

NCMI EQUIP South Africa 2013

Session 6b



Being Strong in Jesus

by Peter Rasmussen

Tyrone kicked off our time together at EQUIP SA 2013* when he spoke about our identity and I was reminded of Jude 1 where it talks of the saints being “beloved and kept” for Jesus Christ. In our various identities – whatever you may call yourself (a pastor, elder, deacon, saint) – you're beloved and kept in and for Jesus Christ. Our identity needs to be secure as we go to the nations and fulfil the call of God on our lives – as we embark on this incredible adventure that God has for us.

Our relationships are strong when our identity is in Jesus Christ. We have to come back to that place again. My hope is that we would be strong and healthy in our relationship with Jesus and we would have more than just froth and bubble.

The most important thing

I sat with a couple of young men some months ago and we were chatting about ministry. They asked me, "What's the most important lesson you've learned in your ministry life?" I didn't have to think for long. The thing that came to mind straight away was: to sustain a life-giving relationship with Jesus Christ.

You may lead churches, plant churches, have a great ministry and a great future, but to sustain a life-giving relationship with Jesus is the most important thing you will ever do. I watch people do ministry and life and I'm always amazed that one person will do exactly the same thing as another, but one will thrive and the other won't. I'm amazed how churches will do exactly the same thing, but one church will be cooking while the other won't. I wonder about that. In fact, in medical terms, they talk about why some babies in the early phases of their development don't do as well as others. They call it FTT – Failure To Thrive.

I believe that God wants us to thrive. He wants us to be rooted in him, connected into a life-giving relationship with him as the source, so we can do all these things we talk about – churches being planted; nations impacted, as God calls us.

* Also see <http://ncmigauteng.co.za/a-fresh-commissioning/>

I want to expound on one verse here – **Psalm 23:1**

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."

THE

This incredible little verse starts out with "The". See, it's not just anyone we're talking about, it's "The" Lord we're talking about.

I think God is calling us in this adventure and journey into an exclusivity of relationship; into a personal connection with him; into an intimacy that many Christians are not walking in consistently and regularly.

I'm a one-woman man. That means that my heart is closed to all other possibilities. In fact, I even get a little nervous when another woman talks to me. I back off a bit. Because I shut off all other possibilities. Likewise, I'm a one-God man. I'm a one-relationship man with God.

We have to find this single purpose of mind. It's God we're talking about, not just any way or idea. It's our relationship with him. We must be single-minded in our connection, in our desire for intimacy with *The* Lord. We must be captivated again by *him*. We must hear his whispers, his heart, for what it is he wants us to do.

Some of you stand in meetings and say, "I want to go to the nations" and so on and you're waiting for a booming voice from heaven, but may I suggest that the beginning of this journey is in those quiet moments in your garden – your closet, as the scripture says – connecting with him, where he is your one focus, your one life, your one love. It's there where he speaks.

I had one of these moments a while ago. I was hanging out with God and I spoke to the Lord about the offices we were building that I really wanted to see finished. It's difficult to inspire people to give for offices! So I was whispering all this to the Lord and my heart was focused on *The* Lord – it was just him and I, alone. See, before we do other things – before we get round to finishing buildings – it's that intimacy, those whispers, that will sustain us. It's those things that will keep you when you're standing out there alone and things are not easy and the masses of people are not arriving at your new church plant that you thought were going to arrive. It's the intimacy of the whispers that will sustain you – *The* Lord. And I had this moment with God when my heart was now focused on *The* Lord alone, not the other things, and then, over the last year, we've had the incredible experience in seeing these buildings built at great cost and God just supplying in the most remarkable way. He wants to hear your whispers; he wants that connection with you.

Our allegiance can't be to programmes or leaders. We need to be exclusively his.

LORD

The second word in this verse is “Lord”. That's a nice word! It comes from the Hebrew word “Yahweh” which isn't a real word but made up of consonants –*Yodh, He, Waw, He (YHWH)*. This was because they weren't allowed to say the name of God, so they came up with these breath sounds. These sounds made up the name of God.

The Hebrew word for Spirit is *ruach*, meaning wind or breath. This idea is in Genesis 2: 7:

“Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.”

The idea here is that the breath and life of God, his very name, is put on and into us. When we go to the nations and embark on this adventure God has us on, we need to be secure in his name – the breath of God needs to be in us. We need to be full of his breath and life, we need to be sustained by him, we need to see the Spirit fill us again and again.

John 20:22 says, "And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’" When I take moments in my day to hang out with God and say, “God, I am here,” I imagine the breath and life of God and I breathe out and then breathe in, filling my lungs. Yes, I do some strange things, I've been around for a while. I imagine in my mind that the very character and name, these breath sounds, these consonants of *YHWH*, are what I'm breathing in. I'm allowing the Spirit of God to fill me again for the task.

I need to be full of his life to thrive. If you're going to do this mission of God you need to thrive. It's not about preaching, leading churches, leading small groups or all the things you do in your context. This is about him, about life from heaven. Maybe you need to pause a bit in your day, take some time out and see the Spirit of God - the *ruach* – the wind and life of God. (I'm not trying to make the Spirit into wind, he's a person, but his personality - his very character - we breathe in and we live on him.)

All the struggle and the battle and the issues of our life – we expel them out and say, *Yodh, He, Waw, He. Yahweh. The Lord.*

IS

This is a present tense thing. It's not a future thing; not a “one day he will be” or “sometime in the past he was” and we have great stories about everything he did last week, last month, or 10 years ago. But

this is about Today. This is in this moment. The Lord *is*.

To thrive I can't live on the past and I can't constantly live on some future where I keep saying, "God I've got to get to that future." To thrive I have to live in him *now*.

The problem is that many times we're constantly on this journey for a better day and a better thing. We're asking Jesus at prayer meetings to visit our church and make things happen. We're asking him to touch our lives and do the same thing to us that we saw him do with another. And in this we miss the *now*, we miss the fact that he *is now* something to me.

It's in those moments that we have a future and we're able to live on the foundations of the past. There's a commentary on Proverbs 13:12 which says, "Better is he who begins to act than he who remains in hesitating expectation." We have to understand something about the *now*.

So often we fall into the programme trap where believe that something "out there" will change things for ourselves or our churches and we run from pillar to post, or from one extreme to the next, from seeker-sensitive to fire-tunnels or to this or that. But we're not recognising that The Lord *IS* – He *is* in *this* moment.

We also can fall into the waiting trap. I'm a big believer in waiting but it depends what we're waiting for. In this trap we wait for God to visit our church; we wait for something to happen, for some spark to ignite. There's a definition of insanity that talks about doing the same thing over again and expect different results. We often do that.

Waiting in this context is theologically flawed and insane. God has already come! His presence is already here! He is everywhere present! Remember he said in Matthew 28:20, "Surely I am with you always, even to the end of the age."? The veil is torn! The Spirit has come out! It's not just that we can come in but also that the Spirit of God has broken out over the people; he is no longer contained in a moment or a place, but he is here! The Lord *IS* present.

I'm not against us praying for God to come. What we're really praying for is a greater revelation of his presence and a greater manifestation of his presence, and there's nothing wrong with that. But sometimes we pray these things and our prayers betray a lack of understanding on our part. In this thriving business with him we haven't fully understood he *is* here. The Lord *IS*, now, with me, present with me. To thrive and live in his mission and purpose, I have to live in this place.

God wants to do things and he will through his presence. In Matthew 14:17 we read how God multiplied the five loaves and two fish. That's what his presence does. That's what an understanding of him being present is – we bring what we have and we put it into his hands.

I sat with a pastor in the UK a little while ago and he was bemoaning that he had a pastoral gift. He said, "I need to be an evangelist!" I said, "Don't bemoan what you have and who you are, just put it in Jesus' hands." Don't bemoan what you are, not being sure if you have the right gift or the right mix, just put what you have in the hands of Jesus. I continued, "Jesus put you here and he will use your pastoral gift to reach this city with the Gospel. It's the answer to your city. He will use you, your gift, just put it in the hands of Jesus."

We can't constantly be reaching for another moment and having a revivalist mentality where we say, "It'll happen if... if we do more, if we pray more, if we hang around at this thing or that thing more, if we just see the power of God come like it happened in some other place..." No, Jesus is present. He is with you. He was here before any one of us arrived! He is everywhere present! We have to live in that place again. To thrive, I need to live in the fact that he is here *now*.

MY

The Lord is *my* shepherd. See, this needs to be personal. We often call our time with God our "personal devotion" time. But while we call it that, we often see it as a set of disciplines. I'm not against the disciplines of prayer or reading the Scriptures, but I think that often it's borne out of the wrong motivation.

We don't teach babies to want food. They just cry and make their need known to mom and dad very quickly. Yet so often when new converts come into the life of our churches we're quick to say, "You must do this and that and, by the way, you must tithe as well." We put together some kind of package instead of saying that, actually, the Lord is *my* shepherd. There's a personal connection; there's a life that's meant to draw us to him. There's a desire that calls us into intimacy and prayer and into the Scriptures. We will have a love for the Bible and prayer. It's not discipline alone that will give us that. There are moments of discipline and we ought to be disciplined and read the Scriptures, but not out of the motivation of discipline alone.

If we want to thrive it has to be borne out of a longing in our hearts for him. We long for him, for the Scriptures – when you haven't been in the Bible for a day or two and you've neglected the Scriptures, something should be calling out in you, "I need a meal. I need food again." As much as you need breath and life, you need food for your soul. Teach new converts to listen to their hunger and feed themselves in his presence.

When last did you have a "my" moment with God? When you didn't live on other people's revelations and thoughts about God but are connecting with him yourself? Matthew 3:17 shows us how the Spirit came down on Jesus and the Father said, "This is *my* beloved son with whom I am well pleased." Our

identity comes in the affirmation of *MY* beloved.

You can live with lack of exposure, support and anything else when you have “mine” written on your forehead. You are his. Men have lived with much worse before you for the sake of the Gospel, but they lived with the assurance that they were his. They woke up and when they opened their eyes in their beds in the morning they heard these words: "You are mine." And that allows you to do this thing, to go to nations, to see the Gospel preached, to go to all the world. Because our identity is in the affirmation that we are his. We belong to him. He is my personal shepherd!

SHEPHERD

If you look at the original text, there's an understanding of nourishment here. He is the nourishment of our soul. Psalm 34:8 says, “Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.”

So often we are one-dimensional in the way we think about our personal connection with God. My dad used to wake me up at 5am every morning for most of my life for breakfast. I can remember after I had had breakfast and had my own space again, I would open up my Bible and fall fast asleep, waking up 45 minutes later or so with drool dripping down the pages of the Scriptures. I would feel so guilty!

Now I love coffee and being out in the community. I can be in the midst of a coffee shop with Bibles open while I read and pray as if I'm the only person in the place, despite the waitresses running around and music blaring. But others of you are not like that at all. You need a quiet space to hang out with God and it's there where there's nourishment that you need to find.

So many of you have got so stuck into a pattern saying that this or that way is the only way to do this thing and you're like me when I was young, sleeping on the open pages of the Bible, and it's not producing any nourishment for you. If you want to thrive remember this: as individual as your fingerprint is, so is God's unique connection with you. So find it! Make it your life's mission to walk with him in the cool of the day again! God is still calling and still walking in the cool of the day and asking, "Who's walking with me?" Some of you tree-huggers need to go and do your devotion outside, under a tree, because inside would be horrendous for you! Go and make it happen! Connect with God! Go find your nourishment from him and your personal connection with him!

I SHALL NOT WANT

The make-up of the modern man is to live wanting. John Cheever writes: "The main emotion of the average adult American who has had all the advantages of wealth, education, and culture is

disappointment."

We live in a driven world where people generally don't know when enough is enough. They're on a quest for more. And as a result there's an underlying drivenness to society. Life in general has a sense of dissatisfaction and restlessness: The businessman doesn't earn enough; the housewife doesn't have enough help from her husband; the teenagers don't have enough clothes (and never enough airtime!); the wife doesn't get enough love from her husband; and the husband doesn't get enough sex from his wife. We're restless and dissatisfied. Something happened to us.

Ecclesiastes 1:8 says:

"All things are wearisome,
more than one can say.
The eye never has enough of seeing,
nor the ear its fill of hearing."

Our hearts have to be settled in him. 1 Timothy 6:6 says, "Godliness with contentment is great gain." We have to be content. If you want to thrive; if you want to go to the nations and plant a church and make all these great, wonderful things happen that God has put on our hearts; you have to be satisfied by him alone.

I say this to young couples that get married in our church: You haven't met your other half. Because if you're a half you're never going to make a whole. Two halves don't make a whole. Two whole people make a marriage. Be filled, fulfilled, in God.

In fact, some of you single ladies need to be satisfied in Christ. He has put you on mission, he has put you into his purpose and his call, and when you're complete in him, when you're whole in him, the possibilities of what God is wanting for your life begin to open up.

We have to settle the want issue because then everything you get is a blessing. Everything that happens to you in your life – the fact that your church or the leaders you lead or the people in your group love you is a blessing, not a right. The fact that your spouse loves you is a blessing not a right. We often live our lives making it a right and believing that the world owes us something. No, it does not.

If you want to thrive and do God's mission well you have to settle the want issue and have all your wants satisfied in Jesus. You've got to decide that anything else you get is a blessing – what people say about your ministry doesn't matter any more because you've settled the want issue.

Hear the whispers again and settle it

Now if we want to do this work, if we want to hear this commissioning call from heaven to go to the nations of the world, let me tell you: *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.* From that place, having connected with our heavenly King, finding our life source from him, we will become useful to the Kingdom of God and to the nations. It's there where ministry begins. There the whispers of heaven, the downloads of God, touch your heart. He'll whisper to you.

We live in a world that squashes dreams. Hear the whispers of heaven again. You have an inheritance here. Maybe you have prophetic words that have been sitting on the shelf for years and maybe they could even fill a book! And you're saying, "Lord, when?" Settle it in him. Settle your desire and want for him, and he will begin to unlock and whisper to you and these words you thought may never come to fruition will come to fruition. Let God settle it Today.

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