

TAKING STOCK OF FAITH

Let's forget about church activities, programmes and rotas!

For the next few minutes, think about your soul, your spiritual life, your relationship with our Saviour Jesus Christ, your eternal destiny.

ROMANS 12:3

*For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in **accordance with the faith** God has distributed to each of you.*

Some blind men came to Jesus seeking healing. Jesus said to them, "**According to your faith let it be done to you**". Matthew 9:29.

There's a sense of faith being something you can have more or less of. So it is worth taking stock from time to time. Taking a measure, an assessment, of our faith. A sober judgement about our faith – not thinking of ourselves too highly or too lowly but getting an accurate picture.

At this time of year Alison and I, and I am sure many of you, review our financial position. Look, you might say. We have some savings. We look back and realise that some decisions we made in the past have resulted in us having some savings in the present. Having made a sober judgement, we can then think about the future and what we should do with our money going forward. Or maybe we review and say, look, I have accumulated this debt. We look back and realise that some decisions we made in the past have resulted in us having debt. Having made a sober judgement, we can then think about the future and what we should do with our money going forward.

Past choices leave us with a present measure which influences our future choices and options. So it is with faith. From time to time we need to check out where we are, remember our history, understand it and then decide and commit to a faith-filled future.

The government in Britain is currently considering various forms of legislation to limit the expression of extremism. Just think, if we woke up tomorrow to find that living as though you had faith in Jesus were a crime – would there be enough evidence to arrest you?

Here are 5 things which will help you measure your faith. 5 ways which will tell you whether or not you have faith and where the Lord wants you to go forward as you take stock and look ahead. (Thanks to Rick Warren for this acrostic).

If you aren't a follower of Jesus this may help you understand what it means and why you may want to give your life to Him.

If you are a Christian this will help you take stock and give you a challenge to pursue in 2016.

TRUST

T – TURN EVERYTHING OVER TO GOD

If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is my LORD," and BELIEVE in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved! Romans 10:9

Some people think that by believing in Jesus, you will be saved. But demons believe in Jesus. They won't be saved. Richard Dawkins believes Jesus existed. But he is not a Christian.

There are two parts to this promise – belief and Lordship. And when you make someone your Lord you turn everything over to them.

So who is in charge of your life? Is it you? Is it your employer? Is it your spouse? Or is it Jesus? Let's take stock. Who is in charge of your money? Your sex life? Your career? Your diary? Your health? Your food, drink and appetites?

He's not going to be satisfied being your co-pilot, He's the captain. The manager, the boss, the Lord. What has He said that you need to change or do in 2016? What are you going to do about it?

The first measure of our faith is whether and how much of our life we have turned over to God.

R – RELAX IN THE UNCONDITIONAL LOVE OF GOD

Nothing will ever be able to separate us from his love. Death can't, and life can't. The angels can't, and demons can't. Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can't keep God's love away. Whether we're high above the sky or in the deepest ocean, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:38-39 (NLT)

Physically, emotionally and psychologically many of you are stressed. Worried. Anxious. What's the opposite of stress and anxiety? Being relaxed.

Jesus made some astounding declarations and promises – not least that He would rise from the dead. And when He did that He demonstrated that He keeps His promises. He promised to be with us, to never leave us. Nothing can separate us from His love. Our circumstances may change but His love doesn't.

His love for you is not dependent upon you but upon Him. And He proved His love for you by dying on the cross. Through Him you can be forgiven for every bad thing you have ever done and be redeemed into relationship with your maker. An amazing promise.

We may try and run away, but we can't run away from His love. If you don't put your security in Him where will you put it? Everything else will run out and come to an end.

But you can relax in His love because it will never run out on you.

We take stock – we turn everything over to Jesus, we learn to relax in His unconditional love and we...

U – USE OUR LIVES TO SERVE HIM BY SERVING OTHERS

Give yourselves completely to God – every part of you – for you've been saved from death and you want to be tools in the hands of God, to be used for his good purposes." Romans 6:13 (LB)

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:10

God calls you to a service far beyond anything you could ever imagine. You were put on Earth to make a contribution. Not just to consume resources — to eat, breathe, and take up space. God designed you to make a difference with your life. You were created to add to life on Earth, not just take from it. God wants you to give something back. (Rick Warren).

When most people think of this “special work,” they think of pastors, priests, and professional clergy. I may be a pastor but who are the ministers in this church? You are. In the Bible, the words “servant” and “minister” are synonyms. If you are a Christian, you are a minister, and when you're serving, you're ministering.

When I take stock I turn everything over to Him, I relax in His unconditional love, I use my life to serve Him through serving others and I ...

S- SUFFER FOR WHAT IS RIGHT

For you have been given not only the privilege of BELIEVING in Christ but also the privilege of SUFFERING for him. Philippians 1:29 (NLT)

But if you suffer for doing what is right, God will reward you for it. So don't be afraid and don't worry. 1 Peter 3:14 (NLT)

There's no question that it is a privilege to be able to believe. But a privilege to suffer? We don't like that very much in our cosseted, materialistic, selfish world do we? But the bible describes suffering as something that Jesus did and when we follow Him we have the privilege of taking the same road.

Some people have bad things happen to them, terrible things – and yet their reaction is to turn toward God, they run to Him: maybe with questions, and in pain, but they go to Him first. And they become whole, healed and more beautiful people as a result.

Others have bad things happen to them and they turn away from God. But when we turn away from God we find no help anywhere else – no eternal peace and sacrificial love.

Sometimes we suffer for what is right – it is the price we pay for making Him Lord of our lives.

At work, your boss asks you to do something which is bending the rules. "I want you to promote this product not that one because we earn a bigger commission" or "I want you to drop that statistic from the records because it paints us in a bad light" or "I want you to circulate this story about our competitor even though it is not true".

How do you react? "Well that is difficult for me to do because I am a follower of Jesus and He wants me to live my life with integrity so I won't be able to do that." What would happen if you did that? You would suffer.

Or you're having a coffee with a bunch of colleagues or friends and the topic turns to gossip or the humour turns unpleasant. Of course you won't say, "I am a follower of Jesus and I don't think we should talk like this". But you might choose to make an excuse and wander off. And then one of your friends runs after you and says why are you going? What's wrong? Are you willing to suffer the embarrassment of explaining?

Take stock of how you are dealing with suffering – and whether or not you are suffering anything for following Jesus.

We turn everything over, we relax in His unconditional love, we use our lives to serve Him by serving others and we suffer for what is right and finally we ...

T – TRUST IN JESUS

For the word of the Lord always holds true, and everything he does is worthy of our trust. Psalm 33:4 (NLT)

God can't break His word. So we who have trusted our very lives to God have every reason to grab the promised hope with both hands and never let go! Hebrews 6:18 (Message)

We put our faith in Him, in Jesus, and His promises.

In the Vineyard we often say that "Faith" is spelt R-I-S-K.

How do we know we are trusting someone or something? Because we take a risk. I trust you to catch me when I jump. I trust you to accept me when I confess my wrongdoing. I trust you to pay me when I start a job for you. I risk my life to you in marriage because I trust you to commit yourself to me. I will risk praying for someone because I trust Jesus to show them His love.

As you take stock of your spiritual life – where are you taking risks? Where are you trusting Jesus in your life? Where is He saying to you, "trust me"? With your money? With your relationships? With your job? With the way you enter into prayer ministry? With your family?

Are there areas where you are saying, I can't let go of that, I can't give that away, I can't stop worrying?

Jesus is trustworthy. If He is calling you to do something that feels risky it's because He wants you to have faith. According to your faith will it be done to you.

TRUST

We turn everything over, we relax in His unconditional love, we use our lives to serve Him by serving others, we suffer for what is right and we put our trust in Jesus.

CONCLUSION

Romans 12:3

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

We've taken stock of where you are. How is your faith? What is God challenging you about today? To have more faith?

Ask Him to speak to you about how you can take part in His designs. And then, may I ask you, what are you going to do about it?

You can do this. With God's help and the support of this community of faith you can be a transformed, world-changing disciple of Jesus. In January 2017 you can be taking stock and stand amazed at what God has done in you and through you in 2016.

So turn everything over to Him, relax in His unconditional love, use your life to serve Him by serving others, suffer for what is right and put your trust in Jesus.

Why don't you choose to follow Him in faith onto the roller-coaster, risk-taking, ride He has prepared for you?!?

David Flowers

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