

CONSECRATION

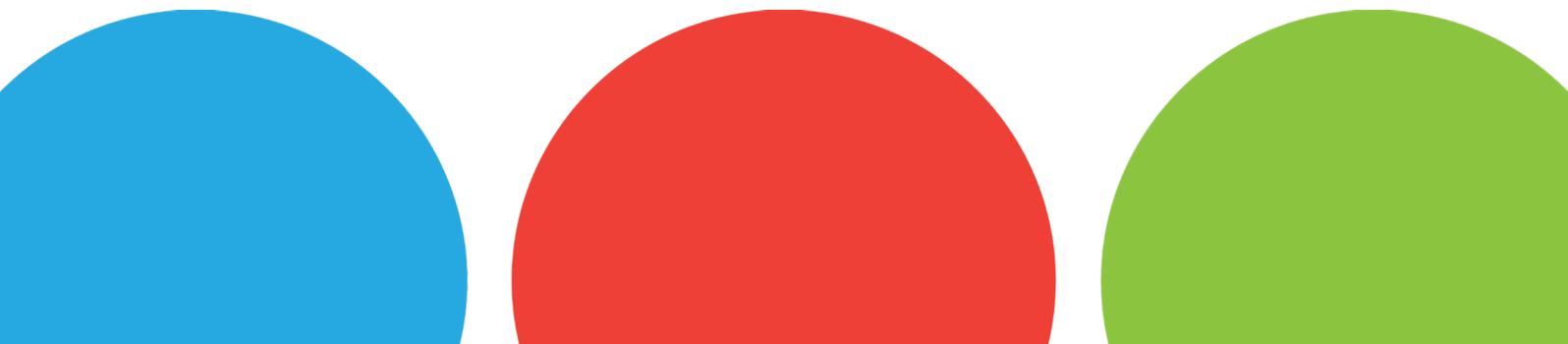
personal churches movement

THE DEVOTIONAL

Malcolm Duncan

September 2024

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INTRODUCTION

I am convinced that consecration is God's call to us as leaders, as churches and as a Movement for this time.

The wonderful call to plant churches, raise leaders, make disciples and reach nations has reverberated around our Movement for the last eight years – and I thank God for it. It has birthed so much good in Elim. Yet at the same time, we must be intentional about the kind of churches we are planting, the character of the leaders we are raising, the hearts of the disciples we are making and the ways in which we are reaching nations.

To me, the call to consecration, is the call that connects and holds all these priorities together. I have no doubt that the words we use around reaching the world will change as Mark Pugh leads us forward, but I am also equally confident that just as Chris Cartwright, John Glass, Wynne Lewis, Eldin Corsie, Tom Walker and every other General Superintendent of Elim has done, Mark will remain true to the heart of Elim. All our national leaders have sought to lead us forward into the things of God, and I believe that the current leaders want to do the same.

Of course, our structures and our processes and our cultures need to be reviewed and renewed. There are many things that we need to address in our Movement. Challenges and difficulties have abounded in recent years, but the strength of our Elim family is that the women and men who lead our churches, who carry our credential and who turn up day in and day out to serve Jesus across the nations in the Elim family are passionate about the Gospel and passionate about the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. We still believe in Jesus as the Saviour, Healer, Baptiser and Coming King, and we still long for His power to rest on us, to fill us and to flow through us into the world.

**THE BEST YEARS OF
ELIM ARE, I BELIEVE,
AHEAD OF US.**



For us to step into those best years, consecration is vital. That's why I am so blessed and feel so honoured to provide you with these devotions. There are 21 of them. That is intentional. I invite you to consider a Daniel Fast alongside the daily reading of the devotionals. I encourage you to circulate them to your elders and deacons and leadership teams. I have written them for our Movement because I love our Movement, but I have written them with pastors, elders, deacons, chaplains, youth and children's workers, prophets, evangelists, teachers and apostles in mind too. Use them how you see fit. Share them with whom you choose. I just pray that God will meet with you as you explore them.

You will notice that I have not gone down the route of choosing the obvious passages on consecration such as 1 John 1, or texts from Joshua or Leviticus or Exodus. That is because I am assuming that you will have handle of the nature and the call of consecration in its Biblical sense. I am assuming that you are each familiar with the call to confession, repentance, obedience, sacrifice, holiness, sanctification and the like. Instead, I have explored some of the nuances in and around consecration for us individually as leaders and how that might flow into the life of our Movement. I hope it helps you. You don't have to read them in order, and they are not set for specific days. You can do that if you want to, but you can also look at the subjects they cover and read whichever one you choose, you could even get together with colleagues and friends locally and use them as launch pads for prayer times and discussions and ministering to one another. Alongside these devotions, Carl & Dani Johnson have been working on some for children and younger people. I pray Carl & Dani's work and mine will also be a blessing to you.

This first stage of our consecration journey is an invitation to each of us individually. It might lend itself to you exploring a retreat on your own or with a colleague or your team. You could start journalling around consecration. You might use the devotions to begin to explore consecration as part of your own spiritual disciplines and practices. Reading the devotions and meditating on them might help you realise that you need some input or help or support to address some issues in your life and ministry. If that is the case, please reach out to someone. If you need a coffee and a conversation, I'd love to connect with you. I also know that our movement has a multitude of godly women and men who can support you, listen to you and pray with you – in our regional teams and in our departments as well as in our local churches and at Malvern. Use whatever means you need to within, and out-with, the Movement to get support, help and encouragement if you need it.

The second stage of the consecration journey will involve churches and regions exploring different aspects of the topic and Mark will share more about that in due course. I know that in my own local context, consecration will be at the top of my agenda as I move into a new situation. I am exploring ways of how we enable the whole church family and network at KT to dive into consecration and emerge stronger, healthier, more hopeful and more united than it has ever been. I am thinking about ways of enabling encounters with the Holy Spirit, space to read and hear God's Word together, and ways in which we can declare our desire to be a consecrated people to the heavenlies and to the world. If you have any ideas, I would love to hear them.

The third stage of the consecration journey will involve some plans for the whole Movement, and Mark will update you on those in due course.

I have never been more excited about being part of the Elim Movement, and I believe that God is on the move amongst us.

God bless you all,

Malcolm Duncan
July 2024

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Mon, 9 Sept

DAY 1

CONSECRATION AND CONNECTION

Not one is missing, not one forgotten. God the Father has his eye on each of you, and has determined by the work of the Spirit to keep you obedient through the sacrifice of Jesus. May everything good from God be yours.

1 Peter 1 (The Message)

Sometimes as we serve others, we can forget that God cares about us.

We can become so focused on making sure our ministries and churches are running, our congregants are happy and our finances are secure, that we forget one simple fact – God has not forgotten us. It is easy, for all the right reasons, to end up with all the wrong ideas! We start off with wonderful intentions of serving others because we have experienced God's grace and goodness in our own lives. We want to see other people's lives transformed because we know that God is in the business of transformation. But the transformation of others should never be at the expense of our own transformation. This forgetfulness is more likely if we become disconnected from God and His presence and purpose for our lives. Consecration keeps us connected.

To be agents of change in the world around us, we must remain connected to God ourselves. The deeper our consecration the deeper our experience of the reality of God's presence and the truths that God watches over us, loves us and wants to bring hope and transformation to us.

You might feel forgotten by God today but take a moment to remember that you are not. As you dwell intentionally before God, and consecrate yourself to His will and His way, my prayer is that He will remind you that He knows every hair on your head. He knows every person that you will see today. He knows the challenges you face and the struggles you have come through. The work you are doing is the work that He called you to. Remember what enabled you to answer the call of God in the first place, and rest in the promise that God is with you today. Whatever you face, whatever might come your way, God is right there beside you – He always has been.

The power of this reality is deeply embedded in your willingness to be consecrated. I am not suggesting that we are consecrated so that we might be blessed in this way, rather I am saying that a byproduct of ongoing consecration is a deepening sense of connection that God gives us; rather like the byproduct of a healthy heart being more energy. A great danger that we must avoid is that we want connection without consecration, and without intentionality. I am not sure that this is possible. To abide in Jesus, in the words of John 15, is to be deliberately rooted in His word, by His Spirit for His purposes, and to commit to obedience and dependence. As we do this, our lives reflect His vision and values, and we hear His voice more clearly. As we remain connected to Him in consecration our ministries are strengthened, but more importantly, our souls are nourished.

For further thought ———

Why not take a few minutes and allow yourself the joy of knowing that God is with you. You could write Him a brief letter, or a thank you note. Ask Him to show you His eyes in the faces of all those you will meet with today. Allow yourself to be changed by each encounter and ask God to give you the grace to stay connected at this deep 'spirit-to-spirit' level so that you can continually grow in your awareness of God's grace.

Tue, 10 Sept

DAY 2

CONSECRATION'S IMPACT

'...You never saw Him, yet you love Him, you still don't see Him, yet you trust Him...

1 Peter 1 (The Message)

What an amazing job you do.

No one else might say this to you today but thank you. Thank you for believing that God is at work in the world. Thank you for getting up out of bed every day determined to make a difference because God has made a difference in your life. Thank you for looking beyond the hopelessness of the situations you deal with and believing that God is at work.

Faith can be a hard thing, and it is always a gift we receive from God rather than something that we create ourselves, but faith works. Yet without that sense of faith, we make ourselves into nothing other than another social service. We do what we do, because God has done what He has done. If we lose the centrality of consecration in our lives, we lean into our own resources and strength and we lean out of God's resources and strength. Faith comes by hearing God's word, but we can only hear God's word properly when we give Him time to speak to us, and to do that we need to slow down our pace and commit to His purpose and His plan being worked out His way. The joyful door into such a perspective hangs on the hinges of sacrifice and obedience, has consecration as its handle, and grace as the lock that is opened by the key of faith. **SO** much of the reality of our lives and our ministries is shaped by consecration.

So, whether you are serving in a local church as the senior pastor, an associate, an assistant, an elder or a deacon; or you are a chaplain or a youth pastor or one of dozens of other roles, from national to local spheres, thank you! Your words and acts and thoughts and attitudes can change the world for someone today. And as you believe that this really can happen, you might just be changed yourself by the same God who uses you to bring change to other people.

WHAT AN AMAZING AND WONDERFUL PRIVILEGE TO BE PART OF THE PEOPLE WHO BRING GOD'S KINGDOM.

For further thought ———

Are there specific things that you know only God can do in your life, your church or your ministry? Maybe today you can just take a second and you can think about those mountains that just won't move. Are you trying too hard to do it yourself? As you consecrate yourself again to God's purposes and remember your need of God's grace and wisdom, why not give the challenges to God again. Name them before Him. Ask God to release more faith in your life and heart as you submit your life to His will again today.

Wed, 11 Sept

DAY 3

CONSECRAT:ON AND TEAM

Love one another as if your lives depended on it...

1 Peter 1 (The Message)

It would be easy to get so caught up with making your ministry prosper, your church flourish and your services shine that you forget about loving your team and your colleagues.

What a travesty that would be. Healthy teams have a heartbeat of consecration because it is only in consecration that we discover humility and it is only in humility that we can see each other properly. Consecration stops us from becoming competitors and enables us to be collaborators.

Our teams can be places where we face the most tension and stress. They can be the places where we can show our frustration and worry. But they should also be the place where we can love one another. Where we find support, encouragement and help. Being part of a team is a responsibility. It demands that we make commitments to one another and that we honour those commitments. One of those commitments is to pray for each other. Another is to see the best in one another and release the best in each other. When our egos are too big, they are easily bruised, but consecration keeps our egos in check and enables us to big others up without needing to big ourselves up. We can get caught up with *'delivering'* at the expense of *'being'*. Yet the *'delivering'* and the *'being'* have to be two sides of the same coin. Imagine a family where everyone outside the family thinks the dad is great, but those in it are terrified of him! There is something very wrong when what others say about us is unrecognisable by those in our own teams.

Teams are the best place to be, the safest place to be, and the most demanding and challenging places to be – but we are transformed through them as we learn to love one another, weep together, laugh together, celebrate together and serve and worship together. We serve best when we kneel together.

AND REMEMBER THAT GOD, BY HIS SPIRIT, IS PART OF YOUR TEAM – HE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PART. GIVE HIM SOME SPACE TODAY, YOU MIGHT JUST BE SURPRISED BY WHAT HE DOES.

For further thought ———

Think about one way in which you can show appreciation and support to your team mates and your colleagues today – then do it! Pray for the folk who do not have the luxury of being part of a team – for those who are having to work alone and without physical or emotional support. Also pray for the people in your own team and ask God to enable you to find time and space to enjoy one another's company. Whatever role you play in the team you are part of (and if you are 'solo' then you are still part of Team Elim), consecrate yourself to God again today and ask Him to show you ways of blessing, celebrating and releasing others. Who could you reach out to today to encourage and support? Do it.

Thu, 12 Sept

DAY 4

CONSECRATION'S POWER

But you are the ones chosen by God, chosen for the high calling of priestly work, chosen to be a holy people, God's instruments to do His work and speak out for Him, to tell others of the night and day difference He made for you – from nothing to something, from rejected to accepted.

1 Peter 2 (The Message)

There is a huge privilege in serving God by serving others.

It is something that we should never take for granted. Instead, I invite you to stop and allow the wonder of it all to sink into your heart once again. All of us are 'priests' and 'kings'. We have been given purpose, mission and meaning by God's grace at work in our lives. It is not our clever ideas, our ingenuity or our own strength that makes what we do work. Rather, it is the absolute reality that God has called us, God will keep us, and God is with us.

This promise-laden trinity of vocation, assurance and enabling flows into our hearts, our souls and our perspectives through our ongoing curation of a consecrated centre at the very heart of our identity and life.

And our '**vocation**' is to both '**do**' and '**speak**'. We must never be ashamed of Jesus – for He has never been ashamed of us. We must never give the impression that we are the one with the plan and He is the one with the resources. Rather, we remember that He is the one with the plan and the resources. The only reason we have anything to offer the world around us is because of the fundamental difference that God Himself has made in our lives. A night and day difference. **WB Yeats, at the end of his poem, Easter, 1916 uses this phrase:**

*All changed, changed utterly
A terrible beauty is born.*

That is true for us too. Something wonderful, and uncontrollable happens in our lives when we walk with God. He changes us, then changes the world through us. But we should never take for granted the change He has wrought in our own hearts and lives. In the words of Peter, we have been taken from nothing to something. From rejected to accepted. This is, I think, a beautiful picture of consecration's transformative power. We are taken into something – a new identity, a new purpose, a new power, a new reality. If we shy away from consecration, we end up relying on our strength rather than on God's strength. Consecration keeps us rooted and established in Christ and allows His life to flow through us.

Consecration unlocks the power of God in us and then unlocks the power of God through us. I think that, when we confess our sins, we not only name them before God and repent of them and seek to live differently in the power of the Holy Spirit, but we also embrace the truth of what God says to us and through us. Consecration therefore involves confession and repentance as both a response to our brokenness and an agreement with God's word over our lives – that we are healed, restored and forgiven by His grace.

For further thought ———

When was the last time you thanked God for His work in your life? There is no time like the present. How can you see confession and repentance as both an acknowledgement of your brokenness and an agreement with God about His word to you and over you?

Fri, 13 Sept

DAY 5

CONSECRATION'S CHALLENGE

Don't indulge your ego at the expense of your soul.

1 Peter 2 [The Message]

We can have very short memories.

When people start to praise us for all the work that we have done and to pat us on the back for the difference we have made, we should be very grateful. But we should also be very careful. God does not bask in our glory; we bask in His.

The ego is a funny thing. You think you have it cracked, that you have your priorities in the right order, that you are not getting too proud, or conceited, then bam! You find yourself claiming the credit for what you haven't done and taking the glory for what does not belong to you. We do that when we exaggerate our figures, when we pretend, we are better than we are, or when we are content to let the work of someone else be accredited to us.

All of these are dangerous things to do. But they can be avoided by consecration. When we make a daily choice to acknowledge our dependence on God, and when we form a habit of humility and ruthless honesty with ourselves and with others, it releases something in us, and it releases us from something. It does the latter by fracturing our fragile ego. It does the former by releasing obedience and faithfulness and gratitude in our lives. Consecrated people can celebrate others without fear of being overlooked. They can stand in the shadow of someone else's success without feeling angry. Most of all, a consecrated person knows that it does not all depend on them. That results in consecrated people being freed people who don't have to keep everything going and don't carry the weight of ministry on their shoulders - then you must keep it all going. If you know it all depends on God, then you work with all your heart, knowing that your work is an act of worship, but you also know that without Jesus, you can achieve nothing,

AND NOTHING MEANS NOTHING.

For further thought ———

Are there people you need to thank today for the work they do? Think about the connection between consecration and celebrating others. Do you find it hard to celebrate others - if so, why do you think that is? Are there areas where you exaggerate your input and significance - why do you do that? How can you practice consecration in very concrete ways, such as correcting exaggerations, sending a note of thanks or celebrating someone else?

Sat, 14 Sept

DAY 6

CONSECRAT:ON AND GOODNESS

It is God's will that by doing good, you might cure the ignorance of the fools who think you're a danger to society.

1 Peter 2 (The Message)

There are lots of people who want to see the Church removed from society.

To be more specific they want the Church's role to be pushed to the edge. They want people of faith to shut up about their faith and just bring their works to the table. I am not one of them. We can only do what we do because we believe what we believe. Then there are others who think that before we do anything we should preach at people. If they will not believe what we believe then they should not get our help and support. I am not in that camp either. The Church is not called to force what we believe on other people. We are called to believe what we believe and to live it out by being committed to Christ and committed to serving others. God has called us to be people who do good. And to do good is to mirror the heart and the attitude of Jesus. Let's not create a tension where one does not exist. Our good deeds show people who we are. But we must never force people to listen to our words at the expense of our deeds.

Unfortunately, a lot of people around us have lost faith or confidence in the Church's message because the Church's messengers – pastors, preachers, leaders, chaplains, youth workers and the like – have been bad ambassadors. To paraphrase words that Ghandi once used when asked by a Christian to consider following Jesus, they cannot hear what we are saying for the noise of who we are. This should not be. And the solution lies in consecrated lives.

Before we proclaim to others that God is love, we would do well to let His love flow into our own hearts and lives and ignite a passion for purity and faithfulness in us. Before we exhort others to follow Jesus, we ourselves need to be willing to take up our crosses and follow Him. There is always a cost to consecration. There is always a challenge in commitment to Christ. But there is always a consequence too. Wilberforce once said that one of the aims of his life was to make goodness fashionable again. Consecrated lives are not good in and of themselves, but they point to the inherent goodness, faithfulness and beauty of God.

A proud pastor is not a good reflection of a humble Saviour. A selfish leader doesn't point well to a selfless Christ. A leader with double standards will never have a single-hearted focus on the Kingdom.

PEOPLE ARE CHANGED BY LOVE, NOT SHOUTING. OUR EXAMPLE MAY WELL BE AS IMPORTANT AS OUR EXEGESIS.

For further thought ———

How can you commit yourself to goodness again today – in your own choices, priorities and example? Where do you need to lay wrong behaviours down and ask God to give you a better way? Are there areas of your life and ministry that need to be re-calibrated for the glory of Christ? Who could help you with that?

Sun, 15 Sept

DAY 7

CONSECRAT:ON

AND OUR ELIM FAMILY

Love your spiritual family. Revere God. Respect the government.

1 Peter 2 (The Message)

We live in an age where it is easy to be cynical.

It is easy to be cynical about the local church, about God and faith and about Government. And it is easy to give into cynicism about our Movement. But cynicism is the incubator of hopelessness and hopelessness is the father of despair. The cure to cynicism is a consecrated and heartfelt commitment to community.

In these few words, Peter gives us a great life manifesto. Loving your spiritual family means being committed to it, speaking well of it and honouring it. There are plenty of places where it is life threatening to be a follower of Jesus and part of the Christian community – maybe we should do less moaning about the local church and more supporting? It is a beautiful thing if you look hard enough. Warts and all! And whilst I do not think we should say that everything in Elim is good and healthy and perfect (*healthy movements can critique themselves*), I also think we must look for the signs of life, and growth and hope in our Movement and celebrate them. We can, and I think we should, commit ourselves to speaking well of our colleagues, encouraging our leaders and affirming the continued hand of God upon our movement and its leaders. God is not done with us yet. We should also remember that God hears our words, spoken in private.

God is not just our buddy, our mate, or the guy at the end of the street. To revere Him is to give Him His place. We can't talk others down and think God does not hear us. We cannot re-cast His image into someone who agrees with all our preferences. We are not free to create the God we like and ditch the things about His character that challenge us. As followers of Christ, we follow the One who leads us to those in need, to the broken and to the poor. But we also follow the One who leads us to the God of Israel, a God of purity and holiness as well as compassion. We shouldn't treat God as if He is just a bigger version of us. Worship, service, devotion and obedience are all healthy words.

Our Movement may not be perfect, but we should seek to see it change with passionate and respectful discussion and debate. When we disagree, we should make our voices heard clearly, graciously and properly. Too often we only say something when we have something negative to say about others but not when we have something positive to say. But there are plenty of things to be thankful for in Elim. Passionate worship, people who love God's word, diversity, local engagement, great theologians and teachers, great leaders, caring and faithful pastors and teachers, amazing stories of healing and deliverance and answered prayer and a longing for a fresh move of the Holy Spirit and new churches to be birthed. We have apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor/teachers across our Movement, and a huge amount of potential just ready to be released. A consecrated Movement can celebrate, not just criticize.

Constructive criticism is one thing, cynicism has nothing to do with Christian faith – and should never be at heart of our Movement, our churches or our leaders.

For further thought ———

How can you show your commitment to the Elim Movement locally, regionally and nationally? Think of one thing you can do and do it – it might be as easy as attending more regional gatherings, or it might be taking on the role you have been avoiding for a very long time. Can you encourage a colleague, or do you need to break cynicism in your heart? What can you do for good.

Mon, 16 Sept

DAY 8

CENTRING CONSECRAT:ON

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 3:5,6 (New International Version)

Success brings with it some dangerous attitudes, unless we are very careful.

We can think that we made something happen, when actually God made something happen through us. In essence, consecration is an acknowledgement that all growth, and all health, and all prospering comes from God and not from us. We can think that we have all the answers, when God has all the answers, and we need to listen to Him. We can turn accolades *(which are good)* into worship of us or self-promotion *(which is bad)*. The only One who deserves worship is God. We see change in people's lives *(which God has used us in helping bring about)* and think that we are the ones who bring change *(which is wrong)*. True change only comes from God. Consecration is the deliberate act of stepping out of the centre of the circle so that God can stand in it alone. Our lives revolve around God and His purposes, not the other way round.

We can begin to think that the only thing that we need to make our preaching, pastoral care, strategies, projects, programmes or vocation work is a good business head and clear planning and good funding. All these things are important, but they will never in and of themselves bring transformation. We must resist putting strategy before sanctification, outcomes before obedience, and our glory before God's. If we are not careful, we *'forget'* God in our planning! Why do we so often pray at the end of a meeting rather than at the beginning? Why do we tend to ask God to bless what we are doing instead of asking Him to lead us to do what He is blessing? Instead of asking him to direct us to do what His favour rests upon, we fall into the trap of organizing everything then bringing it to God in a short *'lend Your support to our great plans'* prayer. By so doing we shift the central focus of all that we do from God to us. To do that might make us feel very important, but it is a death knell to sustainability and authenticity in ministry and life.

CONSECRATION IS A DELIBERATE RE-CENTRING OF OUR LIVES AND OUR MINISTRIES ON THE PURPOSES AND PLANS OF GOD – AND IT IS THE ONLY POSTURE THAT BRINGS LASTING CHANGE IN US AND THEN THROUGH US AND OUR CHURCHES, AND OUR MOVEMENT.

For further thought ———

Stop and think about the ways in which you deliberately put God at the centre of your life, ministry and work. If words were to be banned for a month in the work you do, how would it clearly show that it was work that sprung from a commitment to God that leads to a commitment to people? Think about the ways in which you could deliberately trust God and lean on His wisdom rather than your own. Make this the topic of your next team meeting in your church, the centre of your line management meeting with those you manage; or ask for it to be an issue you discuss with those who manage you. Ask God to take centre stage in your life and ministry every day for a month and stop and listen for how the Holy Spirit directs you. Do what He asks and then think about the difference that it has made to your life and ministry.

Tue, 17 Sept

DAY 9

DE-PROFESSIONALIZING CONSECRATION

‘...when you have finished setting aside a tenth of all your produce in the third year, the year of the tithe, you shall give it to the Levite, the alien, the fatherless and the widow so that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied...

Deuteronomy 26:12

Christian ministry in a broken and hurting world is about much more than activity and projects.

It is about us. Who we are, what we have, what we do with our time, our money, our homes and our ambitions. Those of us who have the privilege of being financially supported in ministry can professionalize our vocations. We can end up feeling very entitled, and we can forget the joy of consecrated service.

Whilst giving of money, time and resource fits within the themes of stewardship, worship and obedience, it ultimately sits within the question of whether we are living out a consecrated life. We pastors should talk about money with our congregations and ministry teams, but how we use our own money is a very good indication of how seriously we take our relationship with God and our obedience to Him, and it is a litmus test of our own hearts and attitudes to consecration. The chances are, if you are reading this, that you may well have given up lucrative careers or a big salary because of your commitment to the purposes of God and serving the Kingdom.

Thank you for the sacrifice you make for the Kingdom of God – God sees it and He will reward and bless you for it. But be careful that you are not neglecting disciplines of consecration in your own life whilst calling others to be consecrated. Don't turn this into a job.

There is still a challenge to you and me in our attitude to money and giving. Do we view our money as ours, with us giving God a little back in various ways? Or do we view our money and resources as God's? There is a direct link between our commitment to consecration and our generosity. The great news for the Elim Movement is that God has all the finances that He needs to transform the nations we minister in. The bad news is that some of this money is in the bank accounts of our pastors, elders and deacons and that we are holding onto God's provision whilst asking others to give. We are allowing our consecration to take place in parallel with our resources, which means we have made our consecration shallow. If it doesn't impact our generosity, then it hasn't penetrated our hearts. Does our attitude to money represent our attitude to life? If so, what does that attitude say about our consecration?

Not only is the idea of generosity an important and challenging one personally, but it is also a challenge to our congregations, leadership teams and our Movement. I wonder how many of our churches begrudge their giving to the Movement. How committed are we to global mission, to our youth ministry, to releasing new leaders and raising up young people? Do our church leadership teams celebrate the capacity to be generous or begrudge it? How many ministers, leaders or churches have fallen into entitlement, which is a sure sign of an unconsecrated heart, whatever else we may claim.

For further thought ———

Would your generosity lead to a consecrated heart or not? What can you do about that? What will you do about that?

Wed, 18 Sept

DAY 10

AVOIDING PARTIAL CONSECRAT:ON

Amaziah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years. His mother's name was Jehoaddin, she was from Jerusalem. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, but not whole-heartedly.

2 Chronicles 25:1,2

There are some verses in the Bible and some phrases that seem to put on boxing gloves when you are not looking, and when you come back to them and read them, they reach out and punch you on the nose!

This is one of those, I think. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, but not whole-heartedly. If you read on, you will realise that what he did not do was quite reasonable in modern terms! The challenge is that the Bible seems to suggest that because he did not wholeheartedly follow the instructions of the Law in relation to the people and descendants of the land Israel had conquered, his reign was ultimately less fruitful than it could have been. It is easy to obey the bits of the Scripture that we like, it is harder to obey the bits that we struggle with. Too often we seem to pick and choose the bits that are *'right'* for our time and ignore the *'bits'* that aren't. Partial consecration is, in the end, something of an oxymoron. Nevertheless, a helpful question to consider is, in our own lives, are we consecrated fully or partially?

Do we heed the call of Scripture to a consecrated life in its fulness, or do we cut and paste the consecration calls of Scripture to suit our culture or suit our preferences? Surely consecration affects everything we are and everything we do? Our inner world and our outer world are held together by the degree to which we are willing to be consecrated. We should be in no doubt that there is a central moral and ethical code that we are called never to depart from. God has made clear that it is to be wholeheartedly at the centre of everything we do and say. It is contained in both the Old Testament and the New. Here is a simple test for us – are we living out the truths of the Ten Commandments?

As a pastor, could you cite them to me? If that is too much, then here's another two great questions to help us think about what a consecrated life looks like: are we loving God with everything we have and loving others as we love ourselves? Could you name your neighbours for five houses in either direction of where you live? If you don't know them, how can you love them? Are we so busy with ministry that we have lost the sense of what it means to be wholeheartedly present in the daily rhythm of our lives and families?

CONSECRATION STARTS IN THE QUIET PLACE AND AT HOME, NOT IN THE PULPIT OR THE BOARDROOM.

For further thought ———

Which parts of faithfulness to God do you struggle with most in the work you do or in your life? How can you bring those under the lordship of Christ? Who can you talk to about that? Do you have a prayer partner or an accountability partner? What about pastoral supervision? Is there a band of colleagues you could meet with to open your heart to and spur one another on? Do you know the Ten Commandments? What about your neighbours? What can you do to address these questions?

Thu, 19 Sept

DAY 11

DETERMINED CONSECRAT:ON

Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you, and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

Isaiah 43:1,2

Lift up your head!

It might seem like everything is going wrong, and that no matter what you do you cannot get out of the rut that you are in. But God is with you. His presence is not indicated just by success, it is indicated by your deep and longstanding commitment to keep going. Finances might be tight, the criticisms might be strong, and the opposition might be tangible, but God is still God. He called you to do the work that you are doing, and He will not abandon you. Sometimes the devil wants us to feel like we are wasting our time in the work that we do. We need to have the confidence that comes from knowing that God is with us. When opposition rises and fear creeps in, it can be natural to park our call to be consecrated and focussed, and respond 'in the flesh', but in those moments we need to press deeper into consecration, not park it.

Every time you touch someone, God touches them, so is that a consecrated touch? Every time you love someone, God loves them, so is that love pure and holy and gentle? Every time you welcome a stranger, you are welcoming God. And as you do it, God is not just watching, He is working through you to transform both you and the person you are serving. But in the living, the doing and the being, God is also transforming you.

You know God is calling you to move on to something new when there is a persistent, confirmed and continual yearning for something new. It is confirmed by those around you and by Scripture and a growing sense of direction in your heart. And the best space to be in to hear the voice of God is a consecrated space. An open soul within leads to an attentive ear for the voice of God. If an attack has come out of the blue, and you are taken unawares by the criticism and the 'heat' or flames of opposition, then chances are you need to grit your teeth, keep your determination and continue to serve God, and double down on loving God with all your heart.

Sometimes you need to show your own grit and determination, but you need the reminder that God gives offers you – HE IS WITH YOU – always has been and He is not going anywhere.

For further thought ———

What things can you do to dig into a consecrated life? Where are the challenges coming thick and fast? How can you remind yourself and those around you that God is still with you and that obedience and faithfulness matter most when they are hardest to maintain? Why not take some time to sit down and remind yourself and one another of God's goodness to you individually and together.

Fri, 20 Sept

DAY 12

CONSECRAT:ON'S RELEASE

*When it empties into the sea, the water becomes fresh,
Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows.
There will be large numbers of fish because this water flows
there and makes the salt water fresh, so where the water
flows, everything will live.*

Ezekiel 47:8-9

We must never forget the power of transformation that God chooses to give to the Church and to those who follow Him.

God's Holy Spirit at work in us brings us into deeper consecration and enables us to be channels of fresh water in stagnant pools. Our lives can become drinking water to the thirsty. As we live out the commandments and the call to be people who love God with all our hearts and love other people extravagantly and wholeheartedly, transformation takes place – and beauty is re-discovered. And all this flows from lives that are consecrated to God and His purposes. Our consecration creates conduits of hope into a fractured and broken world.

Holiness may not be infectious, but the blessing that flows from consecrated lives into the world, bringing the aroma of Christ and a message of freedom is incredible. No wonder, then, that the accuser wants to cut us off from consecration. If he can stop us seeing the power in holiness, then he can stop the river of God flowing into the world.

As pastors and leaders in Elim, we can be conduits of the River of life to our churches and our communities. We never become the source, but we can become drainpipes of blessing! The power of millions of acts of consecrated kindness, compassion and mercy is incalculable. We are this river when we challenge exclusion and confront injustice. We are this river when we speak out for those who cannot speak out for themselves. And we are this river when we speak of the wonderful, transforming grace of God exhibited through Christ. But in everything and at every moment, we must be rooted in consecration and sanctification. The Holy Spirit does not flow through us because we are holy, but the Spirit flowing through us makes us holy! Our hands and lives may be the ones that God uses to bless someone else.

The transformation of the world is taking place one life at a time through the power of **both** Christian compassion and the telling of the Christian story of hope, victory and transformation. As we proclaim the Gospel, and join in the mission of God, we are simultaneously called to let the Gospel have its way in us. What flows to us, must flow through us. We need **both** if we are to be the river of life. Consecration is not an optional extra for us as leaders, it is a fundamental part of God's call on our lives.

For further thought —————

Take a little time today and think of the wonderful ways in which God has transformed others or situations through your words and your works. Thank Him for doing it! At the same time, ask Him to remove any obstacles or boulders to the flowing water of God through you. Ask Him to use the power of the Water of Life to clear away sin and shame and disobedience from your life so that the Water of Life might flow through you to your colleagues, your family, your church and your communities, and ultimately to the world.

Sat, 21 Sept

DAY 13

CONSECRAT:ON

AND CONSEQUENCE

Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to His temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,' says the Lord Almighty.

Malachi 3:1

I remember a very wise old Christian woman telling me that God had a thousand ways of answering every prayer – and 999 of them were ways that we had never even thought of!

I don't know about you, but I have a terrible tendency to ask God to meet a particular need, and then tell him how to meet it! I am continually amazed at the way He meets the needs of the ministry to which He has called me. An unexpected provision by a gift for the church's ministry, a letter from a friend telling me they have been praying for me and I should keep going. I often get letters, email or calls from people who have heard me say something, and their encouragement is at exactly the moment I need to be encouraged. I could not plan their support arriving at a better time.

The words used in Malachi 3 literally mean that the Lord whom we are seeking will not just suddenly, but unexpectedly visit His temple. And we know from the New Testament that we are each a temple of God and together in local congregations we are temples. However, temples are also expected to be purified, holy places, set apart for the Lord's use. That applies to our lives and our congregations too. There is a link between our consecration and encounter that we should not miss, but nor should we misunderstand it. We do not need to be holy to have an encounter with God, but encounters with God draw us into deeper and deeper consecration as we allow them to do their full work in us. Many of us want encounters with God, but we may not want to be purified or sanctified by them, yet the reality is that encounters with the Holy Spirit are supposed to leave a mark of holiness in us. Are you growing holiness, or are you stuck? If the Lord visits you, what will be the lasting impact of such an encounter? Surely a growth in holiness is at least part of it.

I recently heard Chris Cartwright say that God's suddenly always comes well prepared. What a wonderful thought. Let me probe it a little by asking you a question – how prepared are we for the suddenly of God? Are we willing to be led into deeper holiness, more liberating obedience and further sanctification? It is the Lord whom we are seeking that will come and He comes as a purifying fire. Often, we expect Him to come, and we forget to do the seeking part. He still comes though – but that is more to do with His wonderful and extravagant grace than our faithfulness. And when He encounters us, He leads us into sanctification because it is in being sanctified that we experience the increasing freedom of the Holy Spirit.

WE REALLY CANNOT DO ANYTHING THAT WILL LAST WITHOUT GOD – BUT WITH HIM, ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE.

For further thought ———

What are the key areas where you need to see a breakthrough from God? Why not just tell Him and leave it up to Him to provide the best answer. Thank Him that the answer is on its way – then expect the unexpected! But are you also ready to be purified and sanctified when He meets you?

Sun, 22 Sept

DAY 14

CONSECRAT:ON

AND LIFE

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

Isaiah 55:1

There should be no hunger in the world.

There is enough to share, and enough to sustain every person on this planet. The very fact that millions of people in the world live on less than a dollar a day is indicative of the depth and the spread of sin. So often we think that we just need to be a social service. But the reason people are hungry, naked and thirsty is greed. The reason people in the UK still live beneath the poverty line is we do not re-distribute what we have, we choose to keep rather than share, and we choose to remain silent rather than challenge. Yet the invitation of God is that all might come and eat! All those who are thirsty are invited to come and drink.

There are personal consequences of wrong behaviour and there are collective consequences of sin. Both need to be challenged. In our action and our commitments, we fight injustice and sin, individually, in our communities and in our nation and the world. But we also challenge and wrestle with dark spiritual forces. The United Kingdom and the nations of the world will not be changed just by our action. We are a people who believe that God is still involved in the world, and we both invite people to come and eat and drink whilst at the same time wrestling with God and confronting the spiritual forces in our nation and in our world. We know there is enough. We know God will change the world through us. But we also confront the wrong in the world, the injustice and the spiritual forces that want to steal, kill and destroy.

Yet the presence of sin in the world is only because there is sin in people, and in us. What a travesty it would be to offer hope to the world without having experienced it ourselves? How sad it would be to see the churches we minister to and the communities that we are part of transformed by the Holy Spirit yet not to experience that transformation ourselves? A sin-soaked world needs a Spirit-filled Church! And how catastrophic would it be to see Elim seeking a new season of power, renewal and anointing if we are not, as Elim's leaders, first willing to get on our knees and cry out to God for His grace at work in us? As Elim's leaders, we are called to come and drink at the well of God ourselves. It seems to me that the stipulations of Isaiah's invitation are very simple. The thirsty can come and drink. The penniless can come and eat. Those who know their need are warmly invited and lovingly satisfied. Our Movement is full of people who know their need – but we, as leaders, must also know ours. We need God's sanctifying, life giving power in our lives. We need His grace to visit us afresh and renew us.

Consecration is too often portrayed as a hard, joyless, legalistic command. Nothing could be further from the truth. God's call to consecration is a command to experience joy, abundance, freedom, life and satisfaction in life, in ministry and in community. The accuser has duped us. He has convinced many that consecration is a pathway to drudgery and obligation, so they have discarded it. But the call to sanctification is a call to liberty and life! The only way to enjoy the fulness of God is to throw ourselves on the mercy of God and lay our lives at His feet.

For further thought ———

Have you allowed yourself to believe that consecration is drudgery? How can you recapture the beautiful picture of a consecrated life being a liberated life? Are there areas of your ministry and life that have become dry and joyless? Take some time to allow God the Holy Spirit to draw you deeper into Christ so that the life of Christ may fill you and flow through you.

Mon, 23 Sept

DAY 15

THE POWER OF A CONSECRATED LIFE

How can I describe the Kingdom of God? It is like a tiny mustard seed. Though this is one of the smallest seeds, it grows to become one of the largest plants, with long branches where birds can come and find shelter.

Mark 4:30-33 (The New Living Translation)

The Kingdom of God has broken in upon us, and nothing can ever be the same again!

Jesus inaugurated it on Resurrection Sunday and gave us, His followers, the task of living as Kingdom people. He also promised that He would finally consummate the Kingdom when He returns. But we would be mistaken if we thought that the Kingdom is established through grand gestures and very public large-scale protests. Quite the opposite is true. God's Kingdom comes through the small '*mustard seed*' actions of consecrated lives. Every day, ordinary decisions of obedience, faithfulness, compassion, grace, love and truth are the things from which God grows the beauty of His world around us through our witness and our worship. We plant seeds for the Kingdom when we walk in humble obedience and faithfulness and choose to serve the broken, feed the hungry, challenge unjust systems, speak out on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves, and tell the truth – to ourselves, to others, to individuals, to our communities and our culture.

Sometimes we think the smallness of the things that we do will mean that they are insignificant. But we must never underestimate the power of a consecrated life. If we want to see Christ-like teachers, doctors or factory workers released in our churches and communities then surely, we must seek to be Christ-like, consecrated pastors, elders, deacons and leaders? How can a Christian project working with the homeless or excluded young people really bring God's Kingdom without consecration? And how can they be consecrated if they do not also see their local church and its leaders living in consecration?

Consecration flows from a deep conviction of the **TRUTH** of who God is and what He does when we live out of the Kingdom being with us here and now and the freedom and joy that it brings. Consecration, together with worship, ministry, fellowship and discipleship is a declaration of defiant trust in the life-giving power of God's holiness and shalom. We do not just plant a seed of kindness, we plant the potential for a revolution in thinking, life and practise when we live consecrated lives. Because with the seed of our acts of obedience, we also plant the love and grace of God. He grows that act of kindness and that word of truth into something that will utterly transform the situation into which it has been planted. And the soil of such change begins in each of us.

SO, KEEP PLANTING!

For further thought ———

Are there ways in which you have thought that your personal consecration is inconsequential when it comes to making a lasting difference in the lives of others? Take some time to ask God to help you to see the eternal significance of your obedience and the posture of your own soul.

Tue, 24 Sept

DAY 16

CONSECRAT:ON AND SUBMISSION

'The Son of Man is going to be betrayed. He will be killed, but three days later He will rise from the dead.' But they didn't understand what He was saying, and they were afraid to ask Him what He meant.

Mark 9:31-32 (The New Living Translation)

The Church might be promised God's victory, but that does not mean that we will not face trials and challenges and pain.

So many Christians think that Christian victory means the absence of struggle or opposition. That is just not the case. Instead, the promise of victory gives us the strength to face **ANYTHING**, to endure **ALL THINGS** and to conquer **EVERYTHING** because we know that the victory that we have is the victory that is assured us by God. The key to keeping this reality at the centre of our lives and ministries is the daily laying down of our own agendas to pick up and pursue God's agenda – and that begins with consecration and with a laser-like focus on intentionality to live God's way and to engage in ministry as God intends it.

Betrayal, disappointment, misunderstanding and attack were all part of the package for Christ. He endured these things because He knew that His father was with Him and because He was living in humble obedience and dependence upon God. His circumstances surrounded Him, but His identity and relationship with God grounded Him. That is why the things He faced did not change His view of God the Father. The same is true for us. Whatever we might face, it does not change the fact that God is with us, and that He has promised never to leave us. If we are to measure the success and effectiveness of what we do with our lives or in our communities simply based on the accolades and applause of people, then we are using a very limited and a very limiting yardstick.

Instead, remember that God's purposes are being worked out through what you say and what you do and that the fundamental purpose of God in us is to fashion Christ-likeness in us. We allow the work of consecration to mould us as we submit first to God, His will and His way in the power of the Holy Spirit. When we kneel before Him, we can stand in the face of any trial. When we allow God's call to be loudest, we can turn the volume down on the voices that will inevitably try to draw us away from God's call. When we live in consecrated connection to the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are liberated from the evils and the dangers of comparison, envy and one-up-manship.

The wonderful promise of God is that no matter what opposition you are facing in the work that you are doing right now, God is with you and as surely as Jesus was raised from the dead, your work is resurrection work in a world of brokenness and need. The pathway to confident ministry is one that involves a bended knee and a submitted spirit.

For further thought ———

What are the ways in which you are suffering and enduring right now in order to see God's resurrection power brought into people's lives through your own life and ministry? Take some time today to silently remember and be strengthened by the fact that God is with you. Thank Him for that in faith. Commit your ways to God, asking Him to enable you to live a purer, holy life for God's glory and for your well-being.

Wed, 25 Sept

DAY 17

GOING DEEPER IN CONSECRAT:ON

Now go out where it is deeper and let down your nets, and you will catch many fish.

Luke 5:4 (The New Living Translation)

Sometimes it is easy to stay in the shallows of our comfortableness.

We have got used to the things around us, we are doing a good job, and we are given reassurance and strength by doing what we know. The only problem is that if we only ever do what we have always done, we will only ever get what we have always had. What is true for our actions can be true for our relationship with God. We can allow the spiritual disciplines to become chores rather than delights. Slowly, we move away from fasting, daily prayer, personal worship, confession, accountability and the daily digesting of God's Word for our own souls. Before long, we are running on empty, or running on fumes. Others may not see it immediately, but deep down in our souls, we have lost our way, and we are afraid to ask for help.

Sometimes God asks us to push out into 'deeper water'. That deeper water might be a new area of service and engagement with our communities, it might be increasing the breadth of the ministry that we already provide, or it might be working with a people group that we have hitherto had little to do with. Equally, it might be an inner journey, a personal pilgrimage toward greater holiness and deeper contentment through a re-consecrated life. To go further outwardly, we must go deeper personally. There is no short-cut to this. Pushing out into deeper water might mean giving more, opening our home more, loving our neighbour more, or stepping back to hear God more clearly. It might mean doing less, getting help, confessing our sin to a friend or a mentor, getting some counselling. It might mean diarising our devotion, putting space in our diary for God and us without an agenda. It might mean sitting with the Saviour, kneeling at the Cross, and remembering the mercy that has been shown us. It will always mean putting things right.

Whatever '*boat*' we find ourselves in, and whatever '*pushing out into deep water*' means to us, we are also asked to cast out nets. And when we do, there will be a catch of fish – transformed lives and communities changed by the grace and presence of God. Ministry is never more important than maintaining a healthy relationship with God. God will never ask us to sacrifice our families and marriages on the altar of ministry. If we cast out unconsecrated nets, we will be deeply dissatisfied. More outward success without inward renewal is a recipe for increased anxiety, frustration and dissatisfaction. It might be easy to stay in the shallows – but it is nowhere near as satisfying or purposeful.

CONSECRATION IS THE PATHWAY TO FULFILMENT, BECAUSE IT IS THE PATHWAY TO THE RHYTHM AND THE PURPOSES OF GOD FIRST IN US, THEN THROUGH US.

For further thought ———

What areas of the work or ministry you are involved in have become stale? Might that be because your relationship with God has become too functional or because you have focussed too much on 'doing' ministry and not enough on allowing God to minister to you? Are there areas where you know that God is calling you to deepen your walk with Him, to try something new, enter new territory or reach out in a way that you have not done before. When was the last time you had a retreat day, or a period of fasting? How is your daily walk with God? The most important question of all – how is your soul? What changes will you make to your rhythm in order to be in a better posture with the Holy Spirit? What help do you need to get there and who will you ask? There is no time like the present.

Thu, 26 Sept

DAY 18

CONSECRAT:ON AND CONFLICT

I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting.

Acts 26:15 (The New Living Translation)

When Paul was converted from his legalism and persecution of followers of Christ, he was confronted with a hard and bitter truth.

When Paul attacked Christ's followers, Jesus saw it as an attack on Himself. The same is true today. When followers of Christ are persecuted, attacked, marginalised, ridiculed, sidelined or discriminated against, God views it as if He Himself is being persecuted, attacked, marginalised, ridiculed, sidelined and discriminated against. Part of the journey of consecration is learning how to deal with criticisms, attacks and being maligned.

We need to be careful to remember that when people criticise us for doing what is right, it is not us they are criticising, it is God Himself. We also need to be thankful that we live in a society where Christian witness and ministry, Christian social action and Christian engagement in our communities is possible. There are plenty of countries around the world where Christians find it almost impossible to be clear about their faith and their allegiance to Christ in what they do.

Perhaps we also need to remember that in the same way as Jesus saw what Paul was doing to those who loved and followed Jesus, He sees what happens to us. Ultimately, He is with us and even those who are critical of what we do and why we do it can be changed by God's grace and power. However, one of the things that is changed in us by unfair criticism is that it can drive us into defensiveness or into dependence. When we are living and ministering in our own strength, we take things very personally and can become very combative, but when we consecrate our hearts and put our arms down, we can become more open and humbler. An unconsecrated heart will leap to self-defence and self-reliance. A consecrated heart will lean into God's strength and grace. Our reactions can reveal our soul's health. When we are consumed by what others think, it is because we have begun to lose sight of what God thinks – and that happens when we forget the importance of consecration.

WE NEED TO REMEMBER THAT.

For further thought ———

Think of ways in which your ministry or character has been ridiculed. How have you responded? You might be right in the middle of some hard stuff and your reactions might be displaying a need for you to be re-established in a consecrated intentionality with God. Your soul may be bruised, and you may need to take a moment to pray for those who have made your life so difficult whilst acknowledging that their actions and your re-actions have been used by God to reveal a need for greater holiness, intimacy and vulnerability in your own heart. Ask God to use the challenges you have faced or are facing to purify you rather than to harden you. As you do, pray for countries around the world where being a Christian is either outlawed or puts believers in danger. Who else do you know that might need encouragement today? Could you offer to spend time with a colleague on a retreat day, or in a personal time of worship, perhaps creating space to minister to one another?

Fri, 27 Sept

DAY 19

CONSECRATION

COMMUNITY & CALLING

As for us, we always thank God for you, dear brothers and sisters loved by the Lord. We are thankful that God chose you to be among the first to experience salvation, a salvation that came through the Spirit who makes you holy and by your belief in the truth. He called you to salvation when we told you the Good News: now you can share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 (The New Living Translation)

It is a deep joy and a privilege to be called to church ministry!

Every day we get to hear the stories of people whose love of God and commitment to other people is transforming communities. It is deeply humbling to think that, somehow, we are part of God's great Family – the Church, which is called to be united by our common worship and obedience of God and our shared commitment to serve those around us. The Church is also called to be a consecrated community, a Holy Spirit band of obedient ragamuffins who want to see the Kingdom of God come *'on earth as in heaven'*.

We are held together by God's love for us, and His calling of consecration and obedience upon our lives. We do not do what we do for money, prestige or power. We serve others and love them because we ourselves have been served and loved by God. His commitment to us, and His gift of salvation – healing, help and wholeness – has so transformed our lives that our response is to offer other people this same love, this same healing, this same help and this same wholeness. But before we offer others this remarkable life of hope and possibility, we must be willing to admit our own failings, failures and need of God's grace. Consecration is the pathway to purpose.

We are changed by the power of God's Spirit and by the power of God's truth. Others are too. And we do what we do because God has called us to do it. And how did He call us? Each of us have a different story to tell, but His truth was revealed to us through someone else. Note that Paul says here that the people in Thessalonica were called to salvation when he **(Paul)** told them the Good News. And what is the Good News? That God's Kingdom has come, and all can now share in the glory of God if we are willing to bow before the King and respond to His call. In all our ministering, we must never lose sight of our need of grace ourselves.

A CONSECRATED LIFE IS A THANKFUL LIFE ROOTED IN REMEMBERING THE GRACE OF GOD TOWARD US.

For further thought ———

Are there ways in which you need to remember the wonderful way in which God has worked in your life? Remember that we cannot offer other people what we have not somehow discovered to be true ourselves. Take time today to remember exactly what God has done for you and your community and allow that to be an encouragement for you as you think about how you serve others. Don't allow yourself to forget the grace of God. Ask God to help you to live in it daily and to commit to it constantly.

Sat, 28 Sept

DAY 20

CONSECRATION AND COMPLETION

So, on October 2nd the wall was finally finished – just fifty-two days after we had begun. When our enemies and the surrounding nations heard about it, they were frightened and humiliated. They realised that this work had been done with the help of our God.

Nehemiah 6:15-16 (The New Living Translation)

There is nothing like getting a job done!

Nehemiah must have been delighted to finish the wall of Jerusalem. And those who said it could never be done must have been disgruntled to see the job finished. Often, we are tempted to give up halfway through what we are doing. Nowhere is that truer than in our own pathways to purity and our own commitment to the ongoing sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps we listen to the voices of the critics and the sceptics too much, or maybe we allow ourselves to rely on our own power more than we should, maybe old habits and behaviours dominate our mindsets, and we think that we will never be free of the struggle with sinful behaviour. Maybe we get bogged down in the detail of our work and we forget the bigger picture and in the stress of ministry we allow old bad habits to resurface. Maybe we find ourselves wondering why we ever entered ministry in the first place. But God will help us to finish what He called us to start – He has promised us that.

In the work that many of us do, **'completion'** is something that we will never enjoy in the fullest sense of the word. We don't measure what we do in terms of buildings and bricks and dates. Instead, we measure in terms of lives transformed, and people becoming awake again to hope and to restored hearts and purposes and self-images and potentials. These are all incredibly hard things to measure – and we may not ever fully know whether they are achieved – but God's promise to finish what He starts through us is in no way less real. And what He has promised to do through us in the lives of others, He also promises to do in us. Don't allow the frustrations, disappointments, or discouragements at the lack of change in your own life to convince you to give up on the pursuit of holiness. Instead, allow yourself to admit your own weaknesses and invite God's grace and the power of His Spirit to continue to draw you into deeper sanctification and faithfulness, because as you do that, you are also drawn into greater freedom, hope and resilience.

SO BE ENCOURAGED!

You may not see all the results – but God will bring to completion the work He called you to do.

For further thought ———

Are there situations that you have given up on? Are there habits and attitudes that you know God needs to break in your life and ministry? Are there personal disciplines or commitments that you have walked away from, or areas of your life and ministry that you have left unfinished or unattended? Maybe for all the right reasons you have made some wrong decisions. Why not ask God to help you to finish the work...

Sun, 29 Sept

DAY 21

CONSECRAT:ON AND PERSEVERANCE

Finally, the seventh time, his servant told him, ‘I saw a little cloud, the size of a hand rising from the sea.’ Then Elijah shouted, “Hurry to Ahab and tell him, ‘Climb into your chariot and go back home. If you don’t hurry up, the rain will stop you!’”

1 Kings 18:44 (The New Living Translation)

Elijah knew God would send rain! But he prayed for it nonetheless.

And his servant could not see the evidence that the answer to prayer was on the way. But after looking six times, Elijah sent him to look a seventh – and the servant could see a tiny cloud in the distance. But that was enough for Elijah – he knew the rain was on its way. He was so confident that God was answering his prayer that he sent a message on to King Ahab to tell him to get ready for the rain.

I wonder what you have been seeking God for in your own life. So often those of us who are called to pastoral ministry or church leadership forget that the only change that lasts in our communities is the change that springs from prayer and from God's holy power at work in us and through us. We can work as hard as we like, but if we do not ask God to intervene, all our work will only have limited effect, in both our own lives and in our ministries. One of the greatest heartbreaks I can think of is a fruitful ministry and a barren life. Of course, such a thing is not possible because what looks like a fruitful ministry will not last if it is not rooted in consecration. You may long for greater change and deeper relationship with God in your own life – but don't be driven by a crisis spirituality. Learn to see the answers of the Holy Spirit in your life at the same time as you are seeking more of the power that He has given you to be released in you and through you.

It is good to get into the habit of looking for the signs of answered prayer in your own soul. Don't just look for a transformed community around you with crime rates falling, families being re-united, hope being re-born. Learn also to look for a greater hunger in your own soul for God, a deeper love for God and His Word, a renewed and growing openness to the Holy Spirit, a willingness to step into new territory, a new anointing in prayer, a fresh victory in your personal habits, new pathways of purity and new victories in prayer and obedience. These might be small things to others, but to those of us who are determined to win the battle for our communities and our churches on our knees, these are the clouds the size of a man's hand. And when we see them, we feel faith rising in our hearts – because God is at work in us as well as through us, and when God is at work all things are possible!

For further thought _____

What have you been asking God to do in your own life and ministry? Where can you see evidence of growing obedience and deeper consecration? Can you see the cloud the size of the man's hand in your own life as well as in your work and in our community? Then rejoice and let faith rise in your heart for your own spiritual health, your church, your ministry community. God can and will do it!

