

ONE THING...

**Seventh Day Baptist
Week of Prayer**

January 6 - 12, 2019

Seventh Day Baptist Week of Prayer • January 6-12, 2019

Sponsored by the

Seventh Day Baptist World Federation • www.sdbwf.org

During the first full week of January since 1967, Seventh Day Baptists around the world have united in prayer by sharing in meditations centered on a theme chosen by the author of the SDB Week of Prayer booklet. This year's theme is "One Thing." And for the first time, we are encouraging prayers each day of the week for all countries in the world where Seventh Day Baptists exist; not just the countries which are members of the World Federation.

Purposes of the SDB World Federation include:

1. **To provide increased communication** among Seventh Day Baptist groups around the world.
2. **To promote projects of mutual interest** which will benefit from international cooperation.
3. **To stimulate fellowship** among Seventh Day Baptist Christians through periodic meetings of representatives between Conferences or groups and programs of mutual aid.
4. **To receive and evaluate statements of need** as may come to the Federation and to share such expression of need with its members, inviting their response as the Lord may lead.
5. **To provide leadership training** for Conference leaders, pastors and lay leaders appropriate to each individual conference, as determined through consultation.

Contributions:

The SDB World Federation encourages all member Conferences to designate an offering from their churches at least once a year in support of the purposes of the SDB World Federation. Other contributions and designations from Conferences, churches, and/or individuals are also welcome. Please make all checks or money orders out to SDBWF. Contributions may be mailed to: Treasurer, SDB World Federation, P.O. Box 1311, West Palm Beach, FL 33402 or you may also donate via PayPal at treasurer@sdbwf.org

Sessions:

The last General Session was held in Brazil (Curitiba, Parana) on January 22-28, 2017 with the theme, "The Kingdom of God is Like...". The next General Session is planned to occur in North America in 2022.

Officers for the World Federation include General Secretary Andrew Samuels (general.secretary@sdbwf.org); President Luciano Baretto Nogueira de Moura; First Vice President & Vice President for Caribbean Claudia Ferguson; Treasurer Garfield Miller (treasurer@sdbwf.org); Assistant General Secretary Michael Spearl; Recording Secretary Karen Umana; Regional Vice Presidents: Canaan Phiri (Africa), Douglas Machado (South America), and John Pethtel (North America).

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About the Author

This year's thoughts for devotions for the Seventh Day Baptist World Federation-sponsored Week of Prayer have been written by **Pastor Canaan Rabson Karonga Phiri**.

Born on 13th January, 1963 to a Seventh Day Baptist Preacher Rabson Phiri and his wife Lydia, Canaan made a personal decision for Christ at a Youth Camp in August 1974 at the age of 11. Married to Mercy Phiri in April 1991, they are blessed with five children; three sons and two daughters.

He started his career as an educationist, graduated with a Bachelor of Education degree from the University of Malawi and later did various Post Graduate trainings in Malawi, USA, Kenya and Singapore in such fields as Ministry, Publishing, Paralegal, Corporate Governance, Strategic Planning and Development, and Leadership. He has worked in different organizations and in various leadership positions. Following his conference's nomination and recommendation, he was appointed to serve as General Secretary of the Malawi Council of Churches, an umbrella body for 25 protestant mainline churches for six years. While serving in that capacity, he was elected president of the Fellowship of Christian Councils in Southern Africa, responsible for 14 countries and also as Chairman of the steering committee of Economic Justice Network of Southern Africa.

Canaan has built a strong career in Corporate Governance having chaired two International Boards and served on over 5 Parastatal (Government owned) Boards as Trustee or Board member, on 4 para-church Boards like Malawi Interfaith Aids Association, Christian Health Association of Malawi (a body looking after Christian Hospitals and health facilities) and the Association for Christian Educators in Malawi (a body responsible for all Church-owned education facilities). He is currently engaged as an International Field Representative for South-

ern Africa in the children's ministry of the Samaritan's Purse organization on consultancy arrangement terms.

He has had the privilege to attend many high profile forums and most notably was part of the Malawi delegation to the United Nations General Assembly on HIV and Aids, representing the Malawi Faith community in his capacity as Chairperson of the Malawi Interfaith Aids Association.

Canaan accepted the call to serve God as Pastor in 2002 and was ordained on 31st January 2004. He has since pastored different Churches in the Central Africa Conference of Seventh Day Baptists in Blantyre and Lilongwe, Malawi. He has served on the Board of Trustees of the conference two separate terms and on both of which, he served as chairperson (Conference President). He has on two different occasions represented the CAC at the World Federation in 2003 and 2017, both held in Curitiba, Brazil.

He likes interacting with people of all ages, various status and of different cultural backgrounds and to this extent he has widely traveled globally attending various workshops and conferences and has been accorded to speak or present on different forums. He likes teaching and his greatest passion is Church Growth.

Canaan Phiri is the current SDB World Federation Vice President for Africa. His vision is to see the true message as propagated by Seventh Day Baptists spread all over Africa and the chain of SDB churches linked from Cape to Cairo.



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Introduction

Life is about making choices. A single seemingly small choice made in life can determine or shape one's entire destiny. Oftentimes we come to a crossroad and no matter what, we need to take one route. "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal is God, follow Him." That's how Elijah challenged the Israelites to choose one (1 King 18: 21). Such crossroads may be physical, emotional or otherwise. Real choices are about leaving one's comfort zone. While some choices are made as a team, most profound choices are not about groups, they are very personal. Joshua said, "Choose for yourselves today whom you will serve but as for me..., I will serve the Lord." There are times when one needs time to think deeply before taking a decision. Definite spiritual resolutions should be made there and then... "Choose today, whom you want to serve...." (Joshua 24:15). "Today as you hear His voice, harden not your heart" (Hebrews 3:15).

As we commence this year 2019, there will be various choices and resolutions we will be called upon to make in the course of the year. The concept of 'One Thing' is about making important decisions of life, amongst several seemingly important things, but 'One Thing' will be needful.

(Luke 10:42) We will be called upon to select one amongst various possible and lucrative things.

'One Thing' is about being focused when faced with several equally important choices of life. 'One Thing' is about determination. When bogged down with a lot of challenges and stumbling blocks in our paths, 'One Thing' is about striving on to achieve our goal. 'One Thing' is about not being complacent or contented, striving to achieve the best even when you may be tempted to believe you are already there. Always feel that you yet have a mile to cover (Phil 3:12-14).

In this year's Week of Prayer, we will be exploring the theme, 'One Thing.' The Bible has about 16 passages which explicitly has the phrase 'One Thing.' However, there are many more that implicitly drive towards the same meaning. As we explore this theme, we will be studying some scriptures where some Biblical characters chose one thing amongst several options or were being asked to make such a choice, and derive our life lessons from there. As we start the New Year, we will have to make our resolutions to guide us throughout the year, we will thus be asked to choose one thing amidst several options.

One Thing Lacking: A Call to Selfless Service

Scriptures: Luke 18: 18 -25 (or Matt 19:16-24)

*"You still lack **one thing** "... Luke 18:22*

The young man was not just rich but he was very religious. From childhood he had been indoctrinated to memorize the law and diligently kept the law. He obviously visited the temple as often as set prayer times were called, he tithed and gave all required offerings. If anything he just came to Jesus to get confirmation that he was on the right path. Despite all these efforts, Jesus noticed that the young man fell short of one thing. When Jesus hit that low nerve, the young man who happened to be a ruler as well, left disappointed and frustrated. Wealth is a symbol of achievements, wealth guarantees comfortable livelihood, wealth gives someone a position of status in society, wealth is a potential to positions of power. Some acquire it by inheritance while for some it takes hard work and sweat.

I come from a society where education is generally perceived as a gateway to wealth or at least a comfortable life. Each parent would send his child to school not because education is bliss but to guarantee him a good job and consequently good income and comfortable living. The Education system is through a bottle neck. Those who manage to go to the University must pass the country's School Certificate level with flying colors. Those who score very high automatically qualify for Government scholarships. The best candidates are filtered to train as Medical Doctors, Engineers, Lawyers and such prestigious and rewarding disciplines. One would stun the society and be perceived insane if he or she would score very high grades and declared that he/she wants to go to a Bible School/College and be a full time minister of the Gospel.

The Rich young ruler must have been in similar hot shoes. Selling and distributing all his wealth meant losing power, status and

comfort. Following Jesus day by day could have further not only meant being poor and joining the degraded of society, but could also actually have meant being homeless and destitute. The society would have likewise questioned his thinking capacity. Was it not enough serving God without actually disposing of his riches?

Jesus challenged the young man that his religious life was not enough. He needed to take a very risky leap into the unknown space. The young man had two things to choose from. He weighed the cost of keeping his wealth and maintaining his nominal religion versus the cost of losing his wealth, putting the memorized law into practice, following Jesus, and attaining eternal life. He opted for one thingto retain his wealth at whatever cost, even if it meant missing out on eternal life. For this young man, one thing - wealth - was a hindrance to his entry into the kingdom.

Jesus saw one thing as a hindrance for this young man to offer his service to God. It was his wealth.

Reflections:

What other characters in the Bible do you know who left their comfort zone to serve God full time? Do you know of others around you who have done the same?

What is the one thing that is a stumbling block to your full commitment to God's service?

What risky step are you ready to take to attain eternal life and fully serve God?

Pray for Seventh Day Baptists in Australia*, Brazil*, Burundi*, Cameroon, Canary Islands, and Chile.

*Conferences which are members of the Seventh Day Baptist World Federation.

One Thing You Know:

Telling our Story - Proclaiming Our Faith Through Our Personal Experience

Scripture: John 9

"... One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" John 9:25b

"Once was lost, but now I am found; was blind but now I see," were the words from a sermon preached on January 1, 1773 by John Newton, an initial slave ship captain who later opposed slavery and the slave trade. He was transformed into one of the powerful English evangelical preachers in British history and author of hundreds of hymns. "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me," is a hymn of testimony originally written by him to accompany his New Year's Day sermon. The hymn is a testimony from the heart based on his actual experience. This is one of the greatest songs of our times translated into various languages and though centuries old, still remains fresh and relevant to most of us.

In the scriptural text, when the Pharisees asked the parents of the healed man to say something about their son, their response was, "He is of age, ask him." (v23). When the Pharisees made all sorts of unfavorable remarks about Jesus, the healed blind man in his response said, "I don't care whatever you have to say against him, one thing I know is that I was blind, but now I see." His personal experience surpassed whatever others could say about Jesus. Although the man had not been with Jesus for a long time, his transformational experience indicated that 'one thing' was enough to make him speak for Jesus without fearing the consequences that would befall him. In the man's statement we derive two lessons; the courage to testify and the contents of his testimony.

Courage: In a similar incident when Peter and John were threatened to stop preaching Jesus, in response, they were able to challenge the authorities saying, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:19-20) Their courage was derived from their personal experience with Jesus; they saw Him and heard Him.

Many are times when we have been timid to defend our faith. Jesus has been mocked in our presence, the Sabbath has been torn apart in our hearing, and our denomination has been degraded before us. This may be because we profess the Christ we have had no personal experience with. We may still be blind and still lost. Like Sceva's boys, we tend to proclaim the Jesus we do not know personally. (Acts 19:13-15) We neither need the healed blind man nor John Newton to speak our experiences; we are of age and ought to speak for ourselves.

Testimony: This man didn't quite understand what had happened to him, but what he did know is that he was a changed man. There is a lot in life (and faith) we don't know. There is a lot we will never know, but there is truth that is so significant that we do know. "ONE THING I do know, I was blind but now I see."

Blindness can be categorized into two forms; the physical and the spiritual. Jesus came to deal with both. Sin is the major cause of the later (John 9: 40-41). There are those born in religious traditions that offer wrong teachings. Some open up to hear the truth while others deliberately refuse to hear the truth. They opt to remain blind like the Pharisees. The worst cases are of those who have known the truth but have drifted into error. Theological myopia is the worst cause of spiritual blindness affecting the world today (2 Timothy 3:5, 7; 4:2-4).

Reflections:

How often have I sang John Newton's song, and does it mean anything to my own life? .

If you could truly understand one thing only, what would it be?

Pray for Seventh Day Baptists in Democratic Republic of Congo, Cuba, Czech Republic, Ecuador, England*, and Ethiopia.

*Conferences which are members of the Seventh Day Baptist World Federation.

One Thing was evident, they had been with Jesus:

Reflecting Jesus In Our Characters Scripture: Acts 4: 1-20

*Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized (**one thing**) that they had been with Jesus" Acts 4:13*

What is the source of our confidence? Is it our position, our big titles? Is it our education or our connections?

My job with an ecumenical organization at one time used to take me to various forums and to meetings with high dignitaries in the religious and political realm. Often times I used to be dwarfed when it came to introductions ... "I am Bishop so and so, Apostle so and so, Prophet so and so.. and when the microphone comes to me, I would timidly say, "I am Pastor so and so." It becomes even more challenging when asked to even mention what denomination you come from. Others would turn around and likely say in their hearts, 'My friend how did you find yourself here? What brings you to this forum?' In such forums, it would be a grave mistake for the organizers to make someone like me lead devotions, and they would even think twice before offering me to say a table grace. When choosing someone to minister, organizers want to know who is who and whose Curriculum Vitae is richest and what denomination he comes from. Before a preacher starts expounding the word, even the audience would yearn to learn who their preacher is, in terms of what prefixes his name or from what denomination is he, before they could tune their ears on. We live in a world where spirituality is judged or associated with education and titles and the size of the denomination one comes from. As much as they expect someone to speak about Jesus, little do they ask if the person had ever met or been with Jesus. We so much think that knowledge of Jesus goes with the titles or theological qualifications. Even in the days of Jesus, it mattered a lot under which Rabbi one was tutored. They had such great names as Gamaliel, Shammai or even Nicodemus.

When Peter and John, the ex-fishermen, were being summoned to face the Sanhedrin, there was no need for the Sanhedrin to even involve their learned lawyers to prosecute them nor involve renowned Rabbis to engage them in theological debate. It was a very simple and straight forward hearing. They were dealing with uneducated and common men. When Peter and John stood up to speak, the

Sanhedrin met the shock of their life. The men were courageous, they had confidence, they spoke with authority, and above all they were knowledgeable and wise. The gathering was stunned but realized one thing the two simple looking men had been with Jesus. People were able to see the characteristics of Jesus in the two men.

Often times it takes people to ask us whether we are Christians or of what religion (if any) we are. Scriptures say let your manner of life or conduct be worthy of the Gospel of Christ (Phil. 1:27). People should be able to identify Christlike traits in us and realize we have been with Christ. Of the many credentials we may have, of paramount importance is to have met and been with Christ. If there is one thing we can boast for or brag about is that we have Christ, and His truth is in us (2 Cor. 11:10). The biggest and most honorable title one ought to have is that he is called a Christian (Acts 11:26) not just by title but in deeds. The highest qualification is to have met Christ and been with Christ, though not physically. Paul taught and wrote all his epistles, not because he had been a Pharisee, not because he had been under the tutorage of the renowned Rabbi, but because of one thing; he met Jesus on the way to Damascus. When he roles out his Curriculum Vitae, he catalogues his experience with Christ (2 Cor. 11:17-30). The most prestigious denomination that we should boast about is not the name Seventh Day Baptist, but the denomination that has Christ, teaches Christ and practices what Christ also taught and upheld.

Reflections:

Have you ever met a situation where you have had to defend yourself and what you believe?

Have you ever been challenged to defend your denomination? What did you say?

Have your accusers or opposers been able to see Christ in you or in your denomination?

Are people around us able to see Christ in our lives or in our denomination?

Pray for Seventh Day Baptists in Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Conakry, Guyana*, Haiti, and India*.

*Conferences which are members of the Seventh Day Baptist World Federation.

One Thing Desired: Investing in the Kingdom

Scripture: Psalm 27: 4

One thing have I desired of the Lord, that I will seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life ... and to inquire in His temple. Psalm 27:4

Whenever I am traveling and I come to check into a hotel, funds permitting, I always want to have a nice and comfortable room even if it may just be for a night. I would so much want to be home even away from home. That is the very reason we beautify our houses to the best of our ability, and put in all sorts of entertainment facilities with the aim of feeling comfortable while there.

David's greatest desire was to live in the house of God, in the temple, for ever. That is why when he compared his house to that of the Lord, which was by far inferior, he felt very bad. This was not a place where he could spend his entire life; it was simply not habitable.

I remember one Sabbath when we entered a certain Church building, our little 3 year old son looked at the type of seats in that church and he immediately started dragging my wife saying, "We can't be here; Mum let's go home." When the mother tried to resist, the boy started crying out loudly, to our embarrassment. Unfortunately, I was the one preaching and we could not immediately take leave, hence my wife had to spend the entire service sitting outside the church. This was not the type of place where my son could join David saying, "I rejoiced when they said, 'let's go to the house of God'" (Psalm 122:1). Often times, going to church even for many adults, becomes more of a burdensome and worrisome norm than an excitement. Some of our structures offer little or no comfort and sometimes our type of

worship makes the stay boring, hence it makes people miss the comfort of their homes.

No wonder therefore that David made it a priority to build a state of the art house for the Lord, his God; a place not just befitting the status and honor of God, but a place where he too would feel comfortable and not miss his house. Where one puts his investment is where he would desire to be (Matthew 6:21). Although David was not allowed to personally build a house for God, he put in a lot of investment for the temple his son would build (1 Chronicles 22:5-19, 1 Kings 5:5).

Over and above the physical structures we put up for the service of God, our spiritual life and services towards the work of the Kingdom are investments towards the mansions the Lord Jesus is building for us in Heaven (John 14:1).

Our heart's desire determines our priorities.

Reflections:

What is that one thing that you personally desire that drives your goals and priorities?

David's goal was to build God a magnificent house. What is your goal?

How do you view your local church structure?

What is that one thing that you would personally want to contribute towards the Lord's house?

Pray for Seventh Day Baptists in Indonesia, Ivory Coast, Jamaica*, Kenya*, Lebanon, and Liberia.

*Conferences which are members of the Seventh Day Baptist World Federation.

One Thing Handy: Putting to use your abilities, however simple

Scriptures: Exodus 3: 1-21; 4:1-3

*What is that in your hand? He said, "A rod."
Exodus 4:2*

When Moses received the question, 'what is that in your hand?' he may have checked twice in both his hands to be double sure if there was anything valuable. The one and only thing he had was a rod. It was not so much a fashionable walking stick or anything artistic, but something simply made or some kind of walking stick just made from a straight branch of a shrub.

Moses' stick was probably not very fashionable. When the Lord asked him what he had in his hand, he could even have said, "Lord, I have nothing save for this useless stick." And when the Lord said, "Throw it down", Moses could have even understood the Lord to mean he should throw it away or just put it away as he had earlier done with the sandals, as its presence was not befitting holy grounds.

To the contrary, the Lord meant to use this one thing; a simple stick, for the redemption of the children of Israel. It was this simple stick that became a wonder machine that the Lord used in solving most of the huddles on the way to the Promised Land. Moses' stick was very instrumental. To Moses it may have had very menial use, but God made the same, very useful for the benefit of the kingdom.

Many are times when we do not notice the one thing in our hands or within our reach that God can put to use. Moses even demeaned himself as not befitting a person God could put to use (not eloquentverse 10). God can use the despised of the world for the enhancement of His kingdom (1 Cor. 1:28).

Peter was uneducated and just a fisherman, a very lowly profession, but Jesus called him and emphatically said, "I will use your menial skill; 'fishing'" (Luke 5:10).

David was just a simple shepherd boy, not fit to be enlisted in King Saul's army, but he provided the winning blow and became the hero of the battle. David could not use Saul's fashionable war gear but used what was handy for him; a sling and a simple stone (1 Samuel 17).

Five loaves and two fish was the only handy meal, not even enough for Jesus and His disciples but put in the hands of Jesus, it became a feast for over five thousand people (Mat 14:15-21).

Reflections

What other scriptural examples do you have where God put to great use something simple but handy?

What one thing is handy for you that God can use for the advancement of His kingdom?

What talent or skill do you have that can be used in the church?

What contribution are you able to make towards God's work?

Pray for Seventh Day Baptists in Malawi*, Mozambique, Netherlands*, New Zealand*, Nicaragua, and Nigeria*.

**Conferences which are members of the Seventh Day Baptist World Federation.*

One Thing Is Needful: Being Closer To Jesus

Scripture: Luke 10: 38-41

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better. And it will not be taken from her."

Luke 10: 41

Society demands that if an important person pays you a visit, as the host you have a duty to entertain her. Nature demands that we eat or drink at such an occasion. The more important the person, the busier you become, and the bigger the delegation, the busiest you become. Jesus, the most eminent person, with a delegation of not less than thirteen, pays Martha a visit. As host, she had to be naturally busy, and normally her entire household were supposed to be helping her, and here is her sister just sitting in the living room with the visitor. This was not only traditionally wrong, but culturally unacceptable; a woman idly sitting, and worse, alone amongst thirteen men.

Martha and others expected Jesus to reprimand Mary. To the contrary, Jesus speaks in favor of her and reprimands Martha instead. Jesus does not say Martha is doing bad things. He only says she is preoccupied with too many things. But comparably, one thing is most important, and that is to be closer to Him, and that is what the younger sister had chosen.

Martha's services were very important, but her standing with Jesus was the most important, needful or necessary. Our relationship and closeness to Jesus is the most important service the Lord requires of us.

Many are times we are so preoccupied about church etiquettes and traditions. We care more about how many people patronize our

church services, the timing of our services, the magnificence of our church building or the quality of our music. We pay more attention to the instruments, and how the sopranos, tenors, altos and basses are coming out than the message of the song. We are so particular about the length of a homily than the message from it. These things preoccupy us so much to the extent that we miss the essentials of worship. Though indeed important these things are, but our standing with Jesus matters most. Otherwise, like in soccer, we are scoring goals from an offside position. Society may cheer, but Jesus, the referee of the game, may not be approving our services.

God deplores mere formality in our worship (Amos 5:21- 24). What does God require of us? (Micah 6:8). True and spiritual worship is that we offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God (Rom 12:1).

Reflections

In what ways can we be closer to Jesus? (Answer before reading) Fellowship, Prayer,

What is it that preoccupies me and prevents me from having quality time with Jesus?

How can you deal with the obstacles that hinder you from true worship?

Pray for Seventh Day Baptists in Philippines*, Poland*, Rwanda*, Sierra Leone, South Africa*, and South Korea.

*Conferences which are members of the Seventh Day Baptist World Federation.

One Thing I Do: Keep pressing towards the goal

Scriptures: Exodus 14:10-15; Philippians 3:12-14

One thing I do, forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead.

Philippians 3: 13

The Bible has illustrated a Christian's life in various ways; either as a traveler, an athlete or a farmer. Regardless of the imagery, progress is key. Progress can be defined as forward or onward movement towards a destination; or development towards an improved or more advanced condition. Often times our progress has been hindered by lack of direction or focus created by:

- Obstacles on the way and our surrounding (which includes public opinion);
- Excess baggage from the past in the form of disappointments or achievements;
- Complacency

Paul argues that none of these will hinder his progress as he would forget the past and press on towards his goal.

Journey: Our salvation journey is like the journey of the children of Israel from Egypt to Canaan through the wilderness. Soon after their liberation as they were still celebrating their liberation from bondage, being led by God Himself, symbolized by a Cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, they came to a sudden halt. Those behind didn't know why the convoy had stopped. There was a blockade in front in the form of a huge impassable body of water; namely, the Red Sea. When they turned to look back ..., they saw an army of the Egyptians coming. Dismayed, they started lamenting, esteeming their life while in Egypt (Exodus 14:10-12). God instructs them, "Go forward!"

However, the journey which could have taken a matter of days had they heeded God's words, took them over forty years because they lacked focus, and they kept looking back mentally by reminiscing on the past. Instead of looking ahead at the pillar of fire by night and the cloud by day, they kept turning back and cherishing the memories of Egypt. They made a golden calf modeled after the gods of Egypt, they chose leaders to take them back to

Egypt, and they kept esteeming the food they used to eat in Egypt. They paid the cost of not forgetting their past and looking ahead.

The analogy of a farmer: To teach this principle, Jesus uses the analogy of a farmer driving an oxen drawn plough, "No man, having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." Implying that the kingdom of God is for those whose attention is not bogged down or diverted by what is behind; the comfort, societal norms, family ties nor prevailing popular opinions (Luke 9:57-62).

The analogy of an athlete: One of the things the modern world owes to the ancient Greeks are the Olympic Games. Some of the churches Paul was ministering to were amongst the Greeks who were very familiar with athletics. Hence he found it easy to draw analogies of the athletic games to illustrate Christian living. He equates the spiritual life of a Christian to a race (1 Cor. 9:24-27, 2Tim 4:7). Paul knows that in his spiritual race, there will be people who will be distracting him, either by wrongly glorifying him or reminding him of his dirty past. There will also be stumbling blocks on the way. No matter what, the only thing he would focus on is this goal and he would press on towards it.

In this race, Jesus is our mentor and coach (1 Cor. 11:1, Heb 12:1-2)

What a great joy it would be upon reaching the finishing line, lifting up your trophy and proudly affirming, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race!"

Reflections

What things hinder your focus personally?

How do you intend to deal with each one of them this year?

Pray for Seventh Day Baptists in South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda*, Ukraine, United States of America*, Canada*, and Zambia*

*Conferences which are members of the Seventh Day Baptist World Federation.



www.sdbwf.org

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