

Forward Planning & God in You

by George Verwer

George Verwer emphasizes the importance of seeking God's face, walking in the Spirit, and being faithful in our assignments as we plan ahead in the work of God.

Duration: 1:15:40

Scripture: Luke 24:25

Topics: "God's Plan"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of being involved in world evangelism. He compares the task of spreading the word of God to fishing, highlighting the joy and thrill of seeing someone come to Christ. The speaker also discusses the concept of being a slave to God, explaining that we become slaves either because our debts are too great, through battle, or voluntarily out of love. He emphasizes the need to fall in love with God, as this is the only sure way for our slavery to continue. The sermon encourages listeners to embrace their role as fishers of men and to continually bless God.

Transcript

I want to just share just a few thoughts and bring this to a close that I'm working on which eventually I'll be sharing with leaders probably in Kathmandu. OM is always dealing with a whole number of different major subjects all of it geared to try to make this a work that will glorify God more, that will be more effective, more efficient, more spiritual. This is the work that some of us have day and night because we're concerned with the level of spirituality, we're concerned with the level of reality that there is in OM and in the work of God.

One of the things we've been talking a lot about lately and it will be the main focus in the next area of the youth meeting is forward planning. It's a word that I guess has come into use just in the last couple of years but other similar words have been used from the beginning, planning ahead. We as human beings, especially in the English language, we have one upmanship we play in language that when a group of people are speaking something we want to say something that's different.

It's got a good factor. I try to engage in it all the time even to the point of ridiculous. But it also becomes very confusing for people who don't have English as their first language because they just get to know what we're talking about and suddenly a new word is popped on them without definition.

So we talk about forward planning, we mean planning ahead. Perhaps it would incorporate into it in a little more thought through and systematic way. Now it's important to understand why this has become so big.

It's a big drum that Alistair Hubbard has been beating since he stepped in the door because of course someone like Alistair came in as a, originally as a paid consultant into OM at a very, very low fee, almost in some ways partly a gift of his time because he loves Christ and partly, he was brought in by the board of trustees, totally unique in almost in all its history. Now I think it's good for you to know he is the acting managing director of STL. He is now in and also a consultant.

Now this is an emergency measure because we have no one for that job. Alistair is there in God's providence. Mike Wheat and Dave Brown, he was appointed as co-deputy directors.

In other words, Alistair is only here three days a week, they're here the whole week, right under Alistair. Dave Brown is moving out of London Road, long story, because of his new responsibility. Is it true that your whole team is going to go to London Road or is that still the aim? It's pretty well planned out.

It's good to know that. We'll all be under one happy roof. People like Philip Morris and Neil and everybody else all functioning together.

But anyway, one of the reasons a man like Alistair Hubbard was brought in during the time of financial crisis, gets into this is because he sees a movement like OM that does all these different things. It's going on all over the world, but doesn't have the money to do it. So forward planning is very much linked with budget.

If you got this much money, you can do this much work. OM traditionally has had this much money, and has done this much. A traditional OM is Philip going ahead with a type setting of the Hindi Bible in Delhi without any money.

That's the old-fashioned way that people like Alistair Hubbard would like to stop, much less why we own. Or at least have a guarantee that there is this money coming. Very, very few people can grasp what budgeting has done for OM.

Nobody knows the number of ulcers that have been created, the number of friends that have gone their different ways. But there had to come, there had to come. When OM was bordering on being out of control, especially the ships a couple of years ago, this had to come.

And it came after a lot of discussion, prayer, meetings, etc. But as I was thinking on this subject of planning ahead in the work of God, I just came up with these few points. How do we do this in the work of God? We're not a secular corporation.

We have not a guaranteed income. We have to face that reality. Even if we have pledges and promises we have seen in OM, that is no guarantee.

And the bottom line problem in OM, there are a number of them, but one of them is we've got one third of the people in the movement who are short of a minimum support level. In fact, on the do lots, if everybody just sees basic support, there will be no bills. The whole thing, according to Roton's figures, will be completely covered, including the ministry, including the fuel of the ministry, everything, if all the people on that ship saw their support.

However, support has always been a goal within OM. It isn't something that just falls out of a tree. It's a goal that we work toward.

And I think coupled with a lot of dynamic faith, there has been a lot of down-to-earth common sense and flexibility without which OM would have never got this far so that we could even have men like Alistair Hubbard who would even look at us and sit down and talk with us about our problems. But I've just listed these few things that you may want to pray about because you're planning ahead in your own life. How do you get God's plan for your own life? It's actually got many similarities.

And one of the things we failed to do with OM people in the past, we did it to a degree, an area of failure, is to really clearly teach them the problem of finance in terms of their whole future. And just how big that would be when they left OM, how big the financial question would be to go to Bible college, to get into an established mission that wants \$25,000 a year, or \$15,000, whatever. So this is relevant, I think, to all of us.

And I can only just give you my outline. The first thing is seeking the face of God. This is the thing that makes us totally different than the secular company down the road.

And the moment we lose this, we've lost it all. And you can go through, I can give you dozens of verses, seeking the face of God. And a lot of the plans that God gave to us in OM came actually in permeates.

And they were visions, they were God-given ideas. And perhaps we ran into trouble when we presumed that, of course, any idea we got in a prayer meeting was from God. Or we fell into other dangers that I haven't had time to talk about.

Maybe we didn't realize as much importance of the human factor. I remember, let me touch on that later point. Number two, walking day by day in the Spirit.

I don't think there's anything more important than our personal holiness. And as we walk in the Spirit, He leads us. He guides us the next step.

He may show us a five-year plan. He may only show us a one-year plan. We're all different.

But He will definitely guide us as we go step by step in the Spirit. And that needs to continue to be the great emphasis on OM. It's not what we are doing, it's what we are.

It's our life, the first chapter in the old leadership manual. And then number three, reading and research. I'm concerned that in the last couple of years, some decisions have been made in OM without proper research.

This is why, even in this financial issue, I am just reading and I am getting feedback from the widest range, probably the widest range of Christian leaders that I've almost ever been consulted on this subject. And it is really amazing what we're learning from that, because these people, I think of the wife of one of our board members in New Jersey, typed up three pages. In fact, the feedback from without OM is six times better than anything from within OM.

It's actually a bit of an indictment that many people within OM are not even giving feedback. I guess we're just, because we have the general counsel and people spoke verbally, they don't feel any written feedback. It's necessary, though I did urge them at the general counsel to still give written feedback.

And there has been some good feedback from within the work. So reading and research, the facts are important. A lot of the visions God gave me in the early days, and the reason that a lot of the visions came to me in the early days because there weren't too many people.

It was only being born. We weren't even sure. We weren't even sure that it was going to come, anything at all.

But a lot of the burden and vision for Iraq and for Turkey and the Muslim country came in the Moody Bible Institute library, reading books that I wasn't even required to read. And I feel sad that we've had to put the research department of this team on the back burner and then it fell off the stove. There's a lot of unofficial research going on here.

And the amount of information that this team is generating and circulating throughout the work, which is almost completely taken for granted because OM is not an information conscious organization. There's no budget for information within OM to any great degree. There's a budget for free literature.

That's a section of information. And of course, if there's any movement into information, I can assure you it's operation mobilization. What a task if we can systematize this and organize it in a better way.

There will be a day when this team or some other team will have a full-blown research department. One of the reasons I'm not pushing that now is because so many other missions have it and we need to take what they have, not duplicate it, and get it out. That's more argument.

Distribution. We were the ones that took all this information that Patrick Johnson had, which was going almost nowhere, and made it public to the Christian community. But that doesn't mean we don't continue in this area.

And in forward planning, research, homework is absolutely essential. Before we can really intelligently discuss this subject, we have to research how has OM done forward planning for 28 years and then see what we want to change, what we want to keep. In fact, this kind of research in OM has to be done on a national basis.

There's no sense talking about an international conglomerate that has done forward planning because OM has not functioned that way. And even to this day, if you think the area leaders are leading OM, you don't know what's going on. The leadership muscle in OM is on a national basis.

And if we want the national people to do anything, we have to get on our knees and we have to persuade. And we discovered already, the simplest decision we made on an area level, the national leaders have done it without us being able to do anything because they are the ones that have to carry it out. We can't force anybody in Switzerland or France or Turkey to do what we decide.

It has to be persuasion. There are a few exceptions, we think. Number four, faithfulness in what God has given us at our hand to do.

We're wrestling with an awesome problem in OM. How much time do we give to discussion, philosophy, forward planning, argumentation, all this kind of thing which is going on twice as much as ever in the history of OM. And how much time do we actually give to work, W-O-R-K, actually going out and doing what we decided we were going to do a year ago.

This is an awesome problem because you can't do both. If I give five hours to discussion, I cannot give five hours to work. In five hours of work, even on a financial basis, I might generate \$20,000.

Five hours of discussion, I might generate a room full of hot air. You know, as a hyper pragmatic, where my heart is. And for any days that I spend in discussion, there's much crucifixion.

And that's what I need. So I am fully in favor of these meetings. But it's not easy when you think of even a September conference, all the things we could be doing around the world instead of being in Belgium.

But on the other hand, if we don't sort out what we do in Belgium that month, which is my most intensive month of the year, then a lot of what we may try to do during the year is going to come apart. So we need both. It's not one or the other, it's both.

But being faithful in that which God has given us is one of the best ways to lay the foundation for planning ahead. Number five, sharing our vision and our burden with others. One of the first things we did in regard to the ship vision was begin to share this vision out and get feedback, what they think.

OM is not a movement that is operated basically on high level laser beam communication. We got this vision, let's go. I did get that kind of idea and vision in some cases, but the next step was share it with the saints and get ready for a shutdown.

Eighty percent of all my visions over the years have been shot down. And praise God because it's crazy enough as it is. One of the things some forward planners fail to realize is OM has already created, we already planned and created more than we can handle at present.

And very few of those fields are willing to back down on anything. And they have the clout. So how do you get any of these fields to suddenly close things down? India has been the easiest field to get to close some things down, but it already was to start with almost the biggest field.

What about the man who's just surviving? I just read a three page letter from David Zion on it to the financial management department. They put the loving gentle screw on you financially and I will tell you what David Zion has written. It's brilliant.

The little people in OM easily get walked on because they're dealing with a very small budget. One hiccup in Bangladesh is enough to put them into the pool seven days a week to keep the sanity. So that's an important thing and we have to work on that.

Number six, really counting the cost. This is another thing we've always done, but never enough. I launched out in 63, no 62, and in those days a lot of the strategy and policy just came from my head.

And I had a little more authority than today, not to the extremes that people think. But I announced 50 million pieces of literature. Can you imagine? I thought I calculated this.

Empire State Building calculations, some of you have heard the old tapes. We're going to distribute 50 million pieces of literature. Can you imagine that? We had only 10 months to organize it.

And we were nothing. 62, we were next to nothing. Three months down the road, I continued to count the cost.

And I thought, you know, you're blowing this. No way. 50 million pieces of literature.

Some of it, I was living in London at the time. I'd already started distributing. The first million went out to London before the summer campaign began.

I was looking for every kind of escape to get to this huge figure. Then I changed the publicity, and I've got both pieces of publicity, to 25 million. That's a big change, right? 50 million to 25 million.

And so in forward planning, there has to be the counting of the cost. But there also has to be the grace, the humility, even the willingness to lose face in terms of your announced, God-given plan. I wondered if old David Wilkerson would be willing to face up to what he wrote in *The Vision*, most of which, that was 15 years ago it was written, most of which has not come to pass.

Though he definitely communicated that this was a vision straight from God, and it would happen within the next few years. Now he did incorporate a little bit of apology on a tape. I wrote, but my acceptance of him as a prophet getting direct revelations has never been very, very high, though I do love him as a weak, struggling, often confused dear brother.

I think we have to at times really eat a lot of humble pie in leadership, especially if we are the visionary, pioneer types, because we are the types who one minute lead the troops into a tremendous victory, and the next minute lead them right down a dead-end street. And we love to talk about the victories, but we don't like to talk about the times we led the troops down a dead-end street. That's why I believe in corporate leadership, not one-man leadership.

Just bear with me a couple of more minutes. Number seven, moving forward by faith. This is a danger in O.M.'s present move, that we are going to lose the ability to move forward by faith.

Everything is going to be neat and tidy and budgeted. I think there's a way we can have all this and still move ahead by faith, but I'm working on that, and it's going to be discussed on an area level. So you're not totally out of order there, Philip, moving ahead by faith.

But if we can carve the missing money a year from now out of your extra expenses you use for whatever you use money for, that might help. Number eight, learn by our mistakes. I've already touched on that, but it's incredibly important.

And number nine, to just face the variety of ways that God works. Now, why was David so scared? He was hopeless on a bicycle. This wasn't the first person he'd ridden over.

The big problem in this case was, who was the last person that he'd ridden over related to? And we had to go out, so about two hours later, and rescue his bicycle. Me, creeping along ahead to see if the police were anywhere. It's all a question of who he was related to.

And you know, Satan, when he attacks you, does it with fear and trembling. Because of who you're related to. If only you could see yourself as Satan sees you.

With God Almighty dwelling in you. God himself declaring that he is your father. This is such an anchor of the soul.

In Hebrews chapter six, we read that we have an anchor for the soul. And the kind of illustration that Paul is using, if he is indeed the writer, is something like this. You imagine you're sailing a little boat, and you've gone aground on a sand bank.

The tide has gone out, and you've gone aground on this bank. But the tide is going to come in again. But the problem is the wind is blowing in the same direction as the tide.

And as the water rises, you're going to get smashed more and more repeatedly onto that sand bank until the boat is destroyed. What does a sailor do under those circumstances? He throws out an anchor against the wind. So as the tide comes in, as the boat lifts up, it isn't smashed on the bank.

You have an anchor in your Christian life. God has given you the security of making you eternally his child. Christ is the anchor for your soul within heaven already.

And although you may be accused by Satan, and although you may find yourself in difficult circumstances, you have absolute security in your relationship to God. I don't know whether any of you have ever had a lawyer to work for you. You get involved in some legal wrangle with someone, and you're going to be accused of this and that, and so you hire a lawyer.

It's the most wonderful feeling in the world, practically, to say to your accusers, Go see my lawyer. I'm not even going to discuss matters with you. You go see my lawyer.

We read in Scripture that we have an advocate, a lawyer, Jesus Christ the righteous. One who represents you before God in heaven. Who makes out your case.

One who has never lost a case yet. It is important for these people in Luke 24 that they know that they are secure in God's relationship with them. It is so important for these people in Luke 24 that they know that they have the relationship with God.

And when they see the future, that they know that God is their father. The second person we meet is in verse 12, and that is Peter. Peter arose and ran into the tomb, and stooping in, stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloth by themselves, and he went home wondering at that which was come to pass.

Now what a failure Peter had been. Do you ever get discouraged at yourself? The way your mind wanders in the prayer meetings. I have sat in worship meetings, some of the most tremendous worship meetings, and all the time I've actually been scoring some of the most brilliant goals ever seen on a football pitch.

You can get discouraged because you fail in the same way again and again and again. Peter had come out with so many bold words, and then finally ran away. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Mary Magdalene could say that He leads me beside still waters. And Peter could say He restores my soul. Peter is a saved man, a converted man, and yet as we come across him here in this chapter, he needs his soul restoring.

He too must be discouraged and fearful. What is the problem with Peter? It is simply this, that he was immature and he thought he wasn't. I've been pondering spiritual immaturity in recent days.

It's so like babies. Not so many of you have had babies so far as I know. At least half of you I'm sure haven't.

But you know, babies sleep a lot. They spend hours and hours just apparently doing nothing very much. Not much sign of anything happening at all.

And then when they do wake up, they have all kinds of uncoordinated actions. And it sometimes seems with young Christians that they go through long periods, months in their lives, where very, very little happens. And then suddenly they do the most bizarre things and then go back to sleep.

We have people like this on OM all the time. You're praying for them that there might be some signs of spiritual growth and six months later they seem to be the same as when they came in. And then suddenly they wake up and do something crazy and then go back to sleep again.

Another thing with babies is that they dirty their nappies, their diapers, for the benefit of the Americans. I can remember getting my daughter, my oldest daughter, lovely little blonde haired, sweet thing, dressed up to go and see grandparents. And she was washed and bathed and powdered and smelled like only a clean baby can.

We set off in the car. And just about five minutes before we got there, the pong was something else. I was so proud to be taking this little thing and ooh.

I carried her in at arm's length and gave her to her grandmother. It's the way they are. Immaturity.

She's nine next Sunday and she has learned to behave a little better. Because you give the young time and food and fresh air and forgiveness and they will grow. It's practically inevitable that physically a young baby will grow.

But spiritual growth is a battle every day. It is not automatic. Just because you're on OM that doesn't mean to say you're necessarily going to grow spiritually.

There are some people who can go through months of this kind of thing and stay the same as when they came in. Spiritually immature. The immature person seeks primarily its own happiness.

It's looking first for its own happiness. The immature person. The immature person always seeks to receive rather than to give.

They want to avoid discipline rather than to welcome it. And we need to have day by day a sense of how far we need to go. And yet a total confidence in the God who can restore and remould and make us.

I'm amazed reading Philippians chapter 3. The Apostle Paul saying, I've got so far yet to go. This is only four to five years before his martyrdom. It's thirteen years after he has started the church in Philippi.

And yet he's hungry to grow. He wants to go on with God. He wants to hear God's voice speaking to him.

How many days do we go through an OM conference and this be true of us? It's easier sometimes to dodge the meetings. Slip out of the prayer meetings. Forget our Bible.

Do you come to this tent anxious that you personally might hear the voice of God speaking to you? Are you hungry to know God more deeply? The Apostle Peter is a saved man. But he needs the restoration of his soul when we meet him in Luke 24. Do you remember that verse in John chapter 10? And verse 9. Jesus says, I am the door.

By me if any man enter in he shall be saved. And he shall go in and go out and find pasture. What does that mean? Does that mean he goes in and out of his salvation? Well it can't mean that because it would mean you'd only get food when you're on the outside.

You have two needs perhaps in your Christian life. The need for security. And the need for feeding.

Jesus says there is a sheepfold. And I am the door. And if you want security you find it through me.

You go into the sheepfold through the door. And if you want to be fed from the word of God you find it through me. You come out through that same door to the pastures where Christ will lead you.

Jesus says I am the door. I will meet your needs. And if you find security and pasture you will be saved.

And so the Lord meets with Peter privately. We can see reference to that in Luke 24 verse 34. He restores his soul.

He leads him in the path of righteousness. And then there are two more characters in Luke 24. These unnamed disciples.

Walking quietly on the road down towards the village of Emmaus. And we see their story between verses 13 and 35. Walking home full of despair.

Shattered expectations for them too. All the hopes that they had. Christ it seemed was going to be the answer to every need that they had ever experienced.

And they expected all Israel to turn to him. And the politicians and the soldiers and the priests ganged up and they got rid of him. And these two men are walking home.

Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death thou art with me says Psalm 23. Jesus comes in on a side road. Walks with them as they tread along in despair.

Asks them what they are thinking about. Shares with them in their sorrow. And the Lord begins to expound scripture to them.

God in every crisis of your life is going to bring you back to scripture if you are to be brought unscathed through the problem. God is going to bring you back to scripture with the problems at this conference or problems may be on the team or when you get home after this conference some of you. Some of you may well face death or bereavement within the course of the coming months.

We have had people go all the way out of the field and then be summoned home because one of their parents has died. Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death the good shepherd will draw alongside me and anchor my heart in scripture. And though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death the good shepherd will draw alongside me and anchor my heart in scripture.

Between verses 25 and 27 the Lord says these words. Foolish men. Slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken.

Slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken. Verse 27. And he began from Moses and all the prophets and he went through all the prophets interpreting to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

How is the Lord going to be shepherding you in these days? Through his still small voice that you hear in your own heart as you read his word. Six months ago I went through one of the most traumatic experiences probably of my life. And my wife was taken into hospital with cancer.

And we were wondering just what the future was holding. She was going to have an operation and the result of that operation would let us know whether cancer had spread throughout her body or was simply in one local place. And it seemed like days and days before the medical people could give us any answer.

And God spoke through one verse that became an anchor for my heart in those days. The Good Shepherd drew alongside me. I was having to travel 160 miles a day because of the work that I was then involved in.

And time and again this scripture was coming home to my heart. I was having to prepare to preach the gospel in a university in Britain. Most of the time my mind just wasn't on it.

God was bringing me back to these verses. There is no temptation, no test, no trial that has taken you. But such as man can bear.

Who decides that? God decides how much you can bear. You feel you're getting to the end of your resources. God says you will not be allowed to come into a test that He has not already gauged for you and measured for you.

God is faithful. He will simply not allow you to be tested beyond what you're able to bear. That may speak nothing to you tonight but I tell you that was a tremendous encouragement to me last February.

There was absolutely nothing that I could do except throw myself back on God. When my wife was finally brought out of the hospital. She could hardly walk.

She was brought into a room of some Christian friends of mine. She was going to stay there. I had to go back to the university and finish the mission that night.

She was given a cup of coffee and a Christian magazine to read. And the first article she reads is about cancer in women. And one of the very first things they said was that with that particular cancer two thirds of women are dead within five years.

There she is just out of hospital. Reading this in a Christian magazine. God allows some pretty heavy trials sometimes.

And yet God is the one who measures every test that you ever come to. He wants to anchor your confidence in Himself and His word. Turn back to Psalm 42.

Let me give you a quick example. In Psalm 42 the psalmist has got four problems. This isn't going to be a long Bible study just a series of notes you can look it up afterwards.

His first problem is that God seems so unreal. My soul is panting after God. My soul is thirsting after God.

When shall I be able to come and appear before God? God seems so far away to him. And in verse three he is being taunted by his enemies. And in verse four he is looking back to when things were so much better in his past.

Do you remember times when things were better in your Christian life? The psalmist says I remember how I went with the congregation. I led them to the house of God and they were such singing and rejoicing. They were high and happy days.

And now in verse six he finds himself in exile. His fourth problem. In verse five the psalmist simply talks to his soul.

Have you ever learnt to do that? Soul what are you doing? Soul did I hear you right soul? Are you grumbling and complaining my soul? Soul is that a trace of discouragement I hear? Soul what on earth are you moaning about? Soul why are you discouraged? Stand to attention soul. Put your shoulders back. Come on soul.

That's the kind of way he talks. Soul why are you gloomy? Put your hope in God. Have confidence in him for the future.

He begins to talk to himself. Now they do say that talking to yourself is a sign of lunacy. It may well be.

Except under these circumstances. You Christians are to learn to talk to yourself. That doesn't mean wandering around the corridors mumbling.

Or getting on the telephone. Hello soul I didn't want anyone to think I was a lunatic soul. I just wanted to tell you to get a little bit discouraged.

But that is the beginnings of the improvement. Telling himself to take right and biblical attitudes. And then he talks to God.

Because God is your father. And you can go to God with anything. Some of you don't know where to go at the end of this conference.

And you are becoming almost paralysed by indecision. Go and talk to God about it. Some of you are angry with God.

Or upset with OM leaders. Go and talk to God about it. There have been hundreds of OMers over the last 20 years complaining to God about OM leaders.

You're not the first. You may have complaints about the conditions or about something else. Go and tell God he knows well how to deal with that problem he's been dealing with it for so long.

And as he talks to himself and talks to God he finds in the last three verses, four verses that his confidence returns. I have this written in a little card in the front of my Bible. Every problem a person has is related to his concept of God.

If you have a big God you have small problems. If you have a small God you have big problems. It's as simple as that.

When your God is big then every seeming problem becomes an opportunity. Is your God big enough? Have you been allowing God to speak to your heart through his word? Have you got these days, day by day that which is fresh from the word of God for your own heart? These disciples who are being spoken to in Luke 24 are going to have to go through prison some through crucifixion. They're going to have to face emperors and princes.

They're going to have to face prison. They're going to have to face persecution. The Lord is teaching them from the very beginning every day to have their experience anchored in his word.

And then let's look at the next paragraph in Luke 24. Verses 36 to 43. And what is the next verse in Psalm 23? Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

Here we find the disciples sitting terrified. There are enemies all over the city. And these people are talking in whispers behind locked doors.

And the Lord comes. Can you imagine him coming up to the door? I imagine him like this. He raises his hand to knock on the door.

And then he thinks, no I won't do that. Because if I did on the door three of them would have heart attacks two would go up the chimneys, four out the window and the rest under the table. And so he just steps through the door, into the room.

Because the Lord knows his sheep. He knows what would scare them. He just appears in their midst.

Oh these moments in our experience when the Lord appears in our midst. Those times on the team where you sense God speaking. Those moments when you're on your knees before your open Bible when it just seems as if the page is glowing with the presence of God.

Those times in Evangelism where it just seems as if everything you say goes right to the heart of the person you're talking to. And you almost look around the room to see where the Lord is because obviously it's not just you talking but he's around somewhere at work. During these closing chapters of the four Gospels the Lord appears and disappears again and again.

Why does he do that? Surely to get them used to the idea that he is actually there all the time even though they can't see him. But these disciples are terrified and afraid. They have a disbelieving spirit.

And so the Lord says well have you got any food? And so they give him a bit of fish and he eats it and he spits out the bones. Puts the bones on the side of the plate. They have never seen a ghost eating fish and chips before.

Your imagination is improving translator. This is an amazing scene. There is Jerusalem full of enemies.

There are people who want to see these disciples crucified just as Christ was. They're afraid of what's going to happen to them in the next few days. And Christ is gone.

They're left alone. And then he appears in the midst of this city with all its enemies. He just comes and joins them.

Times when we've been witnessing in Muslim areas in India perhaps. Felt the hostility. Times when believers have been meeting in Eastern Europe.

Known that practically every home in their village is full of people that would like to see them persecuted or imprisoned. Times when we are in the presence of our enemies and the Lord Jesus comes. The shepherd comes to see how his sheep are getting on.

Comes to demonstrate with his word and his presence that he is sovereign over everything. And then how does Psalm 23 go on? Thou anointest my head with oil and my cup overflows. And here in the next paragraph of Luke 24.

We find the Lord promising an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon his people. He opened their mind to understand the scriptures. He gave them a command to take the gospel to the end of the earth.

And then he promised them his power from on high. One of the biggest dangers you face in your own strength. Going to a place the Lord has not sent you.

Going in self confidence. Going without an ear tuned to hear the shepherds voice. The Lord is about to send them out empowered from on high by his Holy Spirit.

From this moment on they are going to be his slaves. Are you a slave of Jesus Christ? So that he can do with your life what he wants, not just this coming year but for the rest of it. A slave is not like a servant, he is a possession forever.

Unless he is set free he will die in slavery. Slave is a person who has no rights whatever. It is your master who chooses the place where you stay.

The apostle Paul would arrive in a town like Philippi. Slave of the living God. And yet here on the living God there is no business in this town.

The apostle to Europe and yet he had no sense that he deserved the best accommodation. If his master chose for him to be put up in the local prison then that was good enough for Paul. Because he was a slave, he had no rights no choice.

He was there to get a job done. And you my friends have been given a job this year. And it is not just for this year, it is until the Lord comes back.

Every single one of us is to be involved in world evangelism. Don't think you can come here and play the conference and then give God a year or two of your life and go back to what you always planned to do a kind of materialistic... I don't know what. God has called us to be fishers of men.

This summer I was fishing. With my children. We went on holiday.

We bought ourselves for a few francs a little nylon line with a hook on the end. We found a little bit of of a dead fish on the ground and we cut out bits of it and we attached it to the hook. And we dangled it in the water.

Useless. We stuck a bit of a prawn on the end. We might have stuck live worms on the end.

And I was getting more and more frustrated just dangling this line in the water. My children were expecting me to pull up fish. My wife was expecting me to bring something home to cook for tea.

And there were about 200 fishermen on this jetty, this pier. And they were all catching fish except me. The man who was fishing next to me offered to give me some of his dead ones.

And I was just dangling this line in the water. And yet there are people, Christians around the world today and that's all they ever do. I will make you fishers of men if you follow me, says the Lord.

I will so work in your life that I will enable you to fish for men and women. And whether you work in a garage or whether you work in an office or whatever you do you are to be involved in drawing men and women to Jesus. What is the use of simply drowning worms? Oh, the delight of that first little fish that we

eventually caught.

It was that long. It was so gross. And it actually so outstretched.

As I saw more and more fish to be caught I thought it was so outstretched. To which the outstretched means again to fish them. God has here this time outstretched again inside the water there each and every guy out he comes again.

And that's all. He becomes like a slave. As he's trying to make him.

You simply can't pay your debt you have to become a slave. Or you become a slave in battle. Captured by the enemy and led away into battle.

Or you become a slave voluntarily out of love. All three of those are true of us. We have debts to God that we cannot pay.

We give ourselves to him in response. God has captured you in battle. For some of you the struggle may have been a very long one.

But there came a moment, maybe even in this tent maybe earlier this summer when you surrendered your whole future to Christ and became his slave. But the only sure way in which this slavery can continue is if you fall in love with the slave master. And you'll hear Christ saying I haven't called you servants I've called you friends.

The Lord anoints our head with oil and our cup of joy runs over. And then these men were in the temple continually blessing God. Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life.

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. These disciples went back to their Jewish community. No new techniques.

No one had taught them much about literature evangelism. They hadn't had any standardized test or driver's meetings. And yet because God was now real to them they moved amongst the Jews overflowing with reality and praise.

Expecting the Lord to appear beside them and to work at any moment. With something fresh from the scriptures flowing through their own lives. A tremendous sense of security in their relationship to God.

Knowing that Jesus was the one that could meet and restore their souls failures and sinners though they all were. These were transformed men. They hadn't just learned from techniques on the outside they were totally different on the inside.

Because Christ had become their rock. And they had a richness of soul that came from feeding on his word. They could walk through a valley of pressure or the valley of death quite untroubled because they knew the shepherd walking alongside them.

What began to happen to these men? They began to shepherd others. They began to influence person after person. Thousands of Jews were shortly to be following in the footsteps of Christ.

Drawn by the lives of these Christians. And these gathered in the upper room before long found themselves in the positions of being shepherds. They had to teach and they had to feed.

They had to walk with those in trouble. They had to reassure and comfort. As they began to walk with Jesus they became increasingly like him.

And as you go on through the second book that Luke wrote you can see these men becoming increasingly like Christ. As the truth of Psalm 23 gets hold of their own lives. That's the whole goal of the Christian life.

God will put you in situations that are designed for the one purpose of making you more like himself. Every gift that God has ever given you is designed for the same purpose. That's why people give gifts so often.

That's why fathers give gifts to their children. It's to somehow make the children more like themselves. Some of you remember your father giving you your first football.

Your mother wanting to pay for you to have piano lessons. My wife giving my three year old son a fully equipped mechanics tool box. Because she comes from a long line of Scottish engineers.

She wants this little boy to grow up in the same kind of way. I'm frantically trying to get him to read so that I can give him other things to get into his life. Why? Because parents want to direct and steer their children in a likeness to them.

And God the Father is no different. He's given some of you very creative gifts of organization. He's given some of you gifts of preaching, solid truth.

He's given some of you tremendous abilities to get alongside those that are hurting and to draw out the hurt. Why has God given you these gifts? So that you can become like himself. Jesus is the chief shepherd.

And he wants these eleven remaining disciples to be under-shepherds. And you can find at the end of Peter's first epistle he's passing on the same charge to the next generation. Send the flock of God which is among you, he says.

Peter was given the job of looking after the sheep. Feed my lambs, tend my sheep. But he looks in 1 Peter chapter 5 ahead to that day when the chief shepherd shall be manifested.

I'm ready. How are you getting on with your shepherding? Helping those in your discussion group. Is God during this conference giving you a heart of compassion, a heart of service for those in the countries where you're going to go in the months ahead? Is God dealing with your heart here at this conference? It is impossible to love other people unless you first know truly and deeply how much God loves you.

We need to allow God to deal with us deeply during these days so that he can prepare us for that which lies ahead. He wants to put challenges before us. He wants to put difficulties before us.

You may have to learn at this conference to get right with someone with whom you've already clashed. And to learn to ask their forgiveness. Because God wants to deal with you in that area here, because you should see the people he's got lined up for you on your team.

God wants to teach you to pray for the people that you bump into and you work with and you deal with during the day here at this conference. Because he wants to make you like himself. To grow up to be like him.

Be perfect, he says. Even as your father in heaven is perfect. It all comes back to who you're related to.

God has put his spirit within you so that you should grow up to be like himself. It is interesting watching the children of OM leaders grow up. I can remember being out in Kathmandu in 1969 and one of George Verber's sons was at school out there and the headmistress asked to see his parents because this little boy who was only 6 years old was running a large scale financial racket in the school.

He was buying and selling from one pupil to another and making enormous piles of money. Obviously he gets these skills from his mother. And just as it is inevitable that you grow up like your parents physically so God is wanting to work through his word and through his spirit and through circumstances to make you like himself.

Embrace every risk, every challenge and ask God during these days to keep your heart soft that you might grow more like himself. Let us pray. Let us pray.

Amen. Lord God we thank you for your word. We thank you for the revelation that Jesus is in glory praying individually for each of us.

That that likeness to him might be formed in us. That the gold of our faith might be utterly purified. Oh God we pray that day by day we might be truly hungry to know you.

Lord we we are immature. Lord we are sorry for the ways in which you must be. You must just long for us to grow up.

Lord we know that you don't expect babies to behave like grown-ups and yet we wish that we were more pleasing before you. We thank you that we are secure in your family. That you watch over us as a good shepherd.

That you come alongside and make your word real. Lord we pray in this year ahead may we increasingly grow like yourself and may our closest team friends recognize it. In Jesus name.

Amen. Amen.

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