



Seamen's Christian Friend Society

Incorporating the Merchant Navy Christian Fellowship

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PASTOR'S LETTER

Dear Friend,

I am writing as Pastor of the SCFS Christian Fellowship and want you to know I have prayed for you and your family; whether you are on vacation with your family or are separated by oceans, you are not forgotten.

"Let go anchor". All seafarers know the frustration of waiting at anchorage when they are eager to go ashore to phone or email their family. Vacation can be unexpectedly delayed, or a requested contract extension may be refused. Sometimes we have to wait for things to happen, and are disappointed even though we prayed. The first disciples of our Lord enjoyed many wonderful experiences, but at other times they also had deep disappointments, struggle and suffering. **James 1:2-8** teaches believers 'will' face 'trials of many kinds', but always with good purpose. **1 Cor. 10:13** makes it clear God always limits temptations to what we can bear. I find it helpful in difficult circumstances to remember that God always has sovereign control and in my personal experience, I have sometimes been humbled when I have seen bad situations turned around, long after I thought it was too late.

Hebrews 6:19 (NIV) *"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain."* This letter to the Hebrews was written to believers who suffered persecution. **Heb.10:32-37**.

Heb. 6:15:- God promised Abraham a son **Genesis 12:7; 13:14 -16**. Years later when his wife Sarai had still not had a child, **Gen. 16** explains they thought it would never happen, Abraham had a son by the servant Hagar, who the Lord named Ishmael meaning 'God hears'. **Gen.17:15-27** tells us God repeated his promise that he would have a son by Sarah as she was by then called. Abraham laughed at this because he was old. God then promised to bless Ishmael and make his descendants into a great nation. **Gen. 18:10-15** tells us Sarah laughed at the thought of giving birth in her old age and the Lord said, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Despite their sins and unbelief, God kept his promise with the birth of their son Isaac **Gen. 21:1-3**. The message from this is clear: God always keeps his promises.

Looking back over 33 years of serving the Lord as Pastor to seafarers and their families, there were times when I did not understand until much later that God was using difficult situations to encourage us to trust our loving heavenly Father. Patience is needed; even when things do not work out as we first hope, it is God's will that must be done. But how can we keep our faith and trust in Christ when life seems so unfair?

Real hope and encouragement.

Heb. 6:16-17:- God's promises are unchanging and trustworthy because that is his nature. When promising Abraham a son, God took an oath in his own name. The oath was as good as God's name, and God's name is as good as his divine nature. But there was another purpose to this: he also wanted to deepen Abraham's faith and make it clear to everyone involved that it was God who was graciously working in this situation.

Heb. 6:18-19:- Two unchangeable things are God's nature and his promises. God cannot lie. Because God is truth, you can be secure in his promises:

In Biblical times ships would drop the anchor inside the harbour and then letting out a long rope, they drifted outside the harbour, where although hit by storms as they waited their turn, they were kept safe and secure knowing that ultimately their time would come to enter the harbour.

The key verse is **V19**. Just as a ship's anchor holds firmly to the seabed, we can have secure assurance and confidence even for eternity, even though we are sometimes hit by the storms of life. But there is 'only one anchor' and that is the Lord Jesus Christ, who has the power to hold us fast when we put our unconditional trust in him alone. In **John 14:1-4** Jesus told his disciples he was going to leave to prepare a place for them in heaven. Although the Lord Jesus spoke with such certainty, he had to clarify how they would go there, saying, **V6 "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."** Anyone can learn from the Bible, the Word of God, how we can come to God the Father through the Lord Jesus. To all who do come to Christ believing, God gives an unconditional promise of acceptance. When you ask the Lord Jesus with openness, honesty and sincerity to save you from your sins, he will do it.

This truth should give you encouragement to want to understand more of what the Bible teaches, to have this assurance and confidence, whatever you are going through at this time.

Heb. 6:19-20. This curtain hung across the entrance to the Most Holy Place in the temple. This curtain prevented anyone from entering, gazing into or even getting a fleeting glimpse of the interior of the Most Holy Place.

Matthew 27:45-51 records that at the very moment the Lord Jesus died on the cross, that curtain that symbolised the barrier between God and man was torn from top to bottom. Now all people are free to approach God because of Christ's sacrifice for our sins. See **Heb. 9:1-14; 10:19-20.**

Guus Peters, my friend and SCFS colleague who visits ships in Antwerp writes:-

I'd like to encourage you with the following story:

In June 2005 I spoke with Federico, the first officer on board a ship from the Philippines. He was a Christian, but had a lot of difficulties with his captain. He wanted to end his contract and go home. His problem was that his captain was constantly correcting him in front of his crew, and he felt humiliated because of this. I showed him the spiritual side of what was happening. We often try to escape from difficult situations. But we have to learn to love in the way Jesus Himself loved. The difficult people that come our way must also fit in our hearts. So I told Federico, that it was his duty to show his captain who Jesus Christ is.

In February 2006 I received a letter from Federico. Among other things he wrote (his own words and not corrected in proper English) "I was been relieved believing that God sent you on our vessel telling me not to walk out with the situation, but the more to show the love of Jesus to our captain here. You know brother, I am very thankful of the Lord Jesus Christ because of sending you on the vessel and I believe the Holy Spirit guide you in our ship, because by human mind you will advise me to get off the ship. It took me a lot of energy, but it was worthwhile."

On New Year's Day 2009 Federico phoned me from Vietnam. He is now a captain. He told me that the greatest lesson he learned was to stay on his ship in 2005, because he now knows how to behave as a captain. He felt like David in the cave of Adullam (1 Samuel 22: 1:2). There in his sorrow David learned how to behave as a future king for all the people that were treated unjustly, and those who were in distress, debt and discontent because of Saul. Christ really appeared to be Federico's anchor in his days of distress back in 2005 and it is for the benefit of his crew and for the Kingdom of Heaven right now.

Guus Peters

I would just like to add that Guus put me in touch with Federico, who told me he was also greatly blessed and encouraged by certain passages from the Bible I shared with him, including **Hebrews Chapter 6.**

Your response:-

Is God still waiting for a greater response from you and me to what the Lord Jesus has done? Perhaps you are waiting for some particular answer to prayer. Are you waiting for God to do your will in your time, rather than accepting that it is God's will that must be done unconditionally in every part of our personal lives. Dare we think we know better than our Creator? It was the Lord Jesus who suffered and died on the cross because he loves us, it was he who went ahead of us into the harbour which is Heaven. If God seems far away, who is it that needs to change?

- 1) "Let go!" Drop your own anchor of trust in the Lord Jesus and know his blessing in your life now and for eternity.
- 2) Reply, even briefly to tell me you received this letter. Ask any questions or make comments.
- 3) Bible correspondence courses are available on various topics. "The Bridge" and "Grace for the weak", written in several languages by my friend and colleague **Volker Lamaack**, have helped lots of sailors to find Christ as their Lord and Saviour, the Anchor to take them through the storms of this life.
- 4) Would you like to attend a church while you are at sea? My friend and colleague **Martin Otto**, who wrote the book "**Church on the Oceans**", leads seminars for groups of Christian sailors who want to learn how to start a Bible study group on their ship, and how it can become their church on board. This has completely changed their time at sea. Get in touch with me for more details about this, and how you can serve the Lord as a seafarer on a ship staffed entirely by Christians.

Letters and emails from seamen and their wives in any language are always welcome. Requests for prayer or advice are always treated seriously. Let me help you with your personal or group Bible study.

I look forward to hearing from you, and my wife Isobel would be pleased to hear from your wife in any language.

Pastor David & Isobel Thomson