

is heard recognised and answered by thee and we pray thy nearness to any oh Lord with us here or joining us on the live stream that thou oh Lord would minister to all who may be passing through such times the strength that thou dost hold in reserve for thou dost appoint days in our earthly pilgrimage that we would never choose but we bless thee that thy word reminds us of the great promise that as thy day so thy strength shall be and that there is a strength that is held in reserve and that we may never experience until we are brought into the very depths from which we cry and receive that strength

Sovereign Father we pray tonight for this congregation as in its spiritual history it finds itself at a time of vacancy and thou knowest oh Lord the concern we have for it as the vital place it plays in its strategic position of walk and witness within the confines of our presbytery and we commit it and commend it to thee remembering tonight the one whom is appointed over them as their inter-moderator Reverend Colin MacLeod with all the burdens he has of his own congregation and back and now the additional burdens of this congregation and we remember also thy servant in the assistantship of the congregation as he also experiences the burden of a vacant congregation as he performs the duties of interim moderator in the congregation of Shawbust and we remember the other vacant congregations and pray for the interim moderators for Reverend Ian Thompson as he takes on the burden of the congregation of South Hewist for Reverend Paul Murray as he takes on the burden of the congregation of Park for the Reverend Ewan Matheson as he takes on the burden of Barvis and Reverend Thomas Davis as he takes on the additional burden of Calanish

[11 : 55] These are days O Lord of concern and we pray that the concern would be laid upon us as a real burden so that we would be found as a praying people petitioning thee that it would please thee O Lord to prepare and provide and raise up those who called and equipped by thee would be enabled to fill these vacancies that we might see days again of gospel blessing and increase across the pulpits and parishes of our beloved island O Lord our God we ask that they would remember us and now sovereign father as we come to read thy truth we pray that they would be with us and clear our minds of every distraction that thy word might be lodged in our hearts in a way that long after we leave this place the power of thy spirit would open and apply the teaching of thy truth to our lives that we might walk in it that we might know its blessing and fullness we pray to remember all who have been bereaved in our town and across our island in recent days when the voice of death has spoken time and again almost day by day and we ask

O Lord that thou would draw near to all tonight who experience the sorrow and sadness of separation and that into the brokenness of bereavement thou would minister the care and compassion and comfort that cometh from thyself in the way that thou are alone not able to access the inner spirit and lay these blessings there Father continue with us watch over us take away our every sin and love us freely for Christ's sake Amen we turn to read in God's word in the Old Testament in the book of Psalms and Psalm 86 the Old Testament the book of Psalms Psalm 86 and we'll read the whole psalm incline your ear O Lord and answer me for I am poor and needy preserve my life for I am godly save your servant who trusts in you you are my God be gracious to me O Lord for to you do I cry all the day gladden the soul of your servant for to you O Lord do I lift up my soul for you O Lord are good and forgiving abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you give ear O Lord to my prayer listen to my plea for grace in the day of my trouble I call upon you for you answer me there is none like you among the gods

O Lord nor are there any works like yours all the nations who you have made shall come and worship before you O Lord and shall glorify your name for you are great and do wondrous things you alone are God teach me your way O Lord that I may walk in your truth unite my heart to fear your name I give thanks to you O Lord my God with my whole heart and I will glorify your name forever for great is your steadfast love towards me you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol O God insolent men have risen up against me a band of ruthless men seeks my life and they do not set you before them but you O Lord are a God merciful and gracious slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness turn to me and be gracious to me give your strength to your servant and save the son of your maidservant show me a sign of your favour that those who hate me may see and be put to shame because you

Lord have helped me and comforted me and so on and may the Lord bless to us this passage of scripture and we'll sing now to God's praise from this psalm in the Scottish Psalter psalm 86 on page 341 if you're using the blue book psalm 86 at verse 6 hear hear Lord my prayer and to the voice of my request attend in troublous times I'll call on thee for thou wilt answer send Lord there is

none among the gods that may with thee compare and like the works which thou has done not any work is there down to the end of verse 11 psalm 86 from verse 6 hear

[18 : 32] Lord my prayer unto the voice of my request attend dear Lord my prayer come to the voice of my request attend and draw on the sight I call on thee for love will answer send for this man the cross and may with people care and like the words which thou must tell not any work is there the ancients do the rich shall come and worship and be for thy and thy name glorify

O Lord thy name glorify glorify! thy voy voy!

voy! voy! voy! voy! voy! voy! voy! voy! voy! Cymru.

Cymru. Cymru. Cymru. Can we turn then this evening for a time to the passage of Scripture that we read, the Old Testament, Psalm 86?

Psalm 86, I'm reading again the words of verse 11. Where we read these words, Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth. Unite my heart to fear your name.

[22 : 17] Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth. Unite my heart to fear your name.

When the great reformer John Calvin wrote his commentary on the Bible and he came to the book of Psalms, He recognised the unique nature of the book.

And of it he said this. It is, he said, an anatomy of the soul. Because there is not an emotion which anyone can be conscious of that is not here represented as in a mirror.

The Holy Spirit has here drawn all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities with which the minds of men are agitated.

Quite a profound statement. And yet one I'm sure that we can all agree that we have experienced in a measure as we ourselves see the preciousness of the Psalms and how they relate and how they relate and how they are a source of comfort to us in experiences that we pass through.

[24 : 01] And for that reason, Calvin gave it that remarkable title, An Anatomy of the Soul. There are bookshops that have vast, vast amounts of titles on the anatomy of the body.

But here we have the only book for their greatest need, that is the anatomy of the soul. And so looking at it with that as our backdrop, we come to this great psalm that we have here.

And at the very outset you may notice something if the designation is given in your Bible, that not only is it a psalm, but it is also a prayer.

A prayer of David. And it is a prayer where the psalmist is presenting petitions of poverty and praise.

As we look at the psalm, we discern that, the petitions of poverty and praise.

[25 : 18] And that comes out very strongly in the boldness with which the psalm begins. The boldness of the opening petition.

Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me. In many other places the psalms open with great declarations of reverence and respect.

But here, because of the poverty that the psalmist is experiencing, it's as if he rushes into the presence of God and just pours himself out.

In the metrical psalm, it perhaps comes across even more strongly where it says, bow down thine ear. It's such a bold petition for a petitioner to come before the living God and make that request.

Because the Bible teaches us that before God, we are the clay. And he is the potter.

[26 : 28] And we have that in the Old Testament prophecies, where, for instance, in Isaiah, in chapter 64 and verse 8, we read these words, But now, O Lord, you are our father, we are the clay, and you are our potter.

We are all the work of your hand. And in another place Isaiah says, does the clay say to whom who forms it, what are you making?

And here we have this bold petition of the clay to the potter saying, bow down your ear to me.

And most remarkably, elsewhere in the book of Psalms, we are told that the petition is answered. Words that we so often sing. Perhaps presenters here will understand what I say when it's one of the great weaknesses.

[27 : 38] I'm guilty of myself because being a presenter, you get so caught up with the concern about the tune and so on, that you can almost at times miss the very words you're presenting.

And yet in Psalm 116, the psalmist tells us of what the effect of his petition being answered had upon him.

Because he says, I love the Lord because my voice and prayers heeded here. And then he tells us the effect that that had on him.

I, while I live, will call on him who bowed to me his ear. It's such a powerful image for us to reflect on God bowing his ear to hear a prayer from the very clay that we are.

And yet before us here, that is exactly what we have again. The psalmist in his great need. And in verses 1 to 7, as he comes then to present his petitions of poverty and praise, from verses 1 to 7, he does that where time and again he highlights his conflict.

[29 : 12] Over and over again, the petitions are there. I am poor. I am needy. Be gracious to me. I cry to you all the day.

Gladden the soul and so on and so on. His conflict. And then in verses 8 and 10, 8 to 10 rather, he presents to us as a backdrop to these, to his conflict, the confidence he has in the character of God. There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours. All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name.

For you are great and do wondrous things. You alone are God. These are wonderful words to read. When we see the conflict and distress that the psalmist experiences, summed up for us in the very first verse where he says of himself, I am poor and needy.

[30 : 30] And into the poverty and into the need. We then come to the remarkable petition that he presents in verse 11, which is going to be the focus of our thoughts for our time this evening.

Where he then presents a petition. And he says, teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth.

Unite my heart to fear your name. And the three points that present themselves specifically there. Your way, your truth, and your name. And so in this petition, in this verse he begins with these words, teach me.

Me. And there is so much depth even in that two words. That they would easily, easily accommodate a single sermon being preached on these two words because of the depth that they contain.

[31 : 46] First of all, he identifies his need. In the midst of the conflict and strife and the poverty that he's experiencing, he now comes to God.

And having assessed his need, he presents that need to God. And he says, teach. Teach. And in these words, teach me. Teach.

Teach. He wants to be taught. And it's himself that he wants to be taught. And he is the needy. Teach me.

And he is the needy. Teach me. Teach me. Teach me. Teach me. And in these words, teach me, we have an evidence of the change that took place in the life of the psalmist when he was brought from death to life and from darkness to light.

What we call regeneration. What we call regeneration. Regeneration. That mysterious work that is undertaken by God in the spirit of man.

[33 : 02] That act of creation that takes place as the desire that the psalmist expresses here was infused into him.

That act of creation. Because regeneration, being born again, coming to faith is an act of creation. Because Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

And in light of that new creation, now the psalmist comes with a great mark of that creation, a great mark of regeneration, what we might call a great mark of grace, desire.

And his desire is for grace. His desire is for grace.

Many people want a mark of grace. Some of the Lord's people, from time to time in their earthly pilgrimage experience a lack of assurance, even although their conversion at one point may have been very, very powerful.

[34 : 24] Yet along the way in the earthly pilgrimage, they can be brought to low places. And in themselves, they look for a mark of grace.

And I think this is one of the greatest marks of grace. The mark of desire. Because as Isaiah reminds us, there was a day when we had no desire.

But regeneration infused desire. Desire for grace. And we see that here in the psalmist.

Verse 3, be gracious to me, O Lord. Verse 6, give ear, O Lord, to my prayer. Listen to my plea for grace. Because the recipient of grace becomes a grace-dependent child.

And grace enrolls the child in the school of God. Where we become grace-dependent children.

[35 : 43] And the grace-dependent children. And the grace-dependent children. Exercise the desire they have to be in the means of grace. Where grace was received and where grace is communicated.

Teach me, he cries. And then he asks what he wants to be taught.

He says, teach me your way. Because he knows that there is only two ways. And for each and every one of us here tonight.

It is either your way. Or we drop the Y. And it becomes our way. It's either his way or our way.

Teach me, he says. Teach me, he says. Your way. And in saying that, he recognizes that it is God alone that is able to teach him.

[36 : 52] Some of you here may be teachers. Some of you may know the burden of teaching. But the request that has been made here to be taught.

Is to be taught by the only one that can teach this lesson. Because those of you who are teachers are teaching the head. But the lesson that is being taught here needs to be taught and received in the heart.

For God alone has access to the heart. For it is there that God infuses the capacity to learn.

And the capacity to be taught the lesson. The capacity to learn. And the capacity to be taught the lesson.

For those of you who are teachers, if there are any present. And all of us know that in the field of education, there are what we call the three R's. The three fundamental skills of education.

[38 : 05] Reading, writing and arithmetic. But in the lesson that we are taught in grace.

I want to suggest that there are four R's. Because the first R is reading.

And the second one is retaining what we read. And the third one is reflecting upon what we read.

And all of these are of no benefit to us.

Unless what we read and what we retain and what we reflect upon is that which regulates our lives.

And one Bible expositor makes this observation with great solemnity.

And he says this. We may listen to the best preacher who ever lived. But unless God shall apply the truth to our heart.

[39 : 12] We will not receive it. We need. We need. Here is a psalm where the psalmist is saying.

I am poor and needy. We need the instruction and the illumination of the Holy Spirit. In the upper room discourse, Christ said to the disciples about the Holy Spirit.

He shall teach you all things. In the school of God. We need the instruction and illumination of the Holy Spirit. But unless we have his teaching, we cannot.

And we will not know the truth. Therefore, he says, never neglect the means of grace.

And then he adds this with great solemnity. But at the same time, never get into the condition that some are in. who feel quite happy so long as they have been to a place of worship on the Lord's day.

[40 : 19] And who return home just as if they had done all their duty for the day. They are, he says, like men who go to the market.

But buy nothing. Here in this school.

There are lessons that we must learn. When the capacity to be taught. And the capacity to receive and retain the lesson is infused by the work of the Holy Spirit.

And of that vast curriculum that there is in God's school. I want tonight to focus on one particular aspect of the curriculum.

And that is the lessons that are taught concerning ourselves. I spoke earlier about the four R's, the arithmetic.

[41 : 24] In this school, there is spiritual arithmetic. And here, in the lesson that has been taught to us, we learn what one writer calls addition by subtraction.

In a Christian context, he says, addition by subtraction signifies that spiritual growth and a closer relationship with God that can only be achieved.

Not by adding more things to one's life. But by removing, by removing negative influences and practices.

And what a day we find ourselves in. Of negative influences that can have such a profound influence upon us.

But even in the psalmist's day, negative influences had an effect on him. And we'll come to that when he identifies the need for his heart to be united.

[42 : 51] Learning addition by subtraction is one of the most difficult lessons that we are taught about ourselves in this school.

It's one thing to say, teach me your way. It's another thing as we receive the lessons, to put our yea and amen to the outworking of providence in our lives and say, not my way, Lord, but your way. Because your ways are not my ways. Let me illustrate this to you. By bringing before you one who has a recipient of grace recorded for us.

The profound experience of being a recipient of grace. Grace that he heard. And today across the world. In many diets of worship. The words that he recorded will have been lifted up in praise.

[44 : 04] Where multitudes today will have sung. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound. That saved a wretch like me.

I once was lost, but now I'm found. Was blind, but now I see. The effect of being a recipient of grace.

And what it had for John Newton. And the depth of assurance that he received. And the depth of inward illumination enabling him to write these remarkable words.

Amazing grace. And yet, as I said a minute ago. On the earthly pilgrimage. As we go on. In this school and we are taught. The lesson of addition by subtraction can be painful. It's almost hard to believe that a man like John Newton.

[45 : 20] Who wrote such beautiful words. Amazing grace. Could further on in his earthly pilgrimage write this. It is a point I long to know.

Of that. Often it causes anxious thought. Do I love the Lord or no? Am I his? Or am I not? If I love, why am I thus? Why this dull and lifeless frame? Hardly sure can they be worse.

Who have never known his name. Could my heart so hard remain? Prayer a task and burden prove.

Every trifle give me pain. If I knew a saviour's love. When I turn my eyes within. All is dark and vain and wild.

[46 : 25] Filled with unbelief and sin. Can I deem myself a child? And so he goes on. Being taught of God.

And I think if we had been contemporary with John Newton. And we had heard him utter these remarkable words.

expressing an extreme lack of assurance. From having been on the high mountain of assurance. We would be desperate to ask the question.

What happened? And remarkably John Newton recorded for us what happened. Because elsewhere he wrote of what happened.

In the school of grace. He prayed. I asked the Lord that I might grow in faith and love and every grace.

[47 : 32] Might more of his salvation know and seek. More earnestly his face. It was he who taught me thus to pray. And he I trust has answered prayer.

But it has been in such a way. As almost drove me. To despair. I'd hope that in some favoured hour at once.

He'd answer my request. And by his love's constraining power. Subdue my sin. And give me rest. And listen to this.

Instead of this. He made me feel. The hidden evils of my heart. And let the angry powers of hell assault my soul.

In every part. Yea more with his own hand. He seemed intent to aggravate my woe. Crossed all the faired signs I schemed.

[48 : 42] Humbled my heart. And laid me low. The experience of addition by subtraction. And it wrought out of the very soul of Newton.

A cry from the depths. And he said. Lord why is this? I trembling cried. Wilt thou pursue thy worm to death?

And back came the answer. It is in this way the Lord replied. I answer prayer.

For grace and faith. These inward trials I employ from self and pride. To set thee free. And break thy schemes of earthly joy.

That thou mayest find. Thy all. In me. In me. Truly. Remarkable words. From a remarkable man. As he learned.

[49 : 46] In the school of grace. What he had to be taught. In the school of grace. What he had to be taught. Because each and every one of us. Must also be taught this lesson. Teach me thy way.

That voy. That voy. That voy. That voy. That voy. That voy. That voy. That voy. That voy. That voy. That voy. That voy. thy way our former minister the reverend roddy john campbell would often address us on this and illustrate the work of the refiner those who refine precious metal requiring great great skill and deft of hand where they would take the raw gold as it came out of the earth or silver whatever they were refining and place it into the crucible where ferocious heat would be applied to melt the metal and in the melting of the metal as the heat was increased so the impurities would be brought to the surface and then the refiner would come with this refining pan and skim the surface and take away only the impurities but leave the precious metal and in our lives as we are taught there are impurities that need to be removed in the school of grace for every grace dependent child we need to learn what humility is that humility that is where we learn the plague of our heart and having its abominable and innumerable abominations abominations exposed to our view and to our understanding we need to be taught and have the impurities of our lives come out through repentance where we learn feeling the heavy burden of our infidelity to be made conscious of that we need to learn love learned by our personal sense of the undeserved goodness of God to us the vilest of the vile we need to be taught what patience is patience as the Puritans would say is only learned in the furnace of affliction and the work of the refiner as he refined the metal and having undertaken the work of skimming he would repeat the whole process as he discerned the need for the lessons to be learned and the impurities to come out and so the process would be repeated over and over and over again and the refiner would know when his work was complete when he would look into the pot and see nothing but his own image no impurities and our earthly pilgrimage consists of the removal of the impurities that are in us as we learn in the school of God's grace what it is that we need to be taught and he goes on and he says teach me your way oh Lord that I may

walk in your truth your truth what we learned as children here is the only rule to guide us and to direct us and how we need to walk in that truth the need for us to come back and remind ourselves of the four hours the need for us to read retain receive reflect!

and live lives that are regulated by that truth and it's the great great charge that Elijah brought against the children of Israel in the day when on Mount Carmel he there restored the worship of God it having been brought to such a low almost as in the observing of it one would easily conclude that it could never be restored and revived and refreshed and yet Elijah there challenges the people of God and he says to them how long halt ye between two opinions it comes across even stronger in the ESV where it says how long will you go halting between two opinions not walking but halting limping how difficult it is to walk when you have a limp perhaps through an injury you've sustained you know what it is when you're trying to walk and the difficulty if you've got a distance to walk because of a limp and some of you here may recall a great sermon that was preached here by the [56 : 23] Reverend Kenneth Stewart when he in his study on the book and in the life of Elijah came to this passage and the challenge that he placed before us that night asking where we were whether we're halting between two opinions because when we are he said we have one foot in the world and one foot in the church and the world doesn't know where we are and the church doesn't know where we are and it's the necessity for us to understand what it is that the psalmist is asking here I need to walk and I need to walk in your truth and in the psalm that we sung in our opening praise psalm 119 the psalmist goes on with that wonderful petition where he speaks of the word as a lamp to his feet and a light to his path and everything that is contained in that petition be strange if this time tomorrow night you were outside the church and you saw somebody walking up kenneth street with a torch why do you need a torch when it's daylight the psalmist is discerning the darkness of the day in which he was found and the necessity to walk to walk with the truth as a lamp to his feet and a light to his path and what about ourselves in the darkness of the day that we are found do we not need that lamp to her feet that light to her path that we might walk in the truth not halting not limping but walking!

because it's the great outcome that the psalmist desires in his petition here in this cry of poverty in this cry where he says to God incline your ear and answer me for I am poor and needy and this is my need teach me your way O Lord that I may walk in your truth and then he comes to pour out

before God a great hindrance that he is conscious of the need for God to unite his heart what about your own heart tonight what about my heart am I before God tonight with a heart that is united are you before God tonight with a heart that is united the psalmist here wasn't he was so conscious of a divided heart and he says unite my heart to fear your name and it's such a barrier to us in our earthly pilgrimage when the heart is divided it's the very thing that brings such dis peace into our relationship when the heart becomes divided imagine if you will for a moment a teenage boy and a teenage girl and they begin a relationship and they only have as we've all seen and experienced some of us eyes for each other they can't bear to be apart and when they're together they just want to talk about each other that depth of feeling and the heart being united and yet into that closeness something comes in that begins to contend for the affection of one or the other perhaps the boy starts to play football and begins to enjoy his football and spend a lot of time with the boys who are playing football and all of a sudden whereas time was fully devoted and committed to the relationship now it's not what it was and how true that can be in our spiritual relationship where the heart that once was united now becomes divided is it not the great charge that Christ laid before the church in Ephesus when he said to them after having listed the qualities for which they were to be commended and he did that and they were not few and they were commended and then solemnly this has to cut right across the whole thing and he says but I have somewhat against thee thou has left thy first love there's a breach thou has left thy first love oh how we remember the fervency of the first love how we longed to be in the means of grace with the singular desire that we spoke of burning in the heart the heart so sorrowful when the benediction would be pronounced here on the sabbath evening thinking of the days that lay between you and being here again in this precious place to receive fresh supplies in the means of grace and here the psalmist comes with his great petition teach me your way oh lord that I may walk in your truth unite my heart because it is only with a united heart that I can fulfill the depth of my desire which is to fear your name and it brings before us the solemnity of the duty that we are to engage in continually that of keeping the heart the great Puritan John Flavel and if you've never read it I commend it to you because I think it's a book that's foundational for each and every one of us to read as it contains the very foundation of our Christian walk and witness His book called keeping the heart based on the text from the book of Proverbs in the Old Testament chapter 4 and verse 23 where we read these words keep thy heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of life keep the heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of life the psalmist hadn't been keeping his heart his heart had become divided and Flavel speaks about that in the book in it he says the greatest difficulty in conversion is to win the heart to God how obvious is that to each and every one of us tonight in the day that we find ourselves possibly in one level a day of greater outreach and evangelism than any of us have ever seen the fact that wherever the furthest point in the world tonight is from Kenneth Street somebody there is able to listen to this the vast resource that is available in the world that we find ourselves tonight the Christian literature the [65 : 39] Christian teaching everything that is there and how little do we hear in the day in which we're found of the work of regeneration and how profound does that statement of Flavel become in 2025 the greatest difficulty in conversion is to win the heart to God but then he comes to this perhaps the most solemn statement in the whole little book the greatest difficulty after conversion is to keep the heart with God the psalmist knew what that meant John Newton knew what that meant I know what that means and every recipient of saving grace in here tonight knows what that means the greatest difficulty after conversion is to keep the heart with God and it becomes each and every one of us to take this petition away to retain it to reflect it and seek that in the outworking of our lives we would engage with the spirit the desire of the psalmist and each day as we step out into the day that we would do so as grace dependent children recognizing our need of dependence upon God because be assured of this each and every one of us will step out into tomorrow of a prayer that was offered up by a revered name in this congregation an elder by the name of Murdo Maccinnon called up in prayer one night and he began his prayer by saying Lord I am nothing and nothing is nothing do we step out tomorrow in that way or do we step out the other way and just say without thee I can do anything and there is no prayer and how it becomes us to embed this petition into our daily walk and witness for God and say teach me thy way and in thy truth O Lord then walk will I unite my heart that I thy name may fear continually the psalmist finally leaves

