

Out of the Comfort Zone

Last Saturday we went to a picnic concert in Hampstead Heath where the Royal Philharmonic Concert Orchestra delighted the crowd with lovely pieces of quality music. From where I was sitting, we could see the whole orchestra and one thing that I found amazing was the fact that there was no time to relax or go into your comfort zone as you always had to be ready for the next part. So although at some point not all the instruments were involved, still the players had to follow the action so that they could intervene at the right time.

This morning, I want to turn your attention to this title "Out of the Comfort Zone" and submit to you that we, who are followers and servants of Christ, are called to stay away from the Comfort Zone in order to live productive and victorious lives for the glory of God. Easier said than done I can hear you whisper! I would like to look with you at 3 As that will hopefully help us get a better grasp of the matter; The **Appeal** of the comfort zone, the **Antidote** to the comfort zone and finally the **Action** away from the comfort zone.

We don't need to look very far to find out why it's **appealing** to be in the comfort zone, the name itself tells us why. We are comfortable in there, it's like being on a nice sofa or a hot bath, and all you want to do is just stay there and not move. That's exactly where the problem is if we are to apply this reality in the believer's life. The comfort zone is a trap which is so comfortable that we are reluctant to leave it. For example, many Christians are so settled in the comfort zone of their basic (shy) character, that they refuse to step out of their comfort zone to say "Hi!" to a visitor in church. Others are snared in the comfort zone of experience and reject offers to serve in ministries that they have not done before.

The comfort zone is attractive in the sense that it offers us a false sense of control over our lives to the extent that we take God more or less out of the equation. We rely on our own strength and forget about the God of the universe who actually controls the rotation of the sun and the lifespan of each and every star.

God as the Master Potter wants to mould us and make us more effective for His service but we tend to hinder His work in the comfort zone because we don't think we are worthy of being used by Him. And so we find excuses like Moses who in **Exodus 3:11** said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" You may be in the same situation this morning, thinking that you can't be of any use because you are not eloquent enough or well-educated or even not mature enough. In the secular world, you are expected to have the necessary requirements of talent, experience, training, resources, etc. before you apply for the job. However, as Christians doing God's work, we are to step out in faith believing that He will enable us to do whatsoever He calls us to do (Philippians 4:13).

God never intended his people to settle for the status quo but to attain to higher grounds as we imitate his Son Jesus Christ. So it's not surprising to read how vehement God is when his Church is dormant and enjoying the compromise of this world instead of being a light shining in the darkness. Two churches in the book of Revelation received a strong rebuke from the Lord because they were living in their little comfort zone and moving backwards without being aware of it. Judgement was about to be passed on them unless they changed their attitude and started seeking God's face seriously. One church, Laodicea was "lukewarm" and the other Sardis was living on its reputation and therefore became useless and spiritually dead. In the same way, the Lord is calling his people to "wake up" so that he can shine on them and use them to bring about His amazing plan for mankind.

I believe that the **Antidote** to the Christian life in the comfort zone where nothing happens except the seasons is sacrifice and surrender. Once again easier said than done because I am still struggling with that concept. But let's look at what God tells us in His word about sacrifice. Being in your comfort zone does not cost you much if anything at all; otherwise you wouldn't stay there that long.

I am always amazed by the life of Abraham because I think he had to make a few sacrifices and step out of his comfort zone on many occasions. We see him in **Genesis 12: 1-5**. Though Abraham did not know where he was going, nor what challenges he would face, he knew Who was going with him - and that fact was more than sufficient for him. He knew that God wanted to bless him but he had to first step out of idolatrous "Ur of the Chaldeans" (**Gen 11:31**) before he could receive God's blessings. Abraham's choice to obey God and step out of his comfort zone changed his life forever from that of a shepherd no one knew about to the "father of faith" of half the world, from a meaningless working life to a victorious life in partnership with God. The Bible records, that after he left his comfort zone, he had a close walk with God (**Gen 12:7,8**), became very wealthy (**Gen 13:2**), was very powerful (**Gen 14:14-16**), had a child at the age of 100 years (**Gen 21:4**) and lived to a ripe old age of 175 (**Gen 25:7**). Most importantly it was through his lineage that the Son of God was born into this world to be the Saviour who died for our sins (**Philippians 2:6,7**).

According to Oswald Chambers, sacrifice in the Bible is very distant from our modern day understanding and perception of the word. Sacrifice means that we give to God the best we have; it is the finest form of worship. Sacrifice is not giving up things, but giving to God **with joy** the best we have. Abraham had to give away the son he waited so many years for but he believed and trusted God and it was credited to him as righteousness (**Gen.15:6**). In **1 Chronicles 21**, when King David wanted to buy a plot of land so he could build an altar to the Lord on it, he was given that particular site and everything on it for free. However, look at David's response in verse 24 **"No, I insist on paying the full price. I will not take for the LORD what is yours, or sacrifice a burnt offering that costs me nothing."**

David understood the meaning of sacrifice and as we seek to step out of the comfort zone, we should learn from him and give God the best quality we have and not the average or even worse the mediocre.

Finally, I would like to encourage you with my last A which examines the kind of **Action** that takes place outside the comfort zone.

Illustration: chat with Lloyd on discrepancy between Bible living and our reality.

When I read about the lives of these people who walked with God I wonder how come my life, our lives are lacking in power and zeal. I read in **James 5:17-8** that "Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops".

When I read the book of Acts, I am face to face with men and women who made themselves available to God and He used them in amazing ways to bring about His justice and righteousness. They had to wait for a signal but once they saw it, they **got up, stood up, went out**, in other words they acted upon God's order.

There needs to be a radical decision made in the mind followed by a physical step forward and as we do so, the Lord equips and goes ahead of us.

During those times that we are forced out of our comfort zone, we have the opportunity to hear God's voice more clearly than ever before, to experience his presence more powerfully than ever before. That was the case of Joseph in **Matthew 2:13** "When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." Joseph was in a position in which he had to put all of his trust in God, and remain focused on hearing God's voice. So God leads us outside our comfort zone so we can learn to depend on Him. This is what **Proverbs 3:5-7** reminds us "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil".

Conclusion: Do you trust your comfort zone to provide more security, satisfaction and joy than your God? Or do you believe that God is your "shield, and your exceeding great reward" as He told Abraham in **Genesis 15:1**.

Please be aware that God's richest blessings on earth are not "automatically" given to us but they are received by us as we make choices of faith!