

A testimony: Our Heavenly Father's loving material provision

No one should regard this testimony as a hint for financial contributions. My wife, Soniah, and I merely wish to testify to the never-failing kindness of our Heavenly Father. His promises in the Word are totally trustworthy. Truly, He is an answerer of prayer, and absolutely faithful to His promises.

The Lord has provided materially for us (and our children when they were still at home) for decades now in answer to dependent prayer and trust – without us receiving a formal salary. And we have never found it necessary to hint for contributions in a scandalous manner.

This testimony merely wants to be a testimony of His endless loving-provision and faithfulness – exactly in harmony with the many promises in the Word.

What a positive testimony would it not be to the unbelieving world if all pastors – and not only some missionaries – should live this way! According to God's Word this is not only possible and completely achievable, but in fact – so we believe whole-heartedly from experience – the eminent way in which full-time congregational pastors also can (and should?) live. In my opinion, such a lifestyle wonderfully emphasizes the fact that our Heavenly Father is involved with His children in a prayer-answering way.

Let us be honest, nothing is more important than money in an unbelieving, materialistic world! When talking about hard cash and all our financial responsibilities, one is at the bedrock of reality.

One of the most wretched problems in the modern church is the many wolves who pretend to be God-called pastors. And many of them do not hesitate to milk their flocks financially (don't get me wrong, of course it does not apply to all ministers receiving regular salaries from their congregations – maybe exactly not!).

As congregations we were able to make regular contributions to missionary and charity work – inside and outside the congregation – or for whoever and whatever was deserving and/or needy. In all honesty I cannot remember us as churches ever having any serious financial troubles; on the contrary. ¹

In our elder's meetings it was seldom necessary to spend much time on the agenda point, "finance". And to hand out, was always a privilege and pleasure!

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Since the beginning of 1976, when I started studying theology at Potchefstroom University, at the age of thirty – with a wife and two children (another two daughters were born shortly thereafter) – Soniah and I have been living "in faith" as far as our material provision is concerned (since 1976 I did, however, for about 13 years receive a formal salary at intervals –

¹ For quite a number of years two full-time colleagues worked with me in the congregation – each with a wife and a number of children (as was the case with Soniah and I). They lived the same way as we did, and, although we never discussed our money-matters with each other, I never got the impression that they or their families suffered from kwashiorkor. Every family also owned their own house – admittedly not to the east of the N1 in Pretoria!

either from the university when I lectured there or from churches where I served as pastor). That simply means that up to this day (2020) we have worked and lived without a fixed income, directly trusting our Heavenly Father to provide us with whatever we need. ² It therefore means that we have lived like this for more than 30 years.

When we talk about faith, then it must be faith. We therefore try to never tell anyone or church council or whoever, about our needs. We never ask for contributions or ask for sponsors. In all integrity we attempt to never hint for donations. We do not even broadcast our lifestyle, unless it serves to honour the Lord, should we talk about it. We live before the face of our heavenly Father and seriously mind our hearts not to expect any financial compensation for whatever "services rendered" (i.e. preaching etc.).

Without implying that it is always easy to live the way we do, we can in all honesty say that, over the decades, the Lord has never failed us. He has, however, often tested us to the point of feeling that we were at the end of our tether. But we can say, in all honesty, that we have never had to miss a meal – even if our meals were not always equally fancy, tasty or plentiful.

While we are so positive and grateful for the lifestyle we lead, and our adventure of faith, we need to warn immediately. We are not talking about something one embarks upon without giving it serious consideration. Unfortunately we know about people that have been seriously hurt on this road (I don't know, but wonder whether they did not give up too soon). Before going to Potchefstroom we spent much time in prayer. And we believe that the Lord certainly led us. We are not talking about visions and dreams and prophecies (these are things we were, and still are, very cautious about — if not totally sceptical). We are talking about a deep conviction which had settled in our hearts — in harmony with God's Word. And, when we eventually came to our senses in Potchefstroom, we were there, and changing our minds and situation was not so easy. Really, it was impossible. We had burnt our bridges. There was only one way – ahead! We experienced many anxieties – especially in those early days when everything was still so new. But, of course, any adventure has its quota of fears and hardships. We are therefore not talking about "an eleven o'clock tea and biscuits at Aunt Edith's". We are talking about realities, about "tyres hitting the tar". But we are also talking about a wonderful romance in our relationship with our Heavenly Father in Christ.

Why did we continue living this way after I had completed my studies, and still continue to do so today? Why do we feel so strongly about it? Why do we never want to live differently?

There are a number of reasons.

With regard to the Word ³

In no way are we saying that the Word forbids a formal salary for full-time workers in the Kingdom of God. However, much is said in the Word encouraging us on this road of conviction.

² As for Soniah, we were convinced that her calling was to attend to our four children and our home.

³ All Scriptural quotations in what follows are from the ESV.

When Jesus sends out His disciples – first the twelve, then the seventy – one of His consistent instructions is that they should not take money and extra clothing with them (Matt 10:9-10; Mark 6:8-9; Luke 9:3; 10:4) Why not? I can think of only one reason: They had to learn to trust their Heavenly Father in all respects – also as far as their material needs are concerned.

He would provide for them; in whatever manner!

And they were indeed provided for in various and unexpected ways (Luke 8:3). On one occasion Jesus and His disciples even found a coin – enough for food – in the mouth of a fish. One cannot doubt that these men were in the school of faith. They clearly had to learn important lessons. And if this is how our Lord lived, why not us, His disciples, His followers who are called to walk in His footsteps?

It appears that this was their ongoing lifestyle – probably for the rest of their lives.

In Matt 10:10 Jesus of course says that the workman is worthy of his meat – no one argues about this fact. But the Lord uses a common example from the world around them, to emphasize the sure provision of their "Employer". Seen in this way, one can easily interpret it as an encouragement to the approach I am talking about. It is certainly not referring to a formal salary. No, they had to trust the Father to provide for them by way of the spontaneous gifts of love of His children – or in whatever way.⁴

This lifestyle may be humiliating at times (and it never harms a Christian!), but it is always beneficial.

Later the apostle Paul also writes that it is extremely important for him to serve the churches without formal payment (Acts 20:33-35; 1 Cor 4:12; 9:12b; 15–19; 2Kor 7:2; 11:7 – 12; 1 Thess 2:8-12; 2 Thess 3:7-9).

A similar attitude is also found in Nehemiah (5:14-19; also see 1 Sam 12:1-5).

The whole purport of the New Testament tells one that the Lord's pronouncement in Matthew 10:8b is a principle of the kingdom of God: "*You received it free of charge, therefore also give it free of charge.*" Handing out, serving, washing of feet! This is what the lifestyle of disciples is all about. It is the unbelievers who insist on compensation for services rendered. The rule of the world is "*buy and sell*". In the kingdom of God it is "*give and receive*".⁵

The Word is full of promises that the Father answers His children's prayers and provides their material needs – too many to mention. The *locus classicus* could possibly be Matt 6:19-34 with the central promise: ". . . seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (verse 33).

Two further verses – both in a financial and material context – are particularly precious to Soniah and me:

⁴ The denomination in which I grew up, the Reformed Church in South Africa (the "Doppers") refers to the minister's remuneration as his "*Traktement*" (from the Afrikaans word, "trakteer", which means to treat, to entertain — certainly not implying remuneration for services rendered). Clearly the old reformed fathers understood the principle I am addressing here.

⁵ Keep in mind, this of course goes for life in Christ's church. This is not about receiving a salary in the world, or about formal compensation for services rendered, or business transactions – although a Christian's attitude in respect of integrity, charitableness and kindness can also be a powerful testimony in a fallen world.

Firstly, 2 Cor 9:8 where the Greek word "*panta*" is used five times: "*And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work*" (ESV).

Secondly, Heb 13:5 with its five negatives: "*I will not forsake you. Never! No! Never and in no way will I fail you*" (own literal translation from the Greek; see also Amplified Bible, which tries its best, but is overdoing it somewhat!).

Note that the above scriptural pronouncements are directed to all Christians.

With regard to God

Our heavenly Father wants His children to live prayerfully dependent on Him – as it were from His hand (like all human fathers, not so). All of us should and can of course live as I am now arguing, whether or not there is a fixed income.

However, our experience is that one's practice and experience of this dependence dull after some time if you are simply provided for mechanically and regularly – especially if it is a big salary. You can of course experience what I am talking about, irrespective of how big your income is. *Simply hand out enough – and more and more!*

Yes, in the early days we were often anxious and thought that we had reached the end of the road. But today it is different — much easier. By experience we have learnt that our Lord Jesus' promise can indeed be understood exactly for what it says: "*Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on ...*" (Math 6:25). And although our provision very often arrives in the nick of time — as a rule before the time – without fail it does come.

Yes, we live a sober and simple life. Yes, we cannot afford to be extravagant. In fact, we are convinced that all Christians should live soberly.⁶ But Soniah and I have learnt to be content in all circumstances. In fact, times without number we have been spoiled far, far beyond what perhaps most experience. And far surpassing all material blessings, we are deeply thankful for the privilege of enjoying an intimate, exciting and life-long walk with our Heavenly Father — even though it may sometimes prove to be somewhat uphill (which, by the way, is not nearly as dangerous as the downhill sections; in fact, it is always in one way or another beneficial).⁷

Least of all do we want to be arrogant, but we do believe that such a lifestyle pleases our Lord and serves His honor. Mammon is indeed god in this world. And there are few that do not dance to his tune. The importance of money in many areas of the present-day church is a God-dishonoring disgrace.

We therefore desire that our lifestyle should be some kind of a directive – away from Mammon – to the true God; to His faithfulness and to His involvement with His children! The big

⁶ Mammon is one of the most underestimated threats for Christian disciples, and myriads of "Christians" will on that day hear the words, "*Depart from me ... For*" (Math 25:41-46).

⁷ Read the biographies of Hudson Taylor, George Müller, Brother Andrew and dozens more who testify to the provision of our Heavenly Father. And certainly thousands – no, many, many more; in fact all true Christians – have experienced this to some extent throughout the ages.

question in our world is not whether there is a God. The qualms of thousands of people – outside as well as inside the institutional church – are whether God is in any way involved with us at all. I am absolutely convinced that there are more church members in our pews who walk around with this doubt than we realize (not to mention our pulpits).

One of the greatest callings of all the Lord's disciples is to live in such a way that sceptical observers will come to the conclusion that not only does God exist, but that He is in fact intimately involved with His children by answering their prayers – that He is in their midst! Therefore, we should live in such a way that unbelievers can unmistakably see God's fingerprints on us.

This of course applies to the whole spectrum of my life as a Christian. But where money matters are concerned we find ourselves on the bed-rock of reality. This is where the "tyre hits the tar". Either you have it, or you don't. And who know this better than the people of this world?

With regard to ourselves

Soniah and I are not ascetic, neither are we heroic. But we want to grow to the image of Christ.

Unfortunately, it is a fact that all the facilities and securities of the prosperous community in our country too often lift one up high and dry above the levels where God's water paper polishes at its best. However, life in direct material dependence of the Father places one in an excellent position to be formed and polished to the image of Christ (by saying this we do not want to imply that we shine like bottles. We still struggle with remaining sin just like any other Christian!).

But our lifestyle certainly brings about experiences and adventures of faith that help to protect one from a prosaic and lukewarm type of Christianity, without any romance in one's walk of love with the Lord. No adventure is of course always enjoyable and easy; as a matter of fact, it necessarily entails many moments or seasons of anxiety and hardship. This is the experience of all who follow our lifestyle. Later on, however, it yields a *"peaceable fruit of righteousness"* (Heb 12:11). And throughout the ages there were, and still are today, many thousands of Christians — especially in the mission field — who experience exactly what we are talking about here.

Such a lifestyle gives one the mandate of testimony – especially if one is a preacher. One's conscience testifies to the fact that you live according to your convictions and preaching. You are not merely a professional man earning and pursuing a job, status, security and fringe benefits. Furthermore, it produces boldness and the power of testimony to unbelievers who are only too inclined to accuse one of such crooked motifs.

Your Heavenly Father determines and orchestrates your income and lifestyle. And who would know your needs better than Him. Please note, this is not just about scaling down; on the contrary, those unforeseen peak expenses experienced by this world's salary slaves pose no problem for the One to whom belongs the cattle on a thousand hills. And, in any case. He delights in, at least from time to time, to abundantly open the windows of heaven to His children.

With regard to the church

The problem experienced by so many congregations, i.e. employer-employee syndrome, is not

created easily if a pastor and his wife follow our lifestyle. In fact, it creates a dynamic of spontaneity and mutual appreciation in a church. Contributions for the minister and his family is always a personal and *ad hoc* matter. It is the decision of every member – whether, what, how, when and how much. And every time something is given it creates a spark of appreciation and love. This does not happen so easily when a salary is paid punctually and once-off by cheque – or worse, via the internet! Even if contributions are made anonymously, as described above – often the excellent way, and as a rule in our case – it is always a small adventure of faith for the giver as well as the recipient.

No minister can ever be everything for everyone in a body of believers. Should one earn a big salary to boot, people simply have less patience with one's failures – especially maybe those making large contributions (may I say this carefully, I in fact think there is often justification for such indignation as there are too many greedy fat-cat ministers in some congregations – especially in certain circles).

However, if one serves the congregation in the way I am suggesting, all kinds of expectations are quickly converted into appreciation. Now there is simply no longer a favourable climate for problems of attitude and tension. Every contribution now given to the pastor and his family – especially if it is given anonymously – is indeed a voluntary gift that can be changed or ceased at will.⁸

Such a lifestyle furthermore helps a pastor and his wife in their relationship with the poor in the body. On the one hand one does not struggle with all kinds of feelings of guilt about one's fat salary, while so many people – who are also part of the body – have to be satisfied with the bare minimum. On the other hand it removes many stumbling blocks in their attitude towards you as pastor. They know you are not a fat-cat (Ezek. 34:7-10, 17-20). And they know you can completely identify with their trials.

Furthermore, a church's life is greatly simplified by following this lifestyle. It helps to remain an organism and to withstand the tentacles of unhealthy institutionalism. The administration of budgets, taxes, pensions, medical funds, leave records, telephone accounts, etc, etc can become a cumbersome task. This is why church board meetings are often swallowed up by administrative matters – totally different to how things were probably done way back in a New Testament church.

Yes, but . . .

Does God's Word not instruct the flock to attend to the needs of their full-time shepherd(s)? Of course! But, the question is not "*whether?*", but "*how?*"

⁸ We never took offerings in the churches where I served as pastor. Especially visitors appreciated this. At the exit we had a box in which people could place contributions voluntarily. After the service two elders or deacons would open the box — something in which I was never involved in. Most of the contributions were intended for the church's needs. However, there were often envelopes – almost always from anonymous donors – with names of addressees written on them, usually those of other members, or missionaries, or whoever. Therefore, nobody knew who the contributor was. And often, not always, there was an anonymous envelope (or more) for Soniah and me.

When our lifestyle is followed, nothing stops anyone to remain faithful to God's instruction. We are merely saying that we do not claim anything and that our eyes are fixed on our caring Father. This was exactly how the apostle Paul approached matters.

Are there disadvantages?

Are there any disadvantages to such an approach? Maybe some dangers.

Some members of the congregation may become lax as far as their contributions are concerned. One could argue that, in the absence of huge salary expenses, the church often does not require much.

The solution is clearly that a congregation should get its priorities right. Priority must be given to charity and outreach. People's contributions should after all be directly aligned with them feeling that they contribute towards something that matters. And what is important to true believers as far as contributions are concerned is the benefit to the Kingdom. Without doubt a vast amount of money will become available for mission work and charity if all shepherds of churches follow the lifestyle we suggest in this testimony.

This approach may cause insecurity with some members: If our minister is not bound by a salary and fringe benefits, how can we be certain that he will not run off tomorrow? Very well, it may be a problem if the minister is a "hireling" (John 10:12). But then it would in any case be better if he leaves, the sooner the better. However, someone that lives out his calling as a shepherd before the face of God need not be bound by worldly securities in order to remain in his position.

Could this lifestyle not cause the minister and his wife experiencing so many financial problems later on that they can no longer concentrate on their calling? We always hear how people warn against this. However, this is not our experience. This does not mean that our road is always an easy one. But we know that times of hardship have always been the reason for much prayer, spiritual deepening and adventures of faith. In any case, our experience is rather that we have mostly had sufficient and at times even more than needed.

Testimonies

We experienced our first big adventure six weeks after moving to Potchefstroom for my theological studies.

We started off with some money in the bank. However, almost all of it went toward buying a very old and small house conveniently close to the campus. And one always needs extra money when one moves into a new place – especially when it requires a lot of attention. As a result, all of our stored-up funds had been spent after six weeks.

At that stage we still planned that Soniah would have to find a job — as we had anticipated. Her salary as Social Worker would provide the fees for the crèche for the two children, as well as approximately half of our budget.

But employment for a social worker was very scarce in Potchefstroom. We then read in the newspaper that an establishment for mentally retarded people just outside the town had a vacancy for an occupational therapist. In spite of the fact that she was not really qualified for the job, she applied. And, lo and behold, she got the job!

Early in the morning our two little girls, aged five and three, were tearfully taken to the crèche in our little yellow car, while their mother went off to earn a pittance for the poor-box. And I stayed at home attempting to cram Greek, Hebrew and Latin vocabulary into my head. But I forgot more than I could remember. After all, engineers are not renowned for their ability to memorise – they work out everything from first principles. Give them mathematics, yes, but classical languages! Fortunately, I did not do too badly in philosophy, but my language lecturers thought I was either lazy or stupid!.

After one month, however, things took a drastic turn.

Our children were regressing – they had to wear nappies again. Their mother was clapped when she had to get out of bed in the mornings, after she had been washing and ironing until late the previous evening. And dad *"amo, amas, amat'ed"*, hating every moment of it with a passion.

It could not go on like this! No, not a day longer!

One particular day I decided not to attend classes. I had to finally sort things out with the Lord. I prayed earnestly! No, I struggled and groaned! I simply had to get wisdom and clarity — or else I had to return to engineering, which at this point in time looked very enticing!

At lunch time I heard our little yellow Alfa stop at the back door. Soniah walked in with a broad smile and said, *"Guess what? I got fired! Head office notified us that a social worker is not an occupational therapist. I simply had to resign!"*

My wife and I danced around the dining room table. Our prayers had been answered in a wonderful way. From that moment on we were going to trust our Heavenly Father to provide for us! From that moment on Soniah was going to live out her calling as mother and housewife. From that moment on we were going to live according to God's orders. And our Heavenly Father was going to provide for us! And if not, I was free to return to engineering. We really had no other options, and we simply embraced the way forward in faith!

Exactly that is what our Father began to do! In dozens of ways. Do remember, we did not trumpet our needs. We trusted our Heavenly Father to provide. Our pleadings were for our Lord's ears only. For us this was a non-negotiable principle. If not for this principle, we would not know whether it really was our Heavenly Father's provision, or whether it was merely people's response to our "hints".

On many occasions an envelope containing two or more money notes appeared under our front door when we woke up in the mornings. People we hardly knew – a farmer and his wife – who lived two or three blocks from us came and told us that they felt the need to give us a slaughtered sheep once a month. Etc etc.

Our Heavenly Father was so kind to us! He provided for us faithfully, especially as far as material things are concerned. As I write here, I remember how a dear brother in Christ – at that time a big farmer in the Free State – instructed his broker/market agent to send the proceeds of half a railway truck of potatoes to us. What excitement and wonder this brought about in our hearts when we tore open that envelope with its fat cheque!

And to appreciate this excitement one must remember that we were at that stage really trusting the Lord for providing our needs directly — even super-naturally, using "crows" if necessary. Exactly that He did unflinchingly, in many ways. And remember, a family needs more

than food and drink. We had a small bond on our house, there were university fees and books, water and electricity — the list goes on and on.

Yes, we lived as frugally as possible. Simplicity was the name of the game. We never used our car when we could walk or bike — the two small girls with me on the cycle, one on the cross-bar in front, and one in a basket behind me. I could even handle a third one, if necessary — in a rucksack on my back. The fourth one? Well, Soniah's bike had a basket as well.

You see, for our Father it is not only about providing for His children; He also wants to teach them valuable lessons. And one of the most important of these is to understand that Hé is the One that intervenes, and cares, and provides, and loves. He is our Father *par excellence*. And when your godsend arrives every time when you reach breaking point, just in time, it starts to penetrate your sluggish heart that it is really His provision. It is all about walking with God, about a personal relationship with Him.

Another outstanding and somewhat funny experience we still remember very well.

Our shelves and purse were empty and our babies' milk supply had run out. Soniah and I could fast, but when babies are hungry you have a problem. The next morning Jeanette Lerofolo, the beloved Tswana woman (whom Soniah had the privilege of leading to Christ) and who some days helped Soniah in the house and with the little girls, arrived with a shopping bag filled with powder milk and other groceries.

To appreciate this, one has to understand that she was married to Jacob, a cripple and invalid, who could not really work. They were as poor as church-mice! The bulging shopping bag continued to arrive for a couple of days (perhaps a week) until we again received some money in the mail, or a note or two were passed under our front door.

What had happened was that a friend of the Lerofolo's, who was a packer at a grocery shop in town, got permission from his tender-hearted manager to take groceries — that actually had to be destroyed because its "use-by date" had been reached — in his *bakkie* to his house. After work he remembered his friends, the very poor Lerofolo's, and delivered some of his load at their house. When they received it, they in turn remembered the Van der Walts and their critical situation. This meant that we and our babies ate for a week — from a small little house in Ikageng.

You might wonder whether we found any worms in the food — after all its "use-by date" had already been reached. We do not know, because we dared not look. After all, one does not look a gift horse in the mouth. One certainly does not do this when it is a gift from the hand of your Heavenly Father. In any case, any additional protein would not have done us any harm!

However, I do have to add: During my first year studying BA, I held two minor jobs during two weekday afternoons, helping first-year students in Industrial Chemistry with their technical drawings. For this I earned the royal amount of R100 per month.

Then, at the end of that year, Professor Pottie (departmental head) called me and told me that their glass blower was completing his doctorate (if I remember correctly) and was leaving. The job was mine at R200 per month for three afternoons a week.

I received six weeks' training by a Dutch gentleman in Pretoria at the Fuel Research Institute, and from January 1977 I was the university's glass blower — for the next year and a

half — with my own workshop (mind you!). Especially at first I was rather clumsy and regularly burnt my fingers in the Bunsen burner, but I enjoyed the creative work tremendously.

Then one day Prof Pottie asked me to come and see him again. He told me the university was working toward an engineering faculty and that they were looking for a professional civil engineer – a senior lecturer (goodness me!). Suitably qualified people were very scarce in those days. He ordered me, "Your application must be on my desk on Monday."

However, I told the Prof that I was done with Engineering and was now studying Theology, and I was definitely not going to cease my studies. And on that note I left. I hardly prayed about it again – the matter was settled, after all!

A short time later the Prof called me and asked where my application was. I replied "But I explained to you, professor." The professor's response was simple: "I want your application, not later than Monday, Van der Walt! We will of course try to accommodate your circumstances as far as possible. But of course, this job will have to enjoy first priority; it stands to reason."

For the first time Soniah and I prayed seriously about the matter, and after the weekend my CV and application were on the Prof's desk. However, I told him that I had one condition, namely that I was not going to do research (as though I was capable of doing anything of the kind). But, yes, I would lecture. He could bring it on!

One of the busiest and most satisfying half-decades of my life commenced. And yes, I certainly worked myself to a standstill. Over the following years I had to lecture over quite a spectrum of engineering subjects – Strength of Materials, Structural Engineering, Hydraulics, Hydrology, Construction and Planning, Land Surveying and one or two more. But let me emphasize again, it was basic stuff, all on a pre-graduate level.

In the mornings I would commute like one possessed on my purple racing bike between Engineering and Theology. I only had five minutes (or was it ten, I cannot remember?) between lectures – then one or two at Engineering, then again one at Theology, then back on my bike again. With my white coat on I would fill the black boards with Mathematics; minutes later I was studying New Testament Exegesis and Dogmatics, or whatever. To and fro as the classes required – those I had to give, and those I had to attend. I became super fit (also intellectually), lost weight, and was unbelievably happy and fulfilled.

At 13:00 I used to rush home, greeted my wife, gave my children a hug (all four of them, in turn), had a quick lunch, took a ten-minute nap, and walked into my office at Engineering by 14:00. There I would be busy overseeing practicals, writing notes, preparing for the following day, mark answer papers and be bored in meetings (given enough people attending, I would sit at the back in order not to be noticed by the chairman, with a theological book on my lap). Daily I would be finished late in the afternoon or early in the evening, and rush home — where I would kiss my wife, hugg my children, then laugh and play with them for a while on the lounge carpet, enjoy a quick supper, and spend fifteen minutes of family devotions. At 20:00 I would go to my outside room — we had a small one behind the single garage — studying Theology until eleven or twelve at night, or even one o'clock in the morning, when I would go to bed and sleep like a log. I would be up again at 06:00, took a quick shower, then went to my study where I would spend an hour to read my Bible and pray (I could not go without it, and still cannot). Then I would be on my bike and be at Engineering or Theology by 08:00.

I worked seven days a week (Sundays, besides two church services, only Theology, though!!). And then on Mondays it started all over again.

During December my family and I went on holiday between Christmas and New-Year's day, and maybe a few more days before and after. Most of the time we visited my in-laws on the farm, where I slept a lot and read theology books, or Christian biographies.

Through those years my wife was a toughy – she supported me like a rock and never complained. She only loved and served me. And she cared lovingly for the daughters.

For the first time in my life I mastered basic engineering (and more than once I was ashamed because I had graduated at Stellenbosch with far less than a perfect knowledge of the academical side of my profession).

During my time as engineering lecturer my Theology marks dropped slightly (if not more). After all, I attended only half of my lectures. My professors were very lenient and understanding, and pretended not to miss me. They knew my situation. After all, I walked gowned alongside them in the academic processions.

As far as some of the classes were concerned, my good excuse for absence was a relief (it was a pebble in boot to sleep uncomfortably under a bombardment of — in my estimation — irrelevant contents). But there were indeed also those lecturers and subjects that I did not want to miss at any cost (I still remember the dear and brilliant professors as though it were yesterday).

Eventually I managed to graduate in the minimum time permitted — but definitely not *Cum Laude*.

After my studies I still lectured for another year, but resigned after a number of wonderful years at the Puk's new Engineering faculty. This I did in order to commence working full-time in a church-plant ministry. Very privileged, very exciting!

Just a last meaningful remark. From the moment I started receiving my first salary at the university, a new season of the Lord's material care commenced of course, and His previous way of provision came to an end. Only after five years it would start again.

Our Heavenly Father in Christ is unspeakably good to Soniah and me! And He knows us and our needs through and through, intimately and minutely! He is truly an answerer of prayer!

We can witness about so much of His faithfulness! We still remember the paper bags with quail eggs, hardly bigger than marbles; the ostrich necks; the ten hectares of maize we had to reap ourselves and sell from a side-walk; second-hand clothing in black bags that kept us warm and tidy (I wore some of those clothes until recently – many years later). After all, wealthy people do not buy cheap and inferior stuff! We remember the freezer full of hot cross buns that meant that we did not need to buy or bake bread for two months (strangely, I am still fond of hot cross buns!). We have received more than one car as a gift — one or two fancy and fairly new, one or two not nearly so smart and new.

And I can continue in this way – right until today!

But what have we learnt from these experiences? Let me just say this: Naturally one comes under the impression more and more of our Heavenly Father's personal involvement and unfailing trustworthiness and love. And as time moves on you learn to trust Him more and more. Something that has been written on our hearts, is that neither the powder milk (although so much smaller as a gift from a very poor person), nor the cheque for the potatoes (from a prosperous farmer), was a more loving gift of our Father. Categories such as rich and poor,

expensive and cheap, more and less, easy and difficult, sophisticated and simple, are as a rule not important when it comes from our Father. Each one is equally precious! *The value of a gift depends on its value for the giver.*

This comes to the fore very clearly in the poor widow's two small coins that were, in terms of Kingdom-standards, worth more than that given by the rich men from their abundance (Luke 21:1-4).

Conclusion

We stress once again: We do not think that we are more spiritual than others because of the way we live. And the Lord does not provide for us because we live so closely to Him, or because our faith is so "big". No, certainly not! We simply have a faithful Heavenly Father

We are painfully aware of how much brokenness and remaining sin there still is in our lives! And people who know us well, certainly know it as well as we do.

But we are in Christ, and in Him reconciled with God! He truly is involved in our lives as one who mercifully hears and answers the prayers of his children — prayers in harmony with His promises in the Word. He is our loving and caring Father. He is infinitely good, and His faithfulness is unimpeachable. As humans we, after all, do not deserve anything at all!

But let us never forget, there is a condition: "... seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness ..." (Matt 6:33).

Because our Heavenly Father is merciful; because the Lord Jesus is an absolutely faithful High Priest; because the Holy Spirit is our always-present Helper — we have food on our table every day. That is why we have been able to meet all our obligations every month to this day.

This lifestyle is not always easy, one does not live in the lap of luxury (should any Christian live in luxury?). But it plays a vital role in making one's discipleship and ministry, in the footprints of the Lord Jesus, and under the wings of the Heavenly Father, an unequalled and never-boring adventure!

Can you understand why we have peace and joy in our hearts, why we love the Triune God — and sleep peacefully at night? Can you understand why we don't ever want to live in any other way?

Nico and Soniah van der Walt

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