

GOD'S CALL

Major themes in the Scriptures

Quality of being (14)

The heart of quality of being

Reference: GDC-S17-014-Mw-R00-P2

(Originally spoken on 29 July 2012 edited on 31 July 2012)

Web site: <http://www.ajourneyinlife.org> and <http://www.ajourneyinlife.com>

This message is protected by copyright © 2012 Lim Liong. Permission is given to reproduce part (where the meaning is retained and the part is not quoted out of context) or all, of it, for personal use or for distribution, on condition that **no changes are made** and the message is **distributed free** of charge. Please do so prayerfully and discreetly.

Unless otherwise stated, Scripture quotations are taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

The paragraphs above as well as this paragraph must be included when the message is reproduced so that others who reproduce it will be conscious of the conditions stated above.

The Lord willing, today we will consider the subject, “Quality of being”, the fourteenth message, in seeking to appreciate major themes in the Scriptures.

A short summary of today's message:

Developing quality of being that is of true and lasting value is a very difficult process. The Scriptures help us understand the right way to develop this quality.

We will seek the Lord to appreciate more of what this means.

In the last message, we sought to consider how we can develop true quality in our being, so that our whole life will be lived with meaning and purpose and fruitfulness, and we can fulfil God's call in our lives.

We saw that there are many problems, hindrances, obstacles, that can make it very difficult for us to properly develop quality in our being. We considered the story of the tortoise and the hare and today, I will continue with the rest of the story.

In the last message, we saw that the hare was poisoned and the tortoise won the race. However, on his way back, the tortoise saw the hare lying on the road in agony and when he asked him, "What happened to you?" he said, "I ate some carrots along the way and they were poisoned."

The tortoise was very sad because he now realized that his friend who had promised him that he would win the race had done this to the hare. He was very sad and he kept apologizing to the hare - "I am very, very sorry. I did not intend it to be this way. I did not know that this is what my friend would do."

The hare told him, "I understand. I forgive you. But you must learn in the future, not just to trust so freely and you must also be careful with those that you relate with. Bad company corrupts good morals. Well, though I may be dying, yet, you have a life to live. Live it well."

The tortoise was desperate. He wanted very much to help the hare to recover. He did all he could but he could not.

Suddenly, he remembered: "In times past, my father has cured some who were poisoned. Perhaps he could help."

He ran home as fast as he could and he told his father what happened. His father brought out a bottle of medicine and gave it to him, and he said, "You must go back very fast. Otherwise, it will be too late."

The tortoise ran the race of his life. He had never run so fast before. He was very concerned for the hare and he ran with all his might. When he reached the hare, the hare was about to lose consciousness. He quickly gave him the bottle of medicine and he collapsed with exhaustion and the tortoise lost consciousness.

When he woke up, the hare was smiling at him and he said, "Thank you so much for saving my life. I really appreciate your great compassion, how much you cared for me and you exerted yourself so much that you collapsed and became unconscious. I must learn from you to be like that."

The tortoise said to the hare, "I really appreciate your willingness to forgive. I nearly caused your death and while you were dying, you were still prepared to forgive me and to give me good advice as to how to live my life. I must learn to be like you to be compassionate, to be kind, to be forgiving."

There was an old owl sitting on a branch of a tree nearby and this owl said to them: "When the two of you were competing to see who would win the race, both of you lost the race. But now, both of you have won the race because you have come to realize that what is most important in life is not to compete with one another and to win that kind of race, but to develop true quality in your heart."

The tortoise and the hare looked up at the owl and said, "Thank you so much for your good counsel. This is the way we should live our lives." The owl smiled and flapped his wings and flew off.

The tortoise and the hare became the best of friends and they helped each other and their families and others around, and they lived happily ever after.

Well, there are many important principles that we can think about: What do we want in life? Many people are doing what they did in the beginning: competing to see who is the best. We want to develop our talents, our abilities, whatever we can, so that we can be better than other people. And even in the spiritual realm, we may still want to compete and see who is more spiritual, who is greater, who has done more.

But that is not the way. If we want to develop true quality of being, we must learn to concentrate on what is really important in life: qualities of character, moral and spiritual excellence, true and genuine love for others.

The tortoise sought very hard to help the hare but he could not. We need to know when we need to seek for help. He sought for help from his father and he was able to save the hare. So too, we need to recognize when we need help. And how much are we prepared to exert ourselves in order to do what is right, what is good? The tortoise was prepared to run until he was exhausted, and collapsed.

What will we give to be what God wants us to be, to fulfil His mission, to accomplish what He wants of us?

Let us look at the Scriptures and consider how God shows to us the right way to live.

In order to develop quality of our being, we must first recognize what is it that destroys the quality of our being, what is at the heart of the problem.

If we do not recognize this deeply enough, we can never resolve that problem. We can do many things that seem helpful and good, but we will never become truly good.

The Scriptures are very clear in helping us understand what is at the heart of the problem.

At the heart of sin is the problem of going our own way instead of following God and His way of moral perfection. This leads to self-centredness, self-seeking and self-exaltation. We know that mankind has generally chosen this path.

Isaiah 53: 6

All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.

This passage is a prophecy of the coming of the Lord Jesus to die on the cross to save mankind. And it tells us the reason why He came to save us: It is because All of us like sheep have gone astray, all of us have sinned, and the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.

So all have sinned and God has caused the sin of all of us to fall on Him, the Lord Jesus. In between these two phrases, we see this part: Each of us has turned to his own way. So All of us like sheep have gone astray. How? We have turned, each one, to his own way.

Why has the Lord caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him? Because Each of us has turned to his own way. This is at the heart of the problem: the reason for the cross, the problem of sin.

But then we may ask the question: What is wrong with our going our own way? Why can't we go our own way? Why shouldn't we concentrate on ourselves?

If we think about it, our own lives, the lives of other people around us, would we not say that it is very natural for us to basically look at life from our perspective, from our point of view?

We basically think of ourselves, we take care of ourselves, we do the things that we think we like, the things that we think are good. Is there anything wrong with that? If we do not look after ourselves, who is going to look after us? So we must look after ourselves, make sure that we get all the things that we want, all the things that we like, all the things that we think are good. It seems to be right.

It is right for us to take care of ourselves.

But the problem is that we take care of ourselves in the wrong way. If you truly take care of yourselves, you will not be concentrating on what you like, and what you prefer, and what is more convenient, what is more enjoyable. You will not be concentrating on that.

If you really want to take care of yourself, you will actually learn to deny yourself, to take up the cross, and to follow the Lord. That will be truly taking care of yourself. Why? Because: that is the path that will lead to true quality of being.

But when we seek to take care of ourselves, it is in a self-centred way, a self-seeking approach and wanting self-exaltation, wanting to be great in the eyes of men, wanting to be greater than other people, wanting to achieve so that we can enjoy the things that we like.

God does want us to take care of ourselves. He says that we should love our neighbour as ourselves.

But we love ourselves in the wrong way and that is why this leads to many, many problems in this world. We are preoccupied with ourselves, we think in terms of what we like, we think in terms of our own ideas, how things ought to be done.

If you were morally perfect, then your way would be a good way because you will be motivated by what is really good. But when you are not morally perfect and you have your own selfish inclinations, then your way is not the best way.

So, God's ways are higher than our ways, His thoughts than our thoughts. And because God is morally perfect, we must choose His way, we must learn His thoughts; we must follow Him.

So this is at the heart of sin: God is morally perfect and yet, we do not choose Him and His ways. We still want to go our own way.

Not only that, we want God to do things for us according to our desires. This is the big problem in human hearts and this is the fundamental issue why it is so very difficult to develop quality of being. We are so preoccupied with ourselves and what we want and what we prefer and our own ideas that we cannot properly listen to God and understand what is truly good.

Over many years in counselling many people, talking to various ones in many situations, it is a very, very common occurrence that when people speak and share what happens, they speak and they share from their point of view and generally, to their own advantage. They may be sincere and yet, there is a direction, there is a self-preservation involved, to present things from an angle that would put them in a better light.

So generally, the other person is in the wrong when there is a problem – how many people would be able to honestly look at the situation and point out where they themselves have gone wrong and they need correction?

That is something that is very common and we can all recognize it.

And unless we change our whole perspective of life, that we truly want the path that is good, in accordance with God's ways, this approach will continue even as we say we repent, we seek forgiveness, we want to follow God and His ways. It will continue in varying degrees – the roots are not properly dealt with.

When we want our own way instead of God's ways, this will lead to many, many different aspects of self-centredness that will result in a manner of life that can become very destructive. It will not benefit others, neither will it benefit us.

This path of going our own way, the path of independence from God is a very, very problematic area and we can see that the most serious course of action that has ever been taken in this direction was taken by the evil one, Satan himself. He took this course of action in the most serious manner before the creation of man.

Isaiah 14: 12-14

- 12 "How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, You who have weakened the nations!
- 13 "But you said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, And I will sit on the mount of assembly In the recesses of the north.
- 14 'I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.'

It is generally recognized that this passage refers to Satan and how he fell from heaven.

Notice how many times the word “I” expressed what he wanted: 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God... I will sit on the mount of assembly... I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.' The whole thrust and direction of what “I” will do and what “I” want in this context is all self-centred, selfish. It is not based on what is good.

He did not say, “I will be the best I can be before God. I will seek to contribute the most I can in accordance with the will of God. I will seek my utmost to be good morally.” There was none of this. If he had said that, then that “I” would become right. He would have taken care of himself in the right way: “I will make sure that I will walk in the path of righteousness. I will ensure that my heart is humble, and be teachable.”

So “I” does not equal wrong. Taking care of yourself is not a bad thing but we have to see what is the direction. When you care for yourself, what are you concerned about?

The whole context here was self-exaltation. He wanted to be great in a manner that was wrong. He wanted power, he wanted honour; he wanted to be worshipped. But that was not what ought to be for him.

Satan fell from heaven. In his heart, he chose the wrong way and God rejected him. He became the adversary of God, enemy of God. God’s judgment fell on him forever.

It was a very serious choice that he made. And so we see that since that time until today, Satan has made use of his power to threaten others, to seek to compel people to follow him. He wants that kind of acknowledgement, the worship – the problem of pride in his heart.

Satan was created very intelligent, very capable. How did he make use of his intelligence?

Basically, he became the greatest deceiver of all time. He sought to make use of his intelligence in a cunning way in order to deceive people, so that they would follow him. And his deception can be so powerful that even Christians may also follow him. The Lord Jesus said he was a liar and the father of lies. All this is with the purpose to destroy, and to bring about glory for himself.

Sometimes, there may be others who follow this direction without realizing how serious it is in the wrong path.

Sometimes, we may think that we need to develop our lives to be thinking people, with our own convictions, not following other people but having our own understanding, our own discoveries, our own experiences, our own achievements.

There is a sense in which it is right. We must have our own convictions. We should not just simply follow people without thinking, without consideration. There is an aspect that is important, that we think through what we believe, who we follow and why we follow, what we follow.

But this kind of thinking can very readily lead to a situation where we develop our convictions, we go through our discoveries, our experiences, and they become the most important. We do not sufficiently learn from others and especially, from God. We think that we know. We want to discover for ourselves. If someone has discovered it, we do not want it. We must discover it for ourselves.

From what we can see, modern science has progressed significantly in many areas in discoveries basically because they learn from others who had discovered before them.

What people have discovered, they publish papers, make them available for others to learn. When they study, they consider is it right or wrong, they test it out for themselves and when they see that there is an aspect that is good, they develop it further. And when they see this is wrong, they seek to correct it and they publish more papers, as a result of which people learn and grow together.

In the spiritual realm, we need to learn and to learn in the right way. God has provided for us in ways that can help us to develop well.

But if we do not have the right attitude and we think primarily in terms of ourselves, and our own ideas, and what we think and what we prefer, we will not be able to benefit from what God has provided.

Sometimes, we may think that if we learn from others, then we are just being followers and we are not people who have strong convictions.

But let us look at the perfect example of the perfect Man who demonstrates deep and good personal convictions – the life of the Lord Jesus.

How did He live His life?

He chose the most difficult path because of love for us, and in full submission to God the Father.

His choices were not made on the basis of a concentration on the self. His choices were made with the emphasis on what is truly good and meaningful in the eyes of God and for the well-being of others.

Philippians 2: 5-8

- 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,
- 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,
- 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men.
- 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

The apostle Paul exhorts us to “have this attitude” in ourselves, and what is “this attitude”?

He is referring to the attitude of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God – the *Logos*, the Word. He chose the path that was the most difficult: the most painful, the most self-giving path. Why: Because of love for us, because He wanted to fulfil the purposes of God that will be the best for the whole universe.

“Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped” – He had all the glory, all the power, all the majesty of God, but He gave that up to come into this world.

It is the very opposite of what men generally are seeking for: Men are striving, seeking for honour and glory and majesty in this world.

The Lord Jesus – who had that kind of majesty that surpasses all other kings and royalties – He gave that up in order to come into this world for our well-being.

King Solomon had so much of riches and honour and wisdom and power, but he ended up saying, “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.” Everything that he had achieved amounted to nothing: it was a striving after wind. He was seeking for the wrong things; his heart became corrupted by the things that he loved in this world. At the end of his life, God was very angry with him and rejected him.

The Lord Jesus had all the glory of heaven but He did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.

Satan wanted to be like God. He wanted that kind of authority and honour.

The Lord Jesus gave up that. He emptied Himself. He “emptied Himself” does not mean that He became not morally perfect. His moral perfection was always present; He never gave that up.

He emptied Himself of this glory in heaven, the majesty. He came into this world, restricting Himself, not expressing His majesty. He came to be born in a manger. There was no place in the inn. He did not come to dwell in a palace. He was born of poor parents. He grew up as a carpenter.

He emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant: It was “this attitude” – the willingness to humble Himself, to give of Himself for the well-being of others. A bond-servant concentrates on serving, concentrates on doing what would be beneficial to his master.

The Lord Jesus was the perfect Servant of God. But we are not His master. He is the Master, but He serves us. And that is why He wiped the feet of His disciples, to show to them the right attitude to live. He had all the authority and power of God but He chose to humble Himself.

He was made in the likeness of men: He lived and dwelt among us and as the perfect Man, He showed to us how we should live our lives.

Why was He baptized with the Holy Spirit? Why did the Holy Spirit come upon Him in this way?

It is to teach us how we as men and women must depend on God.

We must depend on the Holy Spirit to empower us, to lead us, to guide us, to teach us how we should live in full submission to God.

“Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross”. He was obedient. Obedience means you submit to the will of someone else. In this instance, He showed absolute obedience to God.

So too must we. If we want to develop quality of our being, we must choose this path. Are we prepared to give our lives, to be absolutely obedient to God? Or do we still want our own way, we still want to do things our own way, we still want to go our own path?

This is at the heart of true quality of being.

The Lord Jesus humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, and the apostle Paul did not stop there. He said: “even death on a cross”.

Not all deaths are the same. Many people are prepared to die, but the meaning of that death may be very superficial, may even be not good.

But the Lord Jesus died on a cross, and that death is a very wonderful death. It is a very painful, difficult death but full of glory because He died not for His own sins, but for our sins. He died so that we might live. He did no wrong and yet He suffered the wrath of God in order to save us. He was prepared to be obedient to the point of death.

Ask yourself: How far are you prepared to go to obey God? Is there a limit, is there a condition? Is there something that you may not be prepared to do in the path of obedience to God? If there is, then you cannot reach that kind of quality of being that you ought to be.

“Death on a cross” is a representation for us of the highest level of quality in life. The Lord Jesus lived at that highest plane. If we want to be like Him, we must also be prepared for the path of the cross. Why did the Lord Jesus say, “Take up your cross daily”? It is because we are so very self-centred. The things that we do are revolving around ourselves.

Is God self-centred? We can say God has the right to be self-centred because He is perfect. But because He is perfect, He is not self-centred. He thinks of us, He thinks of the well-being of the whole universe and He is prepared to suffer in order to bring about the most wonderful place that He can create.

He created man so that man might find meaning, and joy, and purpose, and life – knowing that in so doing, He would have to suffer. He knew that man would choose to go his own way. He knew that the path would be very difficult to help man to become good, but He did not shrink from it. He chose that path. He was not self-centred.

If He were self-centred, He would create man such that He could enjoy Himself as He pleased. But He created man such that He had to suffer, and suffer so greatly.

The apostle Paul understood some of this when he said: “...the fellowship of His sufferings”. He understood that kind of heart that we need to develop if we want to be like the Lord.

A disciple is not above his Master. If we want to be like the Lord Jesus, we must understand what was in His heart, what motivated Him, what He lived for, how He made His choices. In this way, we can follow Him and be transformed to be like Him. That is why we must behold the glory of the Lord, so that we can be transformed into the same image from glory to glory.

Unless we behold Him, we understand what is in His heart, we appreciate Him, we want to be like Him, we are prepared for the cost of being so, how are we going to be transformed? We will be developing ourselves according to own image, according to our own ideas, according to what we like and prefer.

The Lord Jesus in His choice of full submission to God may seem to be one of weakness, as if He did not have a mind of His own – He was just simply following the directions from God.

But in reality, His choice required the highest level of conviction and commitment to the path of moral perfection and loyalty to God. Without this, He would not have been able to make that choice. The way the Lord Jesus lived His life – which may appear as if He had no will of His own, no mind of His own – was in reality the expression of the greatest convictions in His heart, the highest quality of commitment to the path of moral perfection and loyalty to God.

John 5: 30

"I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

Such a sentence can give people the impression: "Here is a person with no backbone, with no convictions. He just simply follows."

He says, "I can do nothing on My own initiative." Isn't such a person very weak – He cannot do anything on His own initiative?

"As I hear, I judge" – to be a good judge, you must consider. You do not just hear and make a judgment. But He says: "...and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me". This sentence is full of meaning. And it is helpful for us to seek to appreciate the reality behind these words.

"I can do nothing on My own initiative": was not because He could not but He chose not. Why did He choose not? Why did He say "I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me"? That is because He wants to show to us, as the perfect Man, we must learn to walk in this path.

Generally, people seek their own will, what they want. They think for themselves and they make their own choices for themselves.

How many will be prepared to consider in the light of what God wants, what truly is meaningful to Him and make our choices on that basis? "I make my choices on the basis of the will of Him who sent Me" – and the Lord Jesus was able to make perfect judgment as a man because of this attitude of choosing the will of God in all situations, and the will of God is perfect, and therefore His judgment would be just.

Many of us, when we make decisions, we make judgments, we are very often affected by own personal desires and inclinations. And if we like someone, we may make judgment in that person's favour, whether it is right or not right. When it is to our advantage, we will make a judgment that will favour us.

But the Lord Jesus chose the path that was right and good. That is the reason why He went to the cross.

So, on the one hand, we need to see that the Lord Jesus was prepared to give up everything in order to fulfil the will of God. He gave up the self, the direction of all that He as a man might choose, in order to obey God. But the Scriptures also make it very clear that the Lord Jesus had full freedom to live His life. He did not do this because He had no choice, He was compelled, He was frightened... He was just doing it because of consequences that would take place if He did not do that. That was not so. He had full freedom to choose.

Matthew 26: 51-54

- 51 And behold, one of those who were with Jesus reached and drew out his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear.
- 52 Then Jesus *said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword.
- 53 "Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?
- 54 "How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, *which say* that it must happen this way?"

The Lord Jesus made it very clear: He had the full freedom to go to the cross or not to go to the cross. He was not compelled. Notice, He said: "...do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" Twelve legions of angels are enough to kill everyone on earth.

But the Lord Jesus did not choose that. And notice He said: "...do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal...". So the meaning is that God the Father was prepared for Him to choose not to go to the cross. If He chose not to go to the cross, God the Father would not compel Him. It was not something that He had to do, that He must do, otherwise, God would be angry. He did it out of grace, He did it out of love, He did it voluntarily; He did it gladly, willingly.

That is the kind of example that we must follow. The things that we do, are we doing it gladly? Do we really want to do these things for God? Do we really care enough for others that we want to go through all this?

Over the years, you may have heard from time to time, how many Christians have expressed disappointment and regret: "I sacrificed so much, but what have I got? I have done so much for so and so, for these people, but do they appreciate it?" Many Christian leaders have gone through such times when they felt unappreciated – they have suffered so much, they have given so much but not appreciated, and they are very upset; they become discouraged.

We must make sure: If we want to serve, if we want to give, give with the right spirit. Do not seek for a reward; do not seek for approval, appreciation, for something in return. You give because you love; you give because you care, because you are concerned for the well-being of others. This is the attitude of the Lord Jesus. If we are to be His disciple, then this is the path that we must take.

The Lord Jesus did not have to go to the cross. If He wanted to, at the time when they were about to arrest Him and kill Him, He could have appealed to the Father and at once, more than twelve legions of angels would come to His aid. He would not have to die. But then, He said, "How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, *which say* that it must happen this way?"

What does this refer to? The fulfilment of the Scriptures is an expression of the accomplishment of the will of God, the perfect will of God expressed in the Scriptures. How will the perfect will of God be accomplished if He did not go to the cross? That is the way to save mankind; that is the way to bring meaning and life to all of us. If He did not go to the cross, this would not be accomplished. He was so committed to fulfil the will of God that He was prepared to go to the cross.

Are we committed to what God wants to accomplish? Do we recognize sufficiently that His will is perfect, it is so very good we are prepared to give up all in order to fulfil it – even death on a cross, that principle? Is that important enough for us that we want to live this way?

The Lord Jesus was always willing to subject His will to the will of God, meaning His will was always to choose the will of God for His life. It was not that He was weak-willed or that He had no will of His own. His will was very, very strong and He chose deliberately, definitely, without hesitation, to always choose the will of God.

If we want to develop quality in our lives, this is critical. We must be prepared always to choose the will of God, whatever the path, however difficult, whatever it may bring to us. We must delight in His will.

Luke 22: 41-44

- 41 And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and *began* to pray,
- 42 saying, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done."
- 43 Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him.
- 44 And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground.

The Lord Jesus knelt down and *began* to pray. The perfect Man coming before the perfect God and saying, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me".

He understood, He recognized, this cup would bring about death. It was the cup that was the most painful of all. If there were other ways of doing it, He would rather not have to drink this cup. But that was not to say He thought there was any other way. He already knew. It was an expression that it was so very difficult. If there were any other way of doing this, He would rather not have to drink of the cup.

But He made it clear – "yet not My will, but Yours be done." His will was always submitted to the will of God, even in the midst of drinking the cup.

The situation was so difficult that we are specifically told, an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. As a man undergoing such pressure, he felt very difficult. An angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. And being in agony He was praying very fervently... We are told it was a time of great agony for Him.

His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground. And this tells us that it was a very, very difficult time for Him in the spiritual realm and in the physical realm: "death on a cross". He chose that path willingly because He had "this attitude": He was prepared to give up all in order to help us, to rescue us.

So if we want to develop quality of being, then we must begin by giving up the approach of concentrating on ourselves, and what we want, and what we like, in a self-seeking attitude.

If we do not deal with this deep enough, we will not be able to develop that quality of being. This is at the heart of it. We may think we understand it but when tested, we may find that it is very different from what we think.

And that is why it is necessary for us to come before God and ask Him to teach us, show us what it means.

And as we go through life each day, ask Him to search our hearts so that we understand: Are we living according to the principle of self-centredness or are we living according to the principle of God's ways, of submitting ourselves to His will, of choosing the path that is truly good in the eyes of God?

This is the critical issue that we must settle within our hearts.

And it is a problem that is usually not properly settled in Christian hearts. We will find substitutes for dealing with this problem. We may do many things in order to satisfy God, to serve Him, to do the things that we think might be pleasing to Him, but we are not prepared to deal with this.

Ponder about it and you may understand what it involves.

It involves every aspect of your life, every area, every moment of your life. How do you live? What motivates you? What are you concerned about? What are you preoccupied with?

The Lord Jesus Christ came into this world with a mission. And throughout His life on earth, He was absorbed in the will of God. He was concentrating always on what was in the heart of God.

If we want to be like Him, then that is what we must do.

Yes, we have our responsibilities on earth – there are many things to attend to.

The Lord Jesus was a carpenter. He worked as a carpenter. He lived amongst the people; He had many things to do. But His heart was always with God. He was always absorbed in the things of the Father. And that is why we are given a glimpse of the time when He was about twelve years old. He was absorbed in the things of His Father. And that was so throughout His life.

In the midst of a very busy life, curing people, feeding people, helping them, preaching, where was His heart? It was always with the Father, always absorbed in what was important in the kingdom of God, what He valued.

If we want to develop our lives, we must appreciate this; our heart must be filled with this. Or is our heart filled with the things of this world? There are so many things that seem so important to us. In our daily lives, we may think so: We have to attend to this, we have to do that; we must pursue that; that is so important; that is so dangerous; that is so necessary.

But in the heart of the Lord Jesus, there is only one thing necessary, and that is a heart of undivided devotion to God.

And that is what He said to Martha. This is the only thing that is necessary, and Mary has chosen that direction: to be undivided in her devotion to God.

Would we be prepared to choose this path, that we love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength?

We must concentrate on what is good and pleasing in the eyes of God. That must be our concentration at all times. And we learn to give ourselves for what is good, for the well-being of others as well as our own.

We can take care of ourselves but we would take care of ourselves just as we would want to take care of others. We love ourselves; we love others.

We are not called upon to destroy ourselves, to do bad to ourselves. No, we should do good to ourselves. We should develop our lives; we should build the highest quality in our being. That is right.

But that is not at the expense of other people. That is not to the neglect of other people. It is when we truly learn to love others, to care for others, and to give for the well-being of others that actually, we will be developing ourselves. The quality of our heart will grow as we learn the meaning of a self-giving spirit.

We see the beauty of the character of the Lord Jesus when He gave Himself for the sins of the world. How wonderful it is! If we follow Him, our lives will develop, our character will change, and Christ will increasingly be formed in us.

If we do not choose this path, then there will easily arise the spirit of competing with others, to become better than others. And this will lead to death and destruction, both for others as well as for ourselves.

The tortoise wanted to win. The hare also wanted to win. And the hare nearly died. And the tortoise could have lived in regret all his life.

But God is gracious to us. Just as the tortoise was able to save the hare, so too God in His mercy has helped us in our greatest need, so that we will not perish, but we learn.

But the problem is that not all are willing to learn, not all are willing to come before God in the right way to benefit from His grace. Light has come into this world, but men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.

So that is the path that we must choose: What is it that we want to concentrate on, and what is it that is truly important to us? That must decide the whole course of our life on earth, the whole manner in which we live each day - in everything and all things.

The Lord willing, we will ponder further about this whole path of development of quality in our being.

It is a very difficult process but it is very meaningful. God wants us to be like Him and He has already made every provision for us. He went through all the pain necessary to make that provision.

Are we willing to identify with Him, to go through with Him whatever He wants to teach us, wherever He may lead us?

If we are willing, He will help us and we will be transformed to be like the Lord Jesus.

If we are not willing, we will degenerate. Spiritually, we will die.

If by the Spirit, we put to death the practices of the body, we will live. But if we walk by the flesh, we will die. This is for us to choose.

So today, I have sought to consider with you the primary aspect of what brings about poor quality in our being, and understanding that, it will help us to know how to correct that.

A life of self-centredness, self-seeking, wanting self-exaltation, is at the heart of sin in man and also for the evil spirits, for Satan himself.

So if we want the path of righteousness, we must be determined to give this up absolutely, right at its very roots in our being and choose deliberately, decisively and forever to walk with God, to follow Him, to do His will, not according to our own preference and choice but according to what He says, and it can at times be very difficult to go through.

But that is the only way to develop that kind of quality in our being.

Let us now then come before the Lord and ask Him to help us appreciate what is truly involved in developing the quality of our hearts.

Let us ask the Lord to teach us His ways that we may know what we need to do in our own personal lives, what steps we need to take, how to respond to Him, so that our time on earth will not be spent in vain and wasted, and we regret in eternity.

Let us thank the Lord for all that He has done for us, and respond to Him honestly in the direction of truly giving ourselves to Him to live for Him.