

LIVING IN GETHSEMANE

I'm laying in a hospital bed in Africa. Someone has tried to poison me, and having collapsed on the plane, I find myself wide awake, in the dark, in a strange place. I begin to worry about my family, who know nothing of what has happened. I feel so alone, even though my close friend and companion is in the same room with me. I'm going to die! I'm going to be crushed under the weight of fears and worries! Lord help me! But then I began to think about Gethsemane. It was dark for Jesus too, and fearful. He was far from his family, facing an very dark future, and his friends were not on the next bed, but sleeping at the gate. I began to draw strength from his experience. I began my own Gethsemane experience, learning very quickly the rules for survival this dangerous place. When I emerged into the morning sunshine, I was spiritually stronger, and better able to face my own uncertain future.

As the years have gone by, I have had to revisit Gethsemane many times. Now I realise that the gaps between entering and leaving are so short, that I am virtually there all the time. But I don't worry anymore. There is strength and power in Gethsemane. In fact, I have found that it is safer here inside Gethsemane than it often is outside! A prophet has to know how to survive Gethsemane, and draw strength from this well of spiritual power. That's what I have tried to explain in this material.

Gethsemane and the prophet

In Gethsemane, a prophet must struggle with his call. It is a very personal battle, and it can go on and on and on. In this place, the frailty, weakness and humanity of the prophet will be exposed again and again. Doubt and fear will assail him. His friends cannot come with him, however much he longs for them. This is a solitary place. So why does the Lord lead us there so often? Because being revealed as empty exposes us to total trust in Jesus, just as Jesus had to find total trust in the Father.

Gethsemane is our strength, but there are no guarantees that we will be able to survive it. This is the frightening nature of our call. So how can we survive? Let's study together at the Gethsemane experience. I must warn you that it is not easy to study and absorb these hard truths, but ultimately, it is a very great blessing.

1. Do not trust men.

It's a natural human desire to want friends. We cannot survive long in Africa without friends and family. We need each other - it is a natural human instinct. . But in Gethsemane this human emotion must be laid aside, and replaced by this spiritual principle:- "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of

slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.” (Exodus 20:2-3) We have to put our trust in God, and God alone for our survival in this place. No human agent can help us. Jesus knew this. Knowing what was in the heart of man (***) and knowing God, he trusted in God alone for his help and strength. He had to leave his friends at the gate.

We have to face Gethsemane alone, trusting alone in God to sustain and save us. It's such a lonely experience, that you might be thinking “Well, as a prophet, I will stay away from such a place!” If you do, you will have no power in your ministry. For it is in the loneliness of Gethsemane that we fully realise the power and humanity of our Saviour. Drawing on that strength will change us out of all recognition.

2. Embrace the loneliness

Being alone with God has a long prophetic tradition:-

Elijah knew it. (1 Kings 17:2-6)
Habakkuk knew it. (Habakkuk 3:17-18)
Paul knew it. (2 Corinthians 11:23-33)

None of these people liked the loneliness, but each knew that it was their appointed path, and found the strength to walk in it. Prophets who are in Gethsemane have to be encouraged to welcome and embrace the loneliness. This is very hard, because it goes against our need for personal friendship and advice. Let's be clear - we still need our friends and their support. We cannot hope to survive without them in the world. But we have to survive without them in Gethsemane, otherwise our longing for human company will pull us backward and out of Gethsemane. We ultimately don't want that, because that means being out of the intimate presence of Jesus, and we do need that. Fundamentally, we have to make a choice. If we want to be God's men, filled with prophetic power, we have to walk into Gethsemane, and welcome it. If we don't want to be God's men, then we should not be in this call in the first place.

3. Understand the nature of the battle

In Gethsemane, the battle is always the same, even if it takes many forms. It can be summed up in this way:- God says to us “go!” The enemy says “no!” Once this battle line has been drawn, then the old battle of self versus God is fought out again in the heart and life of the prophet. The enemy does all he can to stop us, and we have to have a strong enough character to resist him, and obey the voice of the Lord. This looks so easy to read, but in practice it is very painful. Our emotions are stretched tight, twisted and hurt. Our lives, our health, our family, our work, our play all come under attack. At every level we are beaten and bruised. Our self will is manipulated, by temptations of every kind. Our resolve is weakened, darkness envelops us, and God seems far away.

This is the nature of the struggle the prophet has in Gethsemane. Any prophet who approaches such a place with anything less than deep concern is a fool. Jesus struggled in the heat of this battle. An angel had to come to strengthen him. As it was for him, so it

will be for us. And we have to fight this battle many times, with little or no earthly support – perhaps on some occasions with hostility from our earthly friends. Why must we endure in this way? Because this is where Jesus won his battle, and it is where we will win ours. If you have to try and win the battle in front of the assembly when you are prophesying, you have left it too late. You must win in Gethsemane, and then come out and claim the victory which is yours in Christ.

4. Know your spiritual weapons

A soldier is only as good as his weapons, and he has to know them intimately. For prophets, called again and again to Gethsemane, knowing the weapons is vital to survival. What should we know?

The power of the sacrifice.

John wrote “Look, the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29) It is the sacrifice of Jesus which breaks the power of the enemy. Prophets have to learn to draw on the strength of that sacrifice. We have to know how to release the power of the blood of Jesus, and how to take our stand on the lamb who was slain.(1 Peter 1:19: Revelation 5:6) How do we do this? We need to share in the Lord’s Supper regularly, and we need to know the Scriptures, and how to apply them to ourselves and to the battle we are fighting. Here are some which we must know and apply:-

John 1:29

Mark 14 – 16:8

1 Peter 1: 18-19

Hebrews 9:14

Colossians 2:13-15

1 John 1:8-9

Teaching about the blood of Jesus is not so common these days. But our forefathers spoke of “calling down the power of the blood.” This is something every prophet must know how to do. Ask the Holy Spirit to teach you about the blood of Jesus, and how to apply it to your life.

Crucified to the world

The Bible says “I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.” (Galatians 2:20) The enemy will use everything worldly to trap and defeat us. But what can he do against the man who has crucified everything in the world, and lives only for Christ? We have to crucify self, (Mark 8:34) our love of money, (1 Timothy 6:10) our desire for security in the flesh, (Matthew 6:19-21) our longing for recognition, (Matthew 5:11-12) our physical needs, (Matthew 6:28-33) and our sexual needs (Matthew 5:27-28) If we don’t crucify these things, we are going into battle without all our armour. The enemy will find the gap, and attack us.

The power of the word

The Bible says “I am not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes:” (Romans 1:16) And again “At the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2: 10-11)

Our strength is in the word of God. We need it so much in times of crisis. But in times of crisis, we sometimes cannot read it. When I was in hospital, I was too ill to read. That’s why every prophet must be very familiar with the Bible, knowing it by heart, and using it daily in his life. Then when the crisis comes, he will not be unarmed.

The victory of the cross

The Bible says “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” (Romans 8:37) We have won! If you have been to one of my teaching schools, you might have heard me sing this chorus:- “I am the winner and you are the loser!” It’s true! When the enemy comes against us, don’t hesitate to remind him of his defeat. He won’t like it, and you will grow in confidence.

The spiritual weapons of Ephesians 6: 10-17

The Bible says “Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the Gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” These weapons are part of our basic equipment. We must be familiar with them, and how to use them

His strength, his mercy and our courage

It can be very tough going in Gethsemane. Even with all the weapons deployed, we can still feel very desperate. What do we do then? When Peter saw Jesus walking on the water, (Matthew 14:22-32) he wanted to do the same. His faith was strong, and at the command of Jesus, he began his walk. But after a while, his faith sank, and so did he! Then he used one of the strongest and most passionate weapons in our armoury - he cried out “Lord save me!” (v 30)

The heart of our God is so loving that he will never fail to answer such a cry. When we throw ourselves on his mercy, we can be sure that he will answer. (See the Father’s heart in Luke 15:20) But here is the problem – many prophets fail to do this. We either think that throwing ourselves on God is a sign of weakness, or we fail to see the danger we are in, and our need to throw ourselves on His mercy. We have to lay aside our human feelings of pride, and have the courage to jump blindly into the arms of Jesus. The joy of

serving Jesus is that he is fully human as well as fully divine. We don't have to explain to him how we feel. We don't have to say "Lord, I am at the end of my strength. Of course you would not understand what it is like for a human being to feel like this. Perhaps I had better explain!" The Saviour understands fully what it like to be human, to be lonely, to be desperate, afraid and exhausted. He understands, and his arms are ready. We need the courage to jump.

But we also need the courage to know those arms are there, and be willing to endure to the very end of our strength until we jump, As we mature as prophets in Gethsemane, we have to be able to And one final warning or encouragement, depending on how you look at it! If we run away from a Gethsemane experience, we will only have to return to it again. There are no short cuts in the development of a prophet. The Lord loves us so much, that he will bring us again to the same point, until by his grace we are able to triumph and move on. What a waste of time to have to go back to the same point again and again. Let's endure each visit to Gethsemane, so that the next one leads us on. That's what I want – I want to move on in my experience and in my calling.

Stand firm

Sometimes in Gethsemane, there is nothing to do, and nowhere to turn. The pressures are so great, that we can't go forward, we can't go back and we can't stand still. At these moments, we have to learn from Habakkuk. In chapter 3 we read:- "Though the fig-tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Saviour."

(Habakkuk 3:17-18) St Paul puts it this way:- "Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand." (Ephesians 6:13) In other words, when all else fails, just stand firm and wait. It's hard to do, but I encourage you in this discipline. The day for moving will come. In the meantime, obey and wait. Sometimes I find it hard to stand for just a day. The I change my tactics, and try to stand firm for an hour, a half an hour, or even ten minutes. All I have to do is to hold out against the enemy, and he will have to fall away from me..

Angelic support

Jesus was given angelic support in his struggle. If he needed it, then I do as well. If angels are available to help me, then let them do it! I am not going to give a teaching on angels here, or answer all the questions prophets may have. I'm going to restrict myself to this simple principle – if Jesus needed them, so do I. Let them get busy on my behalf. The Bible says:- "Are not all angels ministering spirits, sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14)

I could write much more, but I think there is enough here for prophets to think and pray about. The more you visit Gethsemane, and the more familiar you become with it, the more positive you become about it. Please note that I did not say “the easier it becomes!”

For further study

Apostolic Gethsemane experiences.

1. “But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that this all-surpassing power is from God, and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.” (2 Corinthians 4:7-12)

Here the Apostle Paul shows us the pains he has had to experience in Gethsemane:- “hard pressed,” “perplexed,” “persecuted,” “struck down,” “given over to death.”

What list of pains can you make from your experience in Gethsemane? If you haven’t been there yet, then what kind of pains do you think you will have to endure?

Once you have made your list, meditate on these words:- “Your attitude should be the same as that of Jesus Christ, who, being in very nature God, did not think equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.” (Philippians 2: 6-8)

Let the power of the servant Jesus begin to touch your Gethsemane wounds.

2. “I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers in danger from bandits, in danger of my own countrymen, in danger from the Gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea, and in danger from false brothers. I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep. I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.” (Cor 11: 23-27)

The Apostle Paul moves on from general to specific struggles, and it is an awesome list. It is good for prophets to have this list within reach, especially when the going gets tough.

3. “While Peter was in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself she looked closely at him. “You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus,” she said. But he denied it. “I don’t know or understand what you are talking about,” he said, and went out into the entrance. When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around,” This fellow is one of them.” Again he denied it. After a little while, those standing near said to Peter “Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.” He began to call down curses on himself, and swore to them, “I don’t know this man you are talking about.” (Mark 14: 66-71)

This Gethsemane experience of the Apostle Peter is very familiar to us, and it is a powerful warning of how tough things can get, and how easy it is for a man to fall in this dark place. His mistake, if it is appropriate to speak about mistakes, is that he didn’t cling on to Jesus. He let his eyes look only at the darkness, and it demolished him. This isn’t the first time he has taken his eyes off of Jesus.(Matthew 14:30) On the previous occasion he was rescued. Jesus would have rescued him again if only he had looked in the right direction.

4. “Now Thomas, (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand in his side, I will not believe it.” (John 21: 24-25)

In Gethsemane, we must be open to the things of the Spirit, based on our understanding of the Bible. Poor Thomas. He entered Gethsemane with a closed mind, refusing to accept the untold possibilities of the working of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, there was no way out for him, except by a divine act of mercy:-n “A week later the disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said “Peace be with you!” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

Thomas responds to this visitation, and finds himself outside Gethsemane again. But note this – Jesus helps him, but does not commend him. Giving up in Gethsemane is not an acceptable practice. We have to be tough and see it through.