

St Andrew's Presbyterian Church Penrith

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ENCOURAGEMENT LETTER 14/5/2025

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

How are you today? I am thankful for spending 5 days last week with a Spiritual Renewal Group, meeting up with other ministers and workers in the Presbyterian Church, sharing stories and struggles, and praying for and encouraging one another.

Today we consider the third stanza of Psalm 119 Gimel “Belonging to God as Strangers on Earth” before moving on to church matters. Please note that the section headed Looking for People to Serve has changed.

ENCOURAGEMENT: Psalm 119 Gimel – Belonging to God as Strangers on Earth

Do you ever feel out of place? It might happen when we find ourselves among a group of people with whom we share nothing in common. It might be that we are a nerd among sports fans, or an older person among a group of teens, or a factory worker among a posse of lawyers. By way of differences in hobbies, age or occupation, we feel out of place, like the person who does not belong. We can feel this way too as those who belong to God in a society that increasingly cares little for him. The next stanza in Psalm 119 – Gimel – addresses this.

The first two verses see that who we are is all because of God.

Be good to your servant and I will live,

I will obey your word.

Open my eyes that I may see

wonderful things in your law.

Psalm 119:17-18

he Psalmist lives only by the grace of God. It is because God is good to him that he has life, a life experienced in obeying God's word. It is only by the Spirit of God at work in us, that we find true life in Christ, and we can will and act according to his will (Philippians 2:13). Without God's intervention we are bereft of the true life he gives and live according to our own devices. Also, it is God who must cause us to see otherwise we remain blind. It is because of God's work in us that we might behold wonderful things in his law, the very law that points to Christ – the perfection we see in him, the sacrifices that are a shadow

of his sacrifice, the covenant of grace that looks forward to Christ the meditator of that covenant. Unless the Spirit opens the eyes of the heart to see his law and his word as that which speaks of Christ, then we remain blind. It is God who makes us who we are and so we belong to him as his people.

But once we experience God's intervention by his Spirit to make us alive in Christ and to see the glory of Christ in his word, we cannot remain the same. We find ourselves out of place, like we no longer belong in the world and its society. It is no longer our home. We have a new perspective for what is important and what gives us meaning. This is why we read next:

*I am a stranger on earth;
do not hide your commands from me.
My soul is consumed with longing
for your laws at all times.*

Psalm 119:19-20

He is a stranger on earth, he no longer belongs to the world but belongs to God. His place is now with God. He knows the life that God gives, and after seeing some of God's glory in the law, he cannot get enough of it. He wants more of God's commands, more of his righteousness, because living for God is better than anything else. He is driven by an intense longing for God and his laws, laws that form the basis of God's covenant with his people, through which he grows in his understanding of God and intimacy with God.

But belonging to God and being a stranger on earth can put him out of step with those around him.

*You rebuke the arrogant, who are cursed,
and who stray from your commands.
Remove from me scorn and contempt,
for I keep your statutes.*

Psalm 119:21-22

Those who live for this world are the arrogant, who see themselves as of foremost importance and care little for God's commands. They stand in stark contrast to the Psalmist. Where he strives to live according to God's word in dependence upon God, they neglect God's word and live for themselves. Where the Psalmist is blessed in knowing God, the arrogant are cursed and cut off from God. Such difference leads to friction. The Psalmist suffers scorn and contempt from the arrogant because he keeps God's statutes to live God's way. We might think of ourselves and the disregard, even hostility we experience

from the world, because we live for Christ and uphold what God commands – like marriage, life for the unborn and the very message of Christ.

It is knowing God that makes the Psalmist wiser than rulers and governments, even though they bring him into disrepute.

*Though rulers sit together and slander me,
your servant will meditate on your decrees.
Your statutes are my delight;
they are my counsellors.*

Psalm 119:23-24

The Psalmist remains fixed on God's decrees and statutes, meditating on them and delighting in them. Even though the rulers slander him for his faithfulness to God, to Christ, he remains true to God and takes his counsel from the word of God rather than wayward words and legislation of worldly authorities. He listens to God first and foremost, and finds his greatest joy in living for him.

We too must make God and his word our highest priority. Christ and his gospel must hold sway over our lives. In him we find life and joy. Do not be disheartened at the slander of the world that demeans those who follow God and who seek to undercut God's laws. It is God by the working of his Spirit that makes you who you are, so live as a stranger in the world as you look forward to the world to come. Are you holding fast to Christ and his word?

WELCOMING TRAINING

If you serve as a welcomer (or would like to) and haven't done training for it yet, our next session will be on Sunday 18th May at 3.30 in the church foyer. Please let Hugh know if you're interested.

PRAYER UPDATE FROM COLIN AND ALISON MORROW (PIM MISSIONARIES)

Please pray for Alison and Colin as Alison's cancer is being treated. She has finished radiation treatment and continues with chemo. Pray they be comforted in our great hope in Christ, to continue finding their refuge in his love, and to know and see the power of our God.

Alison turned 60 on the 12th May and penned another poem:

*Today I'm turning sixty
And I'm feeling truly blessed
For the gift of years that I've been given
Has really been the best.*

*The celebrations have changed somewhat
To all that we had planned.
There's no holiday, no flights to Perth,
'Cause from flying I am banned.*

*And yet, through it all, I'm doing ok
With this gift that I've been given.
For it's through this illness I've been able to share
That through Christ we are forgiven.*

*So be encouraged, rejoice with me,
Share the joy I'm feeling today.
Look to Christ, our Saviour and Lord,
For all of you, this, I pray.*

LOOKING FOR PEOPLE TO SERVE

A number of people have stepped up to serve at STAKZ and Missions. It is encouraging to see older and younger people working together.

There are a number of areas in church where we are looking for people to serve. Please read through the following and pray about whether you serve in any of these ministries.

SRE – We need helpers/teachers in can join the team in teaching the Bible in Penrith South Public school. SRE is on a Tuesday.

Welcoming – More people are needed for welcoming in the 10.30am service

Sound/Computer Desk – We urgently need people to serve at the 9.00am service at the sound/computer desk. You will not be thrown in the deep end but will have some one with you, to help you along, until you get the hang of it. This would be of great benefit to improving the experience of those online too.

Please let Steve know if you are able to serve in any of these ways.

FINAL COMMENTS

While thinking about “The Church at War” in Numbers 1-2, I was listening to this song by Brian Suave, Such Clever Follies. There are a lot of Biblical references in this including from Psalms, Prophets, Proverbs and Revelation. Can you pick them? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1JC-87gWs>

As always, love and prayers,
Steve