

# A THEOLOGY OF ANXIETY

SOME BIBLICAL STORIES ON HOW GOD  
MAKES SENSE OUT OF HUMAN WORRY

RASIKA ABEYSINGHE



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Dedication

To the many of us who worry

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## Foreword

We worry about many matters each day. Sometimes we might feel that life is incomplete without worry. While some types of worry can be useful like worrying about one's children there can also be types of worry that can be harmful like when one worries about success. It is not our task to judge people who worry but to judge worry itself would be helpful in understanding how it becomes a major part in our lives. As in many other aspects of life worry or anxiety has its spiritual dimension as well. In other words anxiety can be related to the spiritual life of a person. This book is an attempt at guessing how spirituality plays a role in anxiety. Using common Biblical stories the writer attempts to bring out how God also becomes a part of the anxious situations and how God leads the anxious parties from it. Many congrats on this devotional piece and hope it will shed some light on our day to day circumstances of anxiety.

Shelton Samadhanam

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## Preface

The word theology itself has the capacity to make a person anxious! In certain Christian circles this word has been used with much caution. While it has been subject to taking apart in study circles, theology has come to be known as somewhat of a topic to be dodged at the dinner table or at most tables. Most of us will know that theology is the combination of two Greek words one signifying ‘God’ and the other ‘words’. The aim of theology is to understand words that explain to us the being of God. In another way it aims to explain to us the operation of God as noted down by another person or even by oneself. It means that anybody can actually ink his or her thoughts on how he or she feels that God moves within a given context. Our attempt is also somewhat similar to this. Of course our reader may have his or her own opinion which may vary with what is given and such diversity is most welcome. It also goes on to show that the human mind is indeed limited to understand God’s full workings. And knowing the mind of God is almost impossible and staying true to the Biblical tradition it is with the mind of Christ that we attempt this. (1 Cor 2.16)

It must be the author’s prerogative to explain as to why he or she chose to think in a particular manner, when decoding these Biblical stories which happened several millennia ago. There are several hundred commentaries on each of the Biblical books for the reader to grasp the context and text of each account. The attempt made in this book is making a sway in trying to interpret the same stories purely from the anxiety point of view. Anxiety has many meanings some technical and some purely hearsay. When talking of faith, anxiety is the probable ‘lack of faith’, for if we had that we would not need to worry. We might even have the euphemism ‘faithlessness’ to describe anxiety.



Whatever we may settle on either it be worry, anxiety or faithlessness this concept is primarily a psychological construct at first. With anxiety we feel for example restlessness or a fear or a doubt or all these three together or in combinations. From a purely psychological angle the physical symptoms may trump the mental symptoms throughout an anxious time. However at a closer look we must conclude that it is not the physical symptoms that make the mental agony, but rather the vice versa. In a way the Bible is a most relevant context to look for anxiety since it deals with faith and human frailty. Throughout the Bible we find stories in which there is a dimension of human worry and the dimension of God's comfort. In another manner we find our lack of faith and God's faithfulness.

The stories selected are purely from a general understanding and there could be many more stories which could be used for this same purpose. As mentioned earlier if the reader would assign different workings on anxiety in these stories it would only enrich the task. The headings are merely for informational requirements and in no way superimpose the crux of the story. There must be something said on the method. Each story taken from the New Revised Standard Bible is followed by a section in which we detail exactly the nature of the worry the Biblical character/s felt. We are not looking for cross cultural references with a deep analysis but merely the emotional stand that was present for that particular person/s. There is suggestion in this section of the similar emotions we may feel in our modern times. This is done merely to stress on the fact that anxiety and worry are timeless emotions we have had as it transcends languages, geography, religion and any barrier or division known to humans. Following this section will be our take on how God has acted to ensure that the person/s affected are not trampled by the emotion. This could be in simple terms is a tricky and risky

ordeal. Such is said because the operation of God and how God wills the result of a situation are indeed God's thinking (Isaiah 55. 9). The way we interpret can never be justified fully. But in theology that is what we assume to do. Throughout history we may have succeeded or failed and this consideration also carries with it that risk. However we do this according to the nature of the event and how the story unfolded and more importantly in faith. Once again we are not attempting any social, historical, textual or hermeneutical (interpretative) criticisms but merely looking at the whole incident with a psychological and emotional lens. The work is simplified in a way that we are looking at well known stories not with a scholarly view but as beings who feel emotions. However the work has not gotten over the odd hard word and long sentence which I have been warned of as making anxiety in readers! It is hoped sincerely that this compilation will assist the reader in a devotional sense whether he or she may disagree with the interpretations given, he or she may be able to agree with the grace of God that has been documented in the Bible over several years and several contexts.

I thank God for the attempt at this compilation and to many friends and well wishers who have encouraged and enabled this exercise. Special thanks are due to Ms Srimani Hettiarachchi for her artwork and Fr Shelton Daniel for his encouragement and foreword. To many who have taken their time to discuss on the topic of the book and for their many perspectives. To my family who always are by my side and to the Theological College of Lanka for their encouragement. To Mr Saliya Gamage and Creative Printers for another great a publishing work.

Rasika Abeysinghe  
Candlemas 2017

## 1. Going Beyond

### Story - Genesis 3

8 They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" 10 He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." 11 He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" 12 The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate." 13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate."

### Our Anxiety-

The Garden of Eden: what a most wonderful place which gave away to one of the most unpleasant encountering that the human being had with God. It is most difficult to imagine that even when the human being is in the company of others and has everything he/she needs for his or her survival still he/she yearns for more. After reading the first pages in the book of Genesis you would be overwhelmed to know of the wonderful environment and the life giving goodness that God left for humanity. Yet God lays just a simple guideline of not tampering with a certain tree and allows any other freedom the human wishes. The freedom of what God allows seems almost more than enough for the human to be content with. Yet the human is either inquisitive more than enough or is not content with having the things as they are. What follows in the above passage is not really about who tricks whom or who starts it first or who becomes the real liar. It shows our inability to accept things as they are. It goes on to show how the human, questions the limits imposed even by his/her maker and is tempted by reason. It simply explains the outcome of being caught outright naked! Or in this case outright fully

covered. The anxiety of our first parents is that having done something wrong they fear the consequence. The fear of the consequence was not strong enough to restrain them. Do we have anxiety after breaking rules or even after breaking barriers? Do we feel scared when we are called to be 'scolded' or handed down our punishment from God? Do we have a sense of guilt that makes us unable to face God?

How God Helps -

What follows this scene is God's questioning. It could also be ourselves questioning why did I do that? And why am I in a situation where I am called to give accountability for something I did. And now that I know that it was wrong for me to do it, I must find a way, a logical or rational way in which I need to present my case. How many times have we come across this dilemma? The anxiety over consequences of breaking set rules. For the non religious human the rules they adhere end with a secular constitution or maybe a conscience clause. Yet for the religious human they are bound with a whole lot of other regulations sometime which contradict what the world rules. Anyway in this case God questions and 'punishes' them. But God also put sense into them and reproduces their 'wrongdoing' by providing them clothes. This makes us to think that the great question was in fact obedience, and not the material need or rather not the fact that they 'thought'. But God empowers them and even brings the pair to realize the partnership they should hold dear, and in a most stunning phase of events God sends out the pair for the pure reason that they might even become like God. Literally it seems that God treats them as beings whose curiosity could make more reasonable innovations. And we see in modern times how far we have gone ahead. In our lives we may have this anxiety where we feel a certain vacuum in faith that makes us not very happy with our lives. And we are tempted to break away. The simple message from this story is that God makes whatever that was missing possible. But it does lead to some guilt; but God questions only our obedience not much so the cause of our anxiety or non contentedness.

## 2. The Waiting

Story –Genesis 16.

1 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children. She had an Egyptian slave-girl whose name was Hagar, 2 and Sarai said to Abram, "You see that the LORD has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my slave-girl; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. 3 So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her slave-girl, and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife. 4 He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. 5 Then Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my slave-girl to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the LORD judge between you and me!" 6 But Abram said to Sarai, "Your slave-girl is in your power; do to her as you please." Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she ran away from her.

Our Anxiety -

The waiting.....When things just don't work for us on time. The Theologian confuses us with God's time and our time. Maybe it works out well anyway. But the wait does test our patience, endurance and eventually our faith. In this story we have an anxiety push working in three ways. First for Sara who has got outright impatient with her condition she resorts to something that even in that day looks a bit desperate. Abraham who having been told by God about an heir is anxious the path that he now needs to take since he's caught between a promise he received and a way proposed to him. Hagar as the tale unfolds will see was anxious about the path that she was told to take but the consequences leave her impatient. She finds herself in the unusual situation of becoming a vessel but without recognition. This recognition God later restores and maybe even on par with what Sara experiences. The question of anxiety does come up in our lives with waiting either

for news or rewards or sometimes even for punishments. As they say 'time can be a real killer' as we find with this triangle of people who just got beaten in waiting. This problem is not new as we see from this story. And we have repeated anxious moments even in our modern times. We may take life for granted in that we hope that we deserve many possessions. And the painful moments will be when we are denied these. For an example a promotion, for the hard worker this seems a realistic expectation. Yet we may lose our patience when the promotion never appears. Do we have the patience to bear in God's time?

### How God Helps -

What follows after this passage is that our anxious trio receives almost what they never expected. For Sara she defines normal spans for child birth and is blessed with the greater and deeper meaning behind the entire episode of Isaac's birth. For Abraham he becomes the father of not only one child but of many generations. And Hagar being led out to die is confronted by the message of God that her child will also be numerous as that of Sarah. Finally with the wait much peace of mind dawns upon the three characters of the story. But it was after much conflict and personal struggle. The modern life has made things easy and also very fast. It leaves not much room for waiting. The people who are religious and who should be patient enough to wait have themselves been afflicted to the point that they get frustrated with waiting. How can we develop patience? It seems much more of a psychological question, but armed with this text it just means trusting. It just means being sure that what needs to happen would happen and what Jesus says in the Gospel of 'can you by worrying add years to your life?' seems to stand very much true. In a way it means we know what has to happen or what God would desire to happen. And it just seem that the only thing we need to be sure of is the mind of God which may not be necessarily an easy task. But rushing without reflection spoils things to some degree.

### 3. The Well

#### Story - Genesis 37

18 They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill him. 19 They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. 20 Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams." 21 But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." 22 Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him" — that he might rescue him out of their hand and restore him to his father. 23 So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves that he wore; 24 and they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

#### Our Anxiety -

One might even think that Joseph the dreamer did get into this mess in the first place. How would have Joseph felt? Pure fear and nothing else. Fear of neglect, fear of the future and fear of life itself. The visions that had kept him dreaming would not have been enough to lift him from this gloomy situation. We might look at this anxiety from a pure jealousy motive for this was one of the utterances not so direct when Joseph was explaining his future greatness. It could be true that Joseph would have felt the sting of the scolding even when he was proclaiming his greatness. But the actual feel when your own kindred drop you down a hole. It must be a fear for life and fear of life. There is the anxiety of the present but there is also anxiety in the future when you know that you will face a family who just don't seem to like you. Did the dreams that he had envisioned stay with him? Was he encouraged by it? To say yes would probably be an over exaggeration. But as the story unfolds he is rescued and then sold, enslaved and then promoted, imprisoned and elevated. Are we also finding such life events in our

lives when all seem so well and things just fall apart and no relief seem to be for miles on end! Probably we all share some part of our life in that way.

### How God Helps -

In this case God's intervention comes in the form of several chapters which follow Joseph's life in which his stamp of greatness is never extinguished. In whatever trouble he finds himself in he is aided by people who give him that second chance. This group of people includes even to the Pharaoh but the final exaltation is by his own family. In which they recognize what he was prophesying all this time. The joyful reunion would not have been on the mind of that youth who was surrounded by stone in the bottom of a pit. It must have been very hard to keep aiming at the place he was destined to go when there were many pitfalls and many of them not of his own doing. In our lives we face this anxiety of not being able to achieve even after been quite sure of how things would turn out. It's very difficult to keep a positive mind. But God who is faithful takes us through ups and downs and curves; in that the place we need to be, is made sure. It's sometime hard to think why God leads people through travail or hardships to get to a situation. We must guess that it is through the falling and the getting up we really understand the work of God. Cultivating a positive mind in the face of setbacks is also part of the assurance God gives us to battle adversity. Maybe God does not create the setbacks but the world nature as we know is this. There seem to be enough and more pitfalls rather than ladders. We applaud the one who succeed in life by persevering. However that is what we assign for human spirit but for the one who believes the well signifies a whole deal more. The well in which we find anxiety not of the inside but of the outside and the future but God's presence is found while we are in it and when we are struggling to get out of it and also when we have come out of it. Knowing so would make a huge difference.



## 4. The Fear of Justice

### Story – Exodus 2

11 One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsfolk. 12 He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. 13 When he went out the next day, he saw two Hebrews fighting; and he said to the one who was in the wrong, "Why do you strike your fellow Hebrew?" 14 He answered, "Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and thought, "Surely the thing is known." 15 When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses.

### Our Anxiety -

Moses remained an anxious man throughout the book of Exodus. It could be that he was born in a time with terrible atrocities against children and he would have inherited some of the fear into him. He has problems with the calling given by God throughout the book. From the time he is asked to stand up to the Pharaoh to the numberless times the people groan for more and more support from God. In this instance we find him with the express need to run away. Once again a fear; but this not because of a future but rather a real present threat. The story goes on to say that Moses had to endure this testing for quite some time. Killing in this instance justified by Moses is not justified in any time and more so the present. The scope of the anxiety will have to be dealt in with a new angle. Perhaps we might be able to label it as anxiety that springs from voicing or acting against injustice. We see his reluctance to be God's messenger and we can only imagine this as a result of what has gone before him. The time that he actually did act in the correct way made him feel anxious to the point of not been able to face friend or foe. And now it is time once again to speak to the ruler of the land and he doesn't have a pleasant message. How awkward that would have felt.

He could be suffering still from the old wounds that have scarred his life for a long time and now he is called to speak the same justice at a higher level.

### How God Helps -

The story rolls on from the moment it has stopped in the above passage and it goes on to say how God calls Moses. Even though with much reluctance and even though it brings him again to do what he feared the most possibly because of the incident at hand. It must have been a hard task to talk injustice with the two people above and more so to confront them. And regardless of the final outcome, the fired up zeal within Moses who could not stand barbarism must be applauded. But barbarism cannot be overcome with barbarism. It does of course stop the bleeding temporarily. Anyhow Moses is now once again called to rise against injustice but this time God has made a promise that God would guide the proceedings. And as we know what followed is an account of events we learn at Sunday School and keep on reflecting upon. Injustice has been a word we come across quite often in modern times. It's uncertain whether injustice is made to blossom out of human beings or they themselves have decided to make injustice. And as fire and smoke are inseparable unjust deeds bear the cause of injustice. All religions are called to fight it and Christians more so as injustice is frowned upon by God as it bars God's love and graciousness to all humanity. However when the unjust forces are more powerful we might get consumed by its power. And rather than fight it we are anxious to run from it just like Moses. And here we will find the gentle calling of God to be a mouthpiece, to be the voice. Because of our weakness we may always say no, we might be too anxious to deal with the consequences as we have seen in the past. But God never gives up. As a matter of fact God keeps fighting, for the injustice we make by not accepting a challenge. How easy would be the tasks that require just a word? But there are many which may require our lifetime and may be even our lives.

## 5. Possession and Worry

### Story- Leviticus 25

1 The LORD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying: 2 Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you, the land shall observe a Sabbath for the LORD. 3 Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in their yield; 4 but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of complete rest for the land, a Sabbath for the LORD: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. 5 You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your unpruned vine: it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. 6 You may eat what the land yields during its Sabbath — you, your male and female slaves, your hired and your bound laborers who live with you; 7 for your livestock also, and for the wild animals in your land all its yield shall be for food.

### Our Anxiety -

Anxieties are not only matters of the head and the body. Many times it is also about our possessions present, future and past. Life is a constant struggle to be comfortable. While we would never accept we get up in the morning and toil quite a bit to make sure that we have enough. Having more or having a hold on many things makes us feel secure. While again we may not agree with it not even the most hard core evangelist tries to live the life ordered by Jesus to the rich young man who came to seek eternal life! We do continually worry about the future and how we are to survive the next day. In this everlasting struggle we tend to show forth our most wicked side. It ends in exploitation, jealousy, competition and most times in despair. And most of the times in which we try to get ahead of the conflicts in life and prepare for a comfortable life we seem to have lost many of the most important things in life. And anxiety comes at the stage where we fight and in the stage where we finish our fight. In a way it is a loss either way.

## How God Helps -

In the verse above God's plan makes a clear distinction between work and rest. Most importantly it is not only for humans but also for the land and the animals. The central argument of the law of Moses is that there be no anxiety in the hearts of humans of how they are to plan ahead. No strict planning is necessary as God, who sees, hears and acts will do exactly that in the time of need. The overtaxing of the environment itself has been a central issue of greed, exploitation and suffering. We in fact make all other components suffer with us due to our haste. There are two important things to learn from this passage. The first is about action where there is a clear message that humans are free willed in that they need to act. And working for six days in a week and now for six years in a row does make plenty of work. Secondly it is about reflection. Even as in the first week in the Bible had a time of rest there is a Sabbath moment in which all creation comes to admire the goodness of the world and the environment. It makes it important to reflect before the action starts again. And the reflection should be none other than the fact that even without human labour God provides. It is actually a turn from what we said earlier that we need to act. Maybe the argument is resolved more effectively to say human beings are entrusted with toil but they have a greater task in that 'living' to glorify and praise God. Or to live as witness of the abundance that God has prepared for them. Now if all lived exactly as these there would not be any world problems. Therefore the problem of humanity is to break into this thinking. If only a few live in such a way the impact is not going to be felt at all. But by even living on these lines or at least by trying half way in not been anxious about the future, makes us become witnesses even to a handful of people. And it may make that small push that needs to happen in the life of another person who sees of some change that he or she needs to make. It still makes the task look more overwhelming but then again there is no struggle if things have worked out to be perfect.

## 6. The Lord is with you

### Story -Numbers 27

12 The LORD said to Moses, "Go up this mountain of the Abarim range, and see the land that I have given to the Israelites. 13 When you have seen it, you also shall be gathered to your people, as your brother Aaron was, 14 because you rebelled against my word in the wilderness of Zin when the congregation quarreled with me. You did not show my holiness before their eyes at the waters." (These are the waters of Meribath-kadesh in the wilderness of Zin.) 15 Moses spoke to the LORD, saying, 16 "Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint someone over the congregation 17 who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the LORD may not be like sheep without a shepherd."

### Our Anxiety -

Moses has had a tough journey. So also may be the case with the people who journeyed with him. However he seems to be facing a slightly different problem now that after giving leadership and after taking on a role he definitely did not like, he is told that he is no longer going to be part of that effort. God explains that it was for a simple fact, that he was not able to unconditionally show to the people how God had them in God's mind. This looks like the pain of anyone between been asked to retire prematurely and to someone who has lost the friendship or love of a trusted person. This is an anxious moment. When you work hard for a long time or when you commit yourself for a longer time and then towards the last you are called to terminate it does make tough sense. It's probably something we all need to prepare for. But it's also something of a reality that we just would like to ignore for most parts. Moses' sorrow if at all present is not very visible in his words. He seems to be the good servant who just looks at things objectively and

propose it's not about me but it's about the mission. However after been under immense stress which is very visible in the things he shouts at the most dissatisfied people, it just must be heartbreaking. If you are able to shift the attention of mission rather than self, it might help. But been cautioned about it for a mistake done under much expectation from a tough crowd, must also be very very hard.

### How God Helps -

In one way it is a holiness test where Moses did fail. In another way Moses has done his part. Out of a reluctant man who may never have aspired to go into such a leadership position to a leader whose name will be forever cherished, he did do his part. Sometimes we feel anxiety has nothing to do with humility. Sometimes it feels like anxiety is the result of not been strong enough. We might even say this could be exactly what Moses would have felt. If he was in fact a strong leader who would have embraced leadership and strong enough even to resist God then maybe this gentle handover of power or the passing of responsibility also would never have occurred. In a way it is as if God is explaining that this is in fact your reward for doing your part and also having a glimpse of what he has achieved but it is God's will, that that another will also be made to take part of that mission. Maybe if we are to explain this to a parent who has lost the love of an errant child who has his or her sights on some other distraction probably the fear and the agony may not be quenched as easily as it rolls out on this piece of paper. It's probably a hard settlement that we will all need to make at one point. In a way all what we do, according to the book of Ecclesiastes, is like a chasing after wind, a life with not much hope, reward or satisfaction. But underneath is the happiness that we have a life in the first place and endless opportunities to make this world a better place. It always boils down to the question of the temporariness of life and the humility needed to forgo whatever we hold as dear and the rewards we claim we are owed are but merely what we are supposed to do.

## 7. The Weakened Spirit

### Story - Judges 6

11 Now the angel of the LORD came and sat under the oak at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press, to hide it from the Midianites. 12 The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, you mighty warrior." 13 Gideon answered him, "But sir, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our ancestors recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has cast us off, and given us into the hand of Midian." 14 Then the LORD turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian; I hereby commission you."

### Our Anxiety -

'If the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us'? This was a typical grievance of the Israelites who were well sure that God was with them in any situation. This is also the typical grievance of any other person living in today's world who believes that there can never be any difficult situation that may arise for the person who believes in God. Has there been an incorrect Sunday School lesson on which there was mentioned and internalized that the people of God do not face adversity. The story of Gideon actually starts with a wrongdoing done by the Israelites against God and it is for this that the anger of God is invoked. But even if not, is there immunity from all the sufferings of the world for people who believe in religion. We might even say that those who do believe have more trouble than those who do not have any idea. It may also be one of the most effective reasons for people to turn away from God as they would have believed that by having God beside them by worshipping by gathering in God's name and by merely belonging to a group, that God protects them from this world. If that were so then where would be the witness that needs to be present for the rest of the

world. And Gideon is told about the Midianite oppression in the same manner.

### How God Helps -

Not only does the angel remind Gideon that the Lord is with him but he strikingly asks him to use this same zeal or enthusiasm he has on finding fault with God, to use it against the oppressors. Other than the clean fact that God is always with those who especially believe in God we also realize the fact that God is with us only through a struggle. If Gideon has not got himself involved in this personal struggle, he would not have been instructed and commissioned to lead against the Midianite oppression. Secondly in a very prophetic manner even to us today God speaks to maintain this 'might' or rather his confidence that there is something actually which has gone wrong. In most times when we become anxious accusing God of not been with us we rarely do this two point plan. We rarely struggle with God, we might struggle with ourselves or with any other party who is part of the problem. And almost very rarely do we try to act to relieve ourselves from the situation. In the story God does only one thing, it is strengthening the spirit of Gideon. God does not promise an over excessive force of authority or power or armies. It's really up to the struggler to make sense of his or her situation. There is no promise that things will work out for the best either. As the story unfolds Gideon is successful in making the Midianite oppression go away. While for Gideon and the present story things did work out well there are many accounts in the Bible that does not work out the way people would have liked it to turn. Then we are left with the question whether the failure after a struggle is actually the end. But we may also think of it as another chance for an attempt, waiting for that commission from God. Some other judges from the same book faced failure sometimes permanently. Why the end result differs in cases of struggles is quite striking even in modern times. But we can be rest assured that God will strengthen our spirit as we take the challenge head on.



## 8. Relationship Worry

### Story- Ruth

2 The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. 3 But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. 4 These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there about ten years, 5 both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

### Our Anxiety -

Loss of a loved one or breaking a relationship is a very hard thing. Although anyone will probably say how they know the feeling of losing someone, it may either be a very consolatory remark or really they would have experienced this most hard feeling themselves. Naomi's story is one such as this. She loses her husband and both her sons. In the early Jewish interpretations of culture and tradition she would have been considered one of the weakest and most helpless persons in that particular society because of this matter. It's even more difficult to imagine the social implications that came with being a widow and then also being without any off spring to support and look after her. This is probably the story of many a person almost anywhere in the world. Sometimes such situations do arise, and to these there is no theologian or spiritualist who can address the 'why' or 'how' of the situation. They may come up with excuses to comfort. The anxiety in such situations is in many directions. Losing a loved one initiates being lost, a future destroyed, a helplessness, guilt and a lost opportunity. There will also be many other such reasons too. Sometimes the pain and anguish will leave a mark for the rest of the life and most times a continuous struggle is apparent between oneself and the world, which most times just carry on its own duties quite blind to the individual sorrow.

## How God Helps -

Once again, death, for our limited human minds is not justifiable and the story of three widows resonate even with the destructive revolting that was present in our own country from the north to the south. The marks of death remain for a long time with the individuals affected by it and sometimes forever. How can we understand how God is guiding this specific case into a place where they will start to believe once more? First there is the community aspect of how God leads this group. As a community God directs two unions; one where Ruth joins her mother in law and secondly the union of the surroundings. While most of us may never be happy with the support we receive in most times from our loved ones and the community, when such a painful act has occurred, this support is not necessarily the only means by which we console ourselves. On the other hand it only points to one way where we acknowledge that we are not alone. While each person we meet may not be the counselor or mentor or friend type, all of them offer at least something. It could be just one sentence for a whole month. We might be called to see the still small voice of God in that communication. Secondly there is the objective aspect. Ruth and the Naomi partnership had another objective one which God has ordained for them. It's a little hard to imagine whether God would have not willed this even in Ruth's former situation. But we know that the Davidic line is now going to be continued through the engagement of Ruth to her next in kin. While a saddened heart will never be able to think of matters so far reaching, in that moment of sorrow, this pain if not diverted can be a constant psychological battle for which we find no answers. Therefore even in painful situations God has some comfort. It could be through the people close by and sometimes it could be for a new purpose in life. But this still leaves us with the question of why it may happen and most times unexpectedly; for which we have no ready answer. It sometimes may take years of reflection to understand such things and maybe never.

## 9. Self Image

### Story - 1 Samuel 15

10 The word of the LORD came to Samuel: 11 "I regret that I made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me, and has not carried out my commands." Samuel was angry; and he cried out to the LORD all night. 12 Samuel rose early in the morning to meet Saul, and Samuel was told, "Saul went to Carmel, where he set up a monument for himself, and on returning he passed on down to Gilgal." 13 When Samuel came to Saul, Saul said to him, "May you be blessed by the LORD; I have carried out the command of the LORD." 14 But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears, and the lowing of cattle that I hear?" 15 Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and the cattle, to sacrifice to the LORD your God; but the rest we have utterly destroyed."

### Our Anxiety -

Saul was the first King in Israelite history. When there has been nobody before you to compare its very difficult to perform to expectations. The Biblical literature does not speak generously, for almost most parts of Saul's life. It must be safely guessed whether there is a certain bias that has come upon the authors as they made David a hero even with his several doubtful exploits. On this occasion Saul is blamed through Samuel for not obeying some instructions which was connected with destruction. In our modern age and also very much in line with the teachings of Jesus we might have opted to side with Saul on this matter. And more on humanitarian grounds maybe none should have been destined for destruction. But the context in question was different and there the command of God had a different perspective. God's command is for the removal of any barrier for God's chosen people to advance. However we might still frown upon this but also knowingly that this

command was also in line with the warrior spirit prevalent in those times in contexts such as theirs and even ours, we must treat it on a contextual basis. But as we read on; its more than disobedience its more than just the denial of a higher order it's the failure to acknowledge that he now needs to meet the demand of higher responsibilities. Elsewhere Samuel admonishes him saying that 'you may be small in your sight.....' which is also the anxiety, positions demand.

### How God Helps -

How God assists Saul is not very much visible from the story which follows. But it's visible from the accounts that were before where God meets each and every failure with no punishment. Even going further on God did not burden Saul with any other adversity but simply the taking away of the title he was given. Failure to do this resulted in his competition with David the new face of the title. Eventually he became a victim of this bitter jealousy that prevailed and still did not endure wrath from God but from humans themselves. There are psychological disorders which rule the lives of every human being. While some are very persistent and visible some are not. Therefore the labeling of each disorder takes place on what is observed and with several cures for same. Having a personality disorder can be an anxious moment especially in a time where looks, skills and achievements play a huge role in the success of people. Nothing impressive about Saul is referenced only with his physical stature and David is looked as missing this but he was found to be with something within which God was content with looking at. It is very important to understand that while each of us is unique and no comparison can be made which in the eyes of God is non acceptable, God also drive people forward through many opportunities that are either given or that needs to be taken in life. If for at all we are not able to claim what we feel, we are given the possibility of changing. It could either be the present work or state or situation. There can never be an anxious person who knows that at least God knows the path that he or she has to take. It must be in God's will.

## 10. Signs and Symbols

### Story- 1 Kings 19

4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." 5 Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat." 6 He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. 7 The angel of the LORD came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you." 8 He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.

### Our Anxiety -

Elijah in this situation is facing two separate anxious moments. In one he is blaming himself for his failures. The modern human being seems to have more and more of responsibilities and more and more of duties to which he/she has to attend to. Sometimes it feels as if much more is required from a person than he/she can give. This is very much the thought of Elijah at this moment. Secondly he is not only fearful of what he did not fulfill but also he fears the future. There is probably nothing worse than the fear that comes over a person who spends time worrying about something that has not occurred but there is a likelihood of it happening. He says that he is now asking the Lord to end it all. He is on the verge of letting go of his life. It sounds very desperate. But for the Christian it also looks like a situation in which that person has also gone beyond that place where even comfort in God cannot be expected. And fearing this, the person will fall into even deeper anxiety. When things go all right it is so easy to live out faith thinking and believing how God can provide and sustain through anything. But it's the reverse when everything falls and it pushes us to the brink of our faith.

## How God Helps -

In the passage we hear two things of consolation. One is that God is the God who hears and sees and most importantly for a person who fears God also feels. Here God speaks to the person through a medium who in turn brings consolation to Elijah, who just is unable to revive himself. God strengthens him in both word which is conscience and also in nourishment which is empowering. God does not stop with this but God also outlines what has to happen. God does not look at what has happened but looks at what is present and also what is the future. The Bible is very clear in both the Old and the New testaments that God can speak through anything. It is very important to be able to receive this message from whichever medium God wishes to communicate to a specific and unique person. If we are unable to be receptive to hear God's voice in almost anything we might be the ultimate loser. The story which follows the present story is one in which Elijah is looking for great visions of God and he has his eyes set firmly on the most awesome of things wind, fire and earthquakes but God's voice comes silently almost the opposite of what he hopes for. God not only empowers people in their weakness through a mental invigoration; but it could also be by food. It was not ordinary food that Elijah is brought or rather what appears before him. It is a special nourishment which allows him to fight another few days. But also God encourages him to go forward for forty days in fact. A time that is by no means a small length of days and in which all what he fears can happen apparently. Out of all anxiety situations these two of fear of inability and the fear of tomorrow are probably the most harmful. We see people continually fall into drastic measures such as stimulants, depression and even suicide. There is very little help from the 'other' for the person whose pain and suffering is veiled by the outer world and people just go on their merry way. But it's our responsibility to seek them that feel this and to bring that good news that God journeys with them and knowing very well what happens, God ensures that the task that has to be completed is done well.

## 11. Attitude and Worry

### Story - Nehemiah 5

1 Now there was a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish kin. 2 For there were those who said, "With our sons and our daughters, we are many; we must get grain, so that we may eat and stay alive." 3 There were also those who said, "We are having to pledge our fields, our vineyards, and our houses in order to get grain during the famine." 4 And there were those who said, "We are having to borrow money on our fields and vineyards to pay the king's tax. 5 Now our flesh is the same as that of our kindred; our children are the same as their children; and yet we are forcing our sons and daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have been ravished; we are powerless, and our fields and vineyards now belong to others."

### Our Anxiety -

The Bible is also a book of history and like many history books it has the authors who have been able to capture the happenings of the times by using the upper crust of that society. To put it in another way there is more talk of what happened to central figures, leaders and kings rather than what the normal man and woman underwent during those times. There are of course the exceptional verses such as references to, there was famine, or people revolted etc. and Nehemiah's story is one where the author distances quite a bit from the higher ups and works the story of a common human and how he together with other common comrades worked and how they were also disturbed by other common folks. Nehemiah was a very sensitive human being who even lets his emotions disturb him during his work. His anxiety is for what he could do. Unlike many other stories in which we see people who are suffering for what they have done or did this story is quite different. It is almost as if he is questioning himself whether his actions will result in something that will make his people happy. Human beings end up playing many roles in their lives. There really is no retirement or easy life. There is always

that call that comes into our minds of what we can do better or more. In a way we may feel that this stressing of ourselves will only result in pain and rather not in commendation. Witness to this would be the many good people who stopped short in their tracks who would have thought not so good to proceed to do some change in the world.

### How God Helps-

Nehemiah's effort was the story of a simple and sensitive human being who felt he was called for a greater purpose. When we look at all the support he received starting from the King to the normal people who decided to stick their neck out for this work of God, it is very obvious that God empowered him in his mission. However God also bestows on him wisdom to keep the enemy from disturbing his task. Not only this but he also has on his side what we call luck. There is of course two types of luck each for the person who believes that God has a hand in activities and for the one who doesn't. When Nehemiah sets out to work out his plan, he also spends time in thought, he also feels the issue. And here we can only imagine that God feels with him. Therefore some of the incidents of the book which we feel that would have either happened or not happened are indeed part of the luck that God has enabled. The anxious person who suffers from the struggle of accepting a task should never suffer from the struggle of accepting luck as well. This is so because that if God has called, God will also fulfill the task that God for. It is not only with support and luck that Nehemiah accomplishes his task but also with his humility. It is becoming evident that while even with God on one's side the temptation of being led to pride is also very real. Nehemiah starts with being a self example, next he humbles his position and he starts some reforms which probably at that time would have looked quite normal. But for a person who struggles and it could be many of us, with the acceptance of a greater role we see how personal devotion can play a part which is actually 'being' in God. We also see how God works and walks with the person who is working the good.



## 12. Faith and Worry

### Story - Job 7

1 "Do not human beings have a hard service on earth, and are not their days like the days of a laborer? 2 Like a slave who longs for the shadow, and like laborers who look for their wages, 3 so I am allotted months of emptiness, and nights of misery are apportioned to me. 4 When I lie down I say, 'When shall I rise?' But the night is long, and I am full of tossing until dawn. 5 My flesh is clothed with worms and dirt; my skin hardens, then breaks out again. 6 My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and come to their end without hope.

### Our Anxiety -

Unlike many other Biblical stories the historicity of the book of Job is doubted. Or to put it differently the beautiful phrases that are made in the book may not be the outcome of an actual event but rather a gifted poet's skill on how he or she understood calamity and God's grace. In the story of Job we find how a man is been tested when everything he owns including his body is either destroyed or on the verge of being destroyed. If this has not made his mental condition worse, he has all those around him giving their various interpretations on what has happened. We know in fact that when we do have everything we might and just might stop worrying. The wise man's saying that 'money is everything when you don't have it' pretty much goes for any other possession a person may ever dream of. However Job's struggle as it turns out or rather his bigger struggle seems to be whether he is now tempted to think of possession as God's grace and now destruction as God's wrath. It was acknowledged that he became such a wholesome person because of his faith and love towards God and more than any material possession God's love and care for him is hanging in balance. With many different streams of thought from his friends he is a question mark. This temptation of being in suspense of God not being on one's side could be one of the most disturbing of questions and one which

could make most doubt. It is no secret that people may treat this anxiety by abandoning his or her faith and this is a commonality in modern times.

### How God Helps

Job, as we know how the story turned out did not lose his faith. He was actually able to win all parties that actually put him into this dire situation maybe except the tempter. However Job's resolute faith was tested over and over again. And between the lines we may even have wondered whether he felt like fighting a losing battle. However God also keeps his faith questioning through the same inquires of his friends. It is very rare that we try to find sense in the nonsense people tell us when we are in need or panic. But each discourse that each person spells also makes Job more inquisitive as to the works of God and he finally ends up being the person on whom God keeps trust even to deliver his friends. The Bible has many more stories in which God draws inspiration from the same people who struggle and oppose and doubt. It's almost as if a small child trying to get in the first words. It sounds different and disfigured at times, but the parent encourages and keeps on encouraging. As it is with the people who reason and question and test. Religion and faith should not be immune from testing but with the exception that how we test should also be looked into. For Job he has now returned to being a joyful person not only because of his wealth, family and status but because his faith even though shaken did not give into it. It also makes sense of anxiety itself, in a way that God uses the confusion to bring God's people into better understanding.

That is why there is always the option of human reasoning as a pathway towards faith. When modern science is looked upon as an enemy we must remind ourselves that for the faithful even reasoning is enabled by God who has given the intellect and the skill. Therefore knowledge, wisdom and thinking are not necessarily allergic to a pure faith. However there are more real world stories of anxiety that does not end as happily as Job's and for this we leave more thinking space.

### 13. Ageing

#### Story - Psalms 71

17 O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. 18 So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to all the generations to come. Your power 19 and your righteousness, O God, reach the high heavens.

You who have done great things, O God, who is like you?

20 You who have made me see many troubles and calamities will revive me again; from the depths of the earth you will bring me up again. 21 You will increase my honor, and comfort me once again.

#### Our Anxiety -

There are many anxieties in life; probably one might say we start being anxious the moment we are born. It is so because we are always uncertain of what the future holds. It is same for death as well. Even though we know in part that after death there is no connection to the world we have left, we still are anxious about it. Worrying about death may start at any point in one's life, possibly in the life span from when we start to reason. The above few verses are actually not from a particular story unlike the other stories we have been reading. It could very well be that the author of this psalm could be an Israelite king but maybe it could be anyone else who had this same sort of experience. The experience of being brought up in a faith order and having experienced the results of being in that faith a person may still have doubts on finishing the race. Or it could be a sadness one might feel that while things looked good in the earlier years of one's life a sudden neglect, sudden illness and sudden withdrawal from active life has had its toll on the mind. This is but a reality for all of us. Human beings remain mortal even though each day we hear of greater and greater advancements. Perhaps this being the nature of life it is also the founding block for our faith in a Supreme Being. If at all the human had power beyond anything such as what we discussed, then the human

takes this place. And death or rather the eventide of life is one that comes to all of us eventually.

### How God Helps -

It's going to be tricky only to adapt a few verses from just one book of the Bible and discuss the doctrine of life in our faith. But as God's living word even these few verses explain to us the amazing hand God guides us in matters such this. Firstly the author explains the teacher in God who teaches us day in and day out of all the wonderfulness that we owe to God. As a response he or she keeps on reminding oneself of it. Secondly it explains the caring God who does not forsake even in the weakest of our times and expects us even to use every moment to be witnesses to the world around. Thirdly and very effectively the writer explains the God of hope who does not dictate our lives but always is there to hold us and strengthen us. Even though we may fall to the depth of the world literally or in metaphors God has all power to deliver us and we are told almost as if God would never fail to do so. It is truly amazing to read a few verses like this and see the depth of the meaning the author wanted to explain. Maybe even if he or she missed the wisdom of God and as we discussed, it must be hoped since we are people with a limited mind trying to understand an unlimited operation. Then lastly at least in this section itself, there is a promise of trust, great trust whereby God adds to the honour of the person who kept trust. The promise is not of status, wealth, power etc.. but of an unseen respect and honour. While all these promises are made to the person who doubts there is also another hint that God will comfort them again. And when we read it again the words again will reappear and reappear and reappear. This shows not that it's a one word deal it's the everlasting promise that when a person distrusts or mistrusts there is God's comforting arm in the distrust and mistrust itself. It is a challenge to see through a glass with muddy water but when it settles there is some transparency but in this dusty cloud the beholder becomes restless.

## 14. Accusation and Worry

### Story - Jeremiah 43

1 When Jeremiah finished speaking to all the people all these words of the LORD their God, with which the LORD their God had sent him to them, 2 Azariah son of Hoshaiah and Johanan son of Kareah and all the other insolent men said to Jeremiah, "You are telling a lie. The LORD our God did not send you to say, 'Do not go to Egypt to settle there'; 3 but Baruch son of Neriah is inciting you against us, to hand us over to the Chaldeans, in order that they may kill us or take us into exile in Babylon." 4 So Johanan son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces and all the people did not obey the voice of the LORD, to stay in the land of Judah.

### Our Anxiety -

The book of Isaiah which starts the prophets' section in the Bible is quite a long book which sometimes do not make easy reading. It could be because there has been found to be several authors and seasons involved in it. The book of Jeremiah is a slightly better flowing version because of a certain secretary called Baruch who seemed to have assisted the prophet in setting the happenings of the times. In the account above Baruch is accused of plotting to betray people into enemy hands. Jeremiah's anxiety is from the hard job he is called to do when he feels strongly that he needs to do something or rather called to do something yet nobody else seem to be convinced. It is always a bold step for the great inventors of history to actually start something for which the beholders would have only some distrust or sarcasm. Jeremiah also faces the greater anxiety many good willed people feel. And that is the displacement effect. To use a simpler term what one tries to do is actually seen as some other matter. In this case the hard task of making the people remain in the land is displaced onto an unwilling Baruch who probably had nothing to do with what God wanted Jeremiah to prophesy. Being unjustly accused of something that

has absolutely nothing to do with a greater mission can really put a person down. We might just ask the many who had to back down from any just cause after being unjustly accused of having some ulterior motive or a hidden agenda.

### How God Helps -

There are of course a few brave souls who seem to weather the storms of opposition and continue their task. But it is not many who do this. In the end even Jeremiah failed in that the people failed. The people failed because their conscience had mixed signals of what God wanted them to do. In this instance how God helps can actually be a debatable point in that God does not withhold God's anger against the people who seem to have disobeyed God. There seems to be oppression against them, hardships and a continuous struggle. In a way we might feel Jeremiah was rewarded for his bravery by the suffering that came upon the ungrateful people. But as we have talked elsewhere in the book as well it is difficult to understand how God can also make people suffer due to disobedience without making them understand what has happened. Therefore without painting the picture of an angry God we might think of how God expresses God's displeasure towards the people who did not want to listen to God's mouthpiece. But how does this help with Jeremiah's anxiety? It looks like he has failed to avert this disaster and he might be more anxious now that the same people might be after him for bringing on this calamity. It is a bit confusing that we do not find much of what happened to Jeremiah after this episode only that he continued to prophecy till the end of the book as well as into the next book called Lamentations. In a way God relieved his anxiety by equipping him with the courage that would have been lost if he had fallen in fear. The situation of the people due to this episode will need to be looked at separately. But it is clear that even when people foil or disrupt a mission there is always consolation from the one to who starts every mission and that is God. If our eyes are fixed on this rather than the surrounding it enables us to do our part in faith.

## 15. Witnessing

### Story - Daniel 5

10 Although Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he continued to go to his house, which had windows in its upper room open toward Jerusalem, and to get down on his knees three times a day to pray to his God and praise him, just as he had done previously. 11 The conspirators came and found Daniel praying and seeking mercy before his God. 12 Then they approached the king and said concerning the interdict, "O king! Did you not sign an interdict, that anyone who prays to anyone, divine or human, within thirty days except to you, O king, shall be thrown into a den of lions?" The king answered, "The thing stands fast, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked." 13 Then they responded to the king, "Daniel, one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the interdict you have signed, but he is saying his prayers three times a day."

### Our Anxiety -

In a book about spirituality and religion we must have at least one story of spirituality and religion itself. While we see general spirituality fading and many other things coming to substitute the place held by religions in modern times, we also see this leading to people strongly holding onto one's faith which is seen as extremism. We maybe bold in saying that all great religious traditions have come under this fire. The world seem to grow secularly at a pace too fast for the spiritual human to catch up. Where would we place Daniel in the above account according to this dilemma? He is brave in that he holds fast to his faith. He is silently voicing against injustice which has been forced. The only pressing matter is that he seems to be in a minority and the majority, who maybe actually not that bad as human beings are under the influence that they need to go behind a secular spirituality. When any

religious person accepts to be really religious he or she has made a pact, while being human we may break it often, we have decided to commit. There can never be a faith-stand that has to be compromised. This was also one of the main arguments in the New testament where religion itself can become a hindrance to be 'religious'. Daniel is now in a dilemma as to how he is to defeat his accusers.

### How God Helps -

The story of Daniel and the den of lions is a very well known story. As in all stories we the readers may look at the main plot and be amazed at how Daniel was able to withstand the anxiety he would have had when faced with this brutal ordeal. We may oversee the anxiety of the king himself who actually ordered this to happen, who seem to lose sleep and food over the matter. When swimming against the tide we might always encounter opposition. How God helps Daniel in this situation may confound science and logic. But it is not only the miracle that happens in this cage that amazes us. It is the conversion of the King who later elevates Daniel on his moral high ground. We see God's favour in the angel who comforted him when faced with an adversary who were not able to think; which were the lions. Perhaps the most greatest news Daniel received while waiting for his death was that he was justified in the eyes of God. He repeats this same to the King when he inquires of how he survived. There probably is no greater happiness for the one who in the Spirit of God stands firm to something one believes in and is commended for this stance. Is there any greater message we can take out of this story; than the fact that God needs to act through a medium and more often than not we are that medium and whenever we are in tune with what God wants us to fulfil on this earth we are always empowered? The slight problem for many of us at this point is how to discern or be sure of what God is sure about. Because jumping into the lion's den can go at least in two different ways. Maybe also there needs to be faith to take that leap and maybe faith is not really speculating or expecting but holding fast.



## 16. Inheritance and Worry

### Story - Amos 7

10 Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the very center of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. 11 For thus Amos has said, 'Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land.'" 12 And Amaziah said to Amos, "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; 13 but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom." 14 Then Amos answered Amaziah, "I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, 15 and the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'

### Our Anxiety -

Amos had no hereditary nor scholarly right to be a prophet. He was a simple individual who seem to have been ordered to give up on a not so simple job. In our modern times if an Amos uneducated and without clout were to come up and prophecy against an authority it would seem more as a foolish mudslinging. Perhaps it was a bit better during the time of the actual Amos; he is not turned away entirely but is redirected in his orders. These orders seem hard to part with, for Amos and he explains that his decree is not of a human origin but one which has been handed over by God. The power in which Amos replies the people who seem to defeat him has much bearing of the power God has given him. But his words of weakness and powerlessness holds an important key even in our modern day and age for the one who is with weakness due to education or background or status or some other division. There seemed to be a decline in the effect of one's identity in the western world which now seems to have been on the increase. The developing world treats identity as too crucial to miss which is really discrimination

but there seem to be a long time gap before this may get rectified. There is always going to be anxiety that stems from our identity. The words on this book are in a foreign language. It may seem odd for people who may not be proficient in this language to see something that targets exactly this issue to be written in this mode. Therefore there is a conscious discrimination as well as an unconscious discrimination that may make a person anxious by another.

### How God Helps -

How God helps Amos does not appear in any clear word or phrase but maybe between the words and phrases we can see how he continues to do this. This will tell us for a fact that either he was extremely foolish in trying to do something which was discouraged for him or we might think he has had more confidence than a normal herdsman to proclaim the words from God even amidst opposition. Either way we could assume that he has had a tremendous energy and empowerment that probably was not missing when he was doing his earlier routine work. While we may not assume too much we are looking at this story from the point of an individual who has been looked down upon and continues to fulfill a hard task, it must be correct to think that it is none other than God's grace and power that becomes to him the ability not to back down and to continue to be God's mouth piece. We in modern times, especially when voicing against some sort of inaccuracy and when we become rebuked or struck down, we fall into either two of the following mental states. The first would be the sure hope that God does not want us to go through this pain and in fact we should stop. The other would be equally self serving in that we might think we were never supposed to do this in the first place. We may continue to pray for some braver soul who we might actually believe is more competent than us and blessed more than us to perform this task. The effort of Amos was in vain, but to see really the effort was in vain since the people never took him for real. However God never lets him back down and drives him forward which is an important lesson to us.

## 17. Anger

### Story - Jonah 4

1 But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. 2 He prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. 3 And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." 4 And the LORD said, "Is it right for you to be angry?" 5 Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city.

### Our Anxiety -

'Is it right for you to be angry?' God asks Jonah. Perhaps God will keep on asking us this same question when we feel angry. We feel angry sometimes for just causes and maybe for lesser times for unjust reasons such as jealousy and competition. In this story Jonah is more upset because he seems to have known beforehand what God planned to do and hence he acted in such a manner that would put himself out of acting God's displeasure. Is Jonah then angry because God did not punish a wicked people? Sometimes in our world we see this happening more often. People or institutions who should actually be getting condemned and punished seem to have all the fun in life. People question when this happens and sometimes even root it to the fact that God does not act against them or simply that God cannot act against them. While we may never be able to satisfy the inquiring mind of why there is evil in the world, we can talk about what happens to us only when this happens to us. The anxiety we feel whenever there is injustice in the world is very real. It puts our faith to the test as to exactly how and why it happens. It is even more challenging to see how God will act when such adversity has happened in life. Jonah experiences anxiety

at three different stages in this short story. The first is when he decides not to prophecy, secondly when he faces a life threatening situation at the bottom of the sea and finally this most frustrating situation in which he seems to be the one condemned and not this city with its many faults.

### How God Helps -

God does not relieve Jonah's anxiety in a flash. God makes Jonah experience the dilemma that God also has with the human race whom God created. The experience Jonah received was a lesson in the dilemma of a loving God and he is brought to understand why such things are allowed. There can be anxiety in knowing that just because you are good does not necessarily mean that God will shower blessings upon you alone. There could also be anxiety in knowing that while there may be many wrong happenings in the world all does not necessarily go punished. There could also be anxiety in wondering, then what is faith anyway, since there does not seem to be a better path for the better person. In a way faith remains to exactly teach us this very hard reality that God's love and kindness is extended for all and very especially for those who may have fallen and have now realized it. This story explains how Jonah was made to deal with the fullness of God. However we distance ourselves totally from Jonah when this may happen to us. It is very important to notice that while God forgives and restores, Jonah had to do his task even with hardship. God continually wants prophets to explain the need to repent even though the outcome may not be expected according to human standards. In our day to day life we experience this anxiety as it always brings the question of righteousness. Who is justified? And why should one go on being righteous when there is no consolation from it? We might get some inspiration from the great philosopher called Spinoza who has said that the reward of goodness is goodness itself. Therefore if you are righteous you are rewarded as you continue to do righteous things which could be impossible for the non righteous.

## 18. Nostalgia and Worry

### Story- Haggai 2

1 in the seventh month, on the twenty-first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by the prophet Haggai, saying: 2 Speak now to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, and say, 3 Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Is it not in your sight as nothing? 4 Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the LORD; take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land, says the LORD; work, for I am with you, says the LORD of hosts, 5 according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My spirit abides among you; do not fear.

### Our Anxiety -

The main object of this story is the house of God, which seem to have lost its former glory. Perhaps we should be open to understand that this may not particularly mean the walls, decorations and adornments but also the spirit of the people. Even to this day we may look at the situations of physical settings and ascertain that the spirit of the people responsible are depleted or have lost its original shine. We use the word nostalgia to talk of the bygone days, the good days. It may refer to our happiness, health or standards that we have held dear in earlier times. There is a certain anxiety when we feel that we have lost the best of what we had and we are to come into terms with a new scenario. This can also translate into fear when we may look at our lives from time to time. Rather than realizing the happiness we would have felt when we did have a certain situation and rather looking at how we can once again draw inspiration from it we may lose heart over the whole matter. This nostalgia could have physical, mental and more seriously spiritual concerns as we see persons who seem to leave their faith due to a sudden fall in life. When we look at the Christian faith the falls only

serve as support to understand faith fully. When the reverse occur this could be the hopelessness equated with the remnant of Israel with Zerubbabel and Joshua.

### How God Helps -

The Lord speaks in simple but certain words; the first is to take courage. We would also comfort another in trouble with these same words. But the encouragement from God seems to be not just the instruction, but with much more attached to the promise. Because it follows the next comforting word and the promise that God is with us. Courage and work are indeed intended for a specific task and we will read about it in the next few lines. This is important to note that while the secular world also encourages 'to work' the promise of working for a spiritual goal and secular goal are as different as it gets. The first is for the pure achievement and pleasure of human will. Yet the second one is for the duty towards a higher and Supreme Being. That is possibly why the next sentence joins the words 'courage' and 'work', for the promise God made when God made the people come out of Egypt. Haggai is amongst the few last books of the Old Testament in a complete different context. But the promise of God is not broken or changed. But the context of lost hope and powerlessness is too much for the people remaining and God gives them the final promise that God's Spirit abides among them and there is no need to fear. Fear is something we talked about earlier in this story. All our anxieties and sorrows are reaching a climax with fear, and fear is not a pleasant feeling for courage or work. From this incident we are able to understand that while we do the work of God, we are also promised of God's Spirit of encouragement. Historical data favorably points to Haggai as well as Zechariah the prophet following this book, of making the temple revolution possible and made possible the national awakening due to this reconstruction. Then it is necessary to know what God expects and to attempt it, surely knowing that God will abide with the one; who follows.

## 19. The Unknown

### Story - Mathew 2

13 Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." 14 Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, 15 and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son." 16 When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men.

### Our Anxiety -

The birth of Jesus carried with it anxieties for quite a number of people which included his parents, well wishers, rulers and as we read in this passage for several families in Bethlehem. The second part of the story in the text selected is a terrible scene which probably, has the many of us thinking how such a disaster could fall on innocent bystanders who may not have known anything about the incidents to which they are being persecuted. We can only attribute this injustice to the evil of a human being who has fallen in love so much with power and status that it was simply not possible to let it go. The Church has not taken a different stance and in December we continue to remember the massacre of the Holy innocents since it continually haunts us and explains the inability of a few to leave power and the most unimaginable acts they might perform to protect themselves. The first part of the story is the anxiety of two people who are scared for the life that was given to them to protect. Our anxieties of this nature may revolve around health, protection even our comfort zones but it is not a rare case to see people being chased away from their homes into the

unknown. Leaving one's known settings and not knowing what holds in the future is an anxiety that we may all encounter and even dread.

### How God Helps -

We do know that the Lord comes and advises Joseph to leave their present place. The voice does not say how they will be assisted. We only know that after the cruel persecutor had died they are once again called back. We also do not know in actual reality how this family fared in Egypt. But we know that they did return and again being warned they settled in another new place. Only by reading between the lines are we able to understand how God helped this family progress through their anxiety. In one way they are instructed and encouraged. Then they are protected and nurtured. We only can conclude that whether it was God's plan or not God did guide them through whatever situation that came upon them. The change of setting did not affect the well being of the people concerned. It could have affected them mentally which must be accepted. It could have even made them much stronger which is the consequence more often than not. While this story may bring quite a few unexpected debates to the reader who may venture into the depths we will look at the aspect of displacement only. Then we are more equipped to know that when we feel that a change in setting has been called for we can only believe that God knows our situation and God's assurance that we will be treated as special in God's sight. There is no need for anxiety this. There is a famous saying that 'we do not need to fear to trust the unknown future to a known God' and knowing the plan of God does help us greatly to undergo any changes that may come up. As we mentioned earlier leaving from our comfort zones makes us anxious. Here it was the physical refugee status to this family. We may be called to step into even psychological and even spiritual dimensions which need us to step out of what we are happy with, what we have grown with or we cherish. Yet when the call happens we need to remind ourselves that come what may we would be looked after so that we play a greater role in the hereafter.



## 20. Initiative

### Story - Mathew 14

13 Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. 14 When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. 15 When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." 16 Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." 18 And he said, "Bring them here to me." 19 Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.

### Our Anxiety -

There is an after service meal crisis! What could possibly come close to this dilemma experienced by this massive crowd? However the author does not seem to mention it at any place during the detailing of this incident. The anxiety of the crowd would probably have been overshadowed by the fact that they were spiritually fed and nothing would have enabled them more to experience what was to follow. However the first signs of anxiety are from the disciples who all of a sudden seem to have understood that they are in a problem situation with regard to the physical nurture and well being of the people. And they are quite bright in the fact that they already seem to have a suggestion that will solve this most pressing matter. The anxiety of the disciples would have vanished at once if their teacher would have accepted their solution But to their dismay he seem to put them in greater anxiety. The ever striking sentence of 'you do something' is not only resounding in this matter but every time we hope to take the easy

way out. Jesus' words are ever challenging us to think why can't I do something in this regard. This anxiety of the disciples could be called the worry which makes them take a harder way into solving a problem. We may have experienced this sort of anxiety when we encounter problems of the nature where we try either to brush them aside or to pass them over to someone else. This could be the fear of failure or simply the inability to get our hands dirty.

### How God Helps -

It's quite remarkable that the modern day scholar seem to suggest that finally what happened was that all had brought something for the journey and they seem to have shared these goodies. While anxiety of the disciples could have faded with the social miracle it's not so difficult to think of how a divine miracle would not have occurred. Jesus' giving thanks to God before breaking the bread and inviting the divine intervention suggests that there was in fact a real miracle. Such is said because from an anxiety perspective, the confusion of the disciples would not have gone away simply because many others had brought some food. It would have vanished, probably as it would have vanished for any one of us, standing in the disciple's shoes if they had witnessed a real miracle and that was not only the fact that people were fed but they also became satisfied. They were assured that spiritual well being will inevitably lead to physical well being. It is remarkable to see that the author mentions again the disciples as having found the solution to the question they posed. Now they are handing over food to the many hungry people. Their anxiety had fled. They who did not believe it was possible were now partaking of the same miracle they had disavowed. Is there a greater lesson for us than knowing that when anxious to take something up, we need to trust in the Lord and very soon what was impossible would become a reality? They of course had to follow the simple instructions. Take initiative and let everything unfold because there is no solution that may not be in the mind of God, it's only our ability to reflect upon how we can help.

## 21. Assurance and Worry

### Story - Mark 2

13 Jesus went out again beside the sea; the whole crowd gathered around him, and he taught them. 14 As he was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. 15 And as he sat at dinner in Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples — for there were many who followed him. 16 When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" 17 When Jesus heard this, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."

### Our Anxiety -

Have we ever being in a situation where Levi son of Alphaeus was in this story? Maybe a bit of explanation of the alleged situation will prove helpful. Levi seems to be a person just caught in the 'act' and 'act' here would be engaging in the corruption, which was thought to be in his day quite below what was expected as an acceptable livelihood. When Jesus asks him to follow him there is no sign of any hesitance or enthusiasm. It just mentions that his reaction was automatic. We encounter both these figures probably sometime later in the day having dinner in the company of several other people who would never have even met each other. We might think that either Jesus was able to speak to Levi within this time or there has been some discussion between them so that there had been some agreement on which they were consolidating over a meal which was a very important part of life in Jewish culture. He would have felt very odd being cornered in that society as a sinner and then to his surprise having received a visit from this great teacher who seem to turn upside down the usual traditions of their way of living. We might have felt this anxiety when we feel that we have distanced

ourselves from a certain belonging and now we are unexpectedly called to be part of the same belonging due to an extraordinary gratefulness that other person has extended to us just like Jesus did in this case.

### How God Helps -

What is the anxiety of, for an example a person who may have fallen out with one's family and now someone from the family reaches out to him or her. There is anxiety of past sins and faults. There is the anxiety of this goodwill not lasting for a long time. There could also be anger coming from anxiety when realizing how the break happened in the first place. God through Jesus in the task of reconciliation brings the one who was 'sick' to the most respected place in the society at that time the dining table and allows for all to behold that Jesus the one who does not hold any law above his law of love has accepted that person. There is no need for anxiety in trying to mend broken ways as this is what God always tries to do and do the same as Jesus did in his earthly life. There is also a guarantee from Jesus that there is no need to fear that being wounded always invites the grace of God when he explains to the accusers that there is always justification and assurance for when reconciliation takes place. He says this in ways that even the most simplest mind will understand as he explains that if there is sickness there is the always the necessary help that comes from the physician, we might think of in modern times that for sickness we need to visit the physician always. But the deeper meaning as its felt is that when there is brokenness, the healing is always available in God and there is no need for anxiety or fear. We have been talking of many incidents in which anxiety is caused by what we might call bad things. Here we think of a good thing that we might do that is being right or going back or helping with healing which in turns can cause some anxiety. With Jesus' assurance we never need a second thought as we are called for this ministry whether we are the one's wronged or trying to undo the wrong.

## 22. Discrimination

### Story - Mark 7

25 but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. 26 Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 27 He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." 28 But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." 29 Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go — the demon has left your daughter." 30 So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

### Our Anxiety -

This is probably one story which may take us awhile to understand what has unfolded. This is a challenge when we look at the words and the author's interpretation of an incident that has occurred. Eventually we may understand that the whole story is woven around the Jewish – Gentile inheritance of God's favour. It does sound that Jesus' words contained some anxiety as well, since he seemed to face a new situation with this request. The woman's anxiety is probably one very common to many of us. It can be explained as the fear of rejection. Jesus' words tests this woman to the limit. Her anxiety of not finding relief for her son would have been amplified with the suggestion that she does not even qualify for this honour. In today's society we encounter many who are unable to change their being as some matters in life seem to be fixed. For an example your name, background, culture, education, status, physical features, physical abilities are some of these aspects that are pretty hard to shake off. We also being in a growing country where a 'certain openness' is not fully available there is a chance that some discrimination could occur. While in this short passage we describe it so briefly the agony and the pain someone might feel with regard to such rejection can never be fully understood by another who has never felt it.

We also may overlook how the woman would have handled this rejection with the child who was afflicted and faced distress.

### How God Helps -

This very short account of course, will give us lengthy discussion just because not much is said but Jesus' words itself of 'you may go', can be understood in many ways. In one way Jesus had also learned about the great answer she had for him. In another way he may not want to pursue his current argument. In another way Jesus accepts that the woman is aware of God's grace that goes beyond any human division. It could also be that Jesus was satisfied with the test he set for her and puts in 'for saying that'. When the woman visited her child again she was well and not disturbed but miraculously she was healed of this demon. There was no division to reject this woman from ever attaining God's healing. There are many gospel stories where Jesus is seen accepting the unaccepted by society. Even here the bias of the author who probably would have been from a Jewish background seems to send discriminating chills up the reader's spine. The use of the word dog which is also symbolic of another abhorrence in that culture also implies the almost impossible task the woman was attempting. However the realization of God's never ending goodness has not only justified her in arguing with a great teacher at that time, but her faith that this will happen has being rewarded to the maximum. There are of course many initiations to eradicate these rejections in modern times. But with newer and newer justifications the attempt is always at a slow go. It must be the most appropriate for Christians who worship a God who has broken these barriers thousands of years ago to seek out these marginalized people who are on mental suffocation, with rejection meeting them at all points. For the one who believes there cannot be greater assurance that God's love and acceptance is readily available for those who know it and for those who don't. And this would establish our ministry in whichever situation we find ourselves in.

## 23. Nature of Life

### Story - Luke 12

16 Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. 17 And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' 18 Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' 20 But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' 21 So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

### Our Anxiety -

Even though not an actual story this parable does sound like an actuality people undergo. So far we have discussed anxieties because of the deficiencies of life. However we rarely look at the anxieties we may face when we have an abundance. All our life we work for that perfect moment when everything is in order and everything is taken care of. But alas then it must be the human tendency that we never seem to get rid of the worry. This story has an earlier section which talks of a few people who are coming to Jesus to resolve a land dispute. Jesus is very dismissive of the fact and even suggests to us that giving solutions to land and wealth matters are not his concern. How many times have we asked for possession in his name in our daily meditations? These words and many verses from our Lord imply that the riches in this world are not to be a concern of human beings. The greed for these riches has made our society and even the world create inequality upon inequality. The worst part of this inequality is that it is not only the group who find themselves lacking riches who keep on searching for it, it's all of us. There seem to be a sense of riches, that link to a better life that has been developed and come to us as fearful as ever in the present time. Maybe

it was this constant headache that caused the persons in the story to have some sort of interference from Jesus. We should be open to perhaps understand that maybe they expected a different perspective from Jesus and they were readily available to accept something other than the norm when it comes to land disputes.

### How God Helps -

One might feel that rather than God helping the person in the parable it does look that there is a curse. There is of course no mention of this matter taking place but there is despair in the person's life because now he is losing it all. All the time and energy he would have put into collecting all these riches are also in vain. But Jesus points to the fact that the really important matter at hand and that is there is a need to be rich towards God rather than toward themselves. When anxieties of this nature strikes us, and it could be quite often because it is related to everything we study, work, relate, plan and even get up in the morning for! The fact that a rich person had a very well producing land signifies not that the person was blessed but rather that the person owned a larger share of God's goodness which is the land and produce. The thought of using that blessedness, maybe in a manner that would enable a few more people who didn't have his worth to eat drink and be merry would have put him in favour with what God wants us to do. There is a definite anxiety in having things as we always live with the fear of losing it. However it is also not practical to act in a manner that we don't care about our possessions as well. Since these enable our life to go on and the more we go on, we have the opportunity of witnessing to God. It could be witnessing through sharing or through living a life of simplicity. Many doctors of the brain have come up with simplicity as a way of resolving die hard confusions. Maybe it is exactly what Jesus is trying to arbitrate between these persons confused with their land struggle. Unless they and in our times we are not able to stand on the platform of temporariness and look at the question we will never have peace of mind.



## 24. Betrayal

### Story - Luke 22

47 While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; 48 but Jesus said to him, "Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?" 49 When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, "Lord, should we strike with the sword?" 50 Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. 51 But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him. 52 Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, "Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? 53 When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!"

### Our Anxiety -

The Lord's betrayal has been depicted by several thinkers in the social, religious and political atmosphere that was present during that time. This atmosphere undoubtedly had many of these conspirators wounded and they could not probably see beyond the solution they have been proposed. In relationships there is nothing as good as friendship. It could be between friends, families, institutions. In relationships there is also nothing as devastating as betrayal. The causes of betrayal of a friendship is always vast and at most times not comprehensible at all. We can only imagine that such takes place when the 'evil' is entered into a person and possibly the person or persons affected would probably have no idea about such thing taking place. While friendships are vital to relationships and betrayals are adverse, the root cause of both these aspects is trust. There is always a question of trust placed by any of us on another when we start to doubt the contribution of the other to the relationship. The stories of Jesus' relationships with the betraying community tell us that Jesus never doubted. He always knew.

And moreover he was direct to say so publicly. One of the reasons that did get him on the hated list was probably this honesty. Imagine the pain that he undergoes here, seeing the same persons who walked and talked with him now on the other side. When it happens to us much less stronger in spirit the affect could have quite sorrowful consequences.

### How God Helps -

Even in this moment Jesus speaks directly first to his follower and next to the larger community. In between he also rebukes the community that is ready to fight against the people responsible for this. The scenes after this episode are heavily depicted at every Lenten period and we also travel with the Lord in his suffering. It also proposes to us that betrayal will always have a long stretch of suffering. Whenever we undergo such pain we always need to remember that this is indeed unfortunate and probably we never would have expected something like this to happen. There would be periods in our lives which can be called 'power of darkness' periods to which we have entered and there seem to be just the path of pain to follow. There is also the effect that we would always carry with us even when we have got over the pain that this might happen again. However Jesus' reply to this betrayal will give us a few lessons on how to deal with this anguish. His answer at this point was directness but it later transforms into silence then into forgiveness and into reconciliation. However this betrayal is not only in the eyes of humans, we also have God who sees this injustice taking place. However even more than harm done to us there is the need for reconciliation. There is a larger picture and a greater plan every time this takes place. For us in sorrow sometimes it's hard and almost impossible to understand how such a thing can be allowed. But God also travels with us and whenever the time is ready there is God's action. With Jesus it was the resurrection event and the resurrection of the community that eventually brought down the accusers at a later time.

## 25. Sin and Worry

### Story - John 9

1 As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. 4 We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." 6 When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, 7 saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

### Our Anxiety -

There is something called inheritance whether we may like to acknowledge it or not. There are some things we inherit from our family lines such as our features. There are also aspects such as wealth and status. Sometimes one generation inherits what the earlier generations have worked about or not worked about. The assumption that this man in the story has inherited something is almost like what we hear even in the modern age when we hear someone explaining one's situation now, good or bad as it is. Maybe the reality is that just like the disciples we humans tend to assign some sort of our present condition to some factors that have been the past conditions. Simply we still believe in a cause and effect relationship. It maybe true upto some point but for those who seem to be pained by it, this continuous struggle could be quite troubling. Imagine if the man who was blind actually heard these words. What would be his immediate thoughts? Either he would have felt very angry at his parents or even his own wrongdoings if he had ever caused them. He would also have felt powerless and totally unable to go any further in life. The most striking factor with these kinds of assumptions is that we always feel free to think in such a way when it

happens to another. But when it happens to us we tend to feel it differently. This sort of anxiety is probably at its worst when we think that we don't often 'own it'. If a child is ridiculed in class for looking differently it could probably have nothing to do with his or her activities. Yet we encounter this sort of situations day in and out.

### How God Helps -

Jesus' answer is simple and also very Biblical. It is also explained in some prophetic books as well as in his own understanding of sin. This is not the first time that he has dismissed sin as been a person's problem. He instructs the disciples first that they should not think otherwise. And he puts it in such a way that the disciples are made to believe that even in this sort of powerless state God's power is always accessible. We may be radical in thinking that all the problems in the world social, political, religious etc are all there in such a way that God's work is to be revealed through these situations. And the answer Jesus gives the man is not only doctrinal or based on a blessing. It has to be witnessed by the surroundings and there should be a clear attempt from the person himself alleviating from the condition. We may also carry the marks of inheritance. We rejoice when it works to our benefit and fall far down when we see these situations as threatening our lives. In the thinking of Jesus the teacher, there is no division that causes humans to believe that another has to be inflicted with suffering for something that has happened to what he or she was related to. There is no division that causes a person to be discriminated. But in everything there is a need to see the power of God. In our lives are we able to see how this power can be captured so that even in powerless states we feel the goodness of God? But we need to be clear that God's goodness may come to us in varied forms and we need to be open to see how it has to be celebrated. Our faith has been plagued by various schools of thought which seem to attribute liberation based on stressing on a particular point. Unless we see the holistic nature of God, the world and humanity we end up reaching only in part towards the solution.

## 26. Mission and Worry

### Story - John 21

20 Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; he was the one who had reclined next to Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?" 21 When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about him?" 22 Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!" 23 So the rumor spread in the community that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?"

### Our Anxiety -

We have had several stories on performance in life and some on non performance in life. Both these aspects give us anxiety. There is a certain truth to the fact that whatever we end up doing in life, it brings with it some sort of worry. If we do something well we fear about the time we won't be able to do something well. If we do something relatively well maybe we fear somebody else might do a better job. Not that we seek competition but it's a reality. If we don't do something well we realize the prying eyes that will fall on us for underperforming. This could be from parenting to being the top spot in a fortune five hundred company. The story at hand is the clash that was to follow in communities that affirmed their faith according to differing traditions. In this story and throughout the gospel we see the hidden but rising tensions between two disciples. It's a bit ironical that this anxiety of performance or non performance seems to come into faith as well. Maybe we see this in our Church life. There is a struggle to be faithful and it is spurred on by what we see in the other. It is no secret that this struggle reaches downwards and even to the top most places within the institution. The worst part in this struggle is not what happens to us when we think about it. It is what happens to us when we think of what to do about it. It is here that we struggle to become better and in the

process we end up being a different person all together. We might take a few unconventional paths to be better. We might become unforgiving and unforgetting. While in the end we might be first, we become last or at least not first in many other areas. The life following this incident for these two disciples were both filled with pain and suffering. They achieved much in their work as apostles. And perhaps they would have reconciled by the time they have realized that they were both on the same mission.

### How God Helps -

Here its more than how God helps, it is more how God leads people to help each other. Now there is much to follow in this story than what we can understand in this small incident. But what we do know is that Jesus dismisses the claims of either of them insisting that they should be the top notch successor. It is quite ironical when we look at our frail human condition to see these two disciples who were on the verge of going over the top because of suspected persecution against them. They meet their teacher who has overcome death and has appeared to them as witness and they seem to; insisting in Peter's case and not insisting in John's case that who should be treated greater in the eyes of the Lord. In a way when all great religious traditions begin with the notion that humanity is limited and is weak it not only explains to us the pure fact that there must be some hope beyond but also that there cannot be immortality in this life anyway. We will continue to miss our mark and however much we do develop, an end will be imminent. And knowing this will enable us to win in this life even if it means actually losing! If there is not much use in winning in this life there need not be anxiety of performing or underperforming. Jesus only wraps the argument by saying that if it is his will. Which also explains to us that some people are given more and are expected to perform more. However the success is not in what we have but in what we actually do and in the attitude we do it with.

## 27. Rest

### Story - Acts 12

6 The very night before Herod was going to bring him out, Peter, bound with two chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, while guards in front of the door were keeping watch over the prison. 7 Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his wrists. 8 The angel said to him, "Fasten your belt and put on your sandals." He did so. Then he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." 9 Peter went out and followed him; he did not realize that what was happening with the angel's help was real; he thought he was seeing a vision. 10 After they had passed the first and the second guard, they came before the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went outside and walked along a lane, when suddenly the angel left him.

### Our Anxiety -

Peter was not having a comfortable time. Herod was on his back. He was sandwiched between two guards for fear of escaping. It says before, that the Church prayed for him, however not much of a plan was in place as to how he was to get release from this nightmare. The word nightmare as opposed to dream is used here to bring the type of anxiety we may at one time or other feel when it concerns our relaxation. It could be inability to sleep. It could be the inability to rise up after a sleep refreshed. It could also be the disturbances we feel when we sleep resulting in a far worse morning than what we expected. However this has a root cause of mental agony. We need not always be affected by the affairs of the world to have a terrible night. We do not know whether Peter had a dream in the nightmare he was experiencing since the main actor of the dream seem to have disappeared and he was still in a nightmare as regards to his situation. Not many of us will accept that being out of chains is any kind of freedom if the conditions outside

have not changed. Peter also doubts this, he did not believe this would have happened to him. The author uses the word vision and we used the word dream. However mental agony coming from real day affairs keeps us awake and we may be trapped inside our own heads in gruesome manners with little hope of release.

### How God Helps -

Peter's situation changed because of two very important factors. The first is the vision that he later found out to be true. Secondly it was the conditions that changed when he accepted the fact that he was been led out. In a way it's a reflection followed by an action. It is safe to say that nobody enjoys or longs for mental agony and torture. For those who have felt it, it may seem far devastating than physical agony or torture. There is a tremendous need for the affected person to break out of this mental network of bonds that is holding him or her captive. But the more struggles you make far harder the chains become. In such a case a person longs for that vision that at least gives some hope that one is still able to see a vision. However there is no greater joy than the vision that leads you out of misery. Sometimes people contemplate of just leaving the world totally as a way out of misery. But for Peter his escape came as being led out. There was his following the vision that made him reach freedom. And suddenly the angel as it were was no more with him. Perhaps it was only an encouragement from God which God has given to realize that all things are still and always possible even when we feel hopeless. However there is always a taking of direction that we need to have so that we are also in control of what happens to us. It gives us two very interesting propositions as it may for this relief. Firstly that God always acts. Secondly we need to respond. There may be failure to do so but maybe if Peter had done that the author would have explained his escape differently. Where there was pain justified God always acts. Yet we need to respond to make that a movement, a reality and a witness not only to the bystanders but most importantly to ourselves.



## 28. Horizons

### Story - Acts 21

27 When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, who had seen him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd. They seized him, 28 shouting, "Fellow Israelites, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against our people, our law, and this place; more than that, he has actually brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place." 29 For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. 30 Then all the city was aroused, and the people rushed together. They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and immediately the doors were shut.

### Our Anxiety -

There cannot be an end without a story about Paul. Most of what follows after the gospels, are the experiences of Peter, John and indeed Paul. Paul's story forms a psychological view point which is very complex. He was extreme to the point when he describes his leaning, faith and attitude since he belonged to a conservative thinking school. Then after his miraculous conversion all the strictness within him has disappeared and he seem to go into another extreme in which he is holding firm to a new teaching with the same confidence. In a person's life when this sort of life changing experience occurs; it really changes one's life. For a person such as Paul to redirect his thinking he would have undergone a massive transformation. His shift from one end to the other is still described as one of the most remarkable conversions in the Bible. He was not a man alien to learning. But he had limited himself to one end in which God could speak to humanity. The present story is one where he with his transformation has hoped that through his interfaith activity he will be able to convince die hard Jews just like himself. Imagine the anxiety of Paul who may feel that these people were blinded by some truth. And we should not dismiss the fact that he

would have felt anxious going to proclaim his new found knowledge with some people who were exactly like his previous self.

### How God Helps -

The doors of the temple were shut. It does speak a lot with the human attitude. Most of us are unable to be open to any other view except what we believe to be implicitly true to us. This is also a social, political and even an ethical issue. There is quite a lot to follow in this story; Paul's opportunity to explain himself to a wider congregation his arrest, attempt on his life and finally his deportation. Maybe Paul carried his anxiety that while his openness was established the others to whom he brought this message were not as open as him. We may imagine that Paul as God's instrument was subject to tremendous torture and harassment in explaining how in fact God was. There is an anxiety for all of us to broaden our horizons. And when Paul did broaden his horizon it was quite amazing to see his change. We live in an age where there is a need to broaden our perspectives. In some way people accuse this aspect because it brings us out of our comfort zones and it makes us step out of what we are happy with. It is also described as a slap against the good old values or orthodox thinking. We only can reciprocate with the idea that God in the Bible and throughout history has been a God of dialogue leading people into transformation exactly by making them broaden their thinking. Here we might feel that the audience present did not shift one bit. But in history whenever we read this story we always look at how his witness to the fuller truth of God was pushed down and he was pushed out. This story remains itself as a witness, where we are called to embrace our uncertainty in order to challenge anxiety. Most times we hide in front of things that scare us. Here it's a story of embracing what we feared in the hope that will transform us. Paul's life as we understand from his later writings was for him a life of content. He had broadened his view to accommodate that what his life turned out to be was also in glory of God.







This book is an attempt to think of well known Bible stories in the light of a common psychological emotion which is anxiety. Twenty eight such stories have been selected, analyzed from the point of human worry and presented how supposedly God has taken charge of matters in that particular context. It is devotional literature but it also calls for the reader to contribute in reflection. It is an attempt at recapturing how God carries situations in our lives when for the human perspective all seems lost. It is an attempt at motivating possibly twenty eight sides of anxiety triggers. However it does not necessary become a therapeutic solution without actually placing ourselves in the midst of the trauma felt by the Biblical characters. The reader is invited for an exploration through modern psychological interpretation fused with contextual socio- historical realities. It may never mean a step too far in understanding the reality of suffering, humanity and God but it is hoped that it will be a worthwhile attempt.