that is, our sins are forgiven” (Colossians 1.13,14). The dark government of evil, which once controlled us, has ended. Jesus now reigns and rules in our lives. Therefore, we are “God’s chosen people who live as refugees” (1 Peter 1.1).

A refugee flees for safety. Our former way of life was really a way of death. Sin leads to eternal death (Romans 6.23). A refugees flees completely, he does not look back. "Remember Lot's wife!" (Luke 17.32). Have you left your evil ways behind? Evil thoughts, immorality, pride, drunkenness, hurtful words, laziness, disrespect for authority, the love of money, all these lead to death. Perhaps you will have to leave certain friends because of their bad influence, "bad companions ruin good character" (1 Corinthians 15.33). Do not worry; God will give you even better friends (Mark 10.29, 30).

A refugee never feels comfortably "at home." We are citizens of heaven, and we eagerly wait for our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ to come from heaven" (Philippians 3.20). We are now here on earth as refugees. This is all the life there is for someone under Satan's government. So that person must busily chase after all the pleasures of earth. But they will not last long (Matthew 6.19-21). Instead, God's people admit "openly that they were foreigners and refugees on the earth...they longed for the heavenly country...God prepared a city for them" (Hebrews 11.13-16). You may be a refugee, a stranger for Jesus, in your own home, school, or community. Sometimes those who reject Jesus will reject you. Being a refugee is never easy. But it is the only way to eternal life. The Bible says this about God's faithful people, "The world was not good enough for them! They wandered like refugees" (Hebrews 11.38).

Looking toward our Final Home,
Your Brother in Jesus

For Further Reflection – Refugee in Jesus

Are you feeling the pain of separation from those in your old life - before following our Lord Jesus?

Are you praying for them?

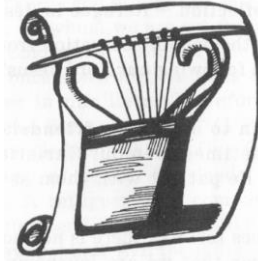
Have you begun to make new friendships with other believers?

Sometimes even our Christian friends will disappoint us. Be patient with them as God is patient with us.

Do you sometimes feel like there is no “home” for you on earth?

Remember that we are journeying through this world – heading for someplace better.

Letter 10



Dear New Friend in Jesus,

It has been a privilege to share with you. I pray that God has used these letters to encourage you in your new life in Christ. I hope I am just one of many new friends you are making in Jesus. One of the most amazing teachings of the Scripture is that we are God's friends. Abraham was a "friend of God" (2 Chronicles 20.7, Isaiah 41.8). When we read the great story of this "Father of our faith" (Romans 4.11), it is not surprising that God considered Abraham His friend. But what does this mean for us? I am sure you have done things, even as a new follower of Jesus, which makes you realize how far we have to grow in faith. I feel that same disappointment in myself, and I have been a believer for many years. How can we be God's friends!?

Our friendship with God is not based on what we do, but whom we know. Jesus said, "The greatest love a person can have for his friends is to give his life for them. And you are my friends...You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15.13, 16). The Son of God teaches that He took the loving initiative to begin our friendship. He chose us. He took the initiative to give His life for us. We are friends with God, because we know Jesus. He was even "a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Luke 7.34). Abraham was not a great man because of himself. A great God made him great. When God made His promises to Abraham, "He did so, not because Abraham obeyed the Law, but because he believed and was accepted as righteous by God" (Romans 4.13). The Apostle Paul goes on to say that all of us who believe, as Abraham did, receive the blessing of God's promises through faith (Romans 4.16). So when you are tempted to think your friendship with God depends on your efforts, rejoice that He made the friendship - and

He keeps His friendship. “We love because God first loved us” (1 John 4.19).

Our friendship with God should break our friendship with the world. “Listen! I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into his house and eat with him, and he will eat with me” (Revelation 3.2). Jesus gave this invitation to a fellowship of believers. It is especially a promise for us who follow Him. Do you want to grow in your friendship with God? Do you want

sweet fellowship with Him? He is knocking. He waits. He is ready to enter into deeper communion with you. Jesus said, “You are my friends if you do what I command you” (John 15.14). His commands to his disciples in that conversation were to “love one another” (15.12) and “bear much fruit” (15.16). Friendship with God is visible in our lives. James gives a strong rebuke to believers who do not take God’s friendship seriously. “Unfaithful people! Don’t you know that to be the world’s friends means to be God’s enemy? Whoever wants to be the world’s friend makes himself God’s enemy” (James 4.4). May your new friendship with God grow deeper daily.

Our friendship with God will last forever. Biblical writers called Abraham God’s friend long after Abraham died. They realized the “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” is the “God of the living, not the dead” (Matthew 22.32). Our friendship with God does not end at death - it just gets more wonderful. We will enjoy endless fellowship with Him – and all His friends – in Heaven. John the Baptist spoke of his relationship with Jesus saying, “The bridegroom’s friend, who stands and listens, is glad when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. This is how my own happiness is complete” (John 3.29). This joy will be ours – endless and abundant – when we sit together with our Bridegroom. “Happy are those who have been invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb” (Revelation 19.9). Until that wonderful day, continue in faith, grow in grace, and live in love. See you at His Feast!

Your Brother in Jesus,
Pastor Mark Blair

For Further Reflection - New Friend in Jesus

It has probably become obvious to you that there are only two directions in life, toward God or away from Him. Which way are you moving most of the time?

What do you do when you find yourself slipping away from Him?

How can you establish patterns of consistency in your walk toward Him - with Him?

It is a long, wonderful, walk. May it forever be a joy to you, and may your joy be a blessing to others.