

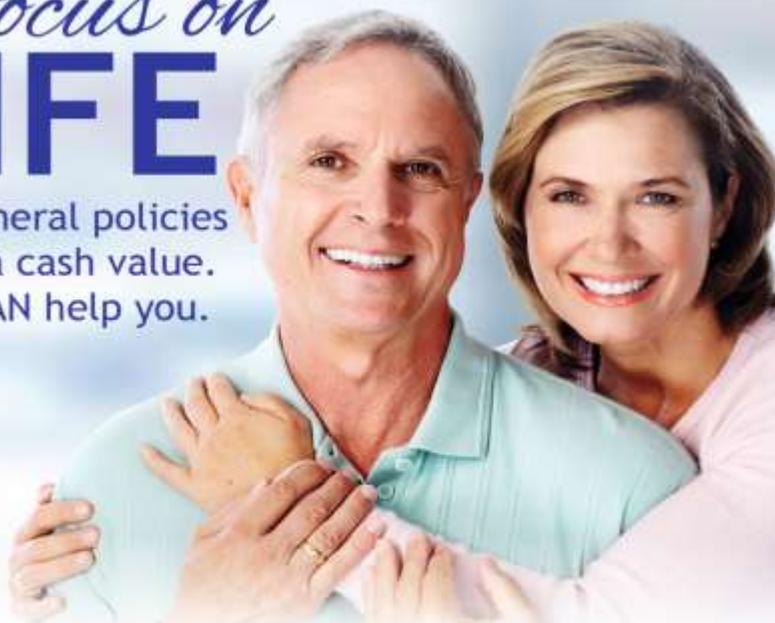
Daily Devotional

Booklet



we focus on
LIFE

ALL funeral policies
have a cash value.
We CAN help you.



East Rand

Funeral Directors

Prompt, efficient, yet homely!

Your **COMMUNITY** Funeral Director

Office: 011 425 0276 | All Hours: 083 266 1926
No.2, 14th Ave, Northmead, Benoni | www.eastrandfunerals.co.za

Reading: Exodus 3:1-4

“Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.”

When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!” And Moses said, “Here I am.”

This series called “Transformed lives” gives us a glimpse into the lives of ordinary people and the transforming power of an extraordinary God. This week we take a look at the life of Moses and how his life was transformed because of an encounter with God.

The Moses story is about calling and vocation. It’s about the extraordinary breaking into the ordinary. It’s about hearing and responding to the call of God in our lives. Old Testament scholar *Walter Brueggemann* captures the story like this, “Moses had his ordinariness broken. He had to rethink the faith and the life of his people. Moses discovered that his life was saturated with the reality of God. . . . and he wondered: What could be different about the purpose of my life because of the reality of this God?” This is the place where transformation begins in our lives. The moment we acknowledge the reality that God is with us and that he is calling us to walk a journey of faith and transformation with him.

Can you pause for a moment and recall a simple experience of the awareness of the presence of God—a sacred or holy moment? The moment the ordinariness in your life was broken.

Prayer: God of transformation, I pray that today you will meet me in those places that I am weakest and lack courage. Spirit of God indwell me so that my life can be transformed. Amen

Reading: Exodus 3:5-6

“Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.”

Holy Ground! When the holy happens, when we experience God's presence, or God speaks to us, all is transformed. “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” Let's reflect on the concept of “The Holy” in ancient Israel. God's holiness requires respectful distance, but God's presence also transforms everything at hand.

The burning bush in the barren, lonely desert of Sinai is a sign that God often comes and graces the lowly, appears in the common places of life, and speaks a word. We can experience God's presence anywhere, anytime, at work, school, home. God's presence happens to ordinary people going about their ordinary routines. So it's important to be watching and listening for those moments.

So often we disconnect our faith and daily life and work. It was in the ordinary work of Moses tending to the flock that the transforming encounter with God took place!

The words of Frederick Buechner come to mind “Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery that it is. In the boredom and pain of it, no less than in the excitement and gladness—touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it—because in the last analysis, all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace”

Prayer: God our Father, it is in your presence that everything changes! The moment you called me your beloved my life was changed forever. Speak to me once again, your servant is listening. Amen

Reading: Exodus 3:7-10

"The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

God Calls Us. God calls Moses to a task. There is work to be done. This call will change his life forever. Such a call will change our life forever! Something that is close to my heart is that our work as calling and vocation. Martin Luther saw all means of livelihood and productive work, even the most mundane and unpleasant labour, as marks of Christian vocation and response to God. John Calvin said that all our actions, not just our work, are a response to God's calling. Taken seriously, this means that our work and all we do in daily life are our vocation. All work given us by God is therefore holy and is done as a service to God. "So come, I will send you to bring my people out of Egypt." As we reflect in these words of God spoken to Moses, lets ask ourselves the question... So what is our calling, your vocation? What is the work to which God calls you? Are you living out your calling? Some writers suggest it is helpful to think in terms of our various or multiple callings in our work, relationships, leisure, family, and community. *Are you and I living out our callings in our different roles in life?* The story of Moses invites us to take off our shoes and listen for the Voice of God's call, God's guidance, and reassurance.

Prayer: O God of Moses, you heard the cries of the people in Egypt. Help me to notice and accept the call you have placed over my life as I live out my different roles. Amen.

Reading: Exodus 3:11-14

But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain. "Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" But Who Am I? Moses' initial response to God was, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (v. 11).

What a human moment! The call was overwhelming and filled with risk. Moses felt fearful and inadequate. He was reluctant to go. I don't think you and I are any different, don't we all feel that way at one time or another? Just as it isn't always easy to hear God's call in our lives, it isn't easy to live out our call. But we don't have to do it on our own, nor can we.

Transformation needs to take place daily! God is saying to Moses and to us "I will be with you! These words by our God spoken to Moses is the same promise of divine presence that gives us hope in our journeys. Created, redeemed, and called by God, with the assurance of God's presence and power every step of the way.

Prayer: Father God, the great I AM! Today I offer my praise and adoration to you! My life is transformed because of you! Amen.

Reading: Exodus 3:15-17

“God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.’ “This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation. “Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—a land flowing with milk and honey.’”

Have you ever called out to God phrases like, “Where are you God”, “Who are you God”, “When will I hear from you God”?

The reality is that God is always present. Just like he was in the wilderness with Moses in that burning bush. The voice of God is always there. When life becomes difficult, and the way grows dark. When we hurt and fail one another or lose someone we love. When faith grows dim. When our work grows wearisome. When we face an uncertain future. When we lift our hands to the heavens in fear or pain.

The Voice is always there: “You are my Beloved, gifted by my Spirit, called and sent to join me at work in the world. Do not fear, for I have redeemed you, I have called you by name, you are mine. You are precious in my sight and honored, and I love you. Do not fear, for I am with you” Isaiah 43:1-5.

“Beloved” is our name, it was the name of Moses and of Jesus. To be called God’s Beloved speaks of a life that is transformed, renewed and set free! And that makes all the difference!

Prayer: Holy Spirit of God. Help me to live out the calling over my life. In my household, school, workplace, church and community. Amen.

Reading: Exodus 3:18-22

“The elders of Israel will listen to you. Then you and the elders are to go to the king of Egypt and say to him, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. Let us take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God.’ But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him. So I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go. “And I will make the Egyptians favorably disposed toward this people, so that when you leave you will not go empty-handed. Every woman is to ask her neighbor and any woman living in her house for articles of silver and gold and for clothing, which you will put on your sons and daughters. And so you will plunder the Egyptians.”

Encounters with God change our lives completely. A true encounter will impact our lives in such a way that we will never be the same again. It is never too late to accept the call over your life. God is very aware of your life, and just as Moses was led to the ‘backside of the desert’ that awesome day, God will lead you gently by His hand to the place and time that He needs to speak with you face-to-face. Today, God is calling you and I closer to Him than we have ever been before. Will you come? If you come, and come willingly, through every challenge you have…God Himself will provide a way forward. Remember Moses had many excuses when God called his name, asked him to come near and remove his shoes. But God gave Moses an answer and a remedy for each of his questions and inadequacies. You may find it hard to accept everything that God had spoken to you in the past. But God has all the remedies, the provisions and the power behind His Word and Promises. He will accomplish more than that which you are able. Are you ready for Transformed Living!

Prayer: Father God, transformed living is possible because of you. Jesus Christ you have conquered all evil and sin for us so that we me live life to the full. Amen

TRANSFORMED LIVES - Moses
Group Notes

Welcome:

Share a moment when you have been Transformed by the presence of God in your life.

Worship:

All Things New Lyric Video - YouTube

Prayer:

Father God,

Thank you that through the Holy Spirit you are present and at work in our lives. As you continue to shape us into the people you have called us to be, we pray that we do not become like the world. We pray that we are transformed by the renewing of our mind so that we may learn to understand Your will for our life, which is good and pleasing and perfect. Thank You for our spiritual growth and transformation, help us focus on the godly values and ethical attitudes that will help us flourish spiritually, emotionally and mentally, Amen.

Word: Exodus 3

Questions:

What can we learn about the character of God and our requests of Him? a. What requests can we take to God, and which ones should we try to handle on our own? (Phil 4:6) b. Will God answer all of our petitions? (Rom 8:28) God asks Ezekiel if these bones can live. What is God trying to teach Ezekiel through this vision?

How specific is God in His calling? What can we learn about the detail in which God calls us?

Define the word Oppression. Why is God concerned with His people being oppressed?

Work: Spend this week asking the Spirit of God to help you acknowledge the areas of your life that need transformation and an encounter with the Living God.

GIDEON : Cry out to the Lord !

Read Judges 6: 5

Reading the book of judges, one gets an assurance that the ears of God are not too far not to hear our cry. Sometimes, when one is in a situation that is defined by sigh and crying – it does feel like God is too far to hear one's prayer and cry for rescue.

You will remember, when God told Moses that he has clearly seen how His people of Israel have been oppressed by Pharaoh and that He has come down to rescue them (Exodus 3: 7 - 8) . I do not know exactly what is it that is troubling you and making you to want to cry out. However, I have known one thing that is – your tears of pain and trouble are seen by God. Therefore, do not be afraid to cry out to the Lord because He is waiting for you to raise up your hand.

The Lord's love and grace is so amazing even to those who sin against the Lord, in the book of judges we witness the people of Israel repeatedly sinning against the Lord, but God never ceases to be gracious.

The Lord is ready to hear and respond lovingly to you when you, your family and friends if you cry out to Him for your past and current season of pain and difficulties of all forms.

Have you cry out to the Lord for your
sickness/loss/disappointment/troubles (write now to the Lord as you cry
out to Him for what has troubled or troubling your soul) ?

.....
.....
.....

Prayer: Lord God, give your servant a sign that you hear his or her cry. May your known attentive attention to him or her be sufficient to heal as your people cry out to you . Amen!

GIDEON : God is worthy of our worship

Read Judges 6: 10

The response of God to the rebellious people of Israel, truly deserves our act of worship. The almighty God is so amazing, that even after the people Israel have done continuously the evil things that God warned them about them – He still reminds them of His past favour and strength over them. This verse.10 of this chapter in the book of judges paints a redeeming picture of God who cares so much for His people that while they do wrong things, He convinced them again to worship Him. The Lord is a capable God to rescue and redeem us from all our troubles and enemies too, just like He did to the Israelites from the Midianites.

God reminds us too today, as He reminded the Israelites that He is God and that those who put trust on Him should not fear all other gods who threaten them. Perhaps, there are things or people in your life currently that threatens your life, the Lord through the book of judges offer us again the power of Him, though we have not obeyed Him. The grace of God is very mysterious even to us when we do not always follow His will.

Your repentance from all the mistrust you probably acted out in your life towards God, even if it was for a minute or second, God will be pleased. Repentance is an act of worshipping God!

Are you struggling to repent? Are you struggling to worship when things do not go your own way?

Please make your notes here as you reflect:

.....
.....
.....
.....

Prayer: Dear Loving God, always help us to live-out lives that affirm your worthiness for our praises and worship to you – in and out of seasons, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

GIDEON : The Lord is with you !**Read Judges 6: 12**

Sometimes, when you are in a season of difficulty , the season of troubles , the season of pain , the season of losing the loved one(s), the season of being tested , the season of heavy storm(s) like the current infection and effects of Covid-19 – all that can restore your soul is experiencing uncontested re-assurance from God through those He called to declare that the Lord is with you !

Today, I borrow from the words of the messenger of the Lord that came to Gideon to assure him and the whole house of Israel that the “ Lord is with you , mighty warrior” – even if you are not going through any of the direct painning stuff in your life , be assured now that the Lord is with you to defeat the enemy that will want to prevent you from achieving living life freely. Furthermore, the people you know and sometimes you do not know but you hear of their painning stories – know again and reassure them too that the :Lord is with them and He will never forsake them nor leave them alone to be humiliated and defeated by the evil.

When the Israelites were to be destroyed by the Midianites because of their disobedience to God by worshipping other gods – God saw it fit to declare salvation to them in-spite of their mistakes that undermined Him.

I declare freedom for you and your family, in the Name of the Lord from all harms.

Prayer: Dear Merciful God, you knew us before you created us, and you have never stopped to look after us through-out all the seasons we experience in life. Thank you, Lord, for always standing up for us as your peoples with errors, and you love us regardless of all things we have failed to do. Renew your spirit to those of us who have lost hope, to know that you are with us, Oh Lord. Amen!

Read Judges 6: 14

The account of the conversation between God and Gideon in this chapter – sends a revival of not just hope but a revival of the spirit of God’s strength knitted within the inner-person of us as humanity. As I read this passage , especially verse.14 as a parent you just feel so much connection to the words of encouragement that have been spoken by God to Gideon in the face of the upcoming death to the people of Israel by the Midianites. There are times in the life of a mother or father , when the need to reinvigorate the spirit of a child , so the expression of the longingness of a parent to get the child to face whatever challenges s/he might be facing will be along the lines such as thus “ Go in this your strength.”.

God is challenging you today, to stop doubting the strength that He has placed in you. You have God’s spirit in you, therefore, the strength needed for your upcoming challenge or enemy is enough to save you and others. You were not created to be defeated by the enemy but to conqueror exceedingly.

Do you believe that you have the strength to overcome your difficulty season (or a difficulty season of your family or friends or others..) ? And why do you say so?

.....
.....
.....
.....

Prayer: Gracious Lord, you are the true strength in us and through us. We salute you for the strength to overcome, in the Name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

GIDEON : Nothing will defeat you

Read Judges 6: 16

When the Lord, says to us that just because He is with us – nothing will defeat us, what will then cause us to fear those who are against us. In this passage, God is re-anchoring a spirit of trusting in Him and courage for the representative of the people of Israel.

The challenges of fear that we at times experience, has a tendency of making us to panic. However, if God speaks to us like He did to the Israelites during the leadership of Gideon – indeed, nothing can ever defeat us.

These words of approval that God declared to Gideon are so relevant to us, as we are infected and affected by the current Covid-19 pandemic that we will not be defeated by this pandemic. The thorn of this covid-19 should never make us to desert God instead we should ask from God to give us added strength to know that not even this virus can make us feel defeated. Do you feel, you have enough strength from God to defeat what comes in your way? Say more!

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Know that the Lord, will stay with you until you defeat whatever that comes in your way.

Prayer: Trinitarian God, we adore you for the courage and strength you give us unconditionally. Thank Lord for making us to be more than conquerors. Amen!

Read Judges 6: 23

Gideon's meeting with God through the angel was perceived by him that – now that he has seen the Lord he will die. It was believed then, that the one who had such a personal experience with the Lord he will die. However, because the mind of the Lord is not the same of that which the people have. Surely, when God want to kill us – he will do so and not accept anything from us (Judges 13:22). We will recall that; Hagar didn't die after seeing the Lord (Genesis 16:13).

When experiencing great things that the Lord has done in your life and/or through your life – be at peace and just serve the Lord. You will not die just because you have seen the greatness of God! Maybe, the great things that the Lord has done for you are to give you an opportunity to be gracious to others! Instead, be at peace because the Lord longs for your acts of worship to Him!

Sadly, the people of Israel after Joshua died – they went back to do evil which undermined God and exalted other gods who swayed their attention and worship to false gods.

In the story of Gideon and God in this passage – we witness Gideon's excitement of meeting the Lord by building an altar to worship God who is peace! Wow! This is so spiritual moving in that, after God has declared peace unto Gideon and us today – that after Gideon received an assurance from God of not dying, He could only worship God. This was a sign that, Gideon, had so much faith and trust into God.

Prayer: Almighty God, you have given to us again “PEACE” and we as your people in the whole world – we need your peace now and forever. Immerse our leaders here on earth into you well of peace, through Jesus Christ. Amen

Read: Luke 1 verses 26 -28, "In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you."

Could you imagine a situation like this today? A young girl named Mary is approached by an angel to be told that God had chosen her to be the mother of his son. What do you think your response would be?

We learn that God did not choose Mary because of her righteous character but because he favoured her. Can you imagine this angelic being leaning forward to talk to Mary? God using His angel to be vulnerable to a human? Choosing to empower her and to invite Mary to make a choice. God chose to be gracious to her, to save her and to favour her.

Although in retrospect Christians today may understand the monumental change that was about to take place. Did this young girl of humble circumstances understand the enormity of what was happening to her?

This occurrence was the first tiding of God's new covenant with his people. A covenant that did not rely on Mary's ability to be righteous or to keep God's commandments, but instead relied on her obedience to him. Like Mary, we are changed by this story. Like Mary, we are highly favoured by God. We are no longer bound by the old covenant but through Christ's death and resurrection from the cross we have become righteous in his sight despite our sinful nature.

Prayer: Father, we are highly favoured by you. We choose to be obedient to you. Thank you for loving us despite our sinful natures. Thank you for dying on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins.

Read Luke 1 verse 28, Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found great favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.”

A young girl such as Mary, who had been brought up in poor circumstances had so much to lose. The dignity of her family and the scorn of a society who could potentially persecute her for being pregnant outside of a marriage. Did those thoughts cross her mind when the angel Gabriel spoke to her?

What is her response to his invitation? In verse 36, we learn Mary's response, “I am the Lord's servant” “May it be to me as you have said.”

These words transformed her entirely and changed the perception society would have of her for generations to come. Mary made the choice to allow God's love to be conceived within in her. Mary chose to join in God's plan to bring good news to all people.

We are today provided with that choice as well. Are we ready to be transformed by God? Are we willing to allow God to work through us so that others may be transformed by his love?

Consider: What is your choice today?

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the transforming power of your holy spirit. Please work through me and use me to tell others of your love

Read : Luke 1 verse 36, “ I am the Lord’s servant.”.. “May it be to me as you have said.”

Can you imagine God waiting for us, like he waited for Mary to answer his invitation? Mary’s answer to God was yes. Just like Mary we have the option to say yes to him.

Like Mary, maybe you are feeling a little afraid or troubled by this invitation, or perhaps you like Mary, are scared to take a risk? Maybe you cannot believe that God would call you or that he would want to use you to share his word?

Just as Mary found joy in her obedience to God, so can we. Is there anyone in your life that you feel you need to be reconciled to? Is there someone you know who desperately needs to hear about God’s eternal love for them? Do you know of someone who is in need of God’s love and comfort?

Will you answer in faith today, just as Mary did, “I am the Lord’s servant.”.. “May it be to me as you have said.”

Try to imagine yourself as Mary. Although troubled and fearful her human response was: Yes, Lord, use me. Be reminded of the amazing impact this response had on the world and on how her choice, continues to impact, transform and change lives today. God can use you too.

Consider: What is your answer to Christ’s invitation?

Prayer: Dear father, help me to take the risk. Help me to be brave as Mary was, by answering yes to your call on my life

Read: Luke 2:19 “But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.”

The word transformed means to “change in condition, nature or character or to convert.” We may ask the question: how was Mary transformed by her circumstances?

By studying the historical background of Mary we can learn more about her: Despite the risk of a private or public divorce (which would have meant her being stoned to death), Mary agreed to carry God's child.

Even though the circumstances of Christ's birth were humble, she understood them and pondered them in her heart (Luke 2:19).

After Christ's birth Mary and Joseph took the baby Jesus to be consecrated to the Lord. When Simeon saw Jesus, he blessed him as the “salvation” of the people and he foretold Christ's death when he said to Mary, “And a sword will pierce your soul too.” (Luke 2: 35).

When Christ was crucified as Simeon had prophesied, Mary stood at his feet. In the midst of his crucifixion Jesus, despite the pain he must have felt, was concerned about his mother and he asked his disciple to take care of her (John 19:26).

Mary risked the scorn of her family and the loss of her life by being obedient to God. The circumstances of Christ's birth were difficult and humble but she still had faith in God's plan for her son, Jesus. It may only have been after Christ's death and resurrection that she fully understood the prophetic word Simeon had given to her when Jesus was blessed and consecrated as a baby, yet she continued to serve God faithfully.

Consider: What can you learn from Mary's responses to the difficult circumstances she had to face? How do you think these circumstances transformed her?

Prayer: Father, we do not always understand why we go through difficult times but we choose to trust in you and in and your plans and purposes for our lives.

Read: Psalm 51 verse 10, “Create in me a pure heart, O God and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”

Just like Mary, Christians have their own story of transformation to tell. Our journey of transformation may not have been an easy one but the closer we come to God in our relationship with him, the more refined and spiritually mature we become.

We may ask ourselves: How much have we really changed? The answer may be: The holy spirit has changed us and worked through us so that we may have peace in him. Christ overcame the world so that the more we yield to Christ in faith, the more we can overcome our own world.

Psalm 51 v 10 says, “Create in me a pure heart, O God and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” When we study more about Mary we learn that despite the difficulties she had to face in her own life, she had a pure heart and a steadfast spirit. We learn that she was:

A mother who worried about and cared for her son. When at the age of 12 her son went missing during the Passover in Nazareth we know that she was frantic with worry and searched for him for 3 days before finding him in the temple. We learn that shortly after this event her husband, Joseph is no longer mentioned and we can surmise that she became a widow. We learn that she had four other boys who mocked Jesus and only believed in him after his death and resurrection. Yet, as a mother despite the discord she had to deal with within her family, she firmly supported and believed in the plan God had for his life.

Some of the challenges described above, might seem familiar to us today. As Christians we may learn from Mary that during times of challenge God is our strength, and we can overcome our own world if we yield to him in faith.

Prayer: Father thank you that we may become transformed in our relationship with you. Thank you for the gift of your holy spirit working in us.

Transformed Lives
MARY

week 3 : day 6

Spread Your Wings and Arise

There are times in our lives
We feel much like
A flower struggling to bloom;
We go through these times
Of change and growth
Like a caterpillar in a cocoon

Nobody can see
The Lord's hidden work
Until the day we break through –
Then we can begin
To spread our wings
And arise as butterflies' do

So allow the Lord
To work in your life,
To make you all you can be –
So you will one day be able to soar
And know what it means to be FREE

By M.S. Lowndes

Prayer: Dear Lord please help me to become transformed by the renewing of my mind so that I may prove what your good, perfect and acceptable will is in my life.

Transformed Lives

MARY

REFLECTION:

A young girl such as Mary, who had been brought up in poor circumstances had so much to lose. The dignity of her family and the scorn of a society who could potentially persecute her for being pregnant outside of a marriage. Did those thoughts cross her mind when the angel Gabriel spoke to her?

What is her response to his invitation? In verse 36, we learn Mary's response, "I am the Lord's servant" "May it be to me as you have said."

We are today provided with that choice as well. Are we ready to be transformed by God? Are we willing to allow God to work through us so that others may be transformed by his love?

Just as Mary found joy in her obedience to God, so can we. Is there anyone in your life that you feel you need to be reconciled to? Is there someone you know who desperately needs to hear about God's eternal love for them? Do you know of someone who is in need of God's love and comfort?

Welcome: Open in prayer: Father, we want to serve you faithfully. Please work through us and use us to spread your gospel and love to others. Amen.

Worship: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FmnOT5FgctE> – Worship songs.

Word:

Read: Luke 1 verses 26 -28, "In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you."

Work:

Why did God choose Mary to have his son?

What was Mary's response to the angel Gabriel?

How did her response affect the world around her?

How does her response affect you?

Read: Jer 1:1-5, Psalm 84:10, Jer 31:31-34

What this series has repeatedly affirmed in me is that transformation has a location! It is in the place of an encounter in the presence of God that we find the transformation we are yearning for. Jeremiah is no exception to this truth! His story begins when he was just a young boy of about 17 years old. He encounters God and a beautiful dialogue unfolds where God gives him a glimpse of why he was put onto this earth! "*I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb. Before you were born, I set you apart and appointed you as my prophet to the nations*"- Jer 1:5. God then reaches out and touches him on his mouth. This is the moment that marked Jeremiah! He was powerfully transformed and went on to be a prophet to the nations, reformer, and author of the book in the bible that bears his name. It is because of his ministry that we have the powerful image of the Father holding us as a potter holds clay, and, it is through his ministry that God first revealed His intention for a new covenant with His people, "*...I will put my instructions deep within them...I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people...and I will never again remember their sins.*" Jer 31:31-34.

It all began with an encounter. Transformation has a location. Perhaps that is why the psalmist boasts, "*better is one day in Your courts than a thousand elsewhere*"- *Ps 84:10* In a single moment with Jesus the blind could see, the deaf could hear and the lame could walk again. He is the God of transformation! Jeremiah was transformed because he spent time earnestly seeking the father! He set himself up for transformation by putting himself in a position to encounter God. Perhaps a question we should contemplate is, how can I set myself up for transformation this week?

Prayer: Lords Jesus, may we experience the transforming power of your presence this week.

JEREMIAH - Transformed Purpose

Read: Jer 1:1-5, Mat 5:13-16, col 1:27

Both Jeremiah's grandfather and father were Levitical priests. This is significant because Jeremiah would have grown up his whole life assuming that he would follow in their footsteps, but God had a different plan for him. God had appointed him to be a prophet to the nations! In his encounter with God his sense of purpose is transformed and a deep sense of vocation is firmly established as God speaks three wonderful statements of affirmation over him in Jer 1:5; *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you", "I set you apart before you were born", "I have appointed you"*. What I love so much about these statements is that they speak deeply of Gods intentionality! In one moment, Jeremiah would have known that he was created on purpose! He did not simply sneak onto the earth, he was not a mistake, He was handpicked by God and commissioned to do Gods work. His life was part of Gods plan. May we know today that just like Jeremiah, God has a plan for our lives! God has given us a purpose! Scripture reminds us that we are His holy priests and that we are divinely Chosen!

In Matthew 5, Jesus calls us the salt and the light of the earth! I love the way the Message translation puts it, Mat 5:13-16 *"Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavours of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? ... You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colours in the world. God is not a secret to be kept.* The hope of the world is not in the size of our churches or bank accounts, or in how many are allowed to gather on a Sunday... Scripture is clear, the hope of the world is the fact that Christ lives inside of us. We are his Chosen instruments to spread His love, His light, and His words to the earth!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, as I hear your call, give me the courage to answer

JEREMIAH - Transformed Self-Worth

Read: Jer 1:6-10, Ex 4:10, 2 Cor 12

Jeremiah's first response to God's call was to give a list of reasons as to why he wouldn't be able to fulfill it. Jer 1:6 *"Alas, Sovereign Lord," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am too young."* He isn't the first of our biblical heroes to bring up their inability and deficiency as an excuse. Remember Moses at the burning bush? He responds to God's call with the words, *"Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent... I am slow of speech and tongue."* When it comes to fulfilling God's purpose in our lives it is so easy to become disheartened and discouraged by our perceived inadequacies, insecurities, and weaknesses. Jeremiah believed that he could not answer God's call because he did not have the right skill and because he was not the right age and Moses believed he wasn't enough. What insecurity is stopping you from answering God's call? Whatever your answer, may you be encouraged by the truth that unfolds in Jeremiah's story. God didn't wait for Jeremiah to feel confident or until he equipped himself with the skills he thought he needed, rather, God met Jeremiah in the midst of his insecurities and revealed that he was valued, known and not alone, and then He does something remarkable! Jer 1:9 *"Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "I have put my words in your mouth"* God touched the very part of him that he believed was insufficient and filled his mouth with the words he thought he lacked! God took a weakness and changed it into a strength. May we be reminded today that God is touching us in our area of weakness! If you are feeling insufficient, remember the words of Paul as he reminds us of what Jesus told him when he felt the same, 2 Cor 12 *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."*

Prayer: Lord Jesus, please touch what is weak within me.

JEREMIAH - Transformed for Courage

Read: Jer 1:8-19, Deut 31:6

When studying the first chapter in Jeremiah you can't help but notice the long list of assurances God gives to him! "*Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you...Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you... Do not be terrified by them...Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land... They will fight against you but they will fail, for I am with you and will rescue you*" Jer 1:8-19. The assurance that God would be with him must have done something powerful within him because after this moment Jeremiah is transformed to a braver version of himself. He moves from being timid and unsure to courageously standing up and speaking out hard truths. Truths that were uncomfortable for people to hear. Truths that often placed him in danger and caused people to reject and scorn him. He wasn't afraid to say what was necessary, in fact, Jeremiah had more to say about repentance than any of the other prophets! He chose what was right over what was easy, he chose courage over comfort and he chose to stand up and be seen when it felt safer to hide. The moment we become aware of Gods promise of His presence, we too become braver versions of ourselves. When I was a child I was terrified of the dark! Every night I would try to endure it, but most nights I would give up and switch the light on. The times I was able to endure it, were the times I had the courage to call for my dad and he would come in and sleep on the top bunk. the dark was still dark, but I knew my dad was near, so I slept peacefully. There is a supernatural Strength and confidence that comes from knowing the one who can rescue you is beside you! May we know today that we can be brave because he is with us. "*Do not be afraid, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you*"

Prayer: Lord Jesus, make me aware of your presence.

JEREMIAH - Transformed Ability

Read: Jer 1:11-12 , Acts 1:8

When Jeremiah encountered God he was not just enabled with a new sense of purpose, worth and courage, but with ability too! After the Lord touches him, he is empowered to see and interpret visions and is enabled to clearly hear Gods truth and given the words to articulate it! *The word of the Lord came to me: "What do you see, Jeremiah? I see the branch of an almond tree," I replied. The Lord said to me, "You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled."* Jer 1:11-12. One of the consequences of being touched by God is that our abilities are transformed! We are suddenly equipped and enabled to do what we have never been able to do before! It is impossible to read the scriptures without being confronted by this reality! We see it in the Old testament as God draws near to Bezalel, fills him with His spirit and he is empowered with Supernatural creativity and we see it when God draws near to Samson and He is empowered with supernatural strength! After Pentecost the disciples went from being men who ran away and abandoned Jesus to men who were filled with a passion for his name, often risking their lives to proclaim the gospel! Gods Spirit empowered them with the gifts of healing, faith, miracles prophesy, wisdom, discernment and speaking in other tongues! The best news is, he has promised to do the same for us! When God touches us, He empowers us with the gifts and the fruit of His Spirit and our abilities are transformed and we to are able to do what we could never do before! *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* Acts 1:8

Prayer: Lord Jesus, touch my life so that I may be empowered with your gifts and fruit and be transformed.

JEREMIAH – The Strength to Keep Going

Read: Jer 15:10-11

One of the things Jeremiah was known as was the 'persistent prophet'. His life was so transformed that He found the strength to endure, press on and keep going in spite of danger, persecution, and the many threats he faced. His ministry lasted over 40 years! As we study his life, we are faced with an overwhelming truth that helps us understand how. He was able to persist because his moment of transformation was not a once off event in his life. He met with God, was touched, and encouraged by God and then he kept on meeting with God! He constantly placed himself in the position to be encouraged, reminded, assured, and strengthened. His life gives us a glimpse of what sustained transformation looks like. Jeremiah spent his life earnestly seeking God. He cried out to God, he shared his pain and sorrow with God, he complained to God and he rejoiced with God. In fact, Jeremiah was so real with God that he is often referred to as the weeping prophet. As you study his life you will quickly realise that his moment of doubt in chapter one was not his only moment of doubt, he suffered from inner doubts for his whole life and was still able to live out his calling because even though the tape of his insecurities and pain kept playing in his head, he constantly returned to the truth of God. In sharing his pain with God, he placed himself in the perfect position to receive God's encouragement, *"What sorrow is mine, my mother. "Oh, that I had died at birth! I am hated everywhere I go. I am neither a lender who threatens to foreclose nor a borrower who refuses to pay— yet they all curse me. The Lord replied, I will take care of you, Jeremiah. Jer15:10-11*

May we place ourselves in the position to encounter God's voice daily.

Prayer: Lord Jesus when I stray from Your presence, please pull me close.

THEME: Jeremiah

Welcome: Have you ever felt God's encouragement in a moment in your life when you needed it most? Share your experience with the group

Worship: Hillsong united- Who you say I am

Word: Read Jeremiah 1:1-10, Mat 5:13-16

Discussion:

- 1- Why do you think an awareness of Gods presence gave Jeremiah so much courage?
- 2- Have you ever felt this kind of courage in a season where you felt afraid?
- 3- Why do you think a sense of purpose is so important as we walk this journey?
- 4- Are there any areas in your life where you feel deficient or unable to fulfil Gods purpose? What truth could you take from Jeremiah's story to encourage you in these areas?

Work: Place yourself in a position to received Gods assurances this week by earnestly seeking his presence.

Read Genesis 25:24-34

Jacob is the twin brother of Esau; however, because Esau was born first he was considered the first born - sibling rivalry 101.

Having an older brother in general was difficult for me, he was good at everything and I tried to walk in his footsteps during primary school, but he was just better. I tried doing athletics, he was better. I tried doing cricket he was better at it. He did soccer I didn't even try. He was so good at whatever sports he did – it was so frustrating.

A there seems to be a common thread with my story and that of Jacob's, his older brother Esau seemed to be better at anything that he did, for example Esau was a skilful hunter and therefore Jacob chose to stayed at home. Their father Isaac seemed to have loved Esau more than anything, and Jacob connected more with his mother Rebekah.

It is easy to be thrown off course and miss the point of life by thinking that life is a constant competition. It is easy to fall into the trap of approaching life wanting to be better than the other person, when instead we should be learning from each other and being in competition. Jacob could have learned some skills from Esau and the other way around, and likewise I could have learnt from my brother instead of trying to be better than him.

When we learn and work together, there is transformation, there is unity in God, and He begins working within our lives. It is not about who is the best it's how can we be the best version of ourselves.

Prayer: Dear Lord, teach me to be humble and learn skills from others and may I be moved to teach others something.

JACOB**Read Genesis 35:6-8**

Jacob's encounter with God, drives him to getting rid of what is unholy in his life, what is not pleasing in the eyes of God. He cleanses his family.

After Jacob encounters God and hears what God is saying, he obediently goes Bethel, sending him to his first love.

In each of our lives there are things that we do, things that are habitual, things that are not pleasing to God, things that are not holy. It is these things so often rob us of a closer relationship with God. Just like Jacob we need to remember of our first love, our encounter with God, when the transformation first happened, and in holding onto that we will be able to find the courage to get rid of those things that are unholy. We will be able to hear what God is saying to us.

Jacob doesn't waste time once he enters into his relationship with God. As troubled, he was by feeling second best, struggling with jealousy over his brother and the skills that Esau had, Jacob puts that all aside and he allows God to speak into his life, he becomes obedient so that the transformation can happen.

Prayer: Dear Lord help me identify those things that hinder me from worshiping you and growing in you.

Read Genesis 35:9-10

On arrival in Bethel from Paddan Aram, something significant happens to Jacob, his name changes.

Generally, the name that you carry has a meaning, in most African contexts, communities, and families names speak into the family's situation at that moment with names bringing some sort of meaning into the house holds.

What God does for Jacob changes his meaning, he changes his name from what he was and what he was no longer going to be, He transforms the meaning of Jacobs life, and there by the meaning of his journey, the meaning of his life plans that God has for him.

God has a vision for Jacob, he has plans for him, and from when he was in his mother's womb, he already knew what he was going to do for Jacob.

God has a vision for us too, just like he had for Jacob, God has great plans for us He knows our future, the plans that are even greater than the meanings that are behind our names. He is always at work, He is ready to use us for the sake of His Kingdom, all we need to do is to be ready and do what he asks us to do, we need to be obedient to transformation.

***Prayer: Dear Lord, teach me to be patient, teach me to not give up.
Teach me to be obedient***

Read Genesis 35:11 and Mathew 28:18-20

Yesterday we looked at how Jacob's life was transformed, how God acted out on the plan and vision He had upon the life of Jacob, He changes the name of Jacob (which meant deceiver) and God names him Israel (meaning he struggles with God), after the transformation God commissions him out, He tells him to be fruitful and go multiply. Yet again we see that God's plans are forever, they don't just end here they are continuous.

The commissioning of Israel, reminds me of a similar commission that Jesus sets out for His disciples years later, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28-18-20

We are called, we are commissioned to go and make disciples of all nations, and just like Israel we are sent out to be fruitful and multiply, teaching people about the love and grace of God. We are called to help them experience the love of God so that their lives too may be transformed.

Prayer: Dear Lord, give me strength to fulfil your call in my life.

Read Genesis 35:12-15

God issues a promise to Israel, a promise of land for him and his descendance, and through being so obedient it happens, resulting in it not only being a transformation of his life but for the future descendants too.

God is a promise keeper, when He says that He will never leave nor forsake us He keeps His promises, He was with Israel and his descendants too.

God is with us today, He never leaves us, He doesn't forsake us. Just like the promise the disciples received a promise from Jesus Christ that He would be with them till the end of age He kept His promise and He still keeps it with us today. He told his disciples that He would send them a helper, the Holy Spirit. And that promise still stands today, we have that helper today.

Our God is a God that that keeps His promises to His people, a God that makes sure that our plans that He has for us are fulfilled by Him. He makes sure that our transformation is for the better for us now, for the future and for our descendants too.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for the promises and the work you keep doing in my life.

PRAY

This whole week we have focused on Jacob, on how God changed his life, used him and the plans that He had for him, today we will be praying.

Praying for the plans the Lord has for our lives, loved ones, the nation of South Africa and for the world. We pray for transformation.

Guidelines

- What are you thankful for? thank God for those things that you are thankful for today.
- Pray for the addicted
- Pray for the families and individuals suffering with Covid
- Pray for the depressed
- Pray for the suicidal
- Pray for the world as we are currently facing the pandemic and other challenges we face in the world
- Pray for the people who are in hospitals or not well at home
- Pray for the families that have lost their loved ones. Families that are grieving
- Pray for the schools – principals, teachers, groundsman, and students
- Pray for the unemployed to not give up seeking employment.
- Pray for the Churches (Congregation members, staff, volunteers, minister)
- Pray for South Africa

Prayer: Lord in your mercy, hear our prayers.

Transformed Lives

Reflection on JACOB

Welcome: This week spend some time reading the book of Genesis from chapter 24 – chapter 35 and reflecting on how God reached out to Jacob and transforming his life and using him for the bigger picture.

Worship: Spend some time listening because He Lives

Word: Read Genesis 35:1-15

God is always with us, wherever we are, what He does He never leaves nor forsakes us. We need to remember that God is always there waiting for us to communicate and through prayer we experience peace, love, forgiveness, acceptance, and joy. The past doesn't matter when God steps in.

Work: Spend some time looking at what challenges bring you down or challenges that you face, what robs you of your joy and peace and bring it before the Lord in prayer. Also spend some time being thankful and praising the Lord for what He has done, but always remember to be still and listen out for what God is saying.