



# **DISCOVERIES IN 'PRAYING SCRIPTURE'**

**LUKE'S AID TO  
'TRAVELLING WITH JESUS'**

**VOLUME TWO**

(Second Edition)

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# **‘PRAYING’ SCRIPTURE**

Travelling with Jesus – Helped by Luke

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## PRAYER TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

*'Come Holy Spirit,  
fill the hearts of your faithful,  
and kindle in them the fire of Your love,  
send forth Your Spirit  
and they shall be created  
and You shall renew the face of the earth.'*

## FOREWORD

There are two main objects in this book:-

- 1) to give examples of one way of praying Scripture that I have found fruitful over many years – personally and with parishioners. It is a series of guided imagination exercises following Luke's order.
- 2) it uses these episodes from Luke to lead towards a particular goal, namely, a new level of companionship with Jesus and a greater awareness of the Gift of Pentecost.

Using these in a newly developed Japanese parish I found that the groups 'Faith-sharing' contributed greatly to their spiritual growth. Here the book is being also adapted for a habit of privately '*Praying Scripture*' and developing fruitful 'Silent Time'. In Appendix 1, I repeat from Volume One a description of 'Praying Scripture'. If Volume One has been missed it would be important to start this book by firstly reading that. It could also be a good refresher of what has been discovered in Volume One. In Appendix 2, I also repeat 'Hints for forming a '*Praying Scripture*' Group' if desired. And in Appendix 3, I write about 'Faith-Sharing.'



## 8. JOHN THE BAPTIST'S PREPARATION FOR HIS MISSION

(Luke 3:1,2)

### **Preparation.**

As usual I decide for how long I will ponder the text at this time. I check briefly my present mood. This is the 'me' who is now here to pray. Maybe now I notice the yearnings in me for answers to many 'needs' around me, in society, in the wide world and in myself. One particular need might claim my attention. But before I ask for help I thank Luke for the help till now, especially for greater awareness of the Holy Spirit working in our – and my life. In the story of John the Baptist I ask to be led on further. **I pause to ask for a greater openness to the Holy Spirit.** After reading the text I become passive and wait for the Spirit to help me notice important things in my mind and heart.

**Luke 3: 1,2:** – In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar's reign, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of the lands of Ituraea and Trachonitis, Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, during the pontificate of Annas and Caiaphas the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. (NJB)

***'The word of God came to John ... in the wilderness.'***

Reading these words I notice a reaction in myself to the long, detailed account of people of power ruling the vast society of that time. I wonder why Luke details them so much. The wide

picture contrasts so greatly with that of the puny figure of John, alone in the ‘wilderness’, possessing nothing. (*Will this prepare me for things in my own future journey?*)

What was it like in the desert? ... being hungry .. empty .. parched .. in cruel heat .. and freezing night cold .. crushing loneliness .. living in a place which God seems to have abandoned? It convinces me that so much of John’s endurance time was praying time! In it he waits .. begging for guidance .. perseverance .. faithfulness .. and deliverance! Did Scriptural memories of God’s promises to save .. or actual saving events in Israel’s history .. or even memories of positive events in his own life, come up to give him HOPE?

I imagine his thoughts sometimes going back on his early upbringing. His parents had told him of the special way in which he was a gift from God. In *trust* they unselfishly prepared him for his special future role while not understanding how it might develop. He felt the deep love that a mother has for a son even as she ‘lets him go’. He felt his father’s awe towards God for the special roles that God asked each one of them – ‘little people’ – to carry out. Now even in his own loneliness he feels their dogged prayers for his perseverance, for trust and fulfilment of his task. These moments of looking back, moments of gratitude and strength also helped John through dark days of struggle and in response helped him pray for them. I also imagine him, *mantra*-like, doggedly repeating a phrase of a Psalm or words of Scripture to help his ‘one-day-at-a-time’ endurance. But gradually –

unrealised? – is he not now being gifted with growth in TRUST .. in HOPE .. in OPENNESS to God's plan.

### **'Word' and Action of the Spirit**

I remember being told that in Scripture writing, '**word**' means much more than just a communication. It means activity that strengthens, points onwards and achieves. It means GOD'S SPIRIT ACTING! Here it is preparing John for his mission. He is growing in openness and response to the Spirit as God's messenger had foretold, '*he will be filled with the Holy Spirit*'? (Lk 1:15) So the 'desert' is John's preparation place and time for his special mission to, '*go ahead of the Lord to prepare his ways before him*'. (Lk 1:76)

### **A sharing**

In this praying time memories of 'deserts' that I myself have come through might flash into mind. These were periods of yearning, helplessness, bewilderment, feeling so alone and suchlike. All I could do was plod on, day by day, renewing my prayers for help, guidance and deliverance. Later, and sometimes much later, I could discover benefits from my time 'in the desert' such as having been pushed into a longer and more attentive habit of prayer or able to wait longer in trust. John's experience points to fruit that can come from being led 'through the deserts'. (It is not just being led *INTO* the desert but *THROUGH* the desert – with fruit!)

Also I am noticing I more frequently find myself repeating meditatively, '*Come Holy Spirit .. Come Holy Spirit.*' This

might happen in my prayer time or at different times during my day. It might be brief or longer. It is becoming a kind of *mantra*. (And I am realising that the Holy Spirit is yearning to come to me! So what I am really asking for is OPENNESS and silent time to allow the Spirit to help me advance to ‘the next step’. ‘Praying Scripture’ is helping me become more conscious of the Holy Spirit ‘working’ in me, in those around me and in the world.

Also I am beginning to see myself – and everybody – as each one having been given a special role to fulfil in God’s Great – but to us Mysterious – Plan of Creation and Salvation. Each one in his/her limitations, but responding to the Holy Spirit, is called in their own ‘small world’ to contribute to God’s Plan. Luke is helping us on that journey.

### **Possible Questions for pondering or sharing.**

- ❖ *Has this given me a new insight into desert experiences that I have come through – or am struggling through now?*
- ❖ *Has it led me to ‘find’ God in places where He, at first, seemed to be completely absent?*
- ❖ *Has my ‘deserts’ helped my present ‘habit of prayer’?*
- ❖ *Do I appreciate enough the power of family prayers for one another?*
- ❖ *Do I ask the Spirit during the day, ‘What do You want me to do here, now?’*



## 9. JOHN THE BAPTIST BEGINS HIS MISSION

(Luke 3:7-14)

### **Preparation.**

I decide for how long I will ponder this text now. Preparing I notice ‘needs’ in myself. Pondering and praying John in the desert has lead me into greater awareness of the Holy Spirit working in our – and my life. I turn again to John’s story for further progress. **I pause to ask for a greater openness to the Holy Spirit.**

After reading the whole text I break it up for slow pondering.

**Luke 3: 3-6:** – He went through the whole Jordan district proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the sayings of the prophet Isaiah: A voice cries in the wilderness: ‘Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley will be filled in, every mountain and hill be laid low, winding ways will be straightened and rough roads made smooth. And all mankind shall see the salvation of God!’ (NJB)

### **John moving out to preach.**

I ponder effects that the desert experience seems to have had on John. Now he has been prompted to come out from the heart of the desert and begin to speak to travellers on that busy road that ran between the Jordan and the edge of the wilderness. This main road up and down Palestine was used by so many travellers of all sorts. He begins sharing his

pondering, praying and experience of God's presence and Spirit in the desert. News about this spreads. Next I am impressed to see people deliberately coming out of cities and towns just to hear him! Both Isaiah's hearers and John's hearers had community experience of toiling hard to prepare for the visit of a very influential person. It involved much labour and changes, exterior and interior. Thus the message of both prophets points beyond the communal hard work and physical changes to changes needed in the heart. These include recognising and having interior obstacles removed, empty spaces filled and wrong directions corrected. John prepares the hearers for being led by the **'One who is to Come'**. He promises, *'All mankind shall see the salvation of God!'*

**Lk 3:7-14:** – He said, therefore, to the crowds who came to be baptised by him, 'Brood of vipers, who warned you to fly from the retribution that is coming? But if you are repentant, produce the appropriate fruits, and do not think of telling yourselves, "We have Abraham for our father" because, I tell you, God can raise children of Abraham from these stones. Yes, even now the axe is laid to the roots of the trees, so any tree which fails to produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown on the fire. When all the people asked him, 'What must we do, then?' he answered, 'If anyone has two tunics he must share with the man who has none, and the one with something to eat must do the same'. There were tax-collectors too who came for baptism, and these

said to him, 'Master, what must we do?' He said to them, 'Exact no more than your rate'. Some soldiers asked him in their turn, 'What about us? What must we do?' He said to them, 'No intimidation! No extortion! Be content with your pay! (NJB)

### **The Challenging Message.**

It was John's basic integrity that communicated. And it was to 'ordinary' people. He is a channel of the Spirit. He reminds listeners of God's dealings with His 'Chosen People' – despite their often poor response. '**Repentance**' is basically recognising the need of opening oneself to be changed! It reminds them again of the Covenant with God through Moses and of God's promises. These tell what God *wants His people to become, to be!* This is bringing them back 'to basics' such as, '**Act justly, love tenderly, walk humbly with your God.**' (Micah 6:8) They respond by asking, '***What must we do, then?***' He points out a basic such as, 'share what you have with the needy'! He mentions some material and emotional examples, – '***If anyone has two tunics he must share with the man who has none and the one with something to eat must do the same.***' (What concrete situations is the Scripture pondering preparing us to face?) John clearly and strongly includes those who were disliked (and it was considered a virtue to dislike them.) These were the judged-unfaithful Israelites such as '***tax-collectors too who came for baptism.***' They too have come, asked, listened and heard, '***Exact no more than your rate***' ('**just act justly!**'). Amazingly, even soldiers were attracted and moved to act correctly, – '***some***

*soldiers asked him in their turn, ‘What about us? What must we do?’ He said to them, ‘No intimidation! No extortion! Be content with your pay!’* John was starting with the basics, – good human values such as honesty .. justice .. respecting others .. sharing .. no self-advantage at the expense of another! Clearly he had an amazing influence on the ‘ordinary’ people, even on those who would be expected to avoid him. All is so deeply challenging! And yet, so many accept baptism! Clearly God’s Spirit is working through John on the hearers! (For renewing wisdom reminds us, *‘Start with, and build on, the positives – no matter how small!’*)

### **Challenged by Religious Authorities**

But it also seems that he is being attacked by other teachers. I picture scribes, lawyers and priests – ‘the establishment’ – coming from Jerusalem to confront this teacher who was not ‘one of their group’. They were angry; their role of religious teachers was being by-passed. John seems to have lost patience with them and berates them, *‘You brood of vipers ..’* I feel he is most angry at them for having betrayed the people. Through time they had allowed self-interest to divert them. (I ponder: *Laws* are originally made to help the better practise of a *Value!* But it is a human weakness – and short cut – to concentrate so much on the law that it gradually becomes the ‘value,’ smothering or distorting the real Value. *Judging only from words can kill the true ‘spirit’.*) Thus the religious leaders, far from helping the people, placed more and more burdens on them. John’s mission reminds us of how difficult it is for those immersed in telling others to change, for

themselves to be open to the need for inner change. This calls for constant vigilance and renewal in everyone. John will point out ***the coming one*** whose value of truth, honesty, respect for others, justice, sharing and compassion will challenge others to recognise those deficient parts in their own hearts and accept help. I pray, *‘Spirit, may I let you change what you want to change in my heart?’*

### **John baptising**

The baptismal ceremony here was the public proclamation of a hearer’s resolution to, with God’s help, put into practice what John had urged. By surrendering in trust to John and allowing him to hold their heads under the water and so emerge ‘renewed’, they showed their determination to rise to a new way of life. The external action signified the internal change of heart and intention. It promised a new way of living. John – and the Spirit – in spite of his challenging call, gives HOPE and TRUST.

### **Possible Questions for Pondering or Sharing.**

- ❖ *Has this given me a new outlook on laws? Do they help me to see and practise the Value they point to?  
Do I see beyond WHAT I do to WHY I do it?*
- ❖ *May we also recognise and support today’s ‘prophets’ of good human values.*
- ❖ *Has this helped me to ask God’s Spirit’s during the day,  
‘What do You want me to do here, now?’*

## 10. JOHN THE BAPTIST RAISES EXPECTATIONS

(Luke 3: 15-20)

I decide for how long I will ponder this text now. Checking my own ‘spiritual temperature’, again I notice ‘needs’ and desires, both in me and around me. I ask for progress in praying, *‘I want...but what do **You** want me to do, here and now?’* I return to the story of John the Baptist for more help in moving onwards. I break up the story. In each section I wait for the Spirit to lead me here and there slowly moving the mind and heart to act better.

**Luke 3:15-18:** – A feeling of expectancy had grown among the people, who were beginning to think that John might be the Christ, so John declared before them all, ‘I baptise you with water, but someone is coming, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fan is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that never goes out. As well as this, there were many other things he said to exhort the people and to announce the Good News to them. (NJB)

### *‘A feeling of expectancy’*

In my life today what is the Spirit saying to me here through

the Baptist and through Luke? I am drawn into pondering ***‘expectancy’***. I sense this feeling in the crowd. Then I think back to the influence of the Spirit on John in the desert. Next I observe the influence of that Spirit on those listeners gathered around John. These are ordinary people from countryside, villages, and, recently, towns. They have come eager to hear him! Hearing, they have become even more conscious of their daily ***‘neediness’***. It includes struggling under domination, burdened under taxes to Rome, taxes to local Rulers, taxes to the Temple and local taxes. Their Religious leaders have not helped lighten their burdens but have only made them heavier. They have been clinging to hope in the coming of a Saviour as promised in Psalms, Scripture readings and Feasts. But there has not even been a prophet in over three hundred years! Now John’s preaching is enkindling HOPE. But besides the HOPE he also emphasises the need to prepare to receive that Saviour. He reminds them of the Covenant commitment and, trusting in God, the need to act that out in daily living. He leads many to publicly affirm that commitment by the ritual of Baptism. His own relationship to God is influencing them! He does nothing to free them from oppressive laws or burdens but he changes their outlooks, their hearts, their feelings and their HOPE. The more they hear, see and feel, the more aware they become of God’s promises working among themselves. They are being prepared to meet the Saviour! (*Does anything stir in me?*)

***‘... that John might be the Christ.’***

Now, the crowd is beginning to feel that maybe he, this John

might even be that long promised ‘Messiah’, the Greatest of Prophets.

### **Sharing Expectancy Memories**

Tasting their feeling of **expectancy**, the memory of missionary experiences after Vatican Two pop into my mind. (I have shared some of this in Volume One.) Our efforts at sharing ‘The Teaching of the Catholic Church’ were having little visible response. Flowing from the Council some ‘Gabriel-like’ persons arrived who helped our ways of praying, in ‘praying Scripture’ and in becoming more conscious of journeying with Christ. Yes, Christianity is beyond a teaching; it is a PERSON! We became more conscious of God’s Spirit at work and now found our missionary efforts were visibly more fruitful. We named our Instruction classes, ‘Introducing Christ’! Using the Gospels much more to present Christ and Christianity also resulted in my own spiritual life been deepened. Like these hearers, we experienced an emerging **‘feeling of expectancy’**! Today the attitude, actions and words of Pope Francis give a like feeling. There is a leading towards **‘someone who is more powerful’**. The SPIRIT here is preparing *US* to enter a more conscious relationship to this **‘One’**.. We also believe the Sprit is working in today’s ‘prophets’ of honesty, justice, respecting others, sharing and uniting. May we contribute to them. (*Here I spend time asking the Spirit to draw me further out on this journey.*)

***‘Someone is coming, someone who is more powerful than I am.’***  
I think of the words of John’s father, Zachariah, ***‘You shall***



*go ahead of the Lord to prepare his ways before him.’* (Lk 1:76.) But here, John’s followers, experiencing the results of his coming among them begin *‘to think that John might be the Christ’*.

But John declares before them all, openly and clearly, that he is not the Christ. *‘I baptise you with water, but someone is coming, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandals.’* John points beyond himself .. to a much greater person .. of much greater importance .. and power. *‘He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.’* The ‘Coming One’ will inspire them with the Spirit that will make their hearts ‘to burn’. Fire warms. Fire has energy. Fire purges. Fire radiates. (*Once more I pause to pray for openness to the Holy Spirit.*)

### **John gives example**

John shows such wholehearted dedication in his mission of pointing out Christ! He confronts the opposition to it. He is conscious of the human inclination to assume for oneself the importance and centrality of the *One* preached about. He sees it in the Religious Leaders, in the seducing tendencies to self-importance, self-righteousness, wanting to control and such. He strives to keep decreasing that the one he is to point out may keep increasing in importance. John recognises the importance of prayer for self-knowledge. It helps us to become more conscious that we have allowed God to work through us when we do a good act. This reflection tells us something of the long spiritual journey we are about to be led

out on. John is an example of allowing the SPIRIT to work in him and through him. His message is challenging but it enlivens HOPE!

*(‘Come Holy Spirit, work in me and work through me.’)*

**Lk 3:19,20:** – But Herod the tetrarch, whom he criticised for his relations with his brother’s wife Herodias and for all the other crimes Herod had committed, added a further crime to all the rest by shutting John up in prison.

John himself becomes a victim and example of how power in human hands easily leads to its misuse. I am briefly brought back to the beginning of the Chapter and the picture of ‘world wide’ power and the puny John. But John is responding powerfully to the Spirit. He leads people to *‘the One who is to come’*. He is faithful to the end.

**Possible Questions for pondering and sharing.**

- ❖ *Has this helped me, more often during my day, to ask the Holy Spirit to guide my heart?*
- ❖ *In this swirling modern world of suffocating ‘powers’ what gives you HOPE?*
- ❖ *Do I recognise any ‘prophet-like’ persons today giving HOPE? Is he/she in my prayers? Can I help in any way?*

## 11.

# JESUS IS BAPTISED

(Lk 3:15,16,21,22)

### **Preparation.**

I decide for how long at this time I will ponder this text. I check briefly who I am before God at this moment and what 'need' is driving me. Luke's help has increased awareness of the activity of the Holy Spirit in our lives. John the Baptist's pointing onwards to '*the one who is to come*' makes me now ask for greater openness of heart and awareness of God working among us.

**(Lk 3:15,16):** – A feeling of expectancy had grown among the people .. so John declared before them all 'someone is coming, someone who is more powerful than I am .. he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. .... (3:21,22) Now, when all the people had been baptised and while Jesus after his own baptism was at prayer, heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily shape, like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on you'.

*Gazing at this I become passive and wait for the Spirit to move my mind and heart so that I see and act more in keeping with its message.*

### **Jesus coming to join John**

As I begin pondering 'the Baptism of Jesus' previous

ponderings pop into mind. I imagine Jesus, as he showed in the Temple, still searching in his prayers to know the next step in his mission to spread his *'Father's business'*. Then I imagine the news of John's preaching reaching Nazareth. Is this the call to leave his familiar village-life and 'step out' into the unknown future? After praying Jesus decides to go and see. He talks and prays with Mary. What was he feeling as he left? What was Mary feeling?

### **Jesus listening to John.**

I now picture you, Jesus standing at the back of the crowd listening to John. 'Jesus, you are so impressed by the effect John has on the crowd. He is promoting the 'Father's business'. 'You sense the openness to the Spirit in everyone.' (I notice I am calling Jesus, 'You'.) 'You feel the air of *"expectancy"*. You decide to join John – and add to his message. But firstly, I see you taking an amazing step. You do not join John in preaching and baptising. You line up 'on the same level' – with the same humanity! – as this crowd wanting 'to be changed', wanting 'new life'. You step into the water and surrender in trust as John holds your head under the water! This action shows your big step of trust in the Father as you go into the unknown future. The history of Prophets in Israel is not inviting. But you go forward into the 'mystery' in this huge act of *TRUST*.' (I spend time reflecting on this *TRUST*. And I think of those Jesus has joined with. Each one is a different 'needy' person. Jesus' goal is to draw them together with one heart in awareness of God's love.)

### **A helpful input.**

Pondering this text again and again and looking back at previous texts I was suddenly very pleased when an emotional memory arose. It was of Childhood movies. They involved stories of communities in a condition of want, oppression and hopelessness. Then next a hero suddenly appears. He contemplates the scene very seriously, then girds on his weapon (to cheers from the matinee audience). He is without an army. Yet he surveys the situation from the midst of the 'needy', organises the community, communicates hope and begins to lead them out into new lives. And we would go home joyfully from the movie. This might seem irreverent but I found it had a positive effect on me. We had felt so much 'at one' with the hero. Now it was helping me to feel a similar joy, thanksgiving, admiration and 'at one-ment' with Jesus as I watched him step out of the water and go to a quiet place to pray. This stepping out of the water became a symbol for me of Jesus leading us out with TRUST on the journey into the mysterious future. His weapon was the Father's love and his own self-giving. This symbol coming back at thankful or 'needy' times has helped.

### ***'While Jesus after his own baptism was at prayer.'***

I continue to reflect. Jesus as a human needed to pray and had built up a habit of spending much time in prayer. 'Now Jesus after this momentous step in your life I see you wanting to go to a quiet place for much prayer. I try to imagine how you would have prayed. I usually imagine your beginning with thanks to the Father. Here I imagine your thanking for John's

mission, for all those who responded to his message, for the Spirit working in them, for the Spirit that was so obviously working in you and helping your own decision to step out in trust into the unknown future. Then I imagine your thanksgiving gradually flowing into asking for guidance, for strength, for perseverance to go on in *TRUST*.'

***'heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily shape.'***

"Now, Jesus, I imagine your prayer becoming especially deep. The words ***'heaven opened'*** make me think of the separation between God and humans evaporating over you for this time. You, Jesus have an awe-inspiring awareness of the Father's presence, a presence that is gentle, strong and comforting. It is the voice of a loving, caring parent, ***'a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved."***' 'The Spirit is making you, Jesus, in your humanity, more deeply aware of the Father's love for you. That love ***'rests'*** in you. That means it is continuous!' This special example of Jesus' praying and its content holds me for a long time. It emphasises again the need for praying. (*I notice myself pausing to pray that my habit of praying deepens.*) Then I find myself spending time asking, 'Jesus, what does hearing ***"You are my Beloved Son"*** do in your heart?' (*I want to know your heart better. May I let it touch mine with more effect.*)

***'my favour rests on you'***

Other translations of ***'my favour rests on you'*** are ***'with you I am well pleased'***. This is regarded as God the Father's

praise of Jesus for freely and fully accepting the call to take up the Father's Saving Mission. Here, the Father is pointing out to the world that Jesus is the promised Saviour. He has come among the 'needy' and publicly shown his surrendering in trust to the Father's unfolding Plan. Jesus' growing awareness of the Father's love will continue strengthening his own loving response. Jesus wants to share these two loves with those he has come among! (*Here I ask for more openness to receive and be changed.*)

**Possible Questions for more pondering or sharing.**

- ❖ *Is the Holy Spirit opening my eyes, ears and my heart more? Am I moving more from head to heart?*
- ❖ *Does meeting Jesus in our prayers, in our pondering and in Sacraments help us in our discovery of God as a loving Father?*
- ❖ *Is my pondering of Scripture putting 'flesh and blood' on the framework of what I was taught?*
- ❖ *Has this caused me to think more about my own baptism?*

## 12. JESUS IN THE DESERT

(LK 4:1-15)

### **Preparation.**

Praying on the Baptism of Jesus has made me more aware of Jesus, the Beloved Son coming among us to lead us to the Father and closer to one another. I vision the Spirit acting on his heart. I ask to be more open to the influence of the Spirit on my own heart and it to be continually changed.

**Luke 4; 1-15.** – Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert, for forty days being put to the test by the devil. During that time he ate nothing and at the end he was hungry. Then the devil said to him, ‘If you are Son of God, tell this stone to turn into a loaf.’ But Jesus replied, ‘Scripture says: Human beings live not on bread alone.’ Then leading him to a height, the devil showed him in a moment of time all the kingdoms of the world and said to him, ‘I will give you all this power and their splendour, for it has been handed over to me, for me to give it to anyone I choose. Do homage, then, to me, and it shall all be yours.’ But Jesus answered him, ‘Scripture says: “You must do homage to the Lord your God, him alone you must serve.” ‘Then he led him to Jerusalem and set him on the parapet of the Temple. ‘If you are Son of God,’ he said to him, ‘throw yourself down from here,’ for scripture says: ‘He has



given his angels orders about you, to guard you, and again: 'They will carry you in their arms in case you trip over a stone.' But Jesus answered him, 'Scripture says: Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' Having exhausted every way of God putting him to the test, the devil left him, until the opportune moment.

### ***'led by the Spirit into the desert'***

Reading the text slowly again I am deeply shocked and confused! I have just seen Jesus, ***'filled with the Holy Spirit'***, so aware of being the ***'Beloved Son'*** praised for his faithfulness and obedience. But now! He is being led by that Spirit into the *DESERT!* But why? The desert is a cruel .. dangerous .. lonely place .. few signs of life, where there is no one to hear the *'Good News'*! I protest, 'Do you lead a loved one into a place of such suffering?' Yet it is where the Spirit leads Jesus! And in *TRUST* he goes! (I spend time on this.)

### ***... 'for forty days'!***

I think about thirst .. hunger .. burning heat .. numbing night cold .. loneliness .. reptiles. And FOR ***'forty days!'*** So long – growing physically weaker and weaker .. the human instinct of self-preservation growing furiously demanding, rebelling. I ask, 'JESUS, HOW DID YOU FEEL? Were you puzzled? After such a compelling awareness of being 'loved' here you are – led into this long, extreme experience of suffering, helplessness. I find myself growing in sympathy for this Jesus who is being emotionally pulled apart.

## **Growth in trusting in the Father and preparation for his Mission.**

I ask, 'Jesus, what went on in your heart? How did you speak and listen for the Father's Spirit? Did you search Psalms or lines from the Scriptures to find perseverance for each day? (The then presumed image of the Messiah was of someone who, like King David, would free the people with military might and rule with power, prestige and authority. And the human inclination to self-preservation and self-centeredness turns us to seek power, possessions and prestige for progress.) But you, by not arranging to feed yourself, but waiting on the Father's providing, show your refusal to take control into your own hands. Explaining, ***'Human beings live not on bread alone'***, you TRUST in the Spirit that led you into the desert and you daily choose to wait in dogged DEPENDENCE on the Father's plan. You refuse to trust in ***'power and splendor'***! You grow in TRUST to the Father's faithfulness – even if the plan is mysterious and confusing!' (It leads me into repeating, *'Jesus, help me grow in trust day-by-day.'*)

## **From the desert.**

Now with relief and joy I see the Spirit leading Jesus from the desert. I imagine his great relief, joy and gratitude. I say to Jesus, 'You have *experienced* how *depending* on the Father saves in the end.' Coming out of the desert everything must have been so eye-catching – vegetation .. birds .. flowers .. streams .. grassy hills and Nature's teeming life. Yes, the birds of the air, the flowers of the fields, Nature stimulates *Dependence* and *Trust* in God,

## **More testing times to come!**

But *‘until the opportune moment’* warns that during his mission Jesus will meet further times like this – times of confrontation - external and internal – and of struggle for the right decision of faithfulness even till the very end of his mission.

## **Desert Experiences.**

I keep discovering new helps when praying this text. We all have desert experiences. I have had many, - short, long and of different turmoils. They came out of times of emotional loss, feeling a task beyond my ability, struggling through difficult human relations and such-like struggles to trust the Father’s daily help. In them I have found myself driven to more prayer-time and to more concentrated prayer. Some struggles lasted quite long and seemed just helping to ‘hang-on’. One plea for help would be *‘Come, Holy Spirit’*. But later I have realised that even after being led from a very trying desert I now continued that habit of much more and more attentive praying. So the ‘desert’ had given me a gift! Also later I have realised how I was led to seek help and it branched out into different habits and sources of help. (Choosing to ‘Go on a ‘retreat’ – which is ‘into the desert’ – is one example.) Another fruit of desert-experience I notice is that I had become more able to help someone asking help in a desert-experience. Thus the Spirit was now able to work better through me for others! Also in the struggles I have found my eyes opened to obstacles in my heart that impeded my relationship with God. I notice traits of superiority, vanity,

an inner urge to be ‘in control’ and such-like self-centeredness. I am realising that in the deserts the Spirit was drawing me to God-centeredness, to ‘let go’ and *trust* God. In the desert I was being drawn closer to the heart of Jesus and even noticing a softening in my own heart. Yes, on our journey (like the Chosen People in the **Exodus**) we are drawn not just ‘into the desert’ but ‘*THROUGH* the desert!’ and drawn further into the mystery of the Father’s love. (*‘Come Holy Spirit, ..’*).

**Possible Questions for reflection or sharing:-**

- ❖ *Did this gazing at Jesus in his sufferings, struggles, choices, bring him closer in any way?*
- ❖ *Did the memory of coming through any previous ‘desert’ experience help you later in any way? .. to pray better? to open the heart to greater day by day trust?*
- ❖ *Finding myself in a desert can I pray, ‘Holy Spirit, bring me through this desert to a greater good’.*
- ❖ *The Spirit through the desert experience prepares Jesus to spread the ‘Good News’ of God’s Kingdom. Is the Spirit preparing us in our deserts to spread it with him?*

### 13.

## BEGINNING OF JESUS' MISSION

(Lk 4:14- 22a)

### **Preparation.**

I am seeing more consciously my life as a journey. My praying time has made me more aware of God's Spirit with me, coaching me on that journey. It becomes a journey of change of heart. Jesus is emerging more as a model, support and companion on that journey. I pray, *'May I let you change my heart and change others through me.'*

(As usual, I first decide length of time on this occasion I will use for pondering and praying. I will use different parts of chapter 4 of Luke which introduce the mission of Jesus.

**Luke 4:14,15:** – Then Jesus returned to Galilee, and the power of the Holy Spirit was with him. The news about him spread throughout all the territory. He taught in their synagogues and was praised by all.

***Returned to Galilee. ... power of the Holy Spirit was with him.***

These few words of Luke cover so much. As I ponder and pray I ask the Spirit to open my mind and influence my heart. As I ponder the words, ***'Jesus returned to Galilee'*** I notice significantly that from the desert Jesus is not going to Judea, to Jerusalem or to the Temple. He is going to *Galilee!* So he is 'starting at the bottom' to spread the ***'Good News'***! And so

I imagine him gradually moving towards Nazareth – considered so backward. On the way I picture him stopping weekly in villages where, as an itinerant carpenter, he can ‘earn his bread’. But I notice he slips off in the evenings to pray at length as he waits for the Sabbath gatherings. Then on the Sabbath in Synagogues, he, as a respectable traveller, would be invited to share on the Scriptural readings. I see him soon making such a big impression that he is being begged to stay. But he moves on. I look down in imagination and sympathy from high-above on that ‘puny’ figure journeying through that huge sea of Galilean ‘neediness’. Then I realise ***‘the power of the Holy Spirit was with him’***. I hold that in mind. I am beginning to perceive Jesus as someone always *eager to come* among the ‘needy’ and share *openness* to God’s Spirit.

### **Reflections on my Ponderings.**

(This pondering is helping me discover an image of Jesus that is quite different from earlier images of and prayers to Jesus that I have had before. He was someone more distant, more commanding or even someone to be ‘careful’ before.) Now I notice a deeper glimpse into his heart. He is so conscious of both the Father’s care and of our ‘neediness’. He is urging us to open our hearts to the Spirit who draws us on our ‘journey’ into closeness to the Father and to himself.

Jesus Preaches in Nazareth.

**Luke 4:16-22a** – He came to Nazara, where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day as he usually did. He stood up to

read, and they handed him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll he found the place where it is written:

*The spirit of the Lord is on me, for he has anointed me to bring the good news to the afflicted.*

*He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord.*

He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down. And all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to speak to them, 'This text is being fulfilled today even while you are listening.' And he won the approval of all, and they were astonished by the gracious words that came from his lips. (NJB)

I imagine him, 'Jesus the carpenter,' finally arriving back in his own village. I imagine some of his feelings. He knows so well the circumstances, desires and needs of those he has grown up with. He knows those suffering from afflictions. He knows their trials from Roman and other oppressions. He knows the humiliations and causes of the poverty they suffer and the poor religious support. He knows human weaknesses. So he eagerly wants to give *HOPE, TRUST, JOY, and NEW LIFE*. The villagers know he left to go and hear John the Baptist. They have heard he has been talking in synagogues on the way and "***was praised by all.***" They decide 'he must have been greatly influenced by this John.' They gather in great expectancy to hear him.

***‘all were astonished’***

And what they hear is even beyond their wildest dreams. Starting with hearing the Scripture he has chosen, they grow in amazement. They hear he has been sent to share ***‘the spirit of the Lord’*** with them. This is the ***‘good news’*** he has been specially sent to bring to them in their ‘afflictions’. They hear his words and think of personal debts, taxes, oppressions, physical handicaps and such-like burdens which they yearn to be freed from. It will become a time of mutual forgiveness and unity! Yes, a new era is beginning! And starting now! ***‘even while you are listening’***! No wonder, ***‘all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him’***. They were mesmerized! I picture their staring eyes and mouths half-open. It is an understatement that, ***‘He won the approval of all,’*** and ***‘all were astonished by the gracious words that came from his lips’***. I think of their continuing rejoicing as they leave the Synagogue. What ***‘good news’***!

**Led to ponder the gift of inner freedom and its task.**

My pondering leads me to see myself here, now. Like the hearers, I have chosen to be in this special ‘prayer place’ at this time. I have been ‘handed the Scripture’. (There’s my copy of Luke!) I ‘hear’ it! Such wonderful teaching for my life! Pondering first reminds me of so much in my daily living that limits me and I yearn to be freed from. But isn’t ***‘liberty’*** what Jesus is now ***‘proclaiming’***! Also I am being offered promptings from the Spirit such as ***‘sight to the blind’***. I am discovering that that primarily means seeing more clearly gifts from God in my day! Also I am noticing more clearly



obstacles to inner freedom in my heart. I think of habits or urges of self-centeredness and such-like compulsions that really control or shackle me. These limit and kill God's gifts. (Do I want just '*freedom from ..*' or to do beyond to '*freedom for ..*'?) But our journey of inner freedom, even led by closeness to Jesus and the Spirit, is not going to be an easy, short journey. We will have to continually struggle with these obstacles. On top of that we have to struggle against the contagious, smothering 'blanket' of accumulated, inbred, oppressive, selfish habits of society and culture. Here I watch Jesus offering to lead the hearers out on this new path. They are really joyous. As I ponder this scene, I find myself praying repeatedly, "*Thank you for coming. We need you. I especially need you. Help me to open my heart. Thank you for coming.*"

### **Reflecting and Sharing.**

During long pondering on this text memories arise. I remember nearly seventy years ago our co-founder gave us talks on the 'Forgotten Holy Spirit' in church life. But it was a long time before that made a change in me. Then after some years of my missionary pastoral work the Vatican 2 Council happened. I still remember how in the first talk of a very valuable series of seminars on it the speaker pointed out that in the history of the church, in times of turmoil and upheaval, there was a return to awareness of the action of the Holy Spirit. Now after Vatican 2 he pointed out examples of awareness of the action of the Holy Spirit emerging again. A third memory was of my making a resolution that, even though I believed it, I would not preach on anything that I

had no experience of. And soon a shock as Pentecost came along. Concentrated searching and praying followed. Helps that I would previously have given credit to e.g. a Saint now suggested I ask was this not the Holy Spirit breaking through. Next, noticing in myself a response of surprising generosity, unselfish patience or deliberate trust I gave the Spirit credit for prompting and helping. I noticed better in the Gospels, Acts and Paul the action of the Spirit. I noticed similar steps forward in the development of activities among the Christians. And I am surprised to realize that at this age I am writing little booklets like these and that I am the one benefiting most spiritually from that! It is making me more conscious of the need for openness to the influence of the Spirit. And I think of Mary in that synagogue listening in wonder to Jesus. (Then I think of her after Jesus' Resurrection helping to prepare the disciples for Pentecost!) I find myself repeating, *'Mary, help me to be open to the influence of the Holy Spirit'*.

**Possible Questions for reflection or sharing:-**

- ❖ *Am I becoming more aware of the influence of the Spirit on myself? On groups I belong to?*
- ❖ *Has this sharing helped you notice the Spirit's influence in any of your own experiences?*
- ❖ *In my silent prayer time were my eyes opened in any way? Led to do anything extra?*
- ❖ *Is the Spirit leading me in my pondering and praying into a growing heart-to-heart relationship with Jesus?*

## 14. JESUS IS REJECTED IN NAZARETH

(4:22-30)

### **Preparation.**

I see Jesus as hastening to offer greater awareness of the Spirit and of the Father's freeing love. He is offering it to the Nazarenes. Are they open to receive? Are they blind? Next I realize he is offering this awareness to me, to us. I pray for openness to receive and allow it to change me as I stay with Jesus visiting in Nazareth.

**Luke 4: 22-30:** — And he won the approval of all, and they were astonished by the gracious words that came from his lips. They said, 'This is Joseph's son, surely?' But he replied, 'No doubt you will quote me the saying, "Physician, heal yourself," and tell me, "We have heard all that happened in Capernaum, do the same here in your own country."' And he went on, 'In truth I tell you, no prophet is ever accepted in his own country. 'There were many widows in Israel, I can assure you, in Elijah's day, when heaven remained shut for three years and six months and a great famine raged throughout the land, but Elijah was not sent to any one of these: he was sent to a widow at Zarephath, a town in Sidonia! And in the prophet Elisha's time there were many suffering from virulent skin-diseases in Israel, but none of these

was cured-only Naaman the Syrian.’ When they heard this everyone in the synagogue was enraged. They sprang to their feet and hustled him out of the town; and they took him up to the brow of the hill their town was built on, intending to throw him off the cliff, but he passed straight through the crowd and walked away. (NJB)

### **A different reaction**

I gaze at a new scene. It is the same Synagogue. But what a different attitude to Jesus! The hearers have moved from admiration, joy and thankfulness to criticism, antagonism and anger. And it seems to be increasing with each visit. (Scripture scholars say – and quotes made here to what must be later things such as cures, and actions in Capernaum etc, would explain it – that Luke telescopes a succession of visits to Nazareth into this one story. So really this is a description of the development of the attitude of many Nazarenes and other hearers towards Jesus during his Galilean ministry.) This tells us that Jesus’ teaching is not only a gift but also a challenge. And it is often resisted. Here the hearers are realising that it is a gift that leads far beyond what they had bargained for. Here is resistance! (*Spirit help me discover resistances in me: open my heart more.*)

### **Calling beyond the ‘expected’!**

The critics have become uneasy as they hear what He is doing throughout Galilee. (And he has not stayed in Nazareth and made it an important centre – which might have upset them!)

They hear he is going especially to the poor and “useless”, eating with tax-collectors and sinners, – a horror to their ears! He is even talking to Samaritans, Romans and other “outsiders.” More horror! All so different to what they had grown up with. But not only is Jesus acting this way, he is encouraging everyone to act this way! He is calling them to undergo change. He is calling them to let their *eyes ‘be opened’*. But it is beyond physical healing. It is to surrender for inner healing of shackles in their hearts and actions, especially towards ‘outsiders’. His behavior calling them out on this path frightens them. It is moving them into an unknown ‘world’. Religious leaders had not led them on this path. I can imagine them thinking, ‘If we start acting differently towards others, especially towards non-Israelites! towards non-observers of the Religious rules! towards non-contributors to Israel’s ‘specialism’! – where will all this end?’ It was wonderful to hear of receiving so much but this giving and sharing is frightening! (They forget the promised Gift of the Spirit.)

### **The Rejection.**

They argue with him, becoming more and more vehement. So they rationalize it, ‘After all, he is only *‘the carpenter’s son’* – not even a student of any Religious school.’ Jesus points out that they ignore parts of Scripture that challenge! He reminds them of how God worked through two great prophets to show care and healing to non-Israelites. Did that not show God’s Heart towards all humans – the same heart as shown in Isaiah which he had read to them? Do they not

accept this message – is that not failing to listen to the WHOLE Scriptures? But this only makes the listeners angrier. They claim that he is insulting the entire nation! Why should they follow his message? I can feel this wave of resistance, anger and self-righteousness growing and overwhelming them. He is just a “false prophet” they now proclaim. ‘And we know what we should do to such!’ They want to throw Jesus over the cliff. (It is a sobering scene.)

### **Imagining Jesus’ reaction**

I watch Jesus. He is not afraid. I assume he will become angry and show his power! But no! He does not. He just looks so sad! He is sad for them. They will not accept the gift he is bringing them. His sadness shows his yearning to give them a fuller life. Here is so much unbelievable compassion! (I wonder, ‘*How am I ever going to deeply know the heart of this Jesus?*’) Next I see him – a lonely figure going off – unaccompanied! (I wonder how many parts of me are not yet ready to go along with him.) I dwell on his great *PATIENCE*; till now he has continued to come back to them in spite of their opposition. We see him going off alone to Capernaum and other places to call others to have their eyes opened, their hearts freed; to receive both the joy and challenge of the ‘*good news*’ of new life.

### **Reflections and Sharings.**

In my pondering I become conscious that I am being called further out with Jesus on this new journey (even if I never leave my present surroundings.) I am becoming conscious of

how patient he is. This encourages me because I feel unreliable and the need to cling to him. 'On the journey, Jesus you are breaking through my defenses of selfishness. You are *opening my eyes* more and more to see the hindrances of self-righteousness, pride and superiority towards others. You are *freeing* me to become more and more an instrument of the Father's patience, compassion and forgiveness. I am to share, not from superiority, but out of *GRATITUDE*.' This brings me back and renews the trust generated by the Vatican 2 Council. It emphasised the Church as the 'Pilgrim People of God' sharing with our neighbors, the 'needy and 'outcasts' and – even with our enemies! Pondering this event has brought me right back to my need of prayer time for openness to the Spirit and closeness to Jesus. I pray, '*Free me to trust and to allow myself to be changed.*'

### **Possible Questions for Pondering or Sharing.**

- ❖ *Were my 'eyes opened' in any way? Was I challenged, changed, 'freed', led to do something new'?*
- ❖ *Has pondering the PATIENCE of God brought the Father, the Spirit and Jesus closer?*
- ❖ *Did spontaneous prayers break out like, 'Free me to trust and to allow myself to be changed.'*

## 15. JESUS CALLS THE FIRST DISCIPLES

### Preparation

Till now I have been seeing Jesus drawing peoples' attention and moving hearts. I have seen him spending time in prayer, talking to the Father and responding to the Spirit. It has moved my heart. I now ask that I can step further out of my 'Nazarene' mentality and respond with trust.

### Introduction

I look again at Jesus teaching and curing many in different parts of Galilee. Next I notice Luke pointing out, *'When daylight came he left the house and made his way to a lonely place'* (4:42). This emphasises for me that Jesus had a habit, in spite of all his activity, of going apart to pray. I imagine a prayer coming from a heart of thanks to the Father for what has happened till now plus asking for guidance and trust for the next step of his mission. The Mission is, *'I must proclaim the Good New of the kingdom of God to the other towns too'*. (4:43). That helps me understand, *'the crowds went to look for him'*. And it is leading me now to do exactly the same two things, one, to come apart to pray and two, to strive to get closer to Jesus. I begin with Luke 5: 1-11.

**Luke 5:1-11** (NJB) – Now it happened that he was standing one day by the Lake of Gennesarat, with the crowd pressing round him listening to the word of God, when he caught sight of two boats at the



water's edge. The fishermen had got out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats – it was Simon's – and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat.

When he had finished speaking he said to Simon, “put out into deep water and pay out your nets for a catch.” Simon replied, “Master, we worked all night long and caught nothing, but if you say so I will pay out the nets.” And when he had done this they netted such a huge number of fish that their nets began to tear, so they signalled to their companions in the other boat to come and help them; when they came, they filled both boats to sinking point. When Simon Peter saw this he fell at the knees of Jesus saying, “Leave me Lord; I am a sinful man.” For he and all his companions were completely awestruck at the catch they had made; so also were Simon's partners. But Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on it is people you will be catching.” Then bringing their boats back to land they left everything and followed him.

## **On the Lakeshore**

So I choose to imagine Jesus very early slipping away to the lakeshore for solitude to pray. Then I see a searcher spotting him and informing other searchers. Now I see many hurrying towards him from different directions. This leads to the words *‘pressing around him.’* Gradually, as the crowd around him

grows, I imagine it swarming around him, everyone contending to be closest, striving to touch, to ‘get his ear’, shouting out requests for cures for themselves or others and elbowing forward. It becomes a noisy, jostling scene. Jesus cannot be heard and they are even crowding him back into the water! I ask, ‘Jesus how must you have felt?’ and wait.

Jesus is creative. *‘..he caught sight of two boats at the water’s edge. The fishermen had got out of them and were washing their nets’.* He asks (*‘asks’!*) asks them to come and help him. *‘He got into one of the boats – it was Simon’s – and asked him to put out a little from the shore’.* I shift my focus onto Peter and crew. How did they feel at the request? They have had some association with Jesus so far. They would have respect and appreciation for him. But they are bone-tired, hungry, dejected, worried about their livelihood. Would yearn to finish tidying up, get home, eat something, get some sleep and prepare for more hard work in the coming night. Yet, they come and do what Jesus asks!

*‘Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat’.*

I am so struck by the result. The atmosphere of the scene has changed! Jesus now ‘sits’ – a relaxed pose – and talks. I imagine the crowd on the shore now also sitting, listening attentively and able to hear! And Peter and companions, instead of being otherwise distracted are drawn to listen attentively! It has become a calm and very fruitful scene. I imagine Jesus giving thanks to the caring Father and to the prompting of the Spirit.

***“put out into deep water and pay out your nets for a catch.”***

But into this comfortably listening, fulfilling scene, I imagine Jesus responding with trust to another prompting. And he drops a ‘bombshell’! He tells the fishermen to prepare the nets for going out into the deep water to start fishing! They are flabbergasted! Maybe a carpenter might not know but generations of fishermen have learned you can not find fish here in the daytime. And they have just had proof that at present there are no fish around here even at night! I can imagine them wanting to say. ‘You can’t be serious, Lord.’ Yet Peter says, ***“Master, we worked all night long and caught nothing, but if you say so I will pay out the nets.”*** However I wonder was it not with a puzzled, weary and resigned to a more toil and disappointment that they rowed out into deep water. I picture their slow, heavy movements, then puzzled frowns, then surprise at movement below the boat, then unbelief, then growing excitement turning to frantic activity. They have never seen so many fish! These might even sink the boat. Be careful! They call frantically to their friends on the shore to come and help. Indeed ***“they netted such a huge number of fish that their nets began to tear, so they signalled to their companions in the other boat to come and help them; when they came, they filled both boats to sinking point.”***

### **Self-knowledge**

What an amazing climax to the ‘hopeless’ invitation to ‘launch out into the deep’! Imagine the excitement, joy and gratitude. Indeed ***“all .. were completely awestruck”***. But in

the midst of this joy it suddenly strikes Peter that he had no hope or trust that anything like this could happen. He really doesn't know this Jesus. He humbly confesses his lack of trust, ***“Leave me Lord; I am a sinful man.”*** I see all the fishermen around Jesus with their heads down and feeling like Peter.

(Are there parts of me that might not say that same thing? It is so hard to realise what getting closer to this Jesus entails. Yes, there is some trust but *‘Lord, I need more! Help my lack of trust – especially in NN..’*)

### **Another amazing invitation**

But Jesus' response is even more startling. He ignores Peter's protest. Instead, he gives them another and greater invitation. ***“Do not be afraid; from now on it is people you will be catching.”*** He is inviting them to share in the mission he himself received. I sometimes imagine that Jesus cannot help smiling as he sees the astounded faces of Peter and friends. Their shocked expressions say, 'We are only fishermen. We have no education, no mixing with outsiders and we have no special religious training.' They feel, 'You must be really joking this time, Lord.' But Jesus is not!

(I am nervous at *‘what this text is beginning to say to me!’*)

### **Their response**

It is even more amazing to see that, ***‘bringing their boats back to land they left everything and followed him.’*** (I remind myself here that Luke is giving a glimpse of the active faith of the Christian Community fed by over thirty years of

post-Resurrection and post-Pentecost experience. I can see these words as telescoping the *LONG TERM RESPONSE*.) They left their boats, their nets, their fishing and all that had been the central part of their lives! This points to their beginning journey of leaving all to *‘follow him’* into an unknown, bewildering future – another *‘launch out into the deep’*. (This can draw us more into responding to nudges of the Spirit and travelling with and sharing more of the heart of this Jesus. I realise I am praying, *‘Lord, what do you want to do through me now?’*)

### **Reflection, Sharing, Praying**

Recently in reflection on Jesus’ concern for the crowd I suddenly noticed myself asking had he no concern for the weariness, hunger and dejection of the fishermen? Then I decided he was responding to a prompting of the Spirit to invite them out to fish again – thoughtless as it might seem then? He is inviting them out on this ‘unimaginable’ task *TRUSTING* in the Father’s loving concern which is seen in the benefit to the crowd and to such an amazing step forward in the inner response of the fishermen. (I pray, *‘Help me to TRUST more and respond to your prompting here and now.’*)

### **A Sharing.**

This text of Luke was the first example used in the group where I first learned about ‘Praying Scripture’ and it figured in the eight-day directed retreat after it. It is one I go back to often. And I keep discovering new things in it. Lately, in pondering Jesus’ choice of Peter as a future leader of so much,

I thought of Peter as a full-hearted hard worker, a leader of a group and a willing-to-help person. But I found myself led deeper. Peter with all his faults was an honest man. He was able to notice his own failings, own up to them and accept the consequences. It gave me a further picture of Jesus' heart. I decided that Jesus looks primarily on the *POSITIVES* in hearts and patiently nurtures those. I see this as also gradually starving negatives and changing hearts. This also gives me a Jesus with a wonderfully warm, forgiving and especially *PATIENT* heart. It led to a deeper communion of hearts between Jesus and disciples. And gives me a greater awareness of where Jesus is continually inviting and leading us – and ME! I am led to pray, '*Jesus, lead me to first see POSITIVES in another before seeing NEGATIVES.*'

### **Possible Questions for prompting and sharing.**

- ❖ *From Jesus 'example am I learning the value of my special quiet time for prayer?*
- ❖ *Has any 'suggestion' come into my mind to do something I would have considered beyond my ability or experience?*
- ❖ *Has pondering these texts so far made me more aware of the activity of the Holy Spirit?*
- ❖ *Am I growing in noticing the patience and compassion in the heart of Jesus towards me? ... towards others around me?*

## 16. JESUS CURES THE LEPER

(Luke 5:12-16.)

**Sample prayer;** *Lord Jesus, in my various needy conditions I go to meet you in this prayer time. I pray I be changed, healed, get to know you better, become closer to you and to others.*

(Pondering and praying this text has led me to the following. What will you get from it?)

**Luke 5:12-16:** – Now it happened that Jesus was in one of the towns when suddenly a man appeared, covered with a skin disease. Seeing Jesus he fell on his face and implored him saying, ‘Sir if you are willing you can cleanse me’. Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him and said, ‘Of course I want to! Be cured!’ and the leprosy left him at once. He ordered him to tell no one, ‘But go and show yourself to the priest and make the offering for your cleansing just as Moses prescribed, as evidence to them’. But the news of him kept spreading, and large crowds would gather to hear him and to have their illness cured, but he would always go off to some place where he could be alone and pray. (NJB)

### **I am the leper.**

I am the leper. I live outside the town. I am not allowed to come close. Everyone is afraid of catching the disease from me. It is a painful, debilitating, and wasting-away disease. It also brands people as ‘religiously unclean’ and by shouting

‘unclean, unclean’ I must warn others to avoid me! If I come too close I am driven away by thrown stones. Since I became a leper life has become so terrible. I live among the rocks. Sometimes my family leave food by the wayside for me but never come near. Always I am hungry and so cold at night. My heart is eaten away by loneliness and sadness. I am helpless. I have prayed but it is just becoming harder to live. I have no hope.

### **Hope!**

I am surprised! More travelers than usual are coming to our town. From my hidden place among some rocks I heard some passers-by talking about a new prophet, Jesus of Nazareth. It seems he is going around Galilee preaching about God’s care for all. I hear he even cures with God’s power. He is visiting our town and so many others have come to hear him. I heard someone say that very, very early he goes to a certain remote place to pray. A thought is growing in me. I wonder if .... I can’t endure this any longer. Yes, I have decided! I will take courage and approach him.

### ***‘Of course I want to’.***

It is now a very early morning. I hear him coming. I run out and throw myself at his feet, shouting, ***‘If you want to you can cure me.’*** He has stopped. He doesn’t turn away. I am astounded to hear the force in Jesus’ voice as he says, ***‘Of course, I want to. Be clean!’*** The tone of Jesus’ words even seems like a reproach, ‘Do you not know HOW MUCH I want to heal you?’



### **‘He touched Me.’**

Next Jesus is stooping down, taking my arm and helping me to stand up! – me! – smelly, covered with sores, repulsive-looking – me! I am astounded. It was not necessary for him to touch me to heal me. Yet he does! And that even makes himself officially ‘unclean’ by doing so! I am amazed to see sores on my skin falling off, parts of my face and body are changing, new strength is coming into my limbs. So quickly! So completely! My heart can not contain my thanks and my joy. I can’t move I am so overcome.

### **Inner healing!**

But Jesus interrupts my cries of thanks. He is telling me, before meeting others, to ***‘go and show yourself to the priest.’*** He is telling me to go and be ‘officially’ certified as clean. I can then be fully part of the social and religious life of the family and community. Also I am amazed to find there has been a big change in my heart too! Resentment, antagonism, despair and self-pity are gone! They have been replaced with understanding and compassion towards my family, friends and community!

### **Jesus has gifted the community too.**

Coming back to the family and community I see how the cure has affected them also. Here is an atmosphere of awe, thanks, and joy. They too are all in awe at the mysterious POWER OF GOD working in our lives and caring for us. Memories of failings towards one another before the cure have been changed into a new closeness. I wonder what affect it had on the priest.

**Jesus' own example of praying leadind us on our journey**  
I read, '*large crowds would gather to hear him and to have their illness cured.*' Yes, the crowds kept him very busy. '*but he would always go off to some place where he could be alone and pray.*' These words reinforce my own developing habit of praying – like now. Here I imagine Jesus thanking the Father for the compassion and power flowing through him to the leper and wider community. I imagine him asking and waiting for guidance through the Spirit for the next step.

### **Meeting a Jesus WANTING to heal my heart!**

Pondering this I am led back into my own daily life. I might notice leper-like feelings and yearnings for healing! These might be a loneliness, an ostracised stature, a crippling debility or such. As I keep asking the Father for healing the feeling of JESUS coming closer grows! As I keep asking I am surprised to feel His warmth, His care and deep WANTING to cure me! An inspiration hits me. *Jesus IS healing me but not in the way I assumed!* I accept it is in a more mysterious and deeper way. I will know it by its fruits. This strengthens my TRUST – and HOPE.

### **Reflection.**

I suddenly realize that on my present journey with Luke this is my first '*ONE-ON-ONE*' meeting with Jesus! I am moved to say, 'Jesus, I might not know you very well yet but I am beginning to feel that I am *IMPORTANT* to you.' At the same time I am becoming more conscious of those 'needs' that come from diseased *PARTS OF MY HEART*. These are

obstacles that distance me from God, (and cut me off from true union with others!) such as ‘self-centeredness’; being the centre of my world and such. These are what I really need cured. I am learning how much Jesus wants to lead us into recognizing *GOD AS THE CENTRE* of our lives! It is a long journey. Jesus wants us to see that what we have and what we are all comes from continual gifting by God. Thus the healing I want and receive in my heart is to let God work more in me and through me. I find myself praying, ‘*I want ... but help me do what YOU want?*’

### **Possible Questions for Pondering or Sharing.**

- ❖ *On my journey with Luke this is my own first encounter with Jesus ‘one on one’. Am I noticing more examples of the Spirit drawing me to speak to and listen to Jesus?*
- ❖ *Have I noticed myself becoming more aware of inner attitudes in my heart towards others?*
- ❖ *Has ever coming through a long suffering and cure brought me closer to God?*
- ❖ *How have cures in me also benefited the community?*

**Note.** I find this scene a help in preparation for the Sacrament of Forgiveness. Instead of a fear of being scolded, turned away or rebuked, I now imagine meeting this compassionate, welcoming Jesus and hearing, ‘*Of course I want to heal you.*’ He draws me closer to himself – and thus to others. The Sacrament becomes more healing.

## 17. JESUS CURES A PARALYTIC

### **Preparation.**

‘In this prayer time reading and pondering this Scriptural event, Jesus, may I find myself attentively before you. Help me to listen, to wait and to be further internally healed. May I be open to respond to prompts coming even through my imagination.’

**Text Lk 5: 17-26:** – Now it happened that he was teaching one day, and Pharisees and teachers of the Law, who had come from every village in Galilee, from Judea and from Jerusalem, were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was there so that he could heal. And now some men appeared, bringing on a bed a paralysed man whom they were trying to bring in and lay down in front of him. But as they could find no way of getting the man through the crowd, they went up on to the flat roof and lowered him and his stretcher down through the tiles into the middle of the gathering, in front of Jesus. Seeing their faith he said, ‘My friend, your sins are forgiven you.’ The scribes and the Pharisees began to think this over. ‘Who is this man talking blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?’ But Jesus, aware of their thoughts, made them this reply, ‘What are these thoughts you have in your hearts? Which of these is easier: to say, “Your sins are forgiven you,” or to say, “get up and walk”? But to prove to you that the Son

of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,’ – he said to the paralysed man – ‘I order you: get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home.’ And immediately before their very eyes he got up, picked up what he had been lying on and went home praising God. They were all astounded and praised God, and were filled with awe, saying, ‘We have seen strange things today.’ (NJB)

**I, the Leper, witness *‘the power of God was with him’*.**

In my pondering I find myself as the ‘cured leper’ listening to Jesus. I have travelled to this neighbouring village where I heard Jesus had come to, teaching. I am growing in more and more gratitude for having met Jesus and for being cured. So too are my family, friends and neighbours. Wishing to hear more and feel the support and warmth of his presence among us I came. Isn’t it lucky that I came early as I have managed to squeeze into the house where he is speaking? There are so many here; so many so aware of their ‘neediness’! And they continue to come. I hear many shouting to be let in. I see many Pharisees here too – from Galilee, from Judea and even from Jerusalem! When the important ones arrived they pushed through the people and are now sitting at the back. But Jesus stands in the middle speaking to us. It is so wonderful to hear him again. Listening, I don’t notice how crushed and stifling it is. (I think he noticed me. He seemed to nod.)

**The paralytic is brought to Jesus**

Now I hear a commotion outside around the door, stronger

voices begging to be let in. No one has moved. Voices cease. Good! We can hear Jesus easier again. But Oh, No! Another commotion! It is above us. People are noisily working on the flat roof! Dust and mud are falling on us. A tile is being wrenched up! Another! A face appears. More tiles lifted off ... the opening is getting bigger. Here there is a shocked silence. We now see four heads glancing down. Now, a bigger shock! They start lowering a stretcher with a man tied on it! He looks thin, rigid and nervous. Only his frightened eyes are moving. Jesus has stopped talking and is gazing calmly but intently. I sense he feels deeply for this person. ***‘My friend,’*** he says. The man’s face changes with astonishment. ***‘Friend!’*** But that address is for people on an equal level; it denotes mutual relationship, respect, warmth and trust!

**More Astonishment! – *‘your sins are forgiven.’***

Jesus continues, ***‘your sins are forgiven.’*** The paralytic is astounded. I too am amazed. There is an air of astonishment everywhere! Then I notice the Pharisees. Some have jerked to their feet. Some are aghast. A few look amazed and thoughtful. But some seem triumphantly aggressive. They conclude, ***‘who is this man, talking blasphemy? Who but God alone can forgive sins?’*** It seems to me these Pharisees have come here today thinking to correct Jesus’ mistakes or even to prove his teaching is erroneous and that he is a ‘false prophet!’ This statement of Jesus gives them proof. They exult!

But can I believe this Jesus is wrong? Look at what he does! He has already done so much good for so many! Look what

he did for me and us. I want to accept all of what he says. I want to continue to listen to him, even though I feel nervous of where it might lead me. Jesus stares at them, *‘what are these thoughts you have in your hearts? Which of these is easier: to say, “Your sins are forgiven you,” or to say, “Get up and walk”?’ But to prove to you that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,’- he said to the paralysed man – ‘I order you: get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home.’ and immediately before their very eyes he got up, picked up what he had been lying on and went home praising God.’* There is awe everywhere. My gratitude and awe has been further increased today.

### **The Leper’s Reflections on the ‘Power of God’**

Now on my way home I am reflecting. The *‘power’ of God* that I witnessed working through Jesus today was not just for the Paralytic – and me. I think of the affect it had on the stretcher bearers, the assembled crowd and even, I think, on some Pharisees. Indeed the witnesses *‘were all astounded and praised God and were filled with awe.’* Yes, I noticed his approving gaze at the stretcher-bearers. I feel Jesus admired their kindness, perseverance, initiative, courage and TRUST. I was also struck by his *patience and encouragement* for the needy, hoping crowd. And he was very patient — even compassionate to the annoying Pharisees. I am surprised to find myself so aware of the *patience* of this Jesus! Yes, *‘the power of God was there,’* working through Jesus! I heard and saw so much today! I need much time to ponder, pray and digest all this!

### **The leper reflecting on the meaning of ‘sin’.**

“I am also trying to understand deeper what ‘*sin*’ means. Jesus said at the cure, ‘*your sins are forgiven*’. I never could understand much of what the religious leaders said about ‘sin’. For example, when we discovered I had become a leper they said it was a ‘punishment for sin’. And that it was even a good work for them acting for God to punish me for my sins! But I had tried hard all my life till then to do as I thought God wanted me to. Of course in the way of life that I was born into I could not observe the lists of ‘laws’ the leaders said I should. I strove to follow as Micah (6:8) summarised, ‘**Act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with your God**’. And when I was culpable in forgetting God or setting Him aside or refusing to act rightly, then I would feel I had ‘sinned’. So I think ‘sin’ as a deliberate act that damages my relationship with God. And I could blame parts of my heart such as selfishness or self-righteousness and pride for it. But I must confess that the longer I lived as a leper the farther away and dimmer God became. My heart grew colder and harder. Jesus openly curing my body said in act, ‘*A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you*’ (Ez. 36:26). I imagine the same happening to the Paralytic. His moving from complete physical dependency (and maybe despair) to carrying his own ‘stretcher’ i.e. going back into a productive life in his own family, among friends – especially ‘the four’, and the community.

### ***Jesus a ‘Friend!’***

My strongest and latest ponderings has centred on the word,



***‘Friend’***. At first it was on the reactions of the Paralytic at hearing it from this awe-inspiring, powerful Jesus. There is astonishment ... disbelief ... confusion ... fright ... resistance to believing what he heard. Even in his limited experience, ‘real’ friendship means a mutuality, an appreciation of each other, mutual trust, understanding and helping one another especially when it costs, etc. He finds it a challenge to ‘believe his ears’. At this point I find myself, the praying Scripture person, being challenged in the same way to accept Jesus addressing ME as ***‘Friend’***. It causes much pondering and many questions. I have heard it before but how did it register? It is more than just a word! How am I accepting that invitation to deeper knowing each other, trusting each other, cooperating with each other for others too? Nervous? Postponing? I wait in the prayer-time. Next, again I see the Paralytic’s with almost unbelieving awe, joy, heart-bursting thanks. I feel in him, in answer to this, the stirring of a new love. He feels it towards Jesus primarily but it is also towards his friends the stretcher-bearers, his patient family and so many around. It leads me back to thinking of God’s Spirit at work in the stretcher-bearers who led the needy Paralytic to Jesus. Then memories arise of special times and through special people what I now believe was the Spirit leading the needy ME to Jesus. And thus I grow to know and feel the HEART OF JESUS. At the same time I realise I become most aware of this when I was most helpless and ‘needy’. I also become aware of ‘paralysed’ – undeveloped, smothered – parts of my heart needing to be changed. I spend time thanking the Spirit for leading me through prayer and Luke

to travelling with Jesus this Spiritual journey which always seems to be just beginning. I pray, *'Spirit, give me trust even when I can't understand.'*

**Possible Questions for Pondering or Sharing.**

- ❖ *Has my 'praying' Scripture brought me closer to and more trusting in Jesus?*
- ❖ *Does praying like this open our hearts to being changed by God's Spirit?*
- ❖ *Are we experiencing a growth in heart of thanksgiving, surrender in trust and closeness to Jesus?*

## HINTS for PERSONAL or GROUP REFLECTIONS or DISCUSSION from EXPERIENCES of PRAYING VOLUMES 1 & 2

So far has pondering and praying Luke helped me *discover*:

- \* my *journey* is into greater *awareness* of God's presence in my life? +
- \* I am more able to *wait* in *openness* to see things in a new way?
- \* I am noticing more and more in my life small and big things to be grateful for?
- \* that by *identifying* with persons in the Gospel I become more *aware* of the promptings of God's Spirit in my own heart and life?
- \* 'PRAYING the Gospel' has drawn me *closer* to the human heart of Jesus
- \* I am becoming more OPEN to allowing God to change my heart to be more like Jesus?
- \* that in '*desert*' or *uncomfortable* experiences I pray more often, '*Jesus, what do You want to do through me now?*'

- \* that God is working in me, in my communities, in society and in the world '*to unite us*'?
  - \* with surprise, that I am being drawn to *participate* in something which, till now, I would have assumed far *beyond* myself?
- + ('*journey*' When I say 'journey' think of those aspects of going into the unfamiliar, out of one's 'comfort zone', going with hope and trust and orientated to companionship.)

## APPENDIX 1.

### **BRIEF EXPLANATION OF 'PRAYING SCRIPTURE'.**

I was already 20 years ordained and working as a pastor in a Japanese missionary parish when I learned about 'praying Scripture'! (So let nobody feel embarrassed if they are not used to it so far.) I had spent much time talking *to* God. But this 'pondering the Word of God' changed my prayer towards more of an 'interaction'; it provided space, patience and openness to 'listen', to hear and be moved inwardly. So 'Praying Scripture' means the help that a text of Scripture gives towards this personal conversation with God. Remember, that what we see God doing in the Scriptures in the past, is telling us what He is doing, here and now, among us! So beyond our talking to God this helps us to 'listen'. We 'listen' by noticing movements in the heart and mind. Examples; A word in the text may hold my attention and as I dwell on it I notice things in a new way or, pulled by imagination deeper into the scene, I taste feelings of those in it. It can cause memories of my own experiences to arise. Gradually I will find myself talking to the GOD I MET in my EXPERIENCE. So, noticing movements in my heart and mind become my listening. Later I reflect further on them. Yes, the Holy Spirit is at work. And this builds up a personal relationship. In this process, *waiting* – with openness – is an important word. Scripture study can add to the pondering, but basically the text alone is all that is needed for 'Praying Scripture.'

Here are a series of '*GUIDED MEDITATIONS*' that I used with groups. They are examples of what can happen in a 'praying Scripture' period. But remember much is based on MY experience. So please be careful to understand that these are only examples of what one might meet. They give reassurance that, if you find them coming into your pondering, you are not being distracted by memories or imaginations about the event but being led on to recognise God acting in YOUR OWN life. YOU take out of your ponderings what vibes with YOUR experience and build on that. Think of this input as 'hints', 'a demonstration', a 'springboard.' Gradually you will find different and deeper insights from yourself or from others but hopefully these examples of mine help you to begin a fruitful 'praying Scripture'.

I recommend first reading the whole planned text. Then gazing attentively at it, allow the Spirit to lead you here and there. In your planned length of pondering time you may be held on a certain word or part of the text. Stay here as long as held. (It is like, when young, slowly rolling a hard-boiled sweet around in the mouth to get as much taste as possible for as long as possible.) Then, when you feel drawn, continue the text till stopped again. Even after times of having used the whole text one can feel drawn back to it again and again – each time it can provide further noticing. These 'Guided Meditations' are examples of my pondering. Find what moves you.

After your 'Silent praying period' a short reflection or thinking time might help you clarify what you experienced

in the silent time. Asking yourself a question such as, '*Did I see anything in a new way?*' or '*Was my heart moved in a new way?*' might help. This can help your noticing when repeating pondering a text. Sharing experiences with another also helps. Repeating pondering the same text gives added fruit – or going back to one before. But you will learn more by doing. Just 'try and see' – with a certain perseverance!

## APPENDIX 2.

### HINTS FOR A 'PRAYING SCRIPTURE' GROUP

*(Reading the Brief Explanation of  
'PRAYING SCRIPTURE' and 'SHARING' can help.)*

Each session will have three parts; **GUIDED MEDITATION, SILENT PRAYER PERIOD, SMALL-GROUP SHARING.**

After we listen to the text, the leader gives a **GUIDED MEDITATION** – which is basically some examples of what he/she got from 'pondering' or praying the text at different times. They are prompts towards your noticing new things and making your own discoveries.

**SILENT PRAYER PERIOD.** *(length of time depending on the experience of the group. Even from the beginning I would usually allow ten or fifteen minutes or longer.)*

The explanation for '**praying Scripture**' gives hints of how the prayer can develop in this period. Remember its object is learning better **WHAT GOD IS 'SAYING' TO YOU HERE AND NOW THROUGH THE SCRIPTURE TEXT.** Regard a feeling of being moved to act beyond what you have been doing up till now as something to return to and reflect on.

**SHORT REFLECTION TIME.** *c.5 minutes.*

After the Silent Period there will be a short reflection or thinking time to help clarify what you experienced in the



silent time. This can also help your contribution to the sharing. A self-question may help, such as ‘*Did I see anything in a new way?*’ or ‘*was I moved in a new direction?*’ or, see more Questions after each Guided meditation..

**GROUP SHARING.** (*BIGGER GROUPS divide e.g. into threes or fours.*)

Each one now can share on things noticed and influencing during their silent time. But there must be no feeling of being **COERCED**! If a person is not ready they just say so and listen. Learning to listen is so valuable. This is not a time for discussion. [More on this in **Faith-Sharing** in Appendix 3] (Of course I must tell you that I do not receive conscious help in every ‘silent prayer period’. Some periods are just times of barrenness or frustrated struggle while waiting for new fruit to emerge. In these times, all I can do is come back to the text in the next silent time and wait in hope and trust. I might have to do this over many periods. So in my sharing I would just mention my waiting, maybe my struggle to do so, or feelings of frustration but determination to wait. Hearing another share this can be strengthening. But in everything, attentive listening to what others share is so very fruitful.

**BETWEEN GROUP GATHERINGS** use your own ‘silent time’ to repeat pondering this text – and **DISCOVER**! After praying this passage, and reviewing it, sharing with another – or others – opens us up to receive even further awareness and insights. So, if you get a chance to share, so much the better – even by phone or email! **REMEMBER:** What you

do in a group session is valuable but what you do between sessions is even more valuable!

### **More Tips.**

- ❖ Those who start a bigger group will find that a fixed day and time has benefits. The effort needed to attend can stimulate a struggling participant's preparation for it. And the strength received by meeting others 'on the journey' supports.
- ❖ I saw the value of three or four people taking responsibility for leading a group. The team effort enhanced preparing for, and conducting the prayer sessions. It lessened the burden on any one leader and allowed coping with unexpected events or obligations.

[Practising 'Praying Scripture' was a big step up in my own spiritual life – and in my pastoral and missionary life. I also shared it with my parishioners. Out of it grew this 'Praying Luke' course.

Of course these talks can be used for help in private prayer time – and are mostly derived from it – but I found that where it was possible to have a group, progress moved much faster.]

## APPENDIX 3.

# SHARING ON OUR PRAYING EXPERIENCES

## HELPING ONE ANOTHER ON OUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS

### **The Value of ‘Faith-Sharing’.**

By faith-sharing I mean sharing about discoveries in one’s prayer time or of noticing where God seemed to be ‘at work’ behind big or small events in one’s life and how that affects us and changes us. I am thinking of two people sharing, or a small group sharing, or a large group divided into different smaller groups. Obviously, reflection is a necessary preparation for this kind of sharing. Experience will teach that sharing with others about these discoveries increases manifold the good effects of the prayer and reflection.

### ***Sharing becomes easier, deeper and very fruitful.***

Sharing about inner experiences is not easy, especially in the beginning. But encouragingly it becomes easier and more fruitful with practice. The value comes from:- (1) in order to tell another about it, the effort needed to clarify my own experience makes the experience *more vivid and deeper* for myself. (2) hearing others share of their discoveries of God working in their lives can *help me notice* similar things that God is doing for me too, but which I hadn’t noticed before this. (3) hearing how God is working in others too, and in so many different ways, gives me a much wider view and

deeper admiration of God at work.

***It must be done freely, respecting one's own privacy.***

No one should feel that they 'have to share'. It means waiting for the moment when one feels they wish to share, even though it will probably require effort to do so. It also means deciding about how much to share at any time! We must always respect our own privacy! We should feel free to choose what parts we want to share at any time. Whom we are with, our present mood, etc, will determine our decisions. If there is any doubt, wait! If we can't arrange our thoughts about what we experienced or how to say it, we are not ready to share. So we must wait.

***Good listening.***

Listening is as valuable as speaking. One reason is that attentive listening helps another to share. It gives support and an unspoken message about the importance of the sharer. It is easy for a listener to fall into the mistake of 'half-listening' and, while someone else is sharing, to be mentally preparing their own material for sharing. This spoils good listening. One must listen and concentrate on what the other is sharing and trust God to help, if necessary, when time comes for one's own sharing. Otherwise, without embarrassment, simply saying, 'I have nothing to share today' is itself good sharing. If there is no one ready to share and everyone becomes silent, that is not a loss. It can be a very fruitful period of silence together.

**Remember, we are told that the way we listen to another person, tells us how we listen to God!**

## ***Confidentiality***

Of course, we must respect the privacy of others too, and be very careful to keep what is shared within the group. Finding that others are not critical or shocked if I share my struggle, failure or a slump becomes a big consolation to me. When another shares about a failure to respond to God's gifts or invitations, it consoles me to know that I am not the only one who has embarrassing weaknesses inside me. In fact this sharing brings us closer together. We realise that we are weak, struggling people, journeying together, trying to do our best and being a help to one another.

## ***Growth in sharing.***

But when beginning this practice of sharing on prayer experiences, first look for and share on ***good-things*** – even if it seems only a very small *good thing*. Start there! There will be many times of confusion, struggle or barrenness and to share these will be very helpful but I recommend first trying to notice experiences of '*good things*'. During sharing, even between two people, a short break for silent reflection or prayer can be fruitful.

## ***Feelings.***

We will notice that we gradually begin to share more about how we feel as we discover these workings of God, e.g. joy, surprise, or gratitude. We will be able to share about how we respond to these with, e.g. trust, generosity, courage, or hope. Later, we will be able to talk about negative feelings and responses too.

**Remember! In troubling times, in this kind of ‘sharing’ we just don’t share about our troubles but about how we *talk with God* about our troubles!**

Growth in sharing is part of our journey into intimacy with God, with self and with others. It is *wrong to compare oneself to others*. Each one’s rate of growth is unique. It is important to develop at each one’s own pace. Even as we progress it is not at a steady pace. We will probably find that we move more like a frog – a series of not moving but then a sudden, long leap forward!

In the parish I developed faith-sharing groups using ‘silent praying’ and ‘praying Scripture’ times. Not only did the participants learn from one another but I also learned more and more through them. Since most of our parishioners were women so were the prayer groups. They gave added dimensions to my discoveries. These faith-sharing groups became very important in developing in many ways the new Christian Communities that we were slowly building up in Japan. I was so impressed that having to write a paper on the formation of students for ministry I stressed very much the value, from the beginning, of listening and developing *faith-sharing groups* for spiritual growth and maturity.

## NOTE

Hopefully at [www.columbans.ie/spirituality/praying-scripture](http://www.columbans.ie/spirituality/praying-scripture) you will find the following links to the two booklets, '*Discoveries in Praying Scripture*' Travelling with Luke Vol. 1 and *Discoveries in Praying Scripture* 'Travelling with Luke Vol. 2. There is also the book, '*Discoveries in Prayer*'

These books are fruit of talks shared by 'seekers' and Baptised persons in new Christian communities in Japan. Those groups hoped to discover greater awareness of God in their everyday, ordinary life. The talks and sharings also helped us in silent, receptive moments with the Scriptures.

By seeing what God did in the past in different circumstances, we would discover being led to an awareness of similar invitations from God's Spirit to us here, now, as Vatican 2 reminds us, 'in the modern world', (And they deepened our reception of the Sacraments,) Among my reasons for starting 'Praying Scripture' with Luke was because Luke was a non-Israelite – like ourselves – and because most participants were women and Luke is the one who gives women most prominence. Luke raises awareness of the Holy Spirit on into The Acts of The Apostles, help so badly needed in present day.

After practising finding God in the 'Good Things' of our day in '*Discoveries in Prayer*' and dwelling on some Psalms we would begin 'Praying Luke'.

I hope from these pages you – individually in 'Holy Hour' or suchlike praying times and in sharing – may be helped further to respond to promptings of God's Spirit.



## THANKS.

*This booklet is the fruit of so many who pray,  
ponder and share in communities  
in Japan and Ireland and have also supported  
with suggestions and encouragement.  
This is my 'widow's mite' contribution  
to those exploring 'Praying Scripture'*





Copies of this and other publications by Father Malachy  
can be viewed and downloaded at  
[www.columbans.ie/spirituality/praying-scripture](http://www.columbans.ie/spirituality/praying-scripture)

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## PRAYER TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

*'Come Holy Spirit,  
fill the hearts of your faithful,  
and kindle in them the fire of Your love,  
send forth Your spirit  
and they shall be created  
and You shall renew the face of the earth.'*