

## Tent or Skyscraper?

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### Call to Worship

Isaiah 55      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..... Give ear and come to me, listen ; listen that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you..... Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near.

### Prayer

Father, I come to you now to be refreshed by the “wine and milk” from your storehouse. Refresh me through your word. Refresh me by the Holy Spirit and refresh me with his fruits. Father, I rejoice in what you have done in me, and what you are going to do in me. Through Jesus Christ my Saviour and Lord.      Amen

Song: MHB 76      “The King of love my Shepherd is”      (Henry Williams Baker)

1. The King of love my Shepherd is, whose goodness faileth never;  
I nothing lack if I am His and He is mine forever.
2. Where streams of living water flow my ransomed soul He leadeth,  
And where the verdant pastures grow with food celestial feedeth.
3. Perverse and foolish oft I strayed; but yet in love He sought me,  
And on His shoulder gently laid, and home rejoicing brought me.
4. In death’s dark vale I fear no ill with Thee, dear Lord, beside me;  
Thy rod and staff my comfort still, Thy Cross before to guide me.
5. Thou spreadst a table in my sight; Thy unction grace bestoweth;  
And O what transport of delight from Thy pure chalice floweth.
6. And so through all the length of days Thy goodness faileth never;  
Good Shepherd may I sing Thy praise within Thy house for ever. Amen

### Prayer of Intercession

Father, I pray for those who face this New Year without much hope because of what they have endured, what they have suffered, what relationships were damaged in the last year. I pray now for those I know who are in this situation, and pray that hope will be restored by the saving grace of Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit and by the everlasting love of the Father.....

Father I pray for those who have encouraged me and others, who have surrounded me with love and prayed for me. I thank you for them. Sustain them, refresh them, lift them up, bless them for their obedient service.....

Father I pray with the Persecuted Church, with those who have suffered for their faith, with those who have endured poverty, homelessness, and bereavement – and perhaps without the prospect that this year will be any different.

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Father I pray that they will live in the hope and security of faith in you. I pray that they will experience the deepest joy that comes from obedience in the face of persecution. And I pray for their witness, so that their love, in the face of hate, will declare the love of God to their world.

These things I pray in the name of Jesus. Amen

### Bible Reading

If you have 10-15 minutes, read the book of Philippians which we will draw on in the message. Here is the introduction, Philippians 1:3-11

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel, from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God.

### Song: "The Power of your Love" (Geoff Bullock)

1. Lord I come to you, let my heart be changed, renewed,  
Flowing from the grace that I've found in you.  
Lord I've come to know the weaknesses I see in me  
Will be stripped away by the power of your love.
2. Hold me close, let your love surround me, bring me near,  
Draw me to your side, and as I wait  
I'll rise up like the eagle, and I will soar with you,  
Your Spirit leads me on in the power of your love.
3. Lord, unveil my eyes, let me see you face to face,  
The knowledge of your love, as you live in me  
Lord renew my mind as your will unfolds in my life  
In living every day in the power of your love
4. Hold me close, let your love surround me, bring me near,  
Draw me to your side, and as I wait  
I'll rise up like the eagle, and I will soar with you,  
Your Spirit leads me on in the power of your love

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### Message: “Tent or Skyscraper?”

Recently at our church we celebrated the baptism of a young lad of 10. Mainly through his parents he is steeped in the Scriptures and it was his desire and decision to be baptised. He wanted to declare his faith and the foundation he had in the saving grace of Jesus. The message that followed contained a quote from Howard Hendricks – “You don’t build a tent on the foundations of a skyscraper”.

That which we celebrate in a baptism is a foundation for our lives that is eternal, indestructible, and not of our own construction. Yes, it is our decision to follow Jesus, to confess the sin which has separated us from the Father, but the entire work of reconciliation is that of Jesus on the cross. So, the foundation, fit for a skyscraper, is laid. And what happens next? We build!

The Bible has a lot of imagery of building. There is the well-known parable of building on the rock and not on the sand. There is the picture in 1 Corinthians 3 of building on the foundation which can be nothing other than Jesus, but what is built can vary. It can be a flimsy “tent” which doesn’t fare well in the fire of judgement, or it can be a “skyscraper” which survives. It is a testimony to the power of Jesus salvation that even if we have built “rubbish” in our lives, we are still saved (1 Cor 3:15).

Another quote, this time from CS Lewis, indicates what choices we should be making about what we build to fulfil God’s plan for each of us, recognising that these choices are not always easy, and in fact may even be painful – “Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first perhaps you can understand what he is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on..... But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is he up to? The explanation is that he is building quite a different house from the one you thought of – throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but he is building a palace. He plans to come and live in it himself!”

So, we are at the threshold of 2023 with perhaps talk of New Year’s Resolutions. I’m not sure if you have a good record with NYRs, but most of us don’t. Perhaps those unwanted kilos remain stubbornly attached to our waistlines! But the worthiest NYR (or for that matter Any Day of the Year Resolution) is to build on what Jesus has done in our lives, maybe recently, or maybe decades ago. Resolve to turn some of those tents into skyscrapers.

The book of Philippians, of which the introduction is above, I reckon could be called a builder’s handbook or manual as it contains advice about what needs to happen, or change, in our lives. In reading through Philippians (don’t forget to do it!), here are a few tips for your (and my) building sites. As you read it through, others may strike you.

- Phil 1:9-11 ..... that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth .....

Paul is talking about is growth in righteousness, that is, our behaviour, our thinking, all aspects of our lives becoming right and pleasing in God’s

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eyes – so much so that God will be delighted with what he sees in us when Jesus comes again.

**How to** When faced with behavioural choices, draw from your growing knowledge and wisdom, and perhaps ask that question, WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?). And remember, the Holy Spirit lives in us to guide, strengthen, and not lead us into temptation (Lord's Prayer).

- Phil 1:27-28 ... **conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel ..... Stand firm ... without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.**

We all suffer fear at times of what may happen if we speak up, tell others of our faith in God, or even speak up on behalf of others. We are afraid of what others may think, afraid that we may not be articulate enough. Paul wrote this in a Roman prison, facing death, as do many of our brothers and sisters in other countries.

**How to** By a step of faith, just do it! And remember the Holy Spirit lives in us. Cling to the promise that “blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness” (Matt 5:10). Rely on others as we “strive together as one” (v27).

- Phil 2:5 **In your relationships with others have the same mindset as Jesus.**

The well-known passage that follows explains the humility of Jesus as he gave up his place next to the Father, made himself nothing, humbled himself by being obedient even to death – for you and me. Self-sacrificing humility does not come easily – our ego, our social standing, our self-image are hard to give up, particularly in relation to some people!

**How to** Don't think highly of yourself. Act towards others as though they are important, don't look to take credit, deliberately do something for someone else. And remember the Holy Spirit lives in you, reminding you that Christ is sufficient for you, and exalts us just as Jesus was exalted for his humility (2:9)

- Phil 4:2 **I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.**

That means restoring relationships in the Body of Christ with those with whom we have fallen out. Unity in the church is crucial for the witness of the saving grace of Jesus. (John 17:21)

**How to** Don't wait, make the first move. Do all you can to live peaceably with each other (Romans 12:18)

- Phil 4:8 **Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.**

All our observable actions take place in our heads and hearts first. Our sinful natures pop up and we sometimes succumb to them.

**How to** In the Garden of Eden God gave Adam and Eve the freedom to choose. We still have it! We can choose to “think about these things” and we can choose not to think about the other stuff. And remember, the Holy Spirit lives in us, strengthening us, making each subsequent decision easier to make as we continue to attain the likeness of Jesus. And praise God for his abundant forgiveness for every time we trip up.

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- Phil 4:4,6,12      **Rejoice in the Lord always ..... Do not be anxious about anything ..... I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation.**  
That is, practise radical living. These admonitions turn the logic of the world on its head. Who in their right mind rejoices always, is not anxious about anything, is always content regardless of circumstances?

**How to**      Try it even when you don't feel like it. And remember the Holy Spirit lives in you, producing his fruits of love, joy, peace, patience ... and the other 5!

How's that for some New Year's Resolutions? And you are not on your own. Repeat this promise to yourself ..... I can do all this through him who strengthens me (4:13). Even if we only have a tent on the foundations so far, God wants us to be building that skyscraper, that mansion. It has eternal implications. NYRs test your resolve. This tests your faith.

Song:      "Just a closer Walk with Thee"      (Anon)

1. I am weak, but Thou art strong;  
Jesus, keep me from all wrong;  
I'll be satisfied as long  
As I walk, let me walk close to Thee.

*Refrain:*

Just a closer walk with Thee,  
Grant it, Jesus, is my plea,  
Daily walking close to Thee,  
Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.

2. Through this world of toil and snares,  
If I falter, Lord, who cares?  
Who with me my burden shares?  
None but Thee, dear Lord, none but Thee.
3. When my feeble life is o'er,  
Time for me will be no more;  
Guide me gently, safely o'er  
To Thy kingdom shore, to Thy shore.

### Benediction

Now may the God of peace, ..... equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen      Hebrews 13:20-21

This service was prepared by Ron Tiller, HopeNet SA