

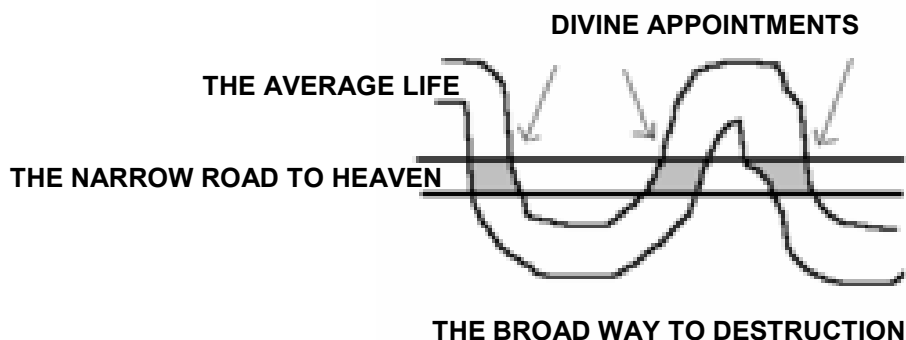
Divine Appointments



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THE DIVINE APPOINTMENT



This short book comes forth out of our experiences in power evangelism, as we travel throughout the “streets and alleys of the towns” (Luke 14:21-23) and the “roads and country lanes” of NSW, to meet those the church has not shepherded well. (Ezekiel 34) So many long for the Shepherd’s loving and compassionate touch and wonder why their prayers and needs are not met. Many churches are closed down in the small communities and many people are looking for fellowship and support in secular activities. They lose touch with a personal God, who loves them and who is the source of all blessing, and they struggle and strive to live their lives in their own puny strength.

Our term “Divine Appointments” is defined in the School of Evangelism on the website www.munumin.com. Briefly it is God’s plan to bring one of His servants described in Luke 14:16-23 and Matthew 22:1-10 to meet the “poor”, “crippled”, “blind” and “lame” and

invite them to the wedding banquet, making sure that they are wearing the wedding garment which God provides.

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1 GOD'S PLANS AND PROMISES

God's desire is that all people be saved and come to a knowledge of the Truth. (1 Timothy 2:4) He is not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9) Nevertheless, although He is wonderfully patient there is an end, and whoever does not believe in the Name of God's one and only Son stands condemned already. (John 3:18) The unbeliever is in Satan's power by default because of Adam's sin, and only believing in Jesus, according to God's plan for the redemption of mankind, changes our status, and our destination. Hell is for the devil and those who choose to follow him, and Heaven is the destination for those who love the Light (John 8:12) and the Truth. (John 14:6)

God knows our human frailties. (Psalm 103:14) Jesus Himself experienced Satan's temptations. (Hebrews 4:15) We in the 21st century are wonderfully blessed because it is easy to acquire God's book of promises, to read them and take Him at His word, because in this same book we read that all His promises are "YES, in Christ". (2 Corinthians 1:20) Those verses speak of the anointing, the seal of ownership and the Holy Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

Later in Ephesians (1:17-19) Paul writes that he asks the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, to give the Spirit of wisdom and revelation that you may know Him better, and the eyes of your heart may be enlightened to know the hope to which He has called you, and the incomparably great power for us who believe. In Ephesians 3:20 this is more than we can ask or imagine, according to

His power that is at work within us. We do not stop with just receiving a seal of ownership and a deposit, but we are to move forward so that “in Christ” (the Anointed One and His anointing) we demonstrate His mighty power within us.

Jesus said His followers would do even greater works (John 14:12) because He was going to the Father, and would send the Holy Spirit (John 16:7) and this would be the power by which to be His witnesses...to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

These then are God’s plans and promises.

2 BELIEF/ REVELATION/ EXPECTATION

Jesus came into the world to His own (the Jews) but His own did not receive Him (John 1:11) yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name (Jesus – Saviour, Christ – the anointed One) He gave the right (power, authority) to become children of God (brothers and sisters to Him), born not of natural descent or human decision, but born of God. (John 1:12) Put bluntly, this means that you cannot be born into God’s family because you belong to a Christian family or a Christian church, and you cannot decide you are a Christian because you do “good” deeds. Jesus says “you must be born into God’s family as supernaturally as Jesus Himself was conceived – by the Spirit of God. (John 3:3)

Paul writes that no one knows the mind of God except the Spirit of God. (1 Corinthians 2:11) Everything in God’s Kingdom is understandable

only by the Spirit of God and this comes, not by book learning, but by revelation into the quickened heart (spirit) of the believer. Ephesians 2:1 explains that we were dead (spiritually) in our transgressions and sins because we followed worldly ways which actually originate in the devil himself. But God made us alive (verse 5) by the transforming miracle of His grace.

He designed us with individual tastes, talents, life experiences, human connections and hopes and dreams to do the “good works” that He has planned for us. (Ephesians 2:10) He has already planted this into our hearts, but it is always much bigger than we can ask or imagine, (Ephesians 3:20) so consequently also bigger than we can possibly do in our own strength, so that we really need His supernatural input to achieve it. Unless we give Him “permission” to use our bodies and our minds, He will not overrule our will which He freely gave us as being “made in His image”. This is why Paul urges us to “offer our bodies as living sacrifices...our spiritual act of worship”. (Romans 12:1) Just as Jesus laid down His life for us, we “lay down” our lives for Him, not to die but to live for His praise and glory.

Once we are born again by the Spirit of God, He begins to reveal Truth to our hearts. (John 16:13,14) Revelation by the Holy Spirit is not book learning and following the traditions and teachings of theologians. Paul’s testimony should be taken seriously. (Galatians 1:12ff) Paul already knew the written word of God but his zeal for this resulted in legalism. This is why he wrote (2 Corinthians 3:6) “the letter (of the law) kills but the Spirit gives life.” We are to be “living letters”, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the Living God. (2 Corinthians 3:3)

We are to be the aroma of Christ, (2 Corinthians 2:15) both to those who are being saved and to those who are perishing. There will be two responses – the fragrance of life or the smell of death. This is saying that our lives are going to challenge people we meet. They are going to want Christ in us or they are going to reject us because of the anointing (His presence) on us. Jesus already warned us that the “world” might hate us but this is because they hated Him. (John 15:18) But for the sake of those who choose to appreciate the “fragrance of life” we are honoured to suffer for Him. Therefore we have an expectation that there are many for whom Jesus died who are lost sheep that need to be brought to the fold (John 10:16) and we step out in faith.

The lost have an expectation too, those who are dead in their sins. It is buried deep in their souls unless they have seared their consciences completely by continuously allowing the “flesh” to overrule. The Bible makes it plain that they need a watchman (Ezekiel 34 and John 10:3) and that they cannot hear without a preacher and that faith comes by hearing. (Romans 10:14,17) God promises that His Word when sent out will achieve the purpose for which it is sent. (Isaiah 55:11)

It is also true that the heart and the mouth are vitally connected (Romans 10:8) so that what we say affects what we believe. What we say has supernatural power to touch our own hearts because we believe what we say. This works very effectively when people tell lies because Satan knows this particular truth and takes advantage but God designed this so believers would overcome the “world” in His name. If the lost can be persuaded to preach the Gospel to

themselves it is a very powerful influence to their hearts. When people repent and repeat the Gospel aloud it gets God's attention – "these people are honouring My Son". This puts even an unbeliever into a place where God can touch his/her life. The Holy Spirit can convict him/her of sin, righteousness and judgment. This is not a "head" thing, not merely words which the mind tries to process but a power encounter, where the human spirit actually takes precedence over the mind (part of the soul).

Jesus promises that no one can snatch them out of His hand, (John10:28) so their future is bright – God who has begun a good work in them will complete it. (Philippians 1:6)

3 THE WAITING TIME/ GOD'S TIMING/ PERSEVERANCE

However we are not "completed" straight away.

When we make a meal for guests we usually plan the ingredients and prepare everything in an orderly way. We go to quite a bit of effort, thinking about the timing, the guests' tastes etc. If we take this much trouble to have a successful dinner party, we can imagine that God is equally meticulous in His preparation of His children for ministry. When we bring our own children to birth and help them grow to maturity we usually are careful to impart to them the values we consider important so that they will be a reflection of us, so also God. He disciplines those He loves so that they will be a reflection of Him.

God is so good. He knows so well the heart of man and He knows just as well the plans of the enemy, who must be furious every time he loses one of those he considers his. When a person is born again into God's family the enemy has just lost a person who was totally vulnerable to his manipulation and he fights hard to cause that person to back-track. Therefore challenges come and the higher the call the harder the challenges.

God wants us to be strong in faith so we must exercise our faith "muscles". There are plenty of "exercises" for our faith to develop, but because God knows our weaknesses He seems to meet us step by step; we step out in faith and He steps in to meet us. Blessings begin to flow and thankfulness feeds them so faith rises. Then challenges come again, but God promises that it will not be more than we can bear, and even then He will provide a way of escape. (1 Corinthians 10:13) If we stumble we can repent, dust ourselves off and begin again, just as a child does when learning to walk. Perseverance is very important if we want to complete the "race". (Romans 5:3-5)

Some people think that waiting on God is not doing anything at all, but the Apostle Paul says we press on to receive the "prize" of our calling. Even if we choose the wrong way God will guide us back and use our mistakes because He looks for our attitude towards Him. We become more conscious of our weakness in the flesh, and that He is the source of our strength and we move towards what an old hymn expresses...

Lord your love at last has conquered
Grant me now my supplication
None of self and all of Thee.

Jesus gave us this example, “I only do what the Father is doing”.
(John 5:19) This waiting time is the best time to learn how to copy the One who has called us, saved us, and equips us by His Holy Spirit to do the works the Father has designed for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

When the time of waiting is long it is possible that we will be tempted to give up on our hope and take second best. We should never regard menial/ servant jobs as second best because this is an opportunity to exercise faith also. For example, when we cleaned the church week after week we imagined getting it ready for the most honoured guest of all – Jesus. Even the toilet cleaning became a joy at the anticipation of Him needing to use the bathroom. Theologically this thought was not sound but it helped us to get our focus right. God has honoured this attitude because now, in the fullness of God’s timing, we take Jesus to the school, church, fire shed, hospital, etc, and He really comes through His presence (the anointing) in us.

God’s timing is always perfect – like Esther’s story – for a time such as this.

4 THE STATE OF THE LOST

We have looked at the servant up till now but we must see the state of the lost – spiritually blind, wretched, hurting, angry, demonised so that they are useful to Satan until he destroys them, sick and wounded, fearful and hopeless. What is worse is that their situation is spiritual death, separation from God who is the source of all love and

goodness, and this will lead ultimately to the lake of fire with their master, Satan. In this life they are wretched and in the life to come even worse. Some recognise their condition but all don't realise or receive that God has made a way, perhaps through ignorance or sometimes the false idea that they have to clean themselves up before they approach God.

They can only have confidence in themselves – they must become their own god and are subject to the devil all the time – without hope. They don't know that God has a plan for them to be in His family. They don't know that two thousand years ago Jesus died for their sins and rose from the grave so that they could have eternal life by trusting in Him. They don't know that they can be filled with the Holy Spirit and power to live a wonderful life in God's presence now and forever. They don't know that the Holy Spirit drives out all the bad habits and bad thoughts and cleanses us. Instead they get deeper and deeper into the pit of the devil's control.

The Bible has something to say about godlessness (2 Timothy 3:1-9) but those who are godless have to live like this, and if it is because they have never seen the love of God in action, because the church has abused people over the ages and even right up to the present, then God must want them to hear and see. Jesus puts a high degree of importance on seeking out the lost sheep. (Luke 15:3-7) Someone has said that the only Jesus that people meet is the One in us and through us. Theory and doctrine are not enough. People need to witness Christian love – to taste and see that God is good. Jesus said so. (Acts 1:8) Jesus was full of compassion when he saw the sheep

had no shepherd and Ezekiel 34 is very strong about the bad shepherds and the heedless sheep who muddy the water of life. (verse 19)

When we really understand the terrible state of the unsaved we are moved enough for the Lord to use us powerfully. Passion and power go together.

5 RECOGNITION OF THE DIVINE APPOINTMENT/ RESPONSE

God is the Initiator all the time but He moves the hearts of His children to do the works He has prepared. (Ephesians 2:10) At the same time as His eyes look over the whole world to strengthen those who are committed to Him (2 Chronicles 16:9) He also sees the needy in their pitiable state. They don't necessarily look pitiable but God knows. He has heard their "wishes" and their cries and He needs a body and a mouth to come to them, to tell them the good news.

When we realise and appreciate that by the grace of God we are saved, we should want to commit to reaching the lost in a purposeful way, thus becoming arrows in the hand of God. He lines up the target and the arrow and the Word of God penetrates the heart of the target to powerful effect. (Hebrews 4:12) When the person being prayed with repeats the gospel aloud, not only their ear-gate, but their heart is touched. When he/she receives the physical touch it is more powerful than a handshake (a sign of friendship and respect) because Jesus

has touched him/her to receive wholeness, spiritual healing, through His messenger. (eg, Mark 16:16-18)

In Mark 16:16-18 and also Matthew 28:19 “whoever believes and is baptised” has traditionally been interpreted as baptism in water, but the text does not say “in water”. This is an assumption, not wrong but not necessarily the full revelation, because Jesus Himself uses this expression after His resurrection to mean Holy Spirit immersion/overwhelming. (Acts 1:8) Peter understands and preaches this in Acts 2:17-21. Even at the end of chapter 2 when the scripture says (verse 41) those who accepted his message were baptised it does not add “in water”. But all three thousand were baptised by the Holy Spirit and added to the church. They were so hungry after being born by the Spirit that they couldn’t get enough spiritual food and devoted themselves to fellowship. (verse 42) This happens in the natural. A newborn baby cries all the time, whereas an unborn baby is quite passive about getting its nourishment.

There are occasions when God, in His mercy, and because He knows the end from the beginning, makes Divine Appointments in which the “target” refuses to accept the offer although the “arrow” sent, God’s messenger, has tried to penetrate the heart of the lost sheep. The anointing has just irritated the person and God’s plan of salvation has no appeal. He/she just does not want to be blessed. This indicates that God has promised that all people will have a chance – no one will be able to say on judgment day that he never had a chance because God will remind him of the time he refused. This is our God who wills that all people be saved, but He knows that

some will never receive. However we do not know who these are and so we are diligent to approach every Divine Appointment with expectation of a positive response. We never know whether we have actually sown seeds which will eventually bring about that person's salvation. God says that some sow, some water but God gives the increase. (1 Corinthians 3:5-9)

There are three very interesting examples of Divine Appointments in the Old Testament.

The first is when the Angel of the Lord came to Abraham at Mamre, to prophesy Isaac's conception and birth. In our ministry we have meditated on this example for some years as the classic example of how to meet a Divine Appointment. (Genesis 18:1-14)

Abraham was caught out unexpectedly when he looked up and saw three men standing nearby. His first instinct was to receive them with great hospitality. He gave them great honour because he was always expecting the answer to God's promise to him. He never gave up the hope that he would indeed be the father of many nations, although he knew that in the natural it was impossible. (Romans 4:18)

The Lord had appeared to him before (eg, Genesis 17:1) so there must have been a great awareness of the powerful presence as the men approached, so Abraham actually addresses them (or the speaker) as Lord. This is a pre-incarnation visit from Jesus Himself and He says "my sheep will listen to my voice...and they will follow me." (John 10:27)

When this is the response in a Divine Appointment there is always a new birth and joy (or laughter). The amazing end to this story is the new revelation which followed as the Lord shared His "problem" with

Abraham, encouraging Abraham's intercessory prayer for Sodom, so that God "changed His mind" and sent angels to rescue Lot and his daughters.

The second story is Gideon. (Judges 6)

Gideon has no expectation recorded. The Israelites had been impoverished by the Midianites (verse 6) and they had cried out to the Lord, who sent them a prophet. Was Gideon in the group that heard his words? It seems so because of what he says in verse 13.

It was a time when people did what was right in their own eyes, which to the Lord was rebellion. Gideon heard God's message through the prophet and as he hid away must have meditated on God's goodness and faithfulness. Perhaps he repented himself, though the Bible does not say. Hebrews 11:32-34 indicates that he rose up in faith and expectancy, believing God's power and love.

When the Angel of the Lord appeared to him, he was addressed as what God saw for him, not as he was. The Angel prophesied him to be a mighty warrior. God fully intended to enable him to be what was prophesied. As long as Gideon cooperated with God in God's plans for him it would all come to pass. There was a bit of conversation as Gideon tried to grasp God's promises to him and then after he had made an offering and seen the supernatural fire he recognized it was truly the Angel of the Lord (the pre-incarnate Jesus). God reassured him and revealed Himself as Jehovah-Shalom – God of Peace.

From that point Gideon had a few challenges to demonstrate that he wanted to obey and revere God rather than man, so that even his father was persuaded to side with God against the Baal worshippers.

Gideon was now ready to be the mighty warrior God had foretold, and at this point the Bible says “the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon”. It is recorded that he had many victories as he learned to rely on God completely.

In 1 Samuel 10:6 we are told that when the Spirit of the Lord comes upon (Saul) in power...he will be changed into a different person. Because God never changes, we can expect to be changed into a different person too. The old is gone, the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

The third story is in Judges 13 – the story of Samson, and in this case the longing hearts were Samson’s parents.

Manoah lived among God’s people, the Israelites, who, the Lord said, did evil in His sight. They did what was right in their own eyes. That is, they thought they were “good” people but did not honour God and worship Him only, (Exodus 20:3&4) so God had allowed Philistines to overrun them.

Manoah and his wife had a longing in their hearts for a son, but his wife was infertile. Because God was looking for someone who was fully committed to Him so that He could strengthen (and bless) them, (2 Chronicles 16:9) and He also wanted to send a “Saviour” to rescue the Israelites from the Philistines, He sent the Angel of the Lord (the pre-incarnate Jesus) who was to be the Saviour of the world more than a thousand years later. First He meets Manoah’s wife and prophesies the conception and birth of Samson and tells her His purpose and the strict requirements of God for both her and her son. When she tells Manoah about this visitation, he prays for confirmation and the Angel of the Lord appears to him also. When the Angel of the Lord confirms

the word of God to his wife to Manoah himself he asks whether he may offer hospitality and is told to offer a burnt offering to the Lord instead. He asks the Angel His name so that he may honour Him when the word comes true, and he is told it is “Beyond Understanding”. As the flame rises from the burnt offering the Angel ascends in the flame and Manoah realised it was the Angel of the Lord. He fell down and worshipped, acknowledging that he had seen God.

In due course Samson was born and the Bible says that the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him while he was still young. Three times it is recorded that the Spirit came upon him in power to do the mighty acts that God had planned for him and at the end he actually gave his life to complete what God had called him to do.

These three stories about pre-incarnate Jesus meeting people for their Divine Appointment, written in the Old Testament, are echoed in the New Testament in Jesus’ ministry, because He is the same yesterday, today and forever. (Hebrews 13:8) He always ministered in the power of the Holy Spirit and He has commanded us to receive the power from on high and to do the works that He did in that same power. He promises that anyone who receives you receives Me and ... the One who sent Me. (Matthew 10:40-42)

In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit only came on people but in the New Testament we can be filled with the Holy Spirit but we still need the Holy Spirit to come on us for mighty acts.

The appropriate response then, from these illustrations, is respect and hospitality (generous reception), obedience and expectation,

revelation and honour to God. This will surely be followed by God's favour and the joy of the Lord.

6 THE PRAYER OF AGREEMENT – WHERE ANY TWO AGREE

How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity. It is like the precious oil poured on the head...running down to the collar...to the skirt (hem) of his garment...the dew of Hermon falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows His blessing, even life for evermore. (Psalm 133)

“Good” is the word God uses to describe His work. (Genesis 1) God is the Giver.

“Pleasant” is the word used to describe the response to God's work. (Genesis 2:9) We are receivers.

When we live in unity there is an ebb and flow of God's design working. Unity is a conscious desire to appreciate God's handiwork in each other, the differences which fuse to be a complete wholeness so that the Kingdom of God is plain to all.

This attracts God's blessing and He pours out His glory and power, the Anointing, which is represented in the Bible by oil. It runs from the head – Christ, the Head of the church, to the skirt of the garment. The priest's garment had an opening for the head, a woven edge like a collar (so that the garment would not tear) and pomegranates (fruit) and gold bells (gifts) around the skirt at the hem. This flow of the

anointing flows to where the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit are – in the heart of the born-again believer. This picture is extraordinarily powerful, because unity brings this overwhelming Presence.

The poet (David) also writes about Mount Hermon, the highest mountain in Israel, which nearly always has snow on its cap and is the source of the Jordan River. He is trying to express how God's blessings and the water of life flow from the heights to Mount Zion, the city of Jerusalem. This was originally a Jebusite fortress but was incorporated into the city of God. Hermon to Zion, mountain to mountain, illustrates that the blessing of God takes us from mountaintop to mountaintop. When we talk about mountaintop experiences we mean an exhilarating and profitable time. David cannot extol the blessing of God enough and it comes through unity!

In Jesus' prayer before He went to the Cross He prayed that we would be one, not denominationally or nationally, not divided by language, colour or even religion, but just united in the love and light of God, in His family, no matter what our backgrounds. This can only be achieved when we choose the good and pleasant place – God's Kingdom, and we can only come into God's Kingdom by being born by the Spirit of God. (John 3:3 & John 17:11&23)

Paul continues this theme of the power of unity and mutual respect. (Philippians 2:1-8) This is imitation of Jesus Himself. He also writes about holy living (Colossians 3:13-17)... over all these things put on love (sincere mutual respect) which gives perfect unity and overflows to God's glory and honour.

The prayer of agreement incorporates these attitudes to each other. If one lacks the other wants to fill that lack. It is never about control and never about superiority. It is never about “you’re wrong and I’m right” or even about human traditions and practices in the church.

It is easy to tie the statement of Jesus (Matthew 18:18,19) in the context where Jesus is talking about a brother sinning against us and how to put it right, but in these two verses Jesus is actually stating the principle that we are talking about. The ideal is to be forbearing (Colossians 3:12,13) but if offence has been taken, then by all means apply the previous practice (Matthew 18:15-17) so that unity can be restored.

This principle (Matthew 18:18-20) is very powerful. Jesus has stated it and, because He is Truth, it must work.

What does it mean to bind something on earth? Jesus demonstrated this all the time – demons, storms, fish into nets, money into the mouth of a fish, sickness, infirmities, etc.

God gave His authority to man and, by faith, having received this commission in our hearts, we speak whatever is needed to enforce this authority over all, except other people. We were never given this sort of authority over other people. (see Genesis 1:28-30) We are effectively saying to get in line with God’s created order.

Loosing something on earth is exactly that. Where God’s Spirit has been shut out of a place, a person, a situation, we speak permission so that God can come into that place, or situation. Where a person has been bound up because of curses, sins and any other evil, by God’s authority and in the name of Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit we speak freedom for the captives.

Because this is so powerful, God has decreed that two must agree so that God and all of heaven (the angelic host) will move to accomplish this.

The prayer of agreement we use in our ministry is:

I repent of my sin.

Jesus died for me.

He was crucified.

He arose from the dead.

Holy Spirit come on me, or

Jesus come into my heart.

And the response is **“Receive the Holy Spirit in Jesus’ name”** with mutual touch.

God does not fuss about our past, as long as we want to repent. We must “take words with us”. (Hosea 14:2) If we do not confess aloud we have not preached to ourselves so our hearts will not be touched.

“I repent of my sin.” This sin is our rebellion against God. This is not sins, the outworking of a state of rebellion. Once we genuinely say we repent, the Holy Spirit immediately comes to our aid. God knows we cannot carry out our desire in the flesh, and we do not believe He even wants us to struggle and strive.

Jesus says, (Matthew 10:32) “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge before my Father in Heaven”. It is Jesus who has opened Heaven’s door for us, by His sacrificial death, so after we have repented it is good to acknowledge this aloud.

“Jesus died for me.” “He was crucified.” This was a painful, humiliating and very public death.

“He arose from the dead.” Jesus has conquered death and bestows life for evermore. Stating this aloud convinces our hearts that Jesus is true to His word, and has the power to turn our lives around, even on a day to day basis.

“Jesus come into my heart.” He fills us with His power and demons flee. This agreement is ratified by touch on His behalf and the words “Receive the Holy Spirit in Jesus’ name”. The Divine transaction is completed. When the person who lacked receives the Holy Spirit from the one who has already received they are “equal”. They are brothers and sisters in the family of God, born from on high by the Holy Spirit, by faith.

The prayer of agreement where the people are already born again has a slightly different purpose in that we are asking “Holy Spirit, come on me” and for each other “Receive the Holy Spirit in Jesus’ name”. This is an empowerment for service and to see the heart’s desires of the other come to pass. This is very powerful because we might be complete strangers just met, yet we are acknowledging our fellowship in Jesus and our desire to bless each other.

Sometimes we use this prayer, even with people whose spiritual status we do not know, because by faith we do know that the Holy Spirit convicts of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8) and that He who has begun a good work will complete it. (Philippians 1:6) We believe it is good that each bless the other with the blessing “Receive the Holy Spirit in Jesus’ name” because this represents an investment

of the talent (the gift of God), so that it is not buried but rather doubled. (Matthew 25:14-23)

The prayer of agreement, in our experience, has the power to change lives forever and to knit hearts, even of strangers, because its purpose is to bless.

7 THE FULFILMENT THAT BRINGS JOY (LAUGHTER)

The original inspiration for the Divine Appointment was at Mamre. (Genesis 18:1) It is very interesting to surmise what might have been if Abraham did not recognise the significance of the Angelic visit.

Sometimes we meet people who have no hopes and dreams and are drifting through life aimlessly, with a handout from a charity or the government and begging in the streets for more money to gamble or drink to while away their unproductive lives. What a terrible situation to be in! Especially is this so because God has always had a plan for them since their birth. Perhaps they were told they were useless and are living out such a Godless “prophecy”. Perhaps this could have been Abraham’s life in Haran until God spoke to him and gave him forward direction. Maybe he could have been tempted back to Ur and paganism to find his “roots” as many people like to do. Everyone needs encouragement from someone because the Bible says that without vision the people perish or where there is no revelation the people cast off restraint. (Proverbs 29:18) God’s word must have struck a

chord of longing in Abraham's heart and he decided to obey God's "invitation".

We believe God is still doing this today, moving people from their roots and their cultural limitations to seek "a better life." We meet them in the streets in Parramatta every week.

Paul makes a very interesting statement when he is speaking in the Areopagus. (Acts 17:26-28) "God determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far off from each of us. For in Him we live and move and have our being." Therefore if we are born in a pagan culture like Abraham God might move our hearts to want to travel to another place where He can reach us.

With God's promise of being the father of many nations Abraham was inspired to believe God and expect Him to keep His promises. Already twenty-four years had gone by, yet Abraham was still expecting God to deliver. He had asked God about Eliezer (Genesis 15:3) and he had also asked God about Ishmael (Genesis 17:18,19) but God said these were not the ones that He would make His covenant with. God assured Abraham that his wife, Sarah, would bear the son with whom God would make covenant. (Genesis 17)

It was after this meeting with God that the Angel appeared at Mamre. This Angel (pre-incarnate Jesus) Who is Everlasting Father, (Isaiah 9:6) Co-creator, (Colossians 1:16) and sender of the Holy Spirit (John 16:15) came to "deliver" what had been prophesied and believed, and at the appointed time Isaac was born. (Genesis 21:1)

Our dream of being “ordained” into full-time ministry was conceived when we were in our twenties but did not come to pass until more than forty years later. We are now of mature age – in our seventies. God’s ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8) Why does He let people get “old” before fulfilling their life dreams? God likes us to depend wholly on Him, instead of using our own wisdom and strength, which younger people tend to do, just because they are clever and strong. Certainly Abraham’s story includes many incidents where he used his own wisdom and strength.

James warns that earthly wisdom is unspiritual and comes from the devil, who is forever trying to thwart God’s plans. (James 3:15)

Abraham’s and Sarah’s dream came to pass “at the very time God had promised him”. (Genesis 21:2) The baby was named Isaac which means laughter. Some people might think that was because Sarah laughed when she heard the promise, but the Bible says that Sarah’s testimony was “God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me”. This is pure joy at God’s goodness and this is always the reaction to the fulfilment of a God-given dream. David’s testimony and advice, “Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desire of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, trust in Him and He will act.” (Psalm 37:4,5)

8 THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF GOD'S PROMISE

FULFILLED/ FAITH/ CONTINUING TO BELIEVE GOD

When Abraham's and Sarah's dream was fulfilled they did not need faith to believe for it any more. Faith is being sure of what we hoped for, and certain of what we do not see. (Hebrews 11:6) Once we see the dream, what then?

God gives us His precious gifts because He trusts us to be faithful stewards of that gift. Sarah and Abraham now had the responsibility to guide Isaac to his destiny in God, to feed, nurture and protect him.

When Ishmael, who was fifteen years older than Isaac, "mocked" him, Sarah told Abraham to get rid of Ishmael and his mother. "Drive out the mocker and out goes strife." (Proverbs 22:10)

The Bible warns us –

not to walk in the counsel of the wicked (lest we believe them),

not to stand in the way of sinners (those not in relationship with God, lest we behave like them),

not to sit in the seat of mockers (lest we are seen to belong to them).

We are to take delight in the law of the Lord and meditate on it day and night. (Psalm 1:1,2)

If a tender rosebud is attacked by thrips, it will not flower, or if it does it will be distorted.

The Bible says to train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it. (Proverbs 22:6) Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but discipline will drive it far from him. (Proverbs 22:15)

Mocking undermines the moral values of a person who wants to have a good character, and who wants to make good decisions. The mocker has the intention to bring the one being mocked down to his lower moral values, whereas God's intention is to lift us up to be like Him, with His values. Isaac had a mighty destiny in God. We are inspired to throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. (Hebrews 12:1) Do not make light of the Lord's discipline or lose heart when He rebukes you. The Lord disciplines those He loves. (Hebrews 12:5&6) No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:11)

The responsibility of a dream coming to pass is both physically and spiritually the same. In thankfulness to God we value the privilege of the sacred trust. Whether a baby, a job, a ministry, a home or any other thing, we follow through with love, nurture, ourselves learning in the process so that we become more competent, doing this work as stewards of God, cleanly and honestly. Sometimes it is for a short time. Children grow and take responsibility for their own lives. Jobs and ministries change for different reasons, and we should hold possessions very lightly as God might ask us to give them away. Sometimes the gift is hard to love or nurture so we learn to exercise our faith and perseverance, continuing in thankfulness to God and asking for wisdom to manage.

There is always a challenge to grow by learning more. There are often difficulties in rearing a child or in aspects of a job or ministry. Even learning all the intricacies of the latest gadget so that we

understand and get the very best out of it is a challenge. It is very tempting to take short-cuts, compromise and put our own convenience first, above the precious gift that we so earnestly believed God for and have now received. Jesus said that whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. If you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? (Luke 16:10-11)

If God gives the gift of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor or teacher, the responsibility is to equip God's people for works of service. (Ephesians 4:12) It is very noticeable in church circles that the hierarchy look after each other more than they equip God's people for service.

Isaac was trained so that he knew how to rely on God and to pray (eg, Genesis 25:21), to obey God in spite of problems (eg, Genesis 26:6), and to sow, expecting a harvest, based on God's word alone. (Genesis 26:12) He learned to respect others, and to be forbearing of their weaknesses and foibles (Genesis 26:17), believing God all the time for justice and increase until he received it. (Genesis 26:28) These attitudes opened the way for personal revelation and became a powerful witness to God's glory. (Genesis 26:24-28) These stories are written down to be useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16) There is another wonderful verse where we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. (2 Corinthians 1:4) Our testimony, our

life journey is always used by God to encourage others, as we learn from Him.

Hebrews 11 is the “faith” chapter. So many people were commended by God for their faith in so many different situations and circumstances. In the life of these people there were new challenges to grow in faith and right down to this day the exciting part is that we are called to be overcomers. (eg, Revelation 2:7,11,17,26 and Revelation 3:5,12,21) All these “faith” successes are written down in the book to be opened on Judgment Day. (Revelation 20:12) Paul says “our work” will be shown for what it is, because the “Day” will bring it to light. (1 Corinthians 3:13)

The Bible says he who wins souls is wise. (Proverbs 11:30) Those who are wise (or impart wisdom) will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. (Daniel 12:3)

When we recognise “Divine Appointments” and cooperate with God to bless another all Heaven rejoices. (Luke 15:7) Isaiah’s response was “Lord here am I, send me.” (Isaiah 6:8)

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