



INTRODUCTION

Do you sometimes wish, when watching TV or a film in the cinema, that you could be one of those talented actors or sportsmen you see on the screen? Sometimes you fantasise that you are the hero in the story being played out in front of you. You are the one who shoots the robbers and rescues the hostages; it is you whom the women admire; it is your autograph and email address that everyone asks for. You watch a late night TV talk show where a well-known person is being interviewed. And then you wish the country could hang on your lips also, and ask for your opinions on current matters. Or early in the morning you page through the business section of the newspaper, and read a column about a successful young entrepreneur who has made an international breakthrough with his IT program. And involuntarily you think: That must be really grand! I want to be like him.

This booklet invites you to page through the Bible and discover the stories it tells about special men. Men play an important role throughout the Bible. Some lived in close relationship with God, while others turned their backs on Him. Sometimes they wrestled with God. They were men of differing dimensions, multi-faceted and unique, men in varying circumstances of life. And God was at work in each of their lives. Between the pages of God's wonderful Word, you will discover: That is me! I am he! And God works in my life, too!

Come along and meet the men in the Bible.

HE LIVES IN RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

The most important dimension of true manhood is to live in relationship with God. He is not afraid to admit that he needs his Creator. As a man of God, he deeply loves God who is at the very centre of his life.

And you discover: I am he!

His life changes radically after meeting Jesus

Jesus went on into Jericho and was passing through. There was a chief tax collector there named Zacchaeus, who was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but he was a little man and could not see Jesus because of the crowd. So he ran ahead of the crowd and climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus, who was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to that place, he looked up and said to Zacchaeus, "Hurry down, Zacchaeus, because I must stay in your house today."

Zacchaeus hurried down and welcomed him with great joy. All the people who saw it started grumbling, "This man has gone as a guest to the home of a sinner!"

Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Listen, sir! I will give half my belongings to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone, I will pay back four times as much."

Jesus said to him, "Salvation has come to this house today, for this man, also, is a descendant of Abraham. The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

(Luke 19:1-10)

He grows spiritually as he studies the Word

The psalmist sings of his love for the Word of God.

How I love your law!

I think about it all day long.

Your commandment is with me all the time

and makes me wiser than my enemies.

I understand more than all my teachers,

because I meditate on your instructions.

I have greater wisdom than those who are old,

because I obey your commands.

I have avoided all evil conduct,

because I want to obey your word.

I have not neglected your instructions,

for you yourself are my teacher.

How sweet is the taste of your instructions—

sweeter even than honey!

I gain wisdom from your laws,

and so I hate all bad conduct.

Your word is a lamp to guide me

and a light for my path.

I will keep my solemn promise

to obey your just instructions.

My sufferings, LORD, are terrible indeed;

keep me alive, as you have promised.
Accept my prayer of thanks, O LORD,
and teach me your commands.
I am always ready to risk my life;
I have not forgotten your law.
The wicked lay a trap for me,
but I have not disobeyed your commands.
Your commandments are my eternal possession;
they are the joy of my heart.
I have decided to obey your laws
until the day I die.

I hate those who are not completely loyal to you,
but I love your law.

(Psalm 119:97-113)

He prays with unconditional surrender

Daniel continued to pray regularly, despite the proclamation of a law which prohibited worship of anyone other than the king.

When Daniel learnt that the order had been signed, he went home. In an upstairs room of his house there were windows that faced towards Jerusalem. There, just as he had always done, he knelt down at the open windows and prayed to God three times a day.

When Daniel's enemies observed him praying to God, all of them went together to the king to accuse Daniel.

(Daniel 6:10-12a)

He submits to God's will for his life

This was how the birth of Jesus Christ took place. His mother Mary was engaged to Joseph, but before they were married, she found out that she was going to have a baby by the Holy Spirit. Joseph was a man who always did what was right, but he did not want to disgrace Mary publicly; so he made plans to break the engagement privately. While he was thinking about this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary to be your wife. For it is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived. She will have a son, and you will name him Jesus—because he will save his people from their sins."

So when Joseph woke up, he married Mary, as the angel of the Lord had told him to do. But he had no sexual relations with her before she gave birth to her son. And Joseph named him Jesus.

(Matthew 1:18-21,24-25)

He dedicates his life to the Lord

(Enoch) spent his life in fellowship with God, and then he disappeared, because God took him away.

(Genesis 5:24)

It was faith that kept Enoch from dying. Instead, he was taken up to God, and nobody could find him, because God had taken him up. The scripture says that before Enoch was taken up, he had pleased God.

(Hebrews 11:5)

He doesn't always understand God's ways

Such a man in the Bible was Gideon:

The LORD's angel appeared to him there and said, "The LORD is with you, brave and mighty man!"

Gideon said to him, "If I may ask, sir, why has all this happened to us if the LORD is with us? What about all the wonderful things that our fathers told us the LORD used to do—how he brought them out of Egypt? The LORD has abandoned us and left us to the mercy of the Midianites."

(Judges 6:12-13)

In spite of struggles in his life, he always looks to God for strength

Even though the fig trees have no fruit
and no grapes grow on the vines,
even though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no corn,
even though the sheep all die
and the cattle stalls are empty,
I will still be joyful and glad,
because the LORD God is my saviour.
The Sovereign LORD gives me strength.
He makes me sure-footed as a deer,
and keeps me safe on the mountains.

(Habakkuk 3:17-19)

Sometimes he doubts

Sometimes he lacks faith, like the disciple Thomas, who had trouble believing that Jesus had really been raised from the dead.

One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (called the Twin), was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

Thomas said to them, "Unless I see the scars of the nails in his hands and put my finger on those scars and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later the disciples were together again indoors, and Thomas was with them. The doors were locked, but Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and look at my hands; then stretch out your hand and put it in my side. Stop your doubting, and believe!"

Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"
Jesus said to him, "Do you believe because you see me? How happy are those who believe without seeing me!"

(John 20:24-29)

Sometimes he is embarrassed to acknowledge that he knows Jesus

Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard when one of the High Priest's servant women came to him and said, "You, too, were with Jesus of Galilee."

But he denied it in front of them all. "I don't know what you are talking about," he answered, and went on out to the entrance of the courtyard. Another servant

HE LIVES IN RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS

He does not live in isolation. He lives in community with others. Each of the relationships which he has is unique and makes specific demands on him.

And you discover: I am he!

He is a husband

He and his wife are companions

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to live alone. I will make a suitable companion to help him." So he took some soil from the ground and formed all the animals and all the birds. Then he brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and that is how they all got their names. So the man named all the birds and all the animals; but not one of them was a suitable companion to help him.

Then the LORD God made the man fall into a deep sleep, and while he was sleeping, he took out one of the man's ribs and closed up the flesh. He formed a woman out of the rib and brought her to him. Then the man said,

"At last, here is one of my own kind—
Bone taken from my bone, and flesh from my flesh.
'Woman' is her name because she was taken out of
man."

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united with his wife, and they become one.

(Genesis 2:18-24)

He loves her dearly

Then Isaac brought Rebecca into the tent that his mother Sarah had lived in, and she became his wife. Isaac loved Rebecca, and so he was comforted for the loss of his mother.

(Genesis 24:67)

Jacob loved Rachel so much that he was prepared to work seven years for his father-in-law Laban in order that he might marry her.

Jacob worked seven years so that he could have Rachel, and the time seemed like only a few days to him, because he loved her.

(Genesis 29:20)

She is the most beautiful woman to him

Like a lily among thorns
is my darling among women.

(Song of songs 2:2)

He admires and compliments her

How beautiful you are, my love;
how your eyes shine with love!

(Song of songs 1:15)

What a wonderful woman you are!
How beautiful are your feet in sandals.
The curve of your thighs
is like the work of an artist.

A bowl is there,
that never runs out of spiced wine.

A sheaf of wheat is there,
surrounded by lilies.

Your breasts are like twin deer,
like two gazelles.

Your neck is like a tower of ivory.

Your eyes are like the pools in the city of Heshbon,
near the gate of that great city.

Your nose is as lovely as the tower of Lebanon
that stands guard at Damascus.

Your head is held high like Mount Carmel.

Your braided hair shines like the finest satin;
its beauty could hold a king captive.

(Song of songs 7:1-5)

He enjoys intimacy with his wife

How pretty you are, how beautiful;
how complete the delights of your love.

You are as graceful as a palm tree,
and your breasts are clusters of dates.

I will climb the palm tree
and pick its fruit.

(Song of songs 7:6-8a)

Together, they fulfil each other's sexual needs

But because there is so much immorality, every man should have his own wife, and every woman should have her own husband. A man should fulfil his duty as a husband, and a woman should fulfil her duty as a wife, and each should satisfy the other's needs. A wife is not the master of her own body, but her husband is; in the same way a husband is not the master of his own body, but his wife is. Do not deny yourselves to each other, unless you first agree to do so for a while in order to spend your time in prayer; but then resume normal marital relations. In this way you will be kept from giving in to Satan's temptation because of your lack of self-control.

(1 Corinthians 7:2-5)

He is faithful to her

Christ's sacrificial love and faithfulness towards his church is an example that he follows in his marriage.

Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave his life for it.

Men ought to love their wives just as they love their own bodies. A man who loves his wife loves himself. (People never hate their own bodies. Instead, they feed them and take care of them, just as Christ does the church; for we are members of his body.) As the scripture says, "For this reason a man will leave his

father and mother and unite with his wife, and the two will become one.” There is a deep secret truth revealed in this scripture, which I understand as applying to Christ and the church. But it also applies to you: every husband must love his wife as himself.

(Ephesians 5:25,28-33a)

He is a father to his children

He and his family serve the Lord

The time came again for Elkanah and his family to go to Shiloh and offer to the LORD the yearly sacrifice and the special sacrifice he had promised. But this time Hannah did not go. She told her husband, “As soon as the child is weaned, I will take him to the house of the LORD, where he will stay all his life.”

(1 Samuel 1:21-22)

He speaks to his children every day about the Lord

“Israel, remember this! The LORD—and the LORD alone—is our God. Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. Never forget these commands that I am giving you today. Teach them to your children. Repeat them when you are at home and when you are away, when you are resting and when you are working. Tie them on your arms and wear them on your foreheads as a reminder. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates.”

(Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

He desires that his children should remain faithful to God

Job was very concerned about his children’s relationship with God.

Job’s sons used to take it in turns to give a feast, to which all the others would come, and they always invited their three sisters to join them. The morning after each feast, Job would get up early and offer sacrifices for each of his children in order to purify them. He always did this because he thought that one of them might have sinned by insulting God unintentionally.

(Job 1:4-5)

He teaches his children to trust God

It is the living who praise you,
As I praise you now.
Parents tell their children how faithful you are.

(Isaiah 38:19)

He treats his children wisely

Parents, do not treat your children in such a way as to make them angry. Instead, bring them up with Christian discipline and instruction.

(Ephesians 6:4)

He teaches his children to be obedient

Pay attention to what your father and mother tell you, my son. Their teaching will improve your character as a handsome turban or a necklace improves your appearance.

(Proverbs 1:8-9)

He accepts his children for who they are

Parents, do not irritate your children, or they will become discouraged.

(Colossians 3:21)

He keeps on loving his children although they may do wrong and hurt him deeply

Absalom murdered his half brother Amnon in order to take revenge on him. Their father, King David, was devastated when he heard it.

While they were on their way home, David was told: “Absalom has killed all your sons—not one of them is left!” The king stood up, tore his clothes in sorrow, and threw himself to the ground. The servants who were there with him tore their clothes also. But Jonadab, the son of David’s brother Shammah, said, “Your Majesty, they haven’t killed all your sons. Only Amnon is dead. You could tell by looking at Absalom that he had made up his mind to do this from the time that Amnon raped his sister Tamar. So don’t believe the news that all your sons are dead; only Amnon was killed.”

In the meantime Absalom had fled.

(2 Samuel 13:30-34a)

Despite the heartache that his son Absalom had brought upon him, David still loved him.

Joab knew that King David missed Absalom very much.

(2 Samuel 14:1)

He gave orders to Joab, Abishai, and Ittai: “For my sake don’t harm the young man Absalom.” And all the troops heard David give this command to his officers.

(2 Samuel 18:5)

Sometimes he fails in the upbringing of his children

The sons of Eli the priest took advantage of their position as priests, which they misused in different ways. All their father’s warnings fell on deaf ears.

Eli was now very old. He kept hearing about everything his sons were doing to the Israelites and that they were even sleeping with the women who worked at the entrance to the Tent of the LORD’s presence. So he said to them, “Why are you doing these things? Everybody tells me about the evil you are doing. Stop it, my sons! This is an awful thing the people of the LORD are talking about! If anyone sins against someone else, God can defend him; but who can defend someone who sins against the LORD?”

But they would not listen to their father.

(1 Samuel 2:22-25a)

HE HAS FEELINGS

Being a man does not mean that he has no emotions. His emotions are an inseparable part of his manhood. He experiences the joys of life intensely. At times, he also experiences negative emotions such as sadness, despondency or inferiority.

And you discover: I am he!

God's Word touches him

When the people heard what the Law required, they were so moved that they began to cry. So Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra, the priest and scholar of the Law, and the Levites who were explaining the Law told all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God, so you are not to mourn or cry."

(Nehemiah 8:9)

His heart overflows with praise

After the wonderful events surrounding the birth of John the Baptist, his father Zechariah praised God and said:

"Let us praise the Lord, the God of Israel!
He has come to the help of his people
and has set them free.
He has provided for us a mighty Saviour,
a descendant of his servant David.
He promised through his holy prophets long ago
that he would save us from our enemies,
from the power of all those who hate us.
He said he would show mercy to our ancestors
and remember his sacred covenant.
With a solemn oath to our ancestor Abraham
he promised to rescue us from our enemies
and allow us to serve him without fear,
so that we might be holy and righteous before him
all the days of our life."

(Luke 1:68-75)

He feels bitterly disappointed in himself

During Jesus' trial, Peter was afraid and pretended that he did not know Jesus. When confronted with his betrayal, he was bitterly disappointed in himself.

Just then a cock crowed, and Peter remembered what Jesus had told him: "Before the cock crows, you will say three times that you do not know me." He went out and wept bitterly.

(Matthew 26:74b-75)

Sometimes he feels inferior

At times, it feels as if he is good for nothing and deserves nothing in life. Mephibosheth, who was crippled as the result of an accident when he was a small child, felt this way.

When Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan and grandson of Saul, arrived, he bowed down before David in respect. David said, "Mephibosheth," and he answered, "At your service, sir."

"Don't be afraid," David replied. "I will be kind to you for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will give you back all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always be welcome at my table."

Mephibosheth bowed again and said, "I am no better than a dead dog, sir! Why should you be so good to me?"

(2 Samuel 9:6-8)

Yet he realises that he need not feel inferior.

You created every part of me;
you put me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you because you are to be feared;
all you do is strange and wonderful.
I know it with all my heart.
When my bones were being formed,
carefully put together in my mother's womb,
when I was growing there in secret,
you knew that I was there—
you saw me before I was born.
The days allotted to me
had all been recorded in your book,
before any of them ever began.
O God, how difficult I find your thoughts;
how many of them there are!

(Psalm 139:13-17)

He feels helpless

Sometimes things happen that he cannot change, such as the death of a loved one. King David was overwhelmed with sorrow when he received the news of his rebellious son Absalom's death.

"Is the young man Absalom safe?" the king asked.
The slave answered, "I wish that what has happened to him would happen to all your enemies, sir, and to all who rebel against you."

The king was overcome with grief. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he cried, "O my son! My son Absalom! Absalom, my son! If only I had died in your place, my son! Absalom, my son!"

Joab was told that King David was weeping and mourning for Absalom. And so the joy of victory was turned into sadness for all David's troops that day, because they heard that the king was mourning for his son. They went back into the city quietly, like soldiers who are ashamed because they are running away from battle. The king covered his face and cried loudly, "O my son! My son Absalom! Absalom, my son!"

(2 Samuel 18:32-19:4)

He experiences the pain of suffering

About this time King Hezekiah fell ill and almost died. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to see him and said to him, "The LORD tells you that you are to put

HE MAKES A DIFFERENCE

He is a man who wants to make a contribution to society. He is not afraid to take risks. He lets his voice be heard and, in doing so, makes the world a better place. He has discovered his calling from God, and he pursues it with all his heart.

And you discover: I am he!

He has the courage to do something for the benefit of his community

One day four months later, when Emperor Artaxerxes was dining, I took the wine to him. He had never seen me look sad before, so he asked, "Why are you looking so sad? You aren't ill, so it must be that you're unhappy."

I was startled and answered, "May Your Majesty live for ever! How can I help looking sad when the city where my ancestors are buried is in ruins and its gates have been destroyed by fire?"

The emperor asked, "What is it that you want?"

I prayed to the God of Heaven, and then I said to the emperor, "If Your Majesty is pleased with me and is willing to grant my request, let me go to the land of Judah, to the city where my ancestors are buried, so that I can rebuild the city."

The emperor, with the empress sitting at his side, approved my request.

(Nehemiah 2:1-6a)

He stands up for what is right

He has backbone and is not afraid to take a stand, even against his superiors. Even when opposing the opinions of others, he remains polite. Daniel, an exile at the court of the Babylonian king, stood by God's laws against the orders of the king himself.

The king ordered Ashpenaz, his chief official, to select from among the Israelite exiles some young men of the royal family and of the noble families. They had to be handsome, intelligent, well trained, quick to learn, and free from physical defects, so that they would be qualified to serve in the royal court. Ashpenaz was to teach them to read and write the Babylonian language. The king also gave orders that every day they were to be given the same food and wine as the members of the royal court. After three years of this training they were to appear before the king. Among those chosen were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, all of whom were from the tribe of Judah. The chief official gave them new names: Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Daniel made up his mind not to let himself become ritually unclean by eating the food and drinking the wine of the royal court, so he asked Ashpenaz to help him.

(Daniel 1:3-8)

He rises above injustice

He is forgiving. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was stoned to death by the Jews because he fearlessly proclaimed the Gospel. With his last words, he pleaded with God to forgive his murderers.

As the members of the Council listened to Stephen, they became furious and ground their teeth at him in anger. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw God's glory and Jesus standing at the right-hand side of God. "Look!" he said. "I see heaven opened and the Son of Man standing at the right-hand side of God!"

With a loud cry the members of the Council covered their ears with their hands. Then they all rushed at him at once, threw him out of the city, and stoned him. The witnesses left their cloaks in the care of a young man named Saul. They kept on stoning Stephen as he called out to the Lord, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" He knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord! Do not remember this sin against them!" He said this and died.

(Acts 7:54-60)

He does not take revenge. Without reason, King Saul wanted to kill young David. One day, David had a golden opportunity to get rid of Saul. Saul had gone into a cave on his own. From his hiding place at the back of the dark cave, David could have easily ended the life of the unsuspecting Saul. However, he refused to take revenge on his enemy. Unnoticed, he cut off a piece of Saul's robe and, in doing so, proved his own innocence. Later, he confronted Saul about what he had done:

"Why do you listen to people who say that I am trying to harm you? You can see for yourself that just now in the cave the LORD put you in my power. Some of my men told me to kill you, but I felt sorry for you and said that I would not harm you in the least, because you are the one whom the LORD chose to be king. Look, my father, look at the piece of your robe I am holding! I could have killed you, but instead I only cut this off. This should convince you that I have no thought of rebelling against you or of harming you. You are hunting me down to kill me, even though I have not done you any wrong. May the LORD judge which one of us is wrong! May he punish you for your action against me, for I will not harm you in the least. You know the old saying, 'Evil is done only by evil people.' And so I will not harm you. Look at what the king of Israel is trying to kill! Look at what he is chasing! A dead dog, a flea! The LORD will judge, and he will decide which one of us is wrong. May he look into the matter, defend me, and save me from you."

(1 Samuel 24:9b-15)

HE IS A SPIRITUAL LEADER

He is willing to take the spiritual lead when required to do so. He is not necessarily a minister, but he listens when God calls him to testify, to help those in spiritual need, and to lead people back to Him. He listens to God and he does his part for the church.

And you discover: I am he!

He is willing to step forward when the Lord calls him

God looked at the world and saw that it was evil, for the people were all living evil lives.

God said to Noah, "I have decided to put an end to the whole human race. I will destroy them completely, because the world is full of their violent deeds. Build a boat for yourself out of good timber; make rooms in it and cover it with tar inside and out."

Noah did everything that God commanded.

(Genesis 6:12-14,22)

He encourages young people to keep their faith

From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by order of God our Saviour and Christ Jesus our hope—

To Timothy, my true son in the faith:
May God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord give you grace, mercy, and peace.

Timothy, my child, I entrust to you this command, which is in accordance with the words of prophecy spoken in the past about you. Use those words as weapons in order to fight well, and keep your faith and a clear conscience. Some people have not listened to their conscience and have made a ruin of their faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have punished by handing them over to the power of Satan; this will teach them to stop their blasphemy.

(1 Timothy 1:1-2,18-20)

He takes a stand regarding spiritual matters

The apostle Paul spoke out strongly against the hypocrisy of some believers, who had started to stray away from the truth of the Gospel.

But when Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him in public, because he was clearly wrong. Before some men who had been sent by James arrived there, Peter had been eating with the Gentile brothers and sisters. But after these men arrived, he drew back and would not eat with the Gentiles, because he was afraid of those who were in favour of circumcising them. The other Jewish brothers and sisters also started acting like cowards along with Peter; and even Barnabas was swept along by their cowardly action. When I saw that they were not walking a straight path in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you have been living like a Gentile, not like a Jew. How, then, can you try to force Gentiles to live like Jews?"

(Galatians 2:11-14)

He equips others with the truth of the Gospel

At that time a Jew named Apollos, who had been born in Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent speaker and had a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the Way of the Lord, and with great enthusiasm he proclaimed and taught correctly the facts about Jesus. However, he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him home with them and explained to him more correctly the Way of God.

(Acts 18:24-26)

He and his family set a good example of devotion to God

"Now then," Joshua continued, "honour the LORD and serve him sincerely and faithfully. Get rid of the gods which your ancestors used to worship in Mesopotamia and in Egypt, and serve only the LORD. If you are not willing to serve him, decide today whom you will serve, the gods your ancestors worshipped in Mesopotamia or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are now living. As for my family and me, we will serve the LORD."

(Joshua 24:14-15)

He follows the Lord to the end

As he neared the end of his life, the apostle Paul was able to write:

As for me, the hour has come for me to be sacrificed; the time is here for me to leave this life. I have done my best in the race, I have run the full distance, and I have kept the faith. And now there is waiting for me the victory prize of being put right with God, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that Day—and not only to me, but to all those who wait with love for him to appear.

(2 Timothy 4:6-8)

He leaves behind a spiritual legacy

But you (Timothy) have followed my (Paul) teaching, my conduct, and my purpose in life; you have observed my faith, my patience, my love, my endurance, my persecutions, and my sufferings. You know all that happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra, the terrible persecutions I endured! But the Lord rescued me from them all. Everyone who wants to live a godly life in union with Christ Jesus will be persecuted; and evil persons and impostors will keep on going from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived themselves. But as for you, continue in the truths that you were taught and firmly believe. You know who your teachers were, and you remember that ever since you were a child, you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

(2 Timothy 3:10-15)

SOMETIMES HE SUFFERS

He notices that everything in his life does not always run smoothly. He gets hurt when unpleasant things happen to him, sometimes as a result of his own wrong choices. But there are also situations that hurt him over which he has no control. Sometimes he battles to free himself of his past, but at other times he manages to talk to God about his suffering and to confront the pain. Then he realises that he can start anew, in spite of all that might have happened before.

And you discover: I am he!

Although he serves God, unpleasant things still sometimes happen to him

One day when Job's children were having a feast at the home of their eldest brother, a messenger came running to Job. "We were ploughing the fields with the oxen," he said, "and the donkeys were in a nearby pasture. Suddenly the Sabeans attacked and stole them all. They killed every one of your servants except me. I am the only one who escaped to tell you."

Before he had finished speaking, another servant came and said, "Lightning struck the sheep and the shepherds and killed them all. I am the only one who escaped to tell you."

Before he had finished speaking, another servant came and said, "Three bands of Chaldean raiders attacked us, took away the camels, and killed all your servants except me. I am the only one who escaped to tell you."

Before he had finished speaking, another servant came and said, "Your children were having a feast at the home of your eldest son, when a storm swept in from the desert. It blew the house down and killed them all. I am the only one who escaped to tell you."

Then Job stood up and tore his clothes in grief. He shaved his head and threw himself face downwards on the ground. He said, "I was born with nothing, and I will die with nothing. The LORD gave, and now he has taken away. May his name be praised!"

In spite of everything that had happened, Job did not sin by blaming God.

(Job 1:13-22)

He suffers from an incurable disease

About this time King Hezekiah fell ill and almost died. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to see him and said to him, "The LORD tells you that you are to put everything in order, because you will not recover. Get ready to die."

(2 Kings 20:1)

He takes his pain to the Lord.

Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed: "Remember, LORD, that I have served you faithfully and loyally, and that I have always tried to do what you wanted me to." And he began to cry bitterly.

(2 Kings 20:2-3)

He suffers because of his child's wrong choices

Isaac and Rebecca were very unhappy about the two wives their son Esau had married.

When Esau was 40 years old, he married two Hittite women, Judith the daughter of Beerli, and Basemath the daughter of Elon. They made life miserable for Isaac and Rebecca.

(Genesis 26:34-35)

His past haunts him

Moses left the palace and saw how his people were suffering under the Egyptians. One day he came across an Egyptian mistreating one of them. In a fit of rage, Moses killed the Egyptian and hid his body in the sand.

The next day he went back and saw two Hebrew men fighting. He said to the one who was in the wrong, "Why are you beating up a fellow-Hebrew?"

The man answered, "Who made you our ruler and judge? Are you going to kill me just as you killed that Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and said to himself, "People have found out what I have done." When the king heard about what had happened, he tried to have Moses killed, but Moses fled and went to live in the land of Midian.

(Exodus 2:13-16)

There are weaknesses in his life

These weaknesses bring him pain, but he fights them with the grace of God.

I was given a painful physical ailment, which acts as Satan's messenger to beat me and keep me from being proud. Three times I prayed to the Lord about this and asked him to take it away. But his answer was: "My grace is all you need, for my power is greatest when you are weak." I am most happy, then, to be proud of my weaknesses, in order to feel the protection of Christ's power over me. I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and difficulties for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

(2 Corinthians 12:7b-10)

Sometimes he feels lonely and vulnerable

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?
I have cried desperately for help,
but still it does not come.
During the day I call you, my God,
but you do not answer;
I call at night,
but get no rest.
But you are enthroned as the Holy One,
the one whom Israel praises.

Do not stay away from me!
Trouble is near,
and there is no one to help.

Many enemies surround me like bulls;

they are all round me,
like fierce bulls from the land of Bashan.
They open their mouths like lions,
roaring and tearing at me.

My strength is gone,
gone like water spilt on the ground.
All my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like melted wax.
My throat is as dry as dust,
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth.
You have left me for dead in the dust.

(Psalm 22:1-3,11-15)

Yet he realises that God will help him once again

I look to the mountains;
where will my help come from?
My help will come from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.

He will not let you fall;
your protector is always awake.

The protector of Israel
never dozes or sleeps.
The LORD will guard you;
he is by your side to protect you.
The sun will not hurt you during the day,
nor the moon during the night.

The LORD will protect you from all danger;
he will keep you safe.
He will protect you as you come and go
now and for ever.

(Psalm 121:1-8)

He knows he can start anew, in spite of his past

The Lord called Paul to a new life, in spite of the fact that he had violently persecuted the Church of Jesus Christ. Paul testified openly about this to King Agrippa:

“It was for this purpose that I went to Damascus with authority and orders from the chief priests. It was on the road at midday, Your Majesty, that I saw a light much brighter than the sun, coming from the sky and shining round me and the men travelling with me. All of us fell to the ground, and I heard a voice say to me in Hebrew, ‘Saul, Saul! Why are you persecuting me? You are hurting yourself by hitting back, like an ox kicking against its owner’s stick.’ ‘Who are you, Lord?’ I asked. And the Lord answered, ‘I am Jesus, whom you persecute. But get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as my servant. You are to tell others what you have seen of me today and what I will show you in the future. I will rescue you from the people of Israel and from the Gentiles to whom I will send you. You are to open their eyes and turn them from the darkness to the light and from the power of Satan to God, so that through their faith in me they will have their sins forgiven and receive their place among God’s chosen people.’

“And so, King Agrippa, I did not disobey the vision I had from heaven.”

(Acts 26:12-19)

He knows that God is always with him, even when he suffers

Joseph experienced God’s presence, even when he was falsely accused and thrown into prison.

Joseph’s master was furious and had Joseph arrested and put in the prison where the king’s prisoners were kept, and there he stayed. But the LORD was with Joseph and blessed him, so that the jailer was pleased with him. He put Joseph in charge of all the other prisoners and made him responsible for everything that was done in the prison. The jailer did not have to look after anything for which Joseph was responsible, because the LORD was with Joseph and made him succeed in everything he did.

(Genesis 39:19-23)

Even though he suffers, he knows that God has a greater plan for his life

Despite the injustice that Joseph’s brothers had done to him, he could look back and see God’s hand on his life.

Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?” But when his brothers heard this, they were so terrified that they could not answer. Then Joseph said to them, “Please come closer.” They did, and he said, “I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. Now do not be upset or blame yourselves because you sold me here. It was really God who sent me ahead of you to save people’s lives. This is only the second year of famine in the land; there will be five more years in which there will be neither ploughing nor reaping. God sent me ahead of you to rescue you in this amazing way and to make sure that you and your descendants survive. So it was not really you who sent me here, but God. He has made me the king’s highest official. I am in charge of his whole country; I am the ruler of all Egypt.”

(Genesis 45:3-8)

He praises God in spite of his suffering

Paul and Silas suffered because they proclaimed the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And the crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas.

Then the officials tore the clothes off Paul and Silas and ordered them to be whipped. After a severe beating, they were thrown into jail, and the jailer was ordered to lock them up tight. Upon receiving this order, the jailer threw them into the inner cell and fastened their feet between heavy blocks of wood.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

(Acts 16:22-25)

