

## TAKE TIME OUT – *Pastoral Retreat*

Half Acre, Horton Heath, Wimborne, Dorset, BH21 7JS  
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### Sunday Scriptures: 12<sup>th</sup> September 2021

#### **Scriptures:** NRSV

**Psalm 19:7-9** *A creation hymn proclaiming the all-encompassing priority of God's Word.*

<sup>7</sup>The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple; <sup>8</sup>the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes; <sup>9</sup>the fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

**Proverbs 1:20-33** *The consequences of not heeding Wisdom*

<sup>20</sup>Wisdom cries out in the street; in the squares she raises her voice. <sup>21</sup>At the busiest corner she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks; <sup>22</sup>“How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge? <sup>23</sup>Give heed to my reproof; I will pour out my thoughts to you; I will make my words known to you. <sup>24</sup>Because I have called and you refused, have stretched out my hand and no one heeded, <sup>25</sup>and because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof, <sup>26</sup>I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when panic strikes you, <sup>27</sup>when panic strikes you like a storm, and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. <sup>28</sup>Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently, but will not find me. <sup>29</sup>Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord, <sup>30</sup>would have none of my counsel, and despised all my reproof, <sup>31</sup>therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way and be sated with their own devices. <sup>32</sup>For waywardness kills the simple, and complacency of fools destroys them; <sup>33</sup>but those who listen to me will be secure and will live at ease, without dread of disaster.”

**James 3:5-8** *Faith and Wisdom*

<sup>5</sup>If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. <sup>6</sup>But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind; <sup>7,8</sup>for the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

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#### **Reflection:**

How does wisdom fit in with faith? John Wesley's sermon XLI 'Heaviness through manifold temptations' goes some way to explaining through considering the difference between the two conditions of 'heaviness' and 'darkness'. The darkness of mind into which those who once walked in the light of God's countenance are often observed to fall. This often leads to or is accompanied by a heaviness of soul in various degrees. But it would be a mistake to merge the two as if one because they are very different in character. An understanding of the difference is essential to appreciate the wisdom of faith from the foolishness of the world and avoid sliding from heaviness into darkness!

Heaviness from the original is λυπηθέντες;- *made sorry, grieved*; from λυπη;- *grief, or sorrow*. Heaviness is experienced by those of faith and those of none alike! A state of heaviness is produced when one's soul is grieved. All are fearful of losing their soul but faith is the soul's salvation.

1. Faith is not destroyed by heaviness; one who believes still believes, even under the burden of heaviness.
2. Neither does heaviness destroy a believer's peace, for Christ's peace passes all understanding and is inseparable from True living faith.

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3. Hope is also maintained through a living faith, undergirded by the Holy Spirit, of an incorruptible and undefiled inheritance of eternal life.
4. Joy in the glory of God is also imparted through the Holy Spirit, despite experiencing heaviness.
5. Likewise, the love of God remains an undeterred knowledge of His character and promise of His Word. We love God because He first loved us.
6. Heaviness has no power over faith for belief enables the soul to maintain holiness over temptation. Obedience through the indwelling Spirit of God enables self-control, which in turn maintains the purity of one's soul.
7. The knowledge of redemption through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ maintains faith, hope, love of God and neighbour, the peace of the Lord, joy in the Holy Spirit, all of which are evidenced by inward and outward holiness. Therefore heaviness does not destroy or even impair any part of the work of God in one's heart.

Sanctification of the Spirit, the root of True obedience, nor the result of grace and peace reigning in the faithful heart, are touched by the heaviness of a grieving soul. However, this does not mean that heaviness is a state that passes quickly but is often one of deep and lasting anguish, even in one born of the Spirit. Such heaviness of heart and soul may even influence the countenance and demeanour of physical appearance and behaviour. This could be understood as a trial of faith; an endurance of the soul expressing the outward suffering of inward affliction. Yet, those in heaviness, although sorrowful, are still able to rejoice in all things, even in the midst of their suffering.

The cause of heaviness arises out of multifarious temptations introduced by a myriad of circumstances. Physical illness or disease, pain in all its degrees, family and social relationships, work based issues and income, are just a few of life's circumstances that can tempt the faithful out of holy living and grieve the soul in sympathy with the body. Other afflictions such as bereavement over lost loved ones', poverty and homelessness resulting in hunger, as well as living under oppressive circumstances or abuse are all potential opportunities for the prowling adversary to exploit. Anguish over family or friends unsaved without faith, will perhaps cause the most spiritually vulnerable heaviness of all. Satan is always searching for the weakest point of faith and will take great delight in exploiting it. Seeds of doubt will be sown at every opportunity in the hope they take root. Blasphemous reasoning, dissatisfactions, dissolutions, and grudging thoughts are just part of his arsenal all designed to undermine faith in God, His creation, His Son, the Holy Spirit and deny the Truth of God's presence in the world.

On the other hand: Darkness is the state of being totally devoid of God in body, mind and spirit. God can and does withdraw Himself from the soul as a consequence of grieving His Holy Spirit. This can be caused by un-repentant outward or inward sin, by doing evil and neglecting to do good works, in giving way to pride and anger, being spiritually lazy, indulging in selfish desires and idolatry. However, none of these necessarily imposes permanent darkness. God can and will re-inhabit our soul if the sin being committed is genuinely repented of. God still loves us no matter what and does not want to remove His presence from us. However, the Creator of all things cannot inhabit or endorse anything corrupt. Darkness is the result of pre-meditated and un-repentant sin against God. Those in darkness are unable to rejoice as the spirit of the glory of God cannot rest upon them.

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Darkness imposes upon the heart a wilderness state that is void of the presence of the Holy Spirit, imprisoning the soul without joy indescribable or peace beyond understanding. Neither the love nor grace of God is known to those in darkness whose faith is decayed if not expunged completely by it. Forgiveness of sin is incomprehensible because their conviction of things not seen is corrupted and their spiritual trust diminished. For those in darkness, faith is replaced with unbelief, hope with despair, peace with conflict, love of God with love of the world. All the burdens of life remain irretrievably upon their own shoulders getting ever heavier without hope of anyone to lighten, let alone remove them. This is a most miserable existence and one to be viewed with compassion.

Having established the distinguishing features that separate 'heaviness' from 'darkness' we can hopefully begin to recognise how wisdom and faith go hand in hand. The Word of God is the book of all wisdom imparting knowledge of Truth and instruction of application. Both faith and the absence of faith have consequences as observed through empowerment to overcome 'heaviness' or powerlessness to repel a descent into 'darkness'. The former develops all the positives of this life, strength, endurance, love and peace. The latter develops all the negatives of this life, despair, self-absorption, jealousy and conflict. The wisdom of God is gained through knowledge of His Word, the example of His Son, Jesus, and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by faith. Those who seek and take note of God's Word will follow the example of Jesus and experience spiritual re-birth. Those who disregard God's Word will ignore the example of Jesus and experience spiritual death. The passage from Proverbs makes this very clear. Those who listen to God and live in Truth and righteousness "will be secure and will live at ease, without dread of disaster." Those who ignore God, hate knowledge and scoff at His reproof, He will, "laugh at your calamity; I will mock when panic strikes you, <sup>27</sup>when panic strikes you like a storm, and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you". Ouch! God does not pull His punches!

I conclude by way of an explanation of the poem below "Abou Ben Adhem", which was written by Leigh Hunt, a key figure of the Romantic movement in England (19<sup>th</sup> October 1784-28<sup>th</sup> August 1859). I find it both poignant to current world news and appropriate to the Scriptures above. The poem focuses on an event in the life of the Sufi saint Ibrahim bin Adham (anglicized to Abou Ben Adhem) born in Afghanistan 13<sup>th</sup> May 718 AD died 777 AD. Ben Adhem encounters an angel, who is writing a record of those who love God. The moral of the poem is that we should love God's creation of humankind, which pleases God very much. In the poem Ben Adhem loves his fellow human beings, which God appreciates. We should look toward the love and goodness inside human beings rather than the show of holiness outside. Abou was not afraid of the angel because he was a sincere and holy man who believed in God. The peace he felt in the presence of the vision made him bold enough to ask the question of his inclusion in the book of life. 'May his tribe increase' means that the narrator would like there to be more people like Abou Ben Adhem. He would like to see people love their neighbour just as Ben Adhem does. Although the author of this poem may not share the same religious perspective as Abou Ben Adhem, he shows great respect and admiration for his integrity of faith.

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Hymn/Song: **Take Time to be Holy** by William Dunn Longstaff (1822-1894) **MP 625**

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Take time to be holy, speak oft with your Lord;  
Abide in Him always, and feed on His Word.  
Make friends of God's children, help those who are weak;  
Forgetting in nothing His blessing to seek.

Take time to be holy, the world rushes on;  
Spend much time in secret with Jesus alone –  
By looking to Jesus, like Him you shall be!  
Your friends in your conduct His likeness shall see.

Take time to be holy, let Him be your guide;  
And run not before Him, whatever betide;  
In joy or in sorrow still follow your Lord,  
And, looking to Jesus, still trust in His Word.

Take time to be holy, be calm in your soul;  
Each thought and each temper beneath His control;  
Thus led by His Spirit to fountains of love,  
You soon shall be fitted for service above.

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**Poem: Abou Ben Adhem** *by* James Henry Leigh Hunt

Abou Ben Adhem, (may his tribe increase)  
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace  
And saw, within the moonlight in his room  
Making it rich, and like a Lily in bloom  
An angel writing in a book of Gold:-  
Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold  
And to the presence in the room he said  
'What writest thou?' – The vision raised its head  
And with a look made of all sweet accord  
Answered 'The names of those who love the Lord'  
'And is mine one?' said Abou 'Nay not so'  
Replied the Angel. Abou spoke more low  
But cheerily still and said 'I pray thee *more*  
Write me as one who loves his *neighbour*'.

The Angel wrote and vanished. The next night...  
It came again with a great wakening light  
And showed the names whom love of God had blessed  
And lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest!

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**Prayer:** Father and Creator of all things, help us to seek knowledge of Your Word and bless us with the wisdom of understanding; Lord Jesus Christ, help us to listen to Your teaching and bless us with commitment to follow Your example; Holy Spirit of God, help us to discern light from darkness and bless us with the power of Your presence within. **Amen!**