

**“The Year of the Lord’s Favour”  
Luke 4:19**

A Quiet Times Series for the London Church

**27th December 2009 - 1st January 2010**

One year draws to a close and another opens its doors. 2009 is almost gone and 2010 beckons. The pages are unwritten. What kind of year will it be? Without any doubt it can be twelve months that we proclaim as “the year of the Lord’s favour”! Jesus used this phrase from Isaiah to express that a new era was at hand. The old covenant was passing away and the new one was approaching. We are living in the times of the new covenant enjoying a personal relationship with God mediated by Jesus and the Holy Spirit (John 14:23, 1 Timothy 2:5). Therefore without any doubt every year for a disciple is a “year of the Lord’s favour”.

We have so much to celebrate and be thankful for. We have been chosen (Eph 1:4), adopted (Eph 1:5), redeemed (Eph 1:7), forgiven (Eph 1:7), and sealed for eternal life (Eph 1:13-14). It reminds me of the first verse of that great hymn, “Praise my soul, the King of heaven” (based on Psalm 103):

*Praise, my soul, the King of heaven,  
To His feet thy tribute bring;  
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,  
Who like me His praise should sing?*

*Praise Him! Praise Him!  
Praise Him! Praise Him!  
Praise the everlasting King!*

God gave us the seasons and this seems a good time of year to do some reflecting. What kind of year has it been, and what kind of year lies ahead? How can we make sure we see it as a “year of the Lord’s favour?” The Quiet Time series that follows is designed to help us think through the lessons of the year and prepare us for the year ahead. You can use these personally, but also as family devotions or family group discussions. In this way we can see what God has taught us and get a picture of what God wants us to grow in for the coming year. But that’s not all. As well as the personal element, we are asking all members of the London church to help in developing a collective biblical vision for the church. If we have a clear picture of our vision we will go into 2010 with a greater sense of purpose.

Use this quiet time series to record your own thoughts on the lessons God is teaching you. Also after you have finished the Quiet Time series go to [www.iccm-events.info](http://www.iccm-events.info) and record your vision for the London church (or write it down on the final page and hand in to any of the ministry staff by Sunday 3rd January who will compile the information and summarise it at the London service on 10th January 2010).

## Sunday 27th December: Remembering Who We Worship

Scripture: Psalm 103

This morning, before going to church, read through Psalm 103 in a quiet place. Then pray through it. If you have never prayed through a Psalm before try reading a verse and then talking to God about its theme. For example, verse one says, *“Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name.”* Then you might pray about the themes of God’s holiness and your desire to praise him with all your being - right from the inside, not just with your mouth. Then move on to verse 2 and so on.

What themes stand out to you? God’s holiness? His generosity? What else? What is your response to this Psalm? Feelings of gratitude? Feelings of love? What else? What do you learn about the character of God? Record your observations and also read through the words of the hymn based on this Psalm.

1. Praise, my soul, the King of heaven,  
To His feet thy tribute bring;  
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,  
Who like me His praise should sing?  
Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him!  
Praise the Everlasting King!

2. Praise Him for His grace and favour  
To our fathers in distress;  
Praise Him, still the same forever,  
Slow to chide and swift to bless;  
Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him!  
Glorious in His faithfulness!

3. Father-like, He tends and spares us;  
Well our feeble frame He knows;  
In His hands He gently bears us,  
Rescues us from all our foes:  
Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him!  
Widely as His mercy flows!

4. Frail as summer’s flowers we flourish;  
Blows the wind, and they are gone.  
But, while mortals rise and perish,  
God endures unchanging on:  
Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him!  
Praise the high eternal One!

5. Angels, help us to adore Him;  
Ye behold Him face to face;  
Sun and moon, bow down before Him;  
Dwellers all in time and space,  
Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him!  
Praise with us the God of Grace!

**Pray** today about God and His holiness.

**Monday 28th December: Reflecting on Lessons**

Scriptures: 2 Timothy 2:7, Haggai 1:2 - 2:9

It is important that we reflect from time to time, or we will not gain insight (2 Timothy 2:7). God asks us to consider the outcome of our faith and life so that we can move forward with a clearer focus and bring Him glory (Haggai 1:2 - 2:9).

After reading the scriptures above, here is an exercise that can help you see what 2009 was like for you spiritually. This will help in setting our sights spiritually for 2010.

There are several major areas of our spiritual lives. For example: prayer (Luke 11:1), bible study (Lk 2:46-47), depth of relationships with disciples (Jn 13:34-35), outreach to the lost and needy (Lk 19:10), fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23), character (Rom 5:1-5) or using gifts (1 Pet 4:10) etc. Take the one that means most to you and do an evaluation of how it has developed in 2009 by using the chart below. Feel free to do more than one area if you like, but do at least one today. You will also find it helpful to share your findings with your spouse or another close friend. Their feedback might help you to be more objective.

Spiritual Area	Feelings	Facts	Personal change	Impact on others
Sample: <b>Prayer</b>	I look forward to praying in the mornings more now than last year.	Studying Jesus' prayer life in Luke helped me learn more about prayer. His example helped me better understand God as Father.	I pray more regularly in the mornings before going to work and have felt greater spiritual energy through the day.	I shared my insights with two friends, and we prayed together more this year. My wife & I are praying more regularly as well.
Your area:				

Now that you have looked at what you learned, what does that mean for the year ahead? Perhaps it would be a good idea to focus on one area of your spiritual life in 2010. Which one should that be? Why not pray about it, talk to a close friend and make a plan that will allow God to help you grow in that area in 2010.

My area is: \_\_\_\_\_

My plan is: \_\_\_\_\_

**Pray** today asking God to give you clarity on what he has taught you this year and what to focus on for 2010.

## Tuesday 29th December: The Church - God's Great Invention!

Scripture: Ephesians 3 (additional scriptures: Exodus 19:5-6, Isaiah 43:20-21, Matthew 16:13-20)

Today we move on to talk about God's plan for His church. In fact we will be looking at this for the next few days. Why did God "invent" His church? What is the point? There have been many great inventions that have made a difference in our lives. It is debatable as to which is the greatest. Some might say the mobile phone, others the internet, perhaps others the combustion engine and so on. But surely what God has invented must be the greatest invention! He invented the church. Why? Does He need the church, or do we? Or does the world need it? Perhaps all of the above. What do you think?

As far as today's Quiet Time is concerned, focus on why God invented the church. We will go on to think about what we should do in the church in the next few days.

Read Ephesians 3 and think about the following questions:

i. Why did God invent the church?

ii. What does God see the church being that no human institution could be?

iii. In what way is the church unique?

iv. Are there any other bible passages that help us understand God's reasons for creating His church? Write them down here ....

v. How does knowing that the church is God's invention make you feel about His church?

**Pray** today about getting God's perspective on His church and learning to feel about the church the way He does.

## Wednesday 30th December: Identity Crisis?

Scriptures: Ephesians 2, 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

What are we to be as a church? In other words, who and what are we? We are not a social club brought together by a common interest or a religious society offering blind devotion. Nor are we simply primates who happen to be slightly more evolved than monkeys! We have a much more profound identity. When we know who we are it affects every part of our lives. We behave differently, we carry ourselves differently, we assess our priorities differently, we treat others differently, and so on. The practicals of that are for tomorrow. For today let us focus on getting a handle on who we are as a church. Here are some words the Bible uses to describe the people of God: *brother, sister, child of God, son, daughter, adopted, beloved, disciples, followers, children of light, branches, friends, believers, community, saints, Christians, slaves, heirs, family, elect, clay, sinners, body of Christ, members, new creation, temple, bride, citizens, assembly, priests, royal, holy, chosen, aliens, exiles, soldiers, servants, lambs, sheep*. Which is your favourite? Which helps you the most? Why is that? Which makes you uncomfortable? Why might that be?

One important note on the passages in Ephesians and 1 Corinthians is to remember that when Paul says “you” he is writing to the church as a whole and not to individuals. The word “you” is always plural in these passages in the original Greek. We get used to reading the letters to the churches as personal and tend to forget that they were written to the body as a whole. What difference does it make that these passages were written to the body of disciples and not just individual Christians?

After reading the passages above, think about the following questions:

- i. What is the identity we share as a church? Who are we in the site of God? See also Ephesians 1:1, 5, 22, 1 Peter 2:9-10
  
- ii. How did we get to share in this identity? See also Ephesians 1:7
  
- iii. What was God’s part and what was our part? See also Ephesians 1:11-14
  
- iv. Are there any other bible passages that help us understand who we are and what we are as a church? Write them down here ....
  
- v. How does it make you feel to know that you share in this identity with all that God has called into His kingdom, his body, his family, his army, his flock?

**Pray** today about growing in your understanding and acceptance of the new identity God has give you in Jesus.

## Thursday 31st December: Shining Lights

Scriptures: Matthew 5:13-16, Romans 12, Acts 2:42-47, Acts 5:42, Acts 18:26, 1 Cor 14:22-25, 40, Ephesians 4, Titus 2:14, Hebrews 3:12-13, Hebrews 10:24-25.

What are we supposed to be doing as church? In other words, what does God want done in this world by His church? What can we do, by God's grace and in the power of His Spirit, that no secular or religious organisation can? What should we be involved in, and what should we avoid being involved in? After reading the passages above, think about the following questions:

i. What are we to do *inside* the church that brings God glory?

ii. What are we to do *outside* the church that brings God glory?

iii. How will people know we belong to God?

iv. When you look at the church in Acts what is the main feeling you have about the church at that time? What stands out? Is that an example for us to follow?

Our personal example makes all the difference. As Francis of Assisi was reputed to say, "Preach the Gospel always. When necessary, use words." This poem says it well:

I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day;  
I'd rather one should walk with me than merely tell the way.  
The eye's a better pupil and more willing than the ear,  
Fine counsel is confusing, but example's always clear;  
And the best of all the preachers are the men who live their creeds,  
For to see good put in action is what everybody needs.  
I soon can learn to do it if you'll let me see it done;  
I can watch your hands in action, but your tongue too fast may run.  
And the lecture you deliver may be very wise and true,  
But I'd rather get my lessons by observing what you do;  
For I might misunderstand you and the high advice you give,  
But there's no misunderstanding how you act and how you live.

*from Collected Verse of Edgar Guest*

**Pray** today about setting the world an example of a Jesus-filled life.

## Friday 1st January: London Vision

Scriptures: Ephesians 4:1 - 5: 21

Our final Quiet Time in this series is looking forward. We are in 2010! What does God have in mind for us as a London church in the year ahead? How are we in this city meant to put into practice the commands and principles we have looked at in this series? Let's think specifically about London and its outlying districts. What is distinctive to London? We know the churches in New Testament times were different in their personalities, circumstances, strengths and weaknesses. Corinth differed from Ephesus and the Jerusalem church was very different to the church in Rome. After reading the Bible passages above, think about the following questions:

- i. What is different about London, or what stands out about it as a city? Perhaps there are many things, so try to pick out the main areas.
  
- ii. Knowing this, how does that effect the answers to the questions you gave in yesterday's Quiet Time? How can we in London shine brightly and be like a city on a hill?
  
- iii. How do the London distinctives effect the way we build relationships with each other and the lost and needy?
  
- iv. What should our church services and other meetings look like?

To conclude this series of Quiet Times let's think about our personal contribution to church life. In light of what we have studied the last few days, what do you need to think about in terms of your contribution to the body of Christ in 2010? Should you be doing more? Less? Something different? Do you need a clearer focus?

Perhaps you have heard this story about four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody, and Nobody. *"There was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about this, because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realised that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done."*

When we recognise our identity in Jesus and rejoice on our membership of God's body, we will be filled with a zeal to contribute our best to the building up of His body and the purposes He has for it to make a difference in this world. What can *you* do in 2010?

**Pray** today about your vision for God's church in London and what you can contribute to that vision becoming a reality.

## Summary Page

Please use this page in two ways. On the first part of the page record your convictions and personal vision for what you believe God has in mind for you in the year ahead. This is your chance to record your dreams, visions and spiritual goals for 2010.

On the second part record your vision for the London church, then copy it into the website on-line survey form which you can find at: <http://www.iccm-events.info/>. If you cannot do this then email or tear it off and hand it in to one of the London staff so that we can compile the information and help to create a clearer vision for God's working in this church in London.

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### Part One - Personal convictions and vision

My dreams, vision and goals for how God can use me and help me grow this year are .....

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### Part Two - London Vision

1. The church was invented by God for .....
2. Our identity as a church is .....
3. God wants His church to do the following .....
4. In London this means we should be doing the following .....

Many thanks for setting aside the time with God and His Word to develop a vision for London that we can all share. We're in for an exciting year!

Your brother,

Malcolm