

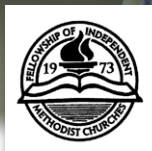


# The Alert

2023 - Oct

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*Be Filled with the Spirit (16)*

Fellowship of Independent  
Methodist Churches



## Statement of Faith

The Independent Methodists are a body of Christians who evidence their genuine experience of God's saving grace by practical godliness and by earnestly seeking to conform to the whole will of God as revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

They do not believe that God or the Bible has changed to accommodate the fashionable tendencies of the age and solemnly protest against any introduction of worldliness into the Church.

The cost of discipleship is the same as it was in the days of the Apostles, therefore if any will be His disciple, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow Christ. It is necessary to come out from the world and be separate, renouncing all vain pomp and glory, adorning oneself with modest attire. In doctrine we are Methodist. We believe in the doctrine of the Trinity, a general atonement, the necessity and possibility of the New Birth for all men, the witness of the Spirit, the ministry of divine healing, future rewards and punishment, the Second Coming of Christ and that it is the privilege of every believer to be sanctified wholly and to be preserved blameless unto the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. All our members are expected to enjoy this blessing or seek diligently until they obtain it.

We are also opposed to the present false Ecumenical Movement and to the World Council of Churches and we will not share in any of their activities. We are glad to have fellowship with born again members of other denominations.

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## From the Editor...



By the time summer has ended the beautiful petals of the poppy are gone. The flower head dries out, the pores open and the seeds disperse in the wind like pepper shaken from a pepper pot.

Seed-propagation is a natural element of the poppy's divine design. It was built to do it and it cannot do otherwise!

Telling others about Jesus will be a natural outcome of knowing him as Saviour. If Christ means everything to us we will speak of him freely in our everyday conversation. If we have spent time communing with him in the morning he will not be far from our thoughts when we talk with the friends we love.

*"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us." 2 Cor. 4:7*

We have been divinely designed to communicate...to tell others, whether through conversation, song or in writing, that true life and hope can only be found in Jesus Christ.

*"The seed is the word of God.."*  
*Luke 8:11.* May we share it naturally with someone else today.

Cover photo: Decaying poppy heads

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### OUTREACH

**Aghadowey** Co. Donegal-Sun.@7pm  
Mr Paul Mc Manus (07545486331)

**Fintona** Kiln Street-Sun. @ 7.30 pm  
Pastor Paul Johnston (07788156074)  
Care of Rev. P. Johnston (02882 244663)

# From the Churches...



## Church Camp in July

A writer once described time as being like a circus; always packing up and moving on. Likewise, it often surprises me how quickly camp comes around! On the 3rd-7th July, fifty-two young people joined us for our youth camp at the Ganaway Activity Centre, Millisle. We had reasonably good weather which in turn added to our enjoyment of the many activities on and off site, including Let's Go Hydro, Clip N Climb, fun and bonfires on the beach and so much more.

Throughout the week we were treated to delicious foods by our cooks, Ann Johnston, Hazel Hadnett, and Ruth Aiken, as well as many tasty traybakes made by those in our Fellowship.

The morning teaching was focused on knowing and living out our identity in Christ, while the evening teaching was from the book of Daniel, entitled "*Courage over Compromise*". We give thanks to God for touching and encouraging the lives of our young people. Can I thank James and Katie Maxwell, Debbie Brown, Victoria Kerr, Anna Campbell, Alistair Aiken and Don Boyd, for their dedicated help during the week.

My wife Johanna and I have thoroughly enjoyed leading the youth camp for some years but now feel the time is right to hand over the leadership to another. We want to thank you for all your prayers and support. Please pray that God will continue to bless this vital work among our youth.



Pastor S. Patterson

## *My Memories of Camp*

There were meetings each morning which covered topics about identity and how to deal with these modern challenges of the 21st century, and in the evenings we had a study on Daniel. There were also lots of activities to challenge our bravery such as rock climbing in Dundonald, Let's Go Hydro Waterpark, and games at the camp centre in Millisle

such as tournament competitions and bucket-ball on the beach. In the centre we had a variety of activities available to us including table tennis, football and basketball.

The favourable weather allowed campfires on the beach, and in the forest at night, with singing while gathered around. The food was also really good; we were never hungry and were provided daily with lots of delicious meals. There were also morning and night-time quiet times with a leader, and also devotions in the assembly room at night. This was a good encouragement in deepening our personal relationships with God and helping us develop good habits when we came back home. Camp is a great opportunity to meet like-minded young Christians and to strengthen existing friendships.

Abbey Johnston, Enniskillen



**Fellowship Youth Weekend**  
**Dates 16th - 18th February 2024**  
Portadown Faith Mission Centre, led by Pastor Samuel Patterson

## *Retirement in Limavady*

On Friday 1st September 2023, a large crowd gathered in Limavady Independent Methodist Church for a special service to mark the retirement of the Rev. Henry and Mrs Caskey from full-time pastorate.

Ministry in song by Mr Nigel Davison and the congregational hymns, reflected the theme of gratitude to God for his faithfulness. Mr Harold Alcorn spoke on behalf of the Limavady congregation. He gave a brief history of the church since its inception in 1983, reminding the congregation that when Rev. Caskey was called to become the pastor, the church was meeting in a temporary prefab hall, but was intending to build a new church.



(Photography: Mr David Larmour)

He reflected on some of the meetings and missions; times of blessing, when God's presence was very real, and souls were saved. He referred to Rev. Caskey's wisdom in the oversight of the building of the new church. He finished by making a presentation to the Rev. and Mrs Caskey acknowledging their labour in the church. Miss Hannah Maxwell presented a beautiful bouquet to Mrs Caskey on behalf of the ladies and children of the congregation.

Rev. Caskey responded by thanking the congregation for the gifts. He thanked God for saving Colleen and himself in 1984, calling them into Bible College in 1988, and then into evangelism in the Garvagh and Kilrea area. It was during this time he received the invitation to become minister of the Limavady Church which God confirmed through the words of Haggai 1:8: *"Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD."* Rev. Caskey began his ministry 4th September 1992

During his response he thanked everyone for their attendance at the meeting, mentioning the ministers and friends from other Independent Methodist Congregations. He thanked the congregation for their support throughout his thirty-one years of ministry, and especially the team of praying people who were engaged in its various ministries. He also expressed gratitude for the unwavering support of his wife Colleen, son Dean and daughter Denise.

Rev. Dean Caskey preached God's Word through Nehemiah Chapter 8. He looked at the ministry of Nehemiah and how he had completed the work God had called him to do and drew parallels with his father's ministry in Limavady.

The meeting concluded with a hymn of confidence for the future, "*All the Way my Saviour Leads me.*" Everyone had the opportunity of fellowship and a beautiful supper at the close of the meeting. May the Lord grant Rev. and Mrs Caskey a long and healthy retirement.

Pastor Paul Johnston



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## ***Ordination in Limavady***

It was a very memorable occasion for the Limavady church on Friday 15th September as they welcomed and ordained their new minister, Rev. Scott McFarland. The service was led by Rev. Raymond Moore, who welcomed everyone, before the sizeable congregation joined heartily in the singing of the opening hymn, *Praise My Soul the King of Heaven*. Rev. Nathan Purdy then opened in prayer, followed by ministry in song from Mr Peter Mander. Mr Harold Alcorn made some remarks on behalf of the local church, before Rev. Moore brought greetings from the Fellowship of Independent Methodist Churches. The new minister then shared a word of

testimony, describing his conversion to Christ, his call to the Lord's work, and his call to the work in Limavady in particular. It was remarkable to hear how the Lord called his young servant so clearly through Deuteronomy 2:3: "*Ye have compassed this mountain long enough: turn you northward,*" - so appropriate in light of the fact that the Bloomfield church is situated on a hill!

After the singing of the second hymn, the ordination ceremony took place, with Rev. Moore asking the prescribed questions. Rev. Robert Maxwell then led in the ordination prayer, after which Rev. McFarland received the right hand of fellowship.

A third hymn was sung, before Mr Mander again ministered in song. Rev. Philip Johnston, minister of Rev. McFarland's home church in Omagh, then brought a very encouraging message from God's word, based on the life of the prophet Jeremiah after which the congregation stood to sing Frank Houghton's great missionary hymn, *Facing a Task Unfinished*. Rev. Samuel Aiken closed the meeting in prayer, and the evening concluded with a lovely supper which was enjoyed by all. We wish Rev. McFarland and the congregation in Limavady God's richest blessing in the days that lie ahead.



(Photography: Mr David Larmour)

Pastor J Campbell

**50 Years! (2024)**

Monday 15th - Friday 19th Jan. 2024 - Co-ordinated Week of Prayer throughout the Churches

Saturday 24th February 2024 - United Day of Prayer via Zoom



# Liddell's Legacy



(Photo: Arthur R. Coester)

*(Editor)*

During an August drive from Pitlochry, through Dunblane, to the Erskine Bridge (Scotland) we pulled in for a short break in the lesser known but picturesque little village of Drymen (pronounced *drimin*). The name immediately sounded familiar to my husband who recalled from his reading that it was the town in which Rev. James Liddell (father of the renowned Scottish athlete and rugby player Eric Liddell) had lived from the age of ten to nineteen.

Unable to find a parking spot in the narrow streets which bustled with summer traffic, we noticed a peaceful, leaf-shaded car park affiliated to a white, painted church, which, upon closer inspection, we discovered to be the very church Liddell's parents had attended!



It only took a few minutes to find the family grave and to see

Eric's name also recorded on the aging stone, even though his actual burial place was in Shandong Province, north-east China, where he died in 1945 of a brain tumour, while interned by the Japanese in Weihsien Camp during World War II.

Following unsought fame, resulting from his unexpected 400 metre gold medal win in the 1924 Paris Olympics, (after being unwilling to compete in the 100m heat because it was on a Sunday), Eric felt called of God to return to China, the land of his birth, to join the missionary work to which his Scottish parents had dedicated their lives.

"I run the first half of the race as fast as I can, and then with God's help, I run the second half even faster", was how Eric described his running technique. Lord Sands, (a fellow competitor), put it differently...



(Photo: The Guardian)

"This young man put his whole career as a runner in the balance, and deemed it as small dust, compared to remaining true to his principles. There are greater issues in life than sport, and the greatest of these is loyalty to the heart laws of the soul. Here is a young man who considered the commandment to rest and worship high above the fading laurel crown, and who conquered."

One of his biographers, David McCasland (in *Eric Liddell, Pure Gold*) later stated that the secret of his life "was not a habit or a routine, but personal fellowship with Almighty God and complete surrender to him."

In his own writing (*The Key to Knowing God*) Eric himself expressed the following:

"One word stands out from all the others as the key to knowing God, to having peace and assurance in your heart; it is obedience. To obey God's will was like food to Jesus, refreshing his mind, body and spirit. *'My meat is to do the will of him that sent me.'* Obedience to God's will is the secret of spiritual knowledge and insight. It is not willingness to know but willingness to **do** (obey) God's will that brings certainty. *'If any man will do (obey) his will he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.'* Obedience is the secret of guidance. Every Christian should live a God-guided life. If you are not guided by God you will be guided by something else. The Christian that doesn't know this sense of guidance in his life is missing something vital.

Take **obedience** with you into your prayer hour, for you will know as much of God, and only as much of God, as you are willing to put into practice."



# From Further Afield...

## Visit to Kiwoko

by Rev. W. Park

Our recent trip to Uganda left us with the impression that it is a land of great gospel opportunity, but with some serious challenges. Helen and I were there to visit our family who are missionaries serving with UFM Worldwide, at Kiwoko Hospital.

### Opportunities

There is a wide open door for the preaching of the gospel. Churches have been planted in many towns and villages. Other agencies such as schools, social care facilities and hospitals have been established by Christians with the purpose of ministering to physical, mental and social needs and sharing Christ's love and message.



Kiwoko Hospital situated in rural Uganda, provides excellent health care to many who could not otherwise access it or afford it. It has training schools for nurses, mid-wives and laboratory technicians. They state, "*Kiwoko is a community hospital which aims to glorify Jesus and impart a definite Christian witness to the area.*"

While there I had the opportunity to speak at the weekly open-air compound devotions. More than 200 gathered for an hour of worship and Bible ministry.

At the conclusion of the service two responded to seek Christ as Saviour. Hospital devotions are conducted Mon - Thurs indoors with attendance of over one hundred staff and students. Small-group ministry is also held and has been used of God in evangelising and disciplining those who are not Christians. Over seventy of the hospital staff are involved in



ministry. To train these and others they have

commenced two monthly seminars: a *Witnessing at Work* seminar, and a preachers' workshop (one of which I had the opportunity to conduct.) Other outreaches include prison outreach, children's ministry, village evangelism and medical missions.



Linda's role at the hospital is obviously medical as a doctor, but she also serves in children's ministry. Stephen's role is as an administrator and he is also

involved in various preaching ministries as well as ward visitation, and organising the small-group ministry and preachers' workshops.

### **Challenges: (1) The Country.**

The country is very much a third world country with much poverty. The World Bank had offered funding to upgrade the infrastructure and economy. When the President introduced strict anti-LGBT laws outlawing homosexuality the World Bank immediately withdrew its funding. We admire President Museveni's resolute response: "*We do not need assistance from the West if that aid is tied to acceptance of homosexuality..*" President Museveni has ruled for 30 years. There are many concerns about the succession to his presidency.

### **(2) The Hospital.**

One of the many challenges facing Kiwoko Hospital is financial resources to pay the staff wages. Recently the government gave a substantial wage increase to nurses. Kiwoko, being a private hospital, receives no funding from the government. Patient fees only cover about 20% of the budget and the rest is dependent on donations and charitable funding. As they cannot match this increase, they have lost some staff and would want to reward their faithful staff. Missionaries such as Stephen and Linda are there as volunteers.

### **(3) Personal.**

Stephen and Linda are still praying for a volunteer to teach the boys in their home schooling. It does not need to be a qualified teacher. Perhaps someone reading this would be willing to answer this call for a short or longer period. They would be part of the team serving God at Kiwoko.

The door of opportunity today is wide open, let us pray that it may remain open and that those labouring in Uganda may be enabled to "*work while it is day.*"

## From the Archives...

### Clay Pots

Elisabeth Elliot

(A Lamp unto my Feet: Month 3:Day 10)



(Pixabay Free Images)

The jungle Indians of Ecuador make clay pots of very simple design with no ornament or glaze. They challenged me to try shaping them as they did, rolling “snakes” of wet clay and then coiling them round and round until they had a perfectly smooth and balanced vessel. It looked rather easy, but I found that it was a highly developed skill, and my attempts to imitate it were laughable. Mine was not a master hand.

The next steps were to build a very hot fire of thorns and brushwood and to bake the pot. It was then ready to use, to carry water from the brook or to cook in. Nobody thought much about the pot itself once it was made. What mattered was what was in it.

We are, Paul said, clay pots (see 2 Corinthians 4:7). The Potter has formed us, shaped us into a useful vessel, put us through the fire of testing, that we might be fit to hold what he gives. We are useful and fit - but we are still *clay pots* - it's what inside that matters. It is a priceless treasure.



(Photo by Bandelier National Monument, via Flickr)

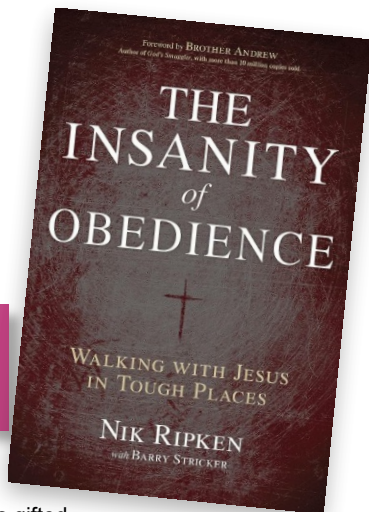
I can think of no clearer analogy of our place in God's service and a no more accurate picture of the *relative* merits of who we are and what we have to offer. We shall always be just *pots*, quite cheap on the market, but what we carry for others is priceless.

Love, Paul said in another passage, “vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.” (1 Corinthians 13:4)

# From the Bookshelf...

By Julie-Anne Maxwell

**“The goal of life with Jesus is not to remain safe, but to sacrifice ourselves for a lost world” – Nik Ripken**



While in Turkey last summer I was gifted a copy of Nik Ripken's 2014 bestseller, *The Insanity of Obedience*. The title grabbed my attention immediately, and the bold claim accompanying it - "You won't be the same once you read this" - was all the motivation I needed to get my teeth into what Ripken had to say about following Christ in some of the world's toughest places.

Ripken's goal is simple: **to challenge followers of Jesus to count the cost in taking the gospel to the nations**; in his words, to equip us to be "wise sheep among the wolves". Through a series of interviews, interwoven with personal accounts of his own decades of experience on the mission field, Ripken guides the reader through the biblical case for choosing to walk with Christ in dangerous places, before exposing the plight of the persecuted church in so many countries across the world today. Drawing from Christ's example as he sent his disciples out into a lost world, Ripken finishes with an urgent plea to join with our persecuted brothers and sisters in boldly proclaiming Christ wherever we are, before outlining some practical tips on how to do so.

In reading Ripken's book I got a lot more than I bargained for. The intimate and often harrowing testimonies of believing brothers and sisters in some of the world's harshest environments for Christ-followers jarred with my cushioned understanding of what it means to suffer for the gospel. Nevertheless, through it all, one overarching theme rang clear: **that of God's power and glory revealed through even the most severe**

**suffering and persecution.** By the time I got halfway through I felt that my own feeble grasp of what it meant to suffer for the Lord Jesus had been turned upside down. By the end, I felt about two inches high.

Ripken's claim is straightforward: that to be a follower of Jesus is to follow him to death, and that Christianity and persecution are not incongruent with one another but rather, as illustrated so often in accounts of the early church, completely inseparable. For Ripken, following the call of God to partner in his work across the globe is the great privilege of every believer, and therefore every single one of us has a part to play.

Echoing Brother Andrew's belief that there are "no closed doors to the gospel", Ripken argues that we are always free to witness for Christ, even if it comes at a high personal cost; our choice is what we do with that freedom.

I cannot recommend this book highly enough, but it comes with a warning - you won't be the same once you read it!



## From Scripture...

# Be Filled with the Spirit

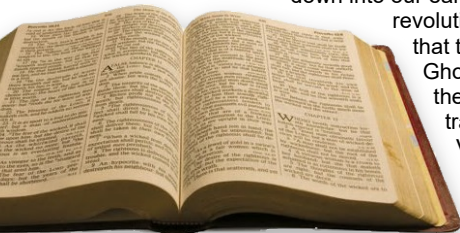
by John Dickson, (Enniskillen)



(Photo: Pixabay)

Just to think about being filled with the Spirit is to think about the most challenging subject any Christian can consider. The three most important facts concerning the Holy Spirit are that he is a person, (not an 'it', thing or influence), he is God, and he dwells within the heart of every believer.

The Lord Jesus said of his own teachings, *"Let these sayings sink down into your ears"*, Luke 9:44, and if we would let these three simple facts sink down into our ears, minds and hearts, they would revolutionise our lives. We should say that the terms Holy Spirit and Holy Ghost are just different translations of the same Greek term. The translators of the King James Version seemed to mainly prefer the term Holy Ghost, we today seem to prefer mainly to say Holy Spirit, but the terms mean exactly the same.



(Photo: Pixabay)

Perhaps the most amazing thing about the Holy Spirit is that he does not impose himself upon us, he does not seek to dominate, and most of the time (perhaps it is a sad indictment of our true spiritual condition) we are quite unaware of his presence. But if it be true that he dwells within our heart, that he is God, and that he is a person - then we should listen for his voice, submit to his will, and ask to be led and taught by him.

### The Temple Filled

Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth, *"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and*



*ye are not your own?*”, 1 Corinthians 6:19. A temple is a place set apart for the worship of God. The temple belongs to God, which is why Paul says, *“ye are not your own”*. You no longer have the right to live as you please; you belong to God and he dwells within you by his Spirit. Paul goes on to say in the following verse, *“For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s”*. We have been redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, shed for the forgiveness of our sins. A price has been paid; we belong to God, body and spirit, therefore we should glorify God in our outward physical life and in our inner spiritual being.

The temple should not contain anything displeasing to God since the Holy Spirit cannot fill what is not clean; he cannot fill what has not been yielded to him. We should therefore trust the blood of Jesus for cleansing from all sin and yield ourselves entirely to God. The Holy Spirit must then fill his temple. It is not a case of us getting the Holy Spirit; it is a matter of him taking possession of what is rightfully his.

### **Praying in The Spirit**

A person filled with the Spirit will be a person of prayer. The place of prayer is where he will grow spiritually, *“But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost”*, Jude 20. He will have a broad, well-informed and consistent prayer life; *“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints”*, Ephesians 6:18.



*(Pixabay Free Images)*

### **Filled With The Word**

A person filled with the Spirit will be a person filled with the word. Peter, filled with the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, preached a message filled with scripture. So too did Stephen, *“a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost”*, (Acts 6:5) in his great defence before the Jewish leaders before they martyred him, as recorded in Acts 7. Peter believed concerning the Old Testament that *“holy men of God spake as they were moved by the*

*Holy Ghost*", 2 Peter 1:21. Scripture was therefore God's Word, not man's. The Saviour's promise in John 14:26 is our guarantee that the New Testament also is the inspired word of God, *"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you"*. A person filled with the Spirit will make the Bible, OT and NT, their guide for life, seeking to know it, believe it, and obey it to the best of their ability.

### **The Fruit of The Spirit**

A person filled with the Spirit will show forth the fruit of the Spirit in their lives, *"love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance"*, Galatians 5:22&23. As someone once said - one fruit, nine flavours! The effect of the Holy Spirit working in their lives will be evident.

Paul helpfully summarises this effect in Ephesians 5:9,

*"For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth"*. It was said of Barnabas, *"For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith"*, Acts 11:24. When the early church needed people to oversee the daily distribution of aid to needy widows they sought *"seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom"*, Acts 6:3. A person filled with the Spirit will be a good person, honest, reliable, trustworthy, of good reputation, and willing to serve their fellow believers as God directs.



### **The Gifts of The Spirit**

A person filled with the Spirit will exercise one or more of the gifts of the Spirit. It is a pity when people say or imply that unless we have a particular gift then we are not filled with the Spirit. That is to focus on a gift rather than on the Giver. The gifts are listed in 1 Corinthians 12 and are given *"to profit withal"*, (v 7), that is, for the benefit of all, for the good of the body of Christ. We do not have the right to choose the gift. It is the Holy Spirit who gives the gift or gifts to each individual believer as he knows best, *"dividing to every man severally as he wills"*, (v 11). Different people

are given different gifts, not for the benefit of an individual, but for the proper functioning of the body of Christ, *“For the body is not one member, but many”* (v 14). The same truth is taught in Romans 12:3-8 and 1 Peter 4:10&11. A person filled with the Spirit will willingly exercise his gift or gifts for the benefit of others and will do it as an act of service to the Lord.

### **Filled With Praise**

A person filled with the Spirit will love to praise God. Music and song seem to be God’s gift to the Church to cheer us on the way to heaven. *“Be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord”*, Ephesians 5:18-19. Spiritual people playing and singing spiritual songs are a rich source of blessing. Music with a message, words that praise God and exalt the Saviour, communicate biblical truth. They concentrate our minds upon God, his goodness in times past, his faithfulness; they cause us to think about our future hope. Faith is strengthened, bonds of fellowship and unity increased, love, praise and thankfulness to God are expressed through such music.



We may sing with others, and if we are not musical or do not have a good voice we may hope that our voice is lost amongst the voices of others. We may sing to others if we have that ability, not for their entertainment but for their spiritual good, as an act of service to the Lord.

Whatever our ability we may sing within ourselves, making melody in our hearts to the Lord. Whatever the case, God loves to hear his people praise him in song. It is a spiritual exercise, something in which the Holy Spirit particularly delights and something in which a person filled with the Spirit will particularly delight, as a means of keeping their heart in tune with God.

# The Academy of Grace

## 16. Pure in Heart (1)

(Deut 29:4, Isa 29:13,  
Luke 18: 9-14, Isa 57:15.)



(Photo: Free Bible Images)

by Rev. Phil Utley

**Matthew 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.**

As Jesus taught the people on that Capernaum hillside, his twelve disciples were sitting at his feet. They could see that Jesus was God the Son because their eyes had seen in him the glory of God the Father.



Around them were the multitudes of ordinary Israelites desiring to see whether Jesus was exactly that. And then, almost certainly standing apart from the crowd, were the Scribes and Pharisees - the Torah teachers. They were not there to cheer Jesus on, but were actively seeking to do him physical harm, and they could not see how Jesus could possibly be God the Son.

Now let us remind ourselves, that Jesus was speaking about a present experience, and not something to be worked towards. So, some had seen Jesus *as God*, some wanted to see *if he was God*, but the Torah teachers could not see it. Their problem was caused by **tradition**, which was known as the **Oral Torah**.

1400 years after the death of Moses, men started passing down traditions and rules invented by rabbis. By the time that Jesus came, the Pharisees had developed a way of life, using these traditions of men, which they believed could change a sinful heart, and give you a pure heart, working from the outside in.

This way of life covered what you ate and drank, how you dressed, who you mixed with, how you prayed and fasted, the observance of Sabbaths, and so on. They had 613 rules on how to appear just and absolved of sin before God.



(Photo by Diana Polekhina on Unsplash)

What the Pharisees believed and taught was the **3 R's**.

- **Ritual** - Man-made religious acts performed to a prescribed order.
- **Rote** - Man-made systematic habitual repetition of learning.
- **Replacement** - Man-made alternatives to what God commanded.

The parable of the Pharisee and the Publican just highlighted the thinking of the Torah teachers. As these two men prayed, the Pharisee thanked God that he was not a sinner, and then paraded all his good works before God, but notice, he hadn't brought a sacrifice to offer to God. To do so would be to openly admit that he was a sinner.



The Publican however had brought a sacrifice as required by God in order to have his sin covered. It says that he smote his breast, but the original text say he kept striking his breast or his heart whilst saying "*God be merciful to me a sinner*". This prayer was usually prayed over a sacrifice for sin. He knew that he was not pure in heart, and so cast himself upon God's mercy, and he received the pardon of his God.

We've looked at how the Pharisees thought you could get a pure heart, but next time we'll look at *how God has made that possible*, (and maybe also learn a bit of Welsh.)

(Photo: Free Bible Images)

## *For Younger Readers...*

You will need to be near a river or a lake to see a **heron**. It's a tall silvery, lanky bird with a long beak and **spindly** legs.

You may spot him slouching quietly along the bank, or standing knee-deep in flowing water, at **dusk** or dawn. Suddenly he will plunge his head under the surface and swallow a poor unsuspecting fish whole!



Country tradition, in Northern Ireland at least, closely linked the heron's appearance with local **weather** predictions. The harsh screech of 'Old Nog' down in the river was regarded as a sure **sign** of coming wet weather, and he was rarely seen or heard before a heat-wave.

If the heron was working his way upstream better weather was on the way, but if he was moving downstream it would be **wet**, or even torrential!

We are all fond of watching changes in nature, such as the colour of the sky, in order to make weather predictions.

But the Bible teaches that Jesus told his disciples to **watch** the **world** for *signs of his return*. Some of these signs include man rebelling against God the Creator, the mistreatment of believers, and an increase in wars, and natural disasters. Are **you** watching for the **return** of the Lord Jesus? The **Bible** tells us what to look for. (Matt. 24)

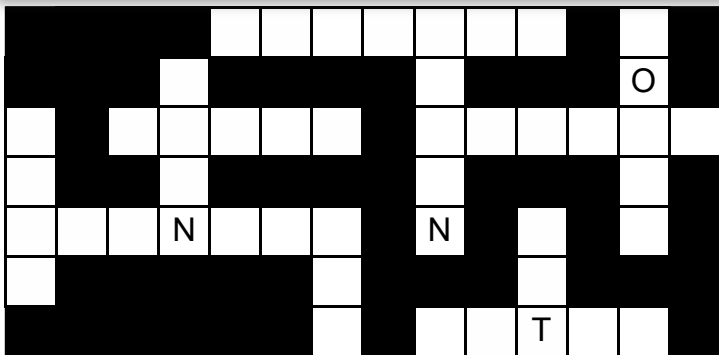
The return of Jesus is a glorious thought, if you love him!

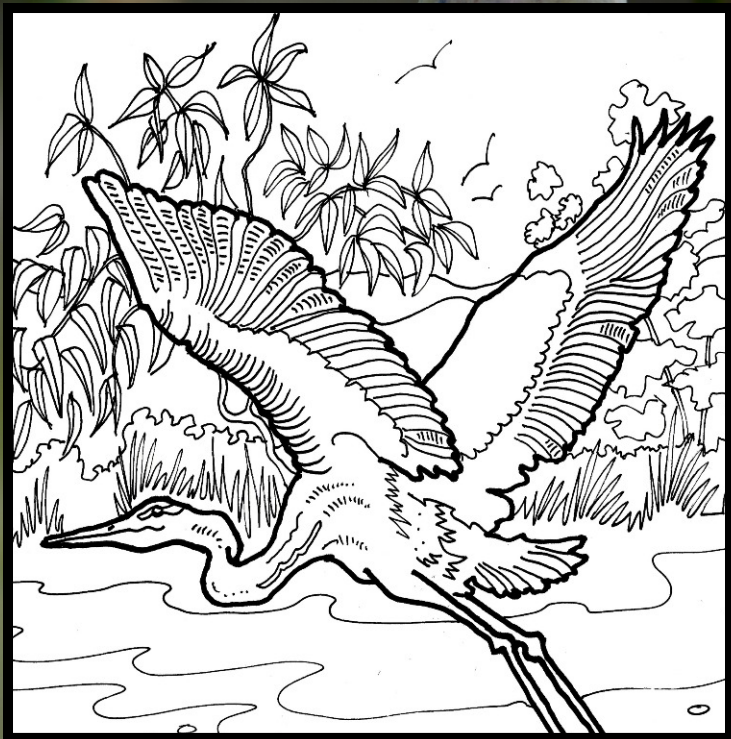
**Matthew 24:42 says**

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*Can you fit the words in bold font into the grid below?*





**The coming of the  
Lord draweth  
nigh James 5:8**