

# Challenge

THE GOOD NEWS PAPER

May 2004

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## PRAYER LETTER OF CHALLENGE LITERATURE FELLOWSHIP (AUST.) INC.

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We are continuing to look at Psalm 23 and the wonderful privilege we have to be in a right relationship with God. Thus we can experience what it means to know God as our Divine Shepherd. Last month we looked at how God delivers us from the treadmill of want, and the bondage of materialism. We saw that as the Lord is our shepherd we find that impacts our desires so much so, that the things we thought we needed we realise are not such a need after all.

In the society we live in now, materialism is only one of a number of problems that has beset our society. Busyness has become a major problem. Some folk are now working longer hours than ever before. With contract employment people are expected to achieve growing quotas with no increase in staff. For others they are driven to achieve as a means of acceptance by their peers, or to obtain significance in this world or to improve their self esteem.

For those of us who are in ministry, busyness is always a problem. For me the next deadline is looming larger than life on the horizon and I am focussed on achieving that goal. The problem is that we can be so busy serving the Lord that we drift in our relationship to the Lord. This drift is reflected in the struggle many Pastors have in getting their people to even read their Bible, let alone take time to study it.

I remember one writer saying that if we don't take time to come apart, we simply come apart. That is definitely true as one views the number of people taking stress leave from work. One professional I spoke to in the health industry said that he was dealing with record amounts of stress related health matters, and it was continuing to increase.

So when we read in Psalm 23: verse 2 "He makes me to lie down in green pastures;" it comes as a much needed salve to our bodies, because we are doing all sorts of things to them to try and cope with the pressure we are under. I know for some of us the thought of laying down anywhere is a luxury we just can't afford. In fact as Max Lucado shares in his book, *Travelling Light*, people are consuming literally tons of sleeping pills and other forms of medication to help them cope with insomnia and other associated stress related disorders.

The word that got my attention in this verse was 'make'. I know for some of us in ministry or in some high powered job, we block the messages our bodies are telling us because we can't afford to stop, or at least that is what we think. So when we are told to take the pedal off the metal, we just fob it off and press on. However, our divine shepherd knows that we need to pull aside for a while for our sanity, for our marriage, and/or for the wellbeing of our family.

If we are not willing to listen to God then being the good shepherd He is, He will move to make us to lie down in green pastures. If we take our eye off the shepherd we can find ourselves getting lost in the mire of over work, busyness, stress and the like. If we are hard of hearing God may have to make us pull aside. How might He do this?

Well it may involve illness. Thus during the time of recuperating He can have the necessary input into our lives. It may mean a loss of your job. It is not pleasant at the time when it happens, but with the passage of time you realise it was the only way God was going to get your attention. It may mean that God uses the loss of a loved one. During the hurt and the grieving process God is able to minister to us at our various points of need. We find during these times that God desires to refresh us and renew us in our walk with Him. He gives us a fresh hunger to not only read His word, but to hear His word. We pray with fervency and an expectation that maybe we have not known for some time.

My experience with these sorts of occasions is that they have been the time I have grown most in my Christian life. Verses that I had read again and again have taken on new meaning and relevance, as they spoke into the situation that I was going through. All this is to show us that the shepherd is in charge and He knows what is best for us. He is the one who directs our steps and stops, but unfortunately in the busyness and stresses of life we get our perspective on this a little confused.

Some time ago I had the opportunity to stay on a farm which was running a flock of about 1500 sheep. My friend and I went to check the sheep that had been moved to another paddock. When we arrived we noticed that a number of the sheep were stumbling around. My farmer friend immediately knew what the problem was. He said that they were suffering from Rye Grass Toxicity. Right away he moved the sheep into another paddock otherwise he would have lost a number of them.

(Please turn over)

Our Heavenly Father knows where to guide us to avoid the toxicity of sin that can corrupt and destroy. He knows what is best for us and how best we can serve Him in a world that can be very difficult to keep a right perspective on life and what is really important in the eyes of God.

God desires to lead us to those quiet waters of rest and balance. I know that this is a message for my own life. Leading has the idea of the need for us to willingly follow, as well as recognizing that God enables us to set the right priorities for our daily lives. He enables us to set realistic goals that are not excessively stressful. We can serve God fruitfully and effectively as we allow Him to lead us. This speaks of being submissive to the shepherd. We don't argue with God, but gladly follow His gracious leading. If we are unwilling to do this then we can find ourselves getting weary and just plain worn out. This is why Jesus says to you and me In Matthew 11: verse 28 "Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." When we try to struggle along in the strength of the flesh it is hard going which is why Jesus says in verse 29; "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

When we look to Jesus as our shepherd life becomes so much simpler as He directs us in our daily walk. As we gladly submit to His leading He directs us to green pastures and those refreshing still waters. Why not start today and you will experience the difference.

— Carl Carmody, Editor of Challenge



## *Praise*

1. We do give thanks to the Lord for the folk at Liberty Heights Baptist Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, U.S.A., who have given generously for the work of Challenge both here in Australia and southern Africa. One couple has committed to providing 60 bicycles for pastors/ evangelists in South Africa.
2. Praise the Lord for the good supply of secondhand books for South Africa. They are greatly needed and appreciated.
3. We are praising God for the number of commitments of late from New Zealand, Australia and South Africa, particularly from the prisons in South Africa where the *Challenge* is going into over 240 prisons.
4. We praise the Lord for the Pastor from Ghana who visited us recently. We are investigating the possibility of extending the work into Ghana, Nigeria and Kenya.

## *Prayer*

1. We do need wisdom and provision from the Lord as we make contacts in the neighbouring countries in southern Africa. Please pray that God will make His will crystal clear to us.
2. We have had an invitation from another church in U.S.A. in North Carolina, to attend their mission conference in September. Please pray with us for direction and provision of funds for travelling expenses to make it possible for Carl Carmody to attend.
3. Pray with us that the interest aroused by *The Passion of the Christ* film and Easter church attendances will encourage people in this nation and overseas to begin a real search for the Christ of the Bible.
4. Please continue to pray for finances for us to go towards the provision of much needed airconditioning in the factory here at Wattle Grove. We are in need of \$A11,000 to cover the cost of 4 split system units, which have already been installed.
5. Pray for our writers who do a great job.
6. We are looking to bring out mission teams from the US and South Africa. Pray for the Lord's clear leading on this critical matter.

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