

JANUARY

DEVOTIONAL JOURNAL 2017

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing...

EZRA 1:1 (ESV)

COVENANT EFC

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MEMORY FOCUS

E Z R A & H A G G A I (E S V)

2017

JANUARY

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EZRA 1:1

FEBRUARY

And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel." And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

EZRA 3:11

MARCH

But the eye of their God was on the elders of the Jews, and they did not stop them until the report should reach Darius and then an answer be returned by letter concerning it.

EZRA 5:5

APRIL

And this was their reply to us: "We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the house that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and finished."

EZRA 5:11

MAY

Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?

HAGGAI 1:4

JUNE

You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes.

HAGGAI 1:6

JULY

Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, declares the LORD. Be strong, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land, declares the LORD. Work, for I am with you, declares the LORD of hosts,

HAGGAI 2:4

AUGUST

For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.

EZRA 7:10

SEPTEMBER

I took courage, for the hand of the LORD my God was on me, and I gathered leading men from Israel to go up with me.

EZRA 7:28B

OCTOBER

... The hand of our God was on us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambushes by the way.

EZRA 8:31B

NOVEMBER

... And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, seeing that you, our God, have punished us less than our iniquities deserved and have given us such a remnant as this,

EZRA 9:13

DECEMBER

Arise, for it is your task, and we are with you; be strong and do it.

EZRA 10:4

FOREWORD BY SENIOR PASTORS

Vision 2028 is spurring Covenant EFC to fulfil her Intentional Disciple Making Church (IDMC) mission within the Church, in our nation and among the nations.

A local church with a national and global influence. A people with devotion, depth and destiny. God has given Acts 20:28 as a spiritual anchor for our journey towards Vision 2028.

“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.” – Acts 20:28 (ESV)

At last year’s Listening Retreat, God continued to urge us to possess the following:

A Firm FOUNDATION in God

“For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations ...”
– Hebrews 11:10a (ESV)

Jesus Christ is the firm foundation of Covenant EFC. Laying a firm foundation for a healthy church means seeking, knowing, loving and proclaiming Christ (Phil 3). How are you building your foundation in Christ today? Your daily devotion is the best place to start!

A Bold FAITH in God’s Faithfulness

“And without faith, it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” – Hebrews 11:6 (NIV)

A bold faith opposes doubt which slows us, opposes fear which paralyses us and opposes apathy which derails us. Bold faith in God’s faithfulness means our allegiance is unto God. Luke 6:46 says, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’ and not do what I tell you?” There is a holy dissatisfaction with our lukewarmness, fear and apathy. Our bold faith in God will see Him restore our spiritual zeal and do far greater things beyond Vision 2028 (Psa 80). How can you be bold in your faith in Christ today? How about B.L.E.S.S.-ing those around you who have yet to know Him?

A Burning Focus Towards FRUITFULNESS for God

“... whose designer and builder is God ...” – Hebrews 11:10b (ESV)

God is the Designer and has a destiny for us! God is the Builder and has the resources! He showed us a promise in Isaiah 37:30-31, “And this shall be a sign for you: this year you shall eat what grows of itself, and in the second year what springs from that. Then in the third year sow and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat their fruit. And the surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward and bear fruit upward.” Authentic discipleship is about people, not just programmes. Intentional Disciplemaking is about reproducing people of *A Certain Kind*, not just attending an event. In the process of making disciples, we must not lose sight of the end result of fruitfulness. Will you pray for God to make you fruitful as you abide in Him daily? Are you ready for the harvest of fruitfulness that He has promised?

This year as we “Return to Our Foundation”, Covenant EFC’s pulpit and Devotional Journal will be mostly based on the books of Ezra and Haggai. May you have a blessed year of studying, practising and teaching God’s Word (Ezr 7:10)!

In Christ,

Rev Tony Yeo and Rev Tan Kay Kiong

GUIDE TO USING THIS DEVOTIONAL JOURNAL

1 Prepare your heart in God's presence

- Select a fixed time (preferably in the morning before you begin your day) and a quiet place where you can be alone and undisturbed.
- Observe a moment of silence as you acknowledge God's presence. Centre down.
- Begin with a song of worship. Meditate on the lyrics even if you are unfamiliar with the tune. (Refer to the list of worship songs provided.)
- Ask God to open your heart to hear Him.

The English Standard Version (ESV) is the default Bible version translation unless otherwise specified.

SOMETHING TO PONDER...

Examining your life is essential in your faith journey. Your redeemed life as a disciple of Christ deserves careful examining. May you take root and bear fruit in Him!

WHAT'S NEW IN 2017?

Prayer pointers for Pastors and Staff are included every Tuesday. On each Friday, there is a prayer pointer for Lay Leaders (e.g. Board Members, Zone Mentors, CG Leaders, Assistant CG Leaders, and Ministry Leaders), to facilitate your prayer for whoever God brings to your mind at that time.

2 Allow God to S.O.A.P. you with His Word and Spirit

- **Scripture** – Take your time to meditate on the Scripture passage for the day. Pause and mull over words and phrases that stand out to you.
- **Observation** – Jot down significant insights and reflections from the passage you have read. You may use the guiding questions provided. *The “Deeper Reflection” section is to aid your contemplation of the Scripture. It is not to replace your own observation, for the Holy Spirit illuminates the Scripture to you as you seek Him earnestly.*
- **Application** – Note down a specific and practical commitment to God's Word for you. Is there a command to obey, a sin to avoid, an example to follow, or a principle to live out? Where appropriate, share your devotional entry with someone.
- **Prayer** – Bring your heartfelt response to God in prayer.

WORSHIP SONGS

JANUARY - FEBRUARY

THIS I BELIEVE (THE CREED)

Verse 1

Our Father everlasting
The all creating One
God Almighty
Through Your Holy Spirit
Conceiving Christ the Son
Jesus our Saviour

Chorus 1

I believe in God our Father
I believe in Christ the Son
I believe in the Holy Spirit
Our God is three in One
I believe in the resurrection
That we will rise again
For I believe in the Name of Jesus

Verse 2

Our judge and our defender
Suffered and crucified
Forgiveness is in You
Descended into darkness
You rose in glorious life
Forever seated high

Bridge

I believe in You
I believe You rose again
I believe that Jesus Christ is Lord

Chorus 2

I believe in life eternal
I believe in the virgin birth
I believe in the saints' communion
And in Your holy Church
I believe in the resurrection
When Jesus comes again
For I believe in the Name of Jesus

Ben Fielding | Matt Crocker
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AMAZING GRACE (MY CHAINS ARE GONE)

Verse 1

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found
Was blind, but now I see

Verse 2

T'was grace that taught my heart to fear
And grace my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed

Chorus

My chains are gone, I've been set free
My God, my Saviour has ransomed me
And like a flood His mercy rains
Unending love, amazing grace

Verse 3

The Lord has promised good to me
His Word my hope secures
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures

Verse 4

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow
The sun forbear to shine
But God, who call'd me here below
Will be forever mine

Chris Tomlin | John Newton | Louie Giglio
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10,000 REASONS (BLESS THE LORD)

Chorus

Bless the Lord, O my soul
 O my soul
 Worship His holy name
 Sing like never before
 O my soul
 I'll worship Your holy name

Verse 1

The sun comes up it's a new day dawning
 It's time to sing Your song again
 Whatever may pass and whatever lies before me
 Let me be singing when the evening comes

Verse 2

You're rich in love and You're slow to anger
 Your name is great and Your heart is kind
 For all Your goodness I will keep on singing
 Ten thousand reasons for my heart to find

Verse 3

And on that day when my strength is failing
 The end draws near and my time has come
 Still my soul will sing Your praise unending
 Ten thousand years and then forevermore

Ending

I'll worship Your holy name
 Worship Your holy name
 Worship Your holy name

Jonas Myrin | Matt Redman

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THE GREATNESS OF YOU

Chorus

Jesus, we lift up Your name

Verse

I wanna sing of Your love
 I wanna sing of Your mercy
 I wanna tell the whole world
 Of the greatness of You

So I'll sing of Your love
 And I'll sing of Your mercy
 And I'll tell the whole world
 Of the greatness of You

Bridge

Your name is higher than the heavens
 Greater than the nations
 Jesus

Erik Cooper | Nathan LaGrange

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OUR GOD

Verse 1

Water You turned into wine
 Opened the eyes of the blind
 There's no one like You
 None like You

Verse 2

Into the darkness You shine
 Out of the ashes we rise
 There's no one like You
 None like You

Chorus

Our God is greater
 Our God is stronger
 God You are higher than any other
 Our God is healer
 Awesome in power, our God, our God

Bridge

And if our God is for us
 Then who could ever stop us
 And if our God is with us
 Then what could stand against
 And if our God is for us
 Then who could ever stop us
 And if our God is with us
 Then what could stand against
 (Then) what could stand against

Chris Tomlin | Jesse Reeves | Jonas Myrin | Matt Redman
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FOREVER

Verse 1

Give thanks to the Lord, our God and King
 His love endures forever
 For He is good, He is above all things
 His love endures forever
 Sing praise, sing praise

Verse 2

With a mighty hand and an outstretched arm
 His love endures forever
 For a life that's been reborn,
 His love endures forever

Pre-chorus

Sing praise, sing praise
 Sing praise, sing praise

Chorus

Forever God is faithful
 Forever God is strong
 Forever God is with us
 Forever and ever

Verse 3

From the rising to the setting sun
 His love endures forever
 And by the grace of God we will carry on
 His love endures forever

Bridge

His love endures forever
 His love endures forever
 His love endures forever
 Forever

Chris Tomlin
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HOSANNA (PRAISE IS RISING)

Verse 1

Praise is rising
 Eyes are turning to You
 We turn to You
 Hope is stirring
 Hearts are yearning for You
 We long for You
 'Cause when we see You
 We find strength to face the day
 In Your presence
 All our fears are washed away
 (Washed away)

Chorus

Hosanna, hosanna
 You are the God who saves us
 Worthy of all our praises
 Hosanna, hosanna
 Come have Your way among us
 We welcome You here, Lord Jesus

Verse 2

Hear the sound of
 Hearts returning to You
 We turn to You
 In Your Kingdom
 Broken lives are made new
 You make all things new
 'Cause when we see You
 We find strength to face the day
 In Your presence
 All our fears are washed away

Ending

Hosanna, hosanna

Brenton Brown | Paul Baloché
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WHOM SHALL I FEAR

Verse 1

You hear me when I call
 You are my morning song
 Though darkness fills the night
 It cannot hide the light

Whom shall I fear
 You crush the enemy underneath my feet
 You are my sword and shield
 Though troubles linger still
 Whom shall I fear

Chorus

I know Who goes before me
 I know Who stands behind
 The God of angel armies is always by my side
 The One who reigns forever
 He is a friend of mine
 The God of angel armies is always by my side

Verse 2

My strength is in Your name
 For You alone can save
 You will deliver me
 Yours is the victory
 Whom shall I fear
 Whom shall I fear
 (Whom shall I fear)

Bridge

(And) nothing formed against me shall stand
 You hold the whole world in Your hands
 I'm holding on to Your promises
 You are faithful
 You are faithful

Chris Tomlin | Ed Cash | Scott Cash
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HOW GREAT THOU ART

Verse 1

O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the works Thy hand hath made
I see the stars I hear the mighty thunder
Thy pow'r throughout the universe displayed

Chorus

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!

Verse 2

When through the woods, and forest glades I wander
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees
When I look down, from lofty mountain grandeur
And hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze

Verse 3

And when I think, that God, His Son not sparing
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in
That on the Cross, my burden gladly bearing
He bled and died to take away my sin

Verse 4

When Christ shall come, with shout of acclamation
And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart
Then shall I bow in humble adoration
And there proclaim, my God, how great Thou art

Stuart Wesley Keene Hine

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VICTOR'S CROWN

Verse 1

You are always fighting for us
Heaven's angels all around
My delight is found in knowing
That You wear the Victor's crown

You're my help and my defender
You're my Saviour and my friend
By Your grace I live and breathe
To worship You

Verse 2

At the mention of Your greatness
In Your Name I will bow down
In Your presence fear is silent
For You wear the Victor's crown

Let Your glory fill this temple
Let Your power overflow
By Your grace I live and breathe
To worship You

Chorus

Hallelujah
You have overcome
You have overcome
Hallelujah
Jesus, You have overcome the world

Verse 3

You are ever interceding
As the lost become the found
You can never be defeated
For You wear the Victor's crown

You are Jesus the Messiah
You're the Hope of all the world
By Your grace I live and breathe
To worship You

Verse 4

Every high thing must come down
Every stronghold shall be broken
You wear the Victor's crown
You overcome, you overcome.

At the cross the work was finished
You were buried in the ground
But the grave could not contain You
For You wear the Victor's crown

Bridge

Every high thing must come down
Every stronghold shall be broken
You wear the Victor's crown
You overcome, you overcome

Darlene Zschech | Israel Houghton | Kari Jobe
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AT THE CROSS (LOVE RAN RED)

Verse 1

There's a place
Where mercy reigns and never dies
There's a place
Where streams of grace flow deep and wide
Where all the love I've ever found
Comes like a flood comes flowing down

Chorus

At the cross, at the cross
I surrender my life
I'm in awe of You, I'm in awe of You
Where Your love ran red and my sin washed white
I owe all to You, I owe all to You

Interlude

Jesus

Verse 2

There's a place
Where sin and shame are powerless
Where my heart
Has peace with God and forgiveness
Where all the love I've ever found
Comes like a flood, comes flowing down

Bridge

Here my hope is found
Here on holy ground
Here I bow down, here I bow down
Here arms open wide
Here You saved my life
Here I bow down, here I bow (down)

Ending

Jesus

Chris Tomlin | Ed Cash | Jonas Myrin | Matt Armstrong | Matt Redman
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NOTES

THE CHURCH BEYOND

PRAY FOR SINGAPORE

“For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations.”
– ISAIAH 61:11 (ESV)

Singapore has seen a steady growth of churches since 1970. Today 18.8% of the population are Christians.

Praise God:

- For causing the Church to grow
- For the significant growth of unity among Christians through initiatives like Love Singapore, Global Day of Prayer and Jubilee Day of Prayer
- For Singapore having become a significant strategic hub for missions activity (Antioch of Asia)



Pray:

- For the families in Singapore as there is a growing concern about broken marriages and issues of sexuality
- For the local churches to train a ready pool of people to reach out to those who are hurting and struggling: elderly poor, dysfunctional youth and those suffering from depression and gambling addiction
- For the discipleship of the next generation that they will stay true to their faith as they face many challenges from the demands of school/work and materialism
- For Singapore to remain as a significant centre for international missions, and for more Christians to be willing to be sent out as missionaries

SUNDAY, 1 JANUARY 2017

SCRIPTURE

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OBSERVATION

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APPLICATION

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PRAYER

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THE PAST WEEK

Review

What was my high point and my low point for the week?

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What gave me life and what drained me?

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How was the Spirit of God at work?

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Reflect

What is one key thing that God said to me this week in light of what has happened?

Respond

What is one thing I need to do in light of what God is saying?
COMMIT IN PRAYER

FAMILY DEVOTIONAL • WEEK 1 • JANUARY 2017

GOD'S WORD FOR TEACHING

The Bible teaches us what we need to know about God's truth.

Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:16-17

★ ACTIVITY BITE

Discover 10 new facts about healthy and unhealthy foods by searching the Internet or reading books from the library. Share your findings with people around you.

★ CHAT TIME

- Q1: Does being aware that certain foods are healthy or unhealthy help you in choosing what to eat? Why or why not?
Q2: Does awareness of what God's truth help you in making life choices? Why or why not?
Q3: How can you best grow in knowing more about God's truth?

★ LEARNING POINT

Being aware of how unhealthy certain foods are will help us avoid eat them often and prevent us from falling sick. Similarly, knowing what truth is will help us make good decisions. We will choose to avoid doing what is wrong, for example, actions like stealing, and do what is right, like saying kind words to one another. The Bible is God's Word that tells the truth about who He is and how we can live right. It teaches us what to believe in, the kind of character we should have and how to treat each other with love. Learn from His Word and hide it in your heart.

★ ACTION POINT

Begin this week by reading a chapter of the Bible each day. Share with your parents what you have learned. Get them to help you select a verse that you can memorise for that week.

★ PRAYER POWER

(Ask your children to pray after you.)

Dear God, thank You for teaching me about what truth is from Your Word. I want to learn more about You and help me always to make the right decisions. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

MONDAY, 2 JANUARY 2017

Truth Killed, God Usurped?

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 3:1-7; Psalm 11:3

OBSERVATION

From verses 1 to 7, how did Satan create doubt in Eve's mind about God's Word (cf. Gen 2:16-17), and why did Eve respond the way she did?

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Deeper Reflection

You can cause a building to collapse by destroying its foundation. Likewise, you can eliminate the concept of truth if you can make people believe that there is no basis of knowing truth. Postmodernism attempts to assassinate truth by postulating the view that there is no objective truth. "There is no essence of truth; truth has no essence", postmodernists tell us. Everything and anything can be revised. So whatever you believe is the "truth" for you. It is totally relative and absolutely subjective. Truth is what works for you. You believe what is "good" for you in your particular cultural context. Therefore truth is but a social construct. If you believe something, then that something is "true" for you. No one can, and no one should, say that it is false. Postmodernism disguises rebellion as maturity, a coming of age that celebrates the rejection of authority. Only the immature take things on authority. So people must exit from the modes of being, thinking and doing which are imposed on them. They must renounce limits – all which claim to be absolutes, universal, obligatory or necessary. These limits seek to define, confine, govern and restrict how people are, think and act. The postmodernist's hermeneutics of suspicion views truth and knowledge as constructed by those who are in power in order to control others. Thus, people must free themselves from conditions that render them a subject, from all attempts to subject them. The values sought are freedom, autonomy, self-creation and self-determination – values of the liberal society that many seek to build. Do you see that Satan today continues to deceive people into self-deification for the self-defining of truth and absolutes ("**you will be like God, knowing good and evil**", v.5)?

APPLICATION

How can I guard myself from being deceived by Satan with regard to the truth of God's Word?

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PRAYER

Lord God, I recognise the deceitfulness of satanic forces at work in the world today. Please help me to know Your Word more and more. Day by day, fill my heart with Your truth. Lord Jesus, strengthen Your Church to abide in Your Word, for You have said, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."¹ In Your name I pray. Amen.



¹ John 8:31-32

TUESDAY, 3 JANUARY 2017

God's Word Is Truth

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 119:41-43, 156-160; John 17:17

OBSERVATION

From these verses, what do you learn about God's Word (synonyms: promise, rules, law, precepts, testimonies, commandments, statutes and commands)?

Deeper Reflection

Those verses make clear that **God's Word is truth** and also tell us four qualities about God's Word. **First, God's Word is trustworthy:** "... **for I trust in Your word.** And take not **the word of truth** utterly out of my mouth, **for my hope is in Your rules**" (vv.42-43). We are to trust in God's Word. Value it. Hold fast to it. Rely upon it. Put our hope in it. God's Word is completely trustworthy because God is completely trustworthy. God's Word contains His promised salvation and reflects His steadfast love (v.41). That is why we love God's Word and delight in it; and we obey God's Word and speak of it (Psa 119:44-48). When we testify to others about the truthfulness of God's Word, it will not fail us or let us down. **Next, God's Word is righteous and eternal:** "**The sum of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous rules endures forever**" (v.160). God's Word as a whole, and in every individual part, is truth and reflects His righteousness. God's rules are eternal and they give us life (v.156) according to His steadfast love (v.159). His Word is a loving gift to bring blessing to us, not a restrictive rulebook that removes freedom from us. **Finally, God's Word sanctifies believers.** In Jesus' high priestly prayer to the Father for the disciples, He prayed, "**Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.**" (Jn 17:17) Jesus' disciples were to be set apart in the truth as He himself (Jesus) is set apart, so that they might carry on His mission in the world after His departure, until He comes again.

APPLICATION

How will I nurture my love for and delight in God's Word? (A good starting point is to keep a daily devotional time with God this year using this Devotional Journal.)

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- Give thanks:
- Pray for pastors and staff:
To love and delight in God's Word
- Pray for significant people:
- Pray for those in need:
- Pray for self:

WEDNESDAY, 4 JANUARY 2017

The Living Word

SCRIPTURE

John 1:1-3, 14-18; 1 John 1:1-3

OBSERVATION

What do these verses tell us about the Word/Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

Deeper Reflection

Today's verses reveal some wondrous truths! **The Word is eternal and living.** The Word existed in the beginning even before the world was made (vv.1-2; 1 Jn 1:1). The Word is not an inanimate force but a living Being: "...the word of life – the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us" (1 Jn 1:1-2). **The Word is God.** The Word/the Son was always fully God: "... the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (v.1). The Son has come to make known the Father to humankind: "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, He has made Him known" (v.18). In the context of verse 18, the first reference to "God" refers to the Father and the second reference to "God" refers to the Son. This tells us that the Father is fully God and so is the Son.² **The Word in creation.** The Word/the Son was the active agent in God's work of creating all things and every single thing (v.3). **The Word became flesh.** The Word/the Son was incarnate as fully human (while still fully God) and dwelt among humankind, allowing people to see His divine glory and experience His divine grace and truth: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (v.14). **Jesus Christ the Son of God is the living Word!**

APPLICATION

How does knowing those truths about Jesus Christ inform my worship of Him?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, I praise and worship You for who You are – the eternal Word, God the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity! You are glorious! You are loving and compassionate! Thank You for being willing to be God Incarnate for the sake of sinful humankind. Thank You for revealing the fullness of God's grace and truth in Your person, life and ministry. Thank You for revealing Yourself to me personally, so that I can believe in You and receive eternal life in You. Thank You for saving me. Amen.

Prayer Pointers

- Give thanks:
- Pray for leaders:
- Pray for significant people:
- Pray for those in need:
- Pray for self:

² Together with the Spirit who is also fully God, we have the doctrine of the Trinity, which can be summarised as: God is three Persons; each Person is fully God; and there is one God.

THURSDAY, 5 JANUARY 2017

The Gospel of Salvation

SCRIPTURE

Colossians 1:1-6; Ephesians 1:13; Romans 1:16

OBSERVATION

What is the significance of the Gospel, the Word of truth?

Deeper Reflection

The Gospel is “**the word of the truth**” that is bearing fruit and growing in the world (v.5). Around the world today, millions especially in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, are putting their faith in Jesus Christ. For example, *The Telegraph* reported in an article dated 20 November 2016: “In 2010 there were more than 58 million Protestants in China compared to 40 million in Brazil and 36 million in South Africa, according to the Pew Research Centre’s Forum on Religion and Public Life. Professor Yang, a leading expert on religion in China, believes that number will swell to around 160 million by 2025.”³ Even in the Middle East, we hear reports that many people are turning to Jesus. The “**word of truth**” is “**the gospel of your salvation**” that leads people to believe in Jesus Christ (Eph 1:13). However, despite the advance of the Gospel and a growing number of Christians around the world, there are projected estimates that, over the next 35 years, there will also be increasing numbers of adherents to Islam and people who are unaffiliated to any particular religion (e.g. atheists and agnostics).⁴ Thus, we can expect that while receptivity to the Gospel will grow, at the same time opposition and hostility to the Gospel will also increase. In such circumstances, it would be easy to feel threatened, intimidated or marginalised as a Christian witness. Yet let us remember the apostle Paul’s confident declaration of an unchanging truth: “**I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile**” (Rom 1:16 NIV).

APPLICATION

How can I boldly and faithfully share the Gospel of salvation with my Family/Friends, Relatives, Associates, Neighbours and even Strangers (FRANS) this year?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- Give thanks:

- Pray for leaders:

- Pray for significant people:

- Pray for those in need:

- Pray for self:

³ www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/10776023/China-on-course-to-become-worlds-most-Christian-nation-within-15-years.html

⁴ www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/

FRIDAY, 6 JANUARY 2017

Rightly Handle the Bible

SCRIPTURE

2 Timothy 2:14-18; 3:14-17

OBSERVATION

How do we rightly handle God's Word, "the word of truth"?

Deeper Reflection

What is the nature of God's Word? The Bible is God's Word and therefore a divine product: "All Scripture is **breathed out** by God" (2 Tim 3:16). In Jesus' and His apostles' views, both the Old Testament and New Testament writings constitute "all Scripture" and are therefore authoritative for all Christians. What the Bible says, God says. **How should Christians handle God's Word?** Rightly – in the proper way in accordance with its purposes: "Do your best to present yourself to God as **one approved**, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, **rightly handling the word of truth**" (v.15). **For what ends do we use God's Word?** All Scripture is "**profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness**" (2 Tim 3:16). One aspect of using God's Word in ministry is to teach the Bible in order to "make [people] wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ" (2 Tim 3:15). The Gospel is not for us to make personal gain in terms of money or fame (see 1 Thess 2:3-6). A second aspect is to teach the Bible in order to build up our fellow believers' faith in Christ. We proclaim Christ as Lord; we are but Christ's servants. As faithful stewards, we work diligently to teach simply and accurately "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). As such, we do not take part in petty, unfruitful quarrels over minor issues. Nor do we engage in uninformed speculations about unsupportable views or about matters that God has chosen not to reveal to us. We major on the major. The above is what it means to rightly handle God's Word as an approved worker and competent minister of God.

APPLICATION

What are two or three things I will now commit to do this year, in order to grow in my ability to rightly handle God's Word?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- Give thanks:

- Pray for lay leaders:
To rightly handle God's Word as approved workers and competent ministers of God

- Pray for significant people:

- Pray for those in need:

- Pray for self:

SATURDAY, 7 JANUARY 2017

The Sword That Wounds to Heal

SCRIPTURE

Hebrews 4:12-16; Ephesians 6:17

OBSERVATION

What is the nature and power of the Word of God, also known as “the sword of the Spirit”?

Deeper Reflection

The Word of God is also known as “the sword of the Spirit” (Eph 6:17). The Greek word used to refer to the sword here is *machaira* (same word used in v.12).⁵ *Machaira* refers to a relatively short sword used for cutting and stabbing.⁶ Thus it was more suited for close-quarter combat and for precise cuts and strong thrusts to mortally wound the enemy. Verse 12 tells us that God’s Word is “living and active”. This means that God’s Word is alive! It can run after you, persistently pursue you, take hold of you and speak to you! God’s Word is “sharper than any two-edged sword” and can pierce to divide “soul and spirit” and “joints and marrow”; it can even “discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart”! What a powerful, precision instrument that God uses to humble the proud in his arrogance and self-sufficiency! To convict the sinner of his visible and secret sins. To wound the wicked person with an out-of-order conscience! To afflict the comfortable and complacent! Everyone must ultimately give an account of one’s life to the Divine Judge. No person can crouch hidden from God’s sight nor stand up under His scrutiny. His indictments are true and His judgments righteous. Unsaved Soul, now is the time to accept God’s offer of complete pardon for sins and to embrace the gracious redemption that His Son Jesus made possible by His substitutionary atoning sacrifice of Himself on the cross for sinful humankind. Christian Pilgrim, come confidently to Jesus, your great high priest who understands your struggles with sin and waits to give you mercy and grace in your time of need.

APPLICATION

In what current situation do I recognise that God has used His Word to wound me in order to heal me with His redemptive grace?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- Give thanks:

- Pray for leaders:

- Pray for significant people:

- Pray for those in need:

- Pray for self:

⁵ The *machaira* was the kind of sword Simon Peter used to cut off the high priest’s servant Malchus’ ear in John 18:10.

⁶ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentaries (Apollos, 1999), 481, n.184. *Machaira* is to be distinguished from *rhomphaia*, a large, broad sword used for both cutting and piercing. That type of sword was referred to several times in the book of Revelation, e.g. Revelation 1:16; 2:12, 16; 6:8; 19:15; 19:21.

SUNDAY, 8 JANUARY 2017

SCRIPTURE

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OBSERVATION

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APPLICATION

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PRAYER

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THE PAST WEEK

Review

What was my high point and my low point for the week?

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What gave me life and what drained me?

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How was the Spirit of God at work?

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Reflect

What is one key thing that God said to me this week in light of what has happened?

Respond

What is one thing I need to do in light of what God is saying?

COMMIT IN PRAYER

FAMILY DEVOTIONAL • WEEK 2 • JANUARY 2017

GOD'S WORD FOR REBUKING

Be bold in saying “no” to doing wrong things.

Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Titus 3:1-3

★ ACTIVITY BITE

When you get scolded by your parents or teachers for doing something wrong, how do you feel?

★ CHAT TIME

Q1: What do you think are your parents' or teachers' intentions for doing that?

Q2: Have you ever felt tempted or pressured by others to do something you should not be doing?

Q3: Have you ever boldly told somebody not to do something that is not right?

★ LEARNING POINT

The word “rebuke” means to disapprove or reprimand someone because of their unacceptable behaviour or actions. It is for the purpose of helping the person grow in character. God's Word will rebuke us if our behaviour and actions are not in accordance with His ways. Do not reject God's rebuke. It may come in the form of a scolding or a gentle reminder. It may be painful, but it is for our own good. Accept God's rebuke and you will find yourself growing each day to be more like Jesus. If your friends ask you to do what is wrong, you should be bold enough to say “no” and encourage them not to do it too.

★ ACTION POINT

Think of someone who is doing things that you believe are not right, like saying bad words. Write a card to that person explaining how you feel about it and the right thing they should be doing instead.

★ PRAYER POWER

(Ask your children to pray after you.)

Lord Jesus, thank You for rebuking me when I do wrong because You love me very much. Help me to learn and be bold in saying “no” to sin any time I am tempted to do so. Amen.

MONDAY, 9 JANUARY 2017

Trinity in Community

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 1:26-27; Matthew 28:18-20; John 10:30

OBSERVATION

What difference does knowing the Triune God make to how much we live in community?

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Deeper Reflection

When God created the heavens and the earth, His constant refrain was “Let there be...” (Gen 1:3, 6, 14). But when man was made, God said, “Let **us** make man in **our** image...” (Gen 1:26, emphasis added). God could have said, “Let **Me** make man in **My** image...”. But all three persons in the Trinity were involved in creation – The Father who declared it, the Son through Whom it was made (Jn 1:3) and the Spirit who hovered over the waters (Gen 1:2). These three Persons of God are one, just as Jesus is one with the Father (Jn 10:30), and the Spirit is sent to us by both the Father and the Son (Jn 14:26, 15:26). When the Bible says that we are created in God’s image, it necessitates that we live as a community in this same oneness – the way God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit are relating to one another. Without which, part of the image of God is lost in us. And we can’t rightly and fully reflect Him to the world! Being one is the prayer and desire of Jesus for His Church (Jn 17:20-23). So that the world may know we are His disciples. Thus when we are called to proclaim the name of our God to the world, the name that is found in three Persons (Matt 28:18-20) and saves, we must proclaim that name not just with our lips, but with our lives of oneness in community to reflect how God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit are one all the time. Where there is absolute harmony, unity and submission, it is beautiful and glorious for the world to behold.

APPLICATION

How can I live in community to better reflect this Triune God whom I worship?

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PRAYER

I worship You, Almighty Father. You created me in Your image. I want to be a sharper and sharper image of You day by day. I worship You, Jesus my Saviour and Lord. Help me to die to my own pride and preferences, that I may truly live in community the way You desire and demand. I worship You, Holy Spirit. Cleanse and empower Your people to relate to one another the way God intended – so that the world may know what a great and glorious God we have. God in Three Persons, Blessed Trinity!

Prayer Pointers

- Give thanks:

- Pray for leaders:

- Pray for significant people:

- Pray for those in need:

- Pray for self:

TUESDAY, 10 JANUARY 2017

Redefining Family

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 12:46-48, Mark 3:20-21

OBSERVATION

Notice how Jesus redefined family. Why do you think this is so?

Deeper Reflection

Jesus said that not everyone who calls Him “Lord, Lord”, will enter the kingdom of Heaven (Matt 7:21). No matter how nice or spiritual it sounds on our lips, especially during times of worship and prayer. In fact, American Pastor Aiden Wilson Tozer says that Christians don’t tell lies; we just go to church and sing them! Jesus looks beyond the mere lip service we pay – be it in church, at work, at home or wherever we may be – to something far more fundamental. He redefined His family members as those who do God’s will. Because He is not simply the Head of this spiritual family. He is the King of a kingdom that has already arrived (Matt 4:17)! As family members of God, we must remember that we are also subjects of this Kingdom, and therefore at the absolute command of the King. This King requires obedience – as demonstrated by doing not our own will but His. Just as Jesus paved the way for us by doing not His own will, but the Father’s (Matt 26:39, 42). No matter how inconvenient, uncomfortable or “absurd” His will is. God calls us not simply to accept His will, but to prefer it and embrace it – so that we will do it! It is thus incongruent to say we are God’s children, calling Jesus our Lord – and yet **not** do God’s will, especially that which has already been revealed to us in the Scriptures. Some of those around us may even think we are impractical, irrelevant or simply out of our minds when we do so. Just as it happened to Jesus (Mk 3:21). But when we discern and do the will of God not as solo Christians, but as communities of God’s people – we will find by God’s help a strength in our community to do it together that is greater than our individual efforts!

APPLICATION

How is God leading my Covenant Group (CG) and I to do His will in our lives together – rather than leaning upon our own desires and preferences?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- Give thanks:

- Pray for pastors and staff:
That they will discern and do God’s will for Covenant EFC

- Pray for significant people:

- Pray for those in need:

- Pray for self:

WEDNESDAY, 11 JANUARY 2017

The Early Church in Community (I)

SCRIPTURE

Acts 2:42-47

OBSERVATION

List down how the early Church devoted themselves to God. Why is this important for life in our spiritual community?

Deeper Reflection

The early Church “devoted” themselves. It is a strong word that suggests being steadfast and single-hearted to a particular course of action⁷, through the stresses and seasons of life – rain or shine, for better or for worse and in sickness and in health. There were two dimensions or directions in their devotion. They were firstly devoted to Jesus Himself. They listened to the explanation of Jesus’ teaching by the apostles with spiritual hunger. They broke bread to commemorate what Jesus had done for them, as commanded by Him (Lk 22:19). Secondly, they were in a constant atmosphere of prayer, which again followed from Jesus’ instruction to them (Lk 24:48), and carried them through their time of waiting for the Holy Spirit to baptise them for explosive witness to their world (Acts 1:14). And in that spiritually positive environment, miracles happened. Fear and awe of God in them were stirred. There was great joy and praise. And this seemed to be the norm for them! In community life, devotion to Jesus is the first order of the day. Without which, we will relegate ourselves to being a social club, where we connect and get to know and enjoy one another’s company, but not sense and savour His presence. And if His presence is not sought when we gather, we miss **everything** else and a spiritual lethargy sets in. If we want to see our Covenant Groups (CGs) grow spiritually and numerically, we need to take an honest look at how we are first devoted to Jesus!

APPLICATION

How can my CG and I better devote ourselves to God’s presence when we gather?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, Your early Church was such a force to be reckoned with. They were hungry for Your presence and fearless in persecution, because they had been with You⁸. Give us more of Your presence, Lord. Stir in us that hunger once again, that we may yearn for You. For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere⁹! In Your name we ask and for Your glory’s sake, amen.

Prayer Pointers

- Give thanks:

- Pray for leaders:

- Pray for significant people:

- Pray for those in need:

- Pray for self:

⁷ Vine, W. E., Unger, M. F., & White, W. 1996. *Vine’s complete expository dictionary of Old and New Testament words*. T. Nelson: Nashville

⁸ Acts 4:13

⁹ Psalm 84:10

THURSDAY, 12 JANUARY 2017

The Early Church in Community (2)

SCRIPTURE

Acts 2:42-47

OBSERVATION

List down how the early Church devoted themselves to one another. Why is this important for community life?

Deeper Reflection

Yesterday, we saw how the early Church first devoted themselves to Jesus. Without this first priority, everything else in community life falls apart spiritually. The early Church also devoted themselves to one another. To have all things in common meant that all that they had was for communal use – whatever personal property and possessions were voluntarily given to those in need, via the apostles whom they submitted themselves to (Acts 4:32-35). They were prepared to give of themselves fully and unreservedly to one another. Notice that as they did so, they did not feel begrudged or sullen, as though they lost out in this life when they had less possessions. In fact, quite the opposite happened! There was extreme joy and generosity among them. The word “generosity” (v.46) can also be translated as “unworldly simplicity”¹⁰. They were uncorrupted by the world’s idea of possessions as being definitive of their self-worth. Nor did they give expecting a favour in return. When such was their way of life, the world around them could not help but sit up and take notice. It was counter-cultural in a very wholesome way and made the Gospel very attractive. Lost people were constantly drawn and added into the Kingdom as a result! In community life, we are called to love people and use things. Not use people and love things. And when that happens, not only are our fellow brothers and sisters liberated from the anxiety of their unmet needs, but our hearts are liberated to experience joy. And lost people are liberated from their sin!

APPLICATION

How can I better devote myself to my Covenant Group (CG) members so that the Gospel looks attractive through my life?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- Give thanks:

- Pray for leaders:

- Pray for significant people:

- Pray for those in need:

- Pray for self:

¹⁰ Vine, W. E., Unger, M. F., & White, W. 1996. *Vine's complete expository dictionary of Old and New Testament words*. T. Nelson: Nashville

FRIDAY, 13 JANUARY 2017

Let Us Not Neglect Community!

SCRIPTURE

Hebrews 10:19-25

OBSERVATION

Why were Christians in those days tempted to neglect or give up community life (see also Heb 10:32-36)?

Deeper Reflection

The writer of Hebrews gave three exhortations to the believers, who were most likely Jewish¹¹ – “Let us draw near...” (v.22), “Let us hold fast...” (v.23) and “Let us consider...” (v.24). Why were these exhortations especially necessary for them? They had suffered under intense persecution, as Hebrews 10:32-36 implied, and needed to endure this religious hostility under the Roman Empire. Under persecution, they were tempted to give up not just their community but their faith altogether. But as far as they were concerned, having a vibrant faith and a visible community were two sides of the same coin. Because for the early believers, when they were baptised¹² into their new faith, they were baptised into a new community. The writer reminded the believers that despite the persecution, they have a responsibility not just to themselves, but to the community. Because their faith in God, which can wane under pressure, can be kept going by the people of God when they come together to spur one another on in the right direction towards love and good works. Unlike our brothers and sisters in Christ from different parts of the world who face persecution today, we are blessed to live in a country with much religious harmony. In some dangerous countries, Christians lose not only their properties when they flee, but literally their heads when they refuse to denounce their faith. We have much less of a reason to neglect or forsake community. Let us not treat it simply as an option, but an indispensable way of keeping our faith strong!

APPLICATION

Reflect on your greatest hindrance in engaging with your Covenant Group (CG) community. What is one step you can take to overcome it?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- Give thanks:

- Pray for lay leaders:
That they will continue to stay true to their faith and not give up urging their members towards love and good deeds

- Pray for significant people:

- Pray for those in need:

- Pray for self:

¹¹ Morris, L. In Introduction to Hebrews. Gaebelein F. E., Expositor's Bible Commentary – Hebrews to Revelation. Zondervann, 1982

¹² Hebrews 10: 22 alludes to this

SATURDAY, 14 JANUARY 2017

Community in an Age of Technology

SCRIPTURE

2 Corinthians 5:5-9; 2 John 1:12; 3 John 1:14

OBSERVATION

What part of the ministry of the apostles Paul and John could not be substituted by their letter writing?

Deeper Reflection

The apostle Paul was facing fears on the inside and fights on the outside. He had sent a severe letter to rebuke the Corinthian church and feared the worst – that his authority as an apostle among them was rejected. At the same time, there were conflicts to deal with when he arrived at Macedonia (v.5), especially opposition to his ministry by outsiders to the point that the great apostle was vulnerable and admitted he was downcast! (v.6). It was in this low emotional state that the arrival of Titus, his friend and co-labourer in the Lord, comforted him. News of the Corinthians' repentance and concern for Paul refreshed his soul. Imagine if Titus was delayed further or failed to arrive! When ministering and encouraging those in need, our physical presence can be a breath of fresh air. It speaks volumes of how much we mean to one another, in the midst of our very hectic schedules. Intentional and intimate fellowship, if it is to encourage the soul, must happen in person. In fact, the Apostle John's use of the phrase "face-to-face" denotes an intimacy that is only possible with physical presence¹³. In our age of fast-paced technology, we are blessed with the ability to communicate virtually and easily, wherever we are. A Covenant Group (CG) member can be overseas and still keep in touch with his or her CG through WhatsApp, and can even join the CG meeting via Skype! However, technology has limitations, however good the emoticons look you cannot replicate an assuring pat on the back, or a comforting hug when you need one. Technology is meant to supplement community life, not substitute it. Let's be high-touch in our high-tech world!

APPLICATION

What are some ways I can bring joy and comfort to my CG members in person?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- Give thanks:

- Pray for leaders:

- Pray for significant people:

- Pray for those in need:

- Pray for self:

¹³ Barker, G.W., 3 John 12. Gaebelin F. E., Expositor's Bible Commentary – Hebrews to Revelation. Zondervan, 1982

SUNDAY, 15 JANUARY 2017

SCRIPTURE

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OBSERVATION

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APPLICATION

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PRAYER

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THE PAST WEEK

Review

What was my high point and my low point for the week?

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What gave me life and what drained me?

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How was the Spirit of God at work?

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Reflect

What is one key thing that God said to me this week in light of what has happened?

Respond

What is one thing I need to do in light of what God is saying?

COMMIT IN PRAYER

FAMILY DEVOTIONAL • WEEK 3 • JANUARY 2017

GOD'S WORD FOR CORRECTING

God's Word corrects our behaviour and actions from wrong to right.

Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Proverbs 19:20

★ ACTIVITY BITE

Bring out one of your school books and show your family mistakes that your teachers have corrected, if any.

★ CHAT TIME

Q1: How does it feel when you make mistakes in your homework and how does your teacher's correction help you to understand the subject better?

Q2: What happens to us when God corrects us through His Word?

Q3: What happens if we choose to ignore His correction?

★ LEARNING POINT

It will not help much if your teachers only tell you what you did wrong in your homework but do not explain how to correct them. To correct means to put wrong things right. We make mistakes in life, whether in our behaviour or actions. So we need to be corrected, if not we will not improve in our character. God's Word is the best corrector of our lives because everything it says is the truth. He does it because He cares for us. However, we can choose to reject any correction. If we do that, we will surely get into a lot of trouble.

★ ACTION POINT

Think of one moment when you were corrected because of an unacceptable behaviour or action. Consider it as God taking a moment to teach you. Give thanks to Him for giving you that learning opportunity.

★ PRAYER POWER

(Ask your children to pray after you.)

Thank You, God, for correcting me when I am wrong. I know You do it because You love me. Help me not to be too proud to receive any correction, but to be glad that I have an opportunity to learn to become better in my character. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

MONDAY, 16 JANUARY 2017

Stewardship: Knowing and Doing God's Will

SCRIPTURE

Romans 12:1-2; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5; 5:16-18

OBSERVATION

How does the renewal of our minds result in the transformation of our lives?

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Deeper Reflection

The apostle Paul urges us to worship God by presenting our bodies “as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God”. In order to do this, we must first have God’s perspective of things. As Reverend Edmund Chan often reminds us, “When we see as God sees, we will do as God says.” How do we see as God sees? In God’s sovereignty and wisdom, He has given us His Word. The Bible is God’s written Word, consisting of 66 books written by more than 40 human authors inspired by God’s Spirit to write God’s revelation of Himself to humankind. The Bible tells us who God is, what He has done and the unchanging principles by which He relates with people. The more we know and understand the Bible, the more we know and understand God’s perspective of things that happen in our lives and in the world. The more we understand God’s Word, the more we are able to discern God’s will based on His revealed will for His people and creation. That is the process of renewing our minds. We will grow in our ability to see as God sees. Then we will be in a better position to do as God says. When we obey God and do as He directs, our lives are transformed. We are changed from the inside out. Our hearts are changed. Our thinking, feelings and actions are changed. So we cooperate with the Holy Spirit’s work of transformation in our lives. We control our bodies in holiness and honour. We rejoice always. We give thanks in all circumstances. When we know and do God’s will, our lives are transformed!

APPLICATION

What is God’s will in my most challenging situation now, and how am I to submit to His will?

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PRAYER

Lord God, please help me to learn how to hear Your voice. As I spend time in Your Word, teach me to discern Your will for my current situation, as well as for the new year ahead. Please give me the faith, humility and wisdom to embrace the changes that need to take place in my heart, and the grace, courage and strength to effect the changes that need to take place in my choices and practices, that I may do Your will. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.

Prayer Pointers

- Give thanks:

- Pray for leaders:

- Pray for significant people:

- Pray for those in need:

- Pray for self:

TUESDAY, 17 JANUARY 2017

Stewardship: Acknowledging and Reflecting God's Ownership

SCRIPTURE

Psalms 24:1-2; 50:10-11

OBSERVATION

According to those verses, what does God own?

Deeper Reflection

God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1). Our Lord God owns the earth and all that it contains – the world and all who dwell in it. The biblical worldview acknowledges God's ownership over all of creation. When we contemplate God's Word and God's creation, we catch a fresh glimpse of His greatness and our smallness. God is infinitely great, and we are infinitesimally small! This correct perspective puts us in our proper place. God is God, not us. He is the centre of the universe. He is the ultimate source, means and goal of all things! ("For from him and through him and to him are all things", Rom 11:36) When we think about stewardship, we begin by acknowledging that God is the owner of everything! All our money, our possessions, the people in our lives and even our very lives belong to Him. We are not the owners. All our positions of prestige, power and influence are from God. All our abilities, assets, accomplishments and accolades have been given by God. We are but stewards entrusted by God with resources for the purpose of serving Him. There are Christians who consider the resources they have as belonging to them and there are Christians who consider the resources they have as belonging to God. The former group act as though they are the owners and do with the resources as they please. The latter group serve as stewards and handle the resources in a way that seeks to please God. There is all the difference in the world! Do you live as though you are an owner or a steward?

APPLICATION

How do I treat the money, possessions and people I have in my life?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- Give thanks:

- Pray for pastors and staff:
That their lives will reflect that all they have is from God's hand

- Pray for significant people:

- Pray for those in need:

- Pray for self:

WEDNESDAY, 18 JANUARY 2017

Stewardship: Faithfully Proclaiming God's Gospel

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 4:1-4; Ephesians 1:3-14

OBSERVATION

What are "the mysteries of God" (v.1) as revealed in Ephesians 1:3-14?

Deeper Reflection

We have believed the Gospel and received eternal life in Christ Jesus. We have been chosen in Christ, adopted as God's children, redeemed by Christ's blood, saved by God's grace, sealed with God's Spirit and guaranteed a glorious inheritance! The question facing each one of us now is: **Are we trustworthy stewards of the Gospel?** Are we keeping the good news to ourselves or are we sharing it with others who have yet to hear? God is the One who will ultimately judge us with respect to whether we have been trustworthy stewards. Often we struggle with sharing the Gospel because we fear what the other person may think of us. There is a simple way to go about this: **PDA**. The first step "P" is **Personal revival**, in other words to keep a daily walk with God, pray to Him, read His Word and live it out. As a result we grow to know God more and His Spirit works in our hearts to grow our love for God and for people. Wherever God sends us, He will bring people into our sphere of influence and give us a genuine concern for their felt needs, as well as their deepest need for God to fill the hole in their soul. The second step "D" is **Divine appointment**, where the Holy Spirit will prompt us regarding particular persons at particular times – to befriend them, engage them in meaningful conversation, do a good deed, offer to pray for their needs or share our testimony and the Gospel. The third step "A" is **Active obedience**, which means we obey and follow the Spirit's leading and simply do as God says and entrust the outcome to Him.

APPLICATION

What is stopping me from faithfully leading a PDA lifestyle?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, please help me to overcome every hindrance that is stopping me from living the PDA lifestyle. In the days ahead let me enjoy Your presence daily and trace Your hand in my life ever so clearly, so that those around me will see Your reality in my life and be drawn to know You for themselves. Grant me the courage to share my testimony and the Gospel with unbelievers, so that they will have a chance to hear and believe in You and gain eternal life. Amen.

Prayer Pointers

- Give thanks:
- Pray for leaders:
- Pray for significant people:
- Pray for those in need:
- Pray for self:

THURSDAY, 19 JANUARY 2017

Stewardship: Investing Resources by God's Grace

SCRIPTURE

2 Corinthians 9:6-11

OBSERVATION

As Christians, what are our God-given resources for?

Deeper Reflection

As stewards of the resources God has put into our hands, we have a duty to use them according to His purposes for His glory. We are called to sow bountifully in order to reap bountifully. We are called to wisely, intentionally, willingly and cheerfully invest temporal resources that we have for eternal returns. The resources and returns are guaranteed (vv.10-11)! What would make good investments? Evangelism efforts and missions engagements come to mind immediately. What about empowering the marginalised and exploited? Educating disadvantaged children and youths? What about development work in rural communities? Disaster relief? Poverty alleviation? The poor have a special place in God's heart. They should have a place in ours, too. Helping them is an expression of God's righteousness. Those who receive our help realise that our God is good and righteous. They begin to learn to give God praise and thanks (v.11b). We go on to tell them that our righteousness is not derived from keeping the law, but is a righteousness that comes through faith in Christ; ours is the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith (Phil 3:9). That is liberating news! And the Gospel points to a glorious future for God's people! A guaranteed future promised by the good and righteous God who keeps His promises and brings everything to pass in accordance with His will. Therefore people everywhere can have hope for the future. Having Christ in them is the hope of glory (Col 1:27)! Pray and ask God to provide you with resources for investing, because "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 (v.8)".

APPLICATION

Where are my resources focused on and why?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- Give thanks:

- Pray for leaders:

- Pray for significant people:

- Pray for those in need:

- Pray for self:

FRIDAY, 20 JANUARY 2017

Stewardship: Living Life Under God's Guidance

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 90:1-12; Proverbs 9:10-11

OBSERVATION

How can we live our lives more wisely?

Deeper Reflection

The secret to living wisely is to number our days in the fear of the Lord. We see two vital truths. One, **God is eternal and our present existence is temporal**. Two, **God is God and we are not**. Therefore, to live wisely, first, **we must make the most of our present life**, which in proper perspective, is really very short. Second, **we must live in a right relationship with God**. We need to come under God's authority and submit ourselves to His leading and direction. Many people today would object to that way of life as being backward, unenlightened, constrained and limited. They champion self-creation, self-autonomy, self-determination and self-fulfilment. However, those notions are illusions and not ultimate reality. General revelation (i.e. the general truths that can be known about God through nature) and special revelation (i.e. the more specific truths that can be known about God through the supernatural, especially God's written Word, the Bible and God's Son, Jesus Christ) tell us that God is the Creator, Saviour, King and Father. Thus, to live wisely is to live an intentional and God-directed life. Are you spending your life on what will count for eternity instead of what will ultimately be of no consequence? Are you living your life the way God wants you to live it instead of how you want to live it? Are you asking God to direct your life and ministry instead of leaving Him out of your decision-making process? Are you so busy with work/ministry that you are neglecting your family's needs? Are you spending so much time on work/ministry tasks that you don't have time to build deeper relationships with the people around you and, more importantly, with God?

APPLICATION

What are some things that I need to do/stop doing in order to live my life more intentionally and in a more God-directed manner?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- Give thanks:
- Pray for lay leaders:
To give God full control of their daily schedules
- Pray for significant people:
- Pray for those in need:
- Pray for self:

SATURDAY, 21 JANUARY 2017

Stewardship: Using Gifts for God's Glory

SCRIPTURE

1 Peter 4:10-11

OBSERVATION

What is the relationship between the stewardship of gifts and the glory of God?

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Deeper Reflection

As God's people, we know that He has blessed us to be channels of His blessing to others around us. God wants and is able to use each one of us for His purposes. He has given each Christian (at least) one gift – a ministry ability. Gifts are given for us to use to glorify God. Here, we see two broad categories of gifts – speaking gifts and serving gifts. Generally, those with speaking gifts will exercise them in the forefront with high visibility, and those with serving gifts will exercise them in the background with lower visibility. Both kinds of gifts face the danger of pride – those in the limelight are in danger of thinking too highly of themselves, while those behind the scenes are in danger of thinking too lowly of themselves. Both kinds of gifts are important to God, and He sees everything that we do for Him even when others don't see. We do not need to compare gifts nor compete with fellow Christians. God evaluates us not on the kinds of gifts we have (He is the One who gave them to us in the first place!), but rather on how faithful we are in stewarding whatever gifts we have received from Him for His glory. If you don't know what your gift is, take the time to seek the Lord, talk to your leaders, read up on the various gifts and simply start serving in a ministry. You will soon discover your gift. If you already know what your gift is, keep using it while continually sharpening and honing your ability so that you can better use your gift to bring maximum glory to God.

APPLICATION

How can I develop my gift to serve God better?

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PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- Give thanks:

- Pray for leaders:

- Pray for significant people:

- Pray for those in need:

- Pray for self:

SUNDAY, 22 JANUARY 2017

SCRIPTURE

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OBSERVATION

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APPLICATION

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PRAYER

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THE PAST WEEK

Review

What was my high point and my low point for the week?

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What gave me life and what drained me?

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How was the Spirit of God at work?

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Reflect

What is one key thing that God said to me this week in light of what has happened?

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Respond

What is one thing I need to do in light of what God is saying?

COMMIT IN PRAYER

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FAMILY DEVOTIONAL • WEEK 4 • JANUARY 2017

GOD'S WORD FOR TRAINING

God's Word trains us to have the right behaviour and actions.

Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 1 Timothy 4:7; Galatians 5:22-23

★ ACTIVITY BITE

Name a game or an activity that you would like to be skilful in. Think of the kind of training you will need to help you be good at it.

★ CHAT TIME

- Q1: Is training important in helping you become skilful in certain activities? Why or why not?
- Q2: Can a warrior go into battle without being trained? If he did, what would happen to him?
- Q3: Is it necessary for us to be trained in Christ-like behaviour and actions? Why or why not?

★ LEARNING POINT

Christ-like behaviour and actions don't come automatically to us. Either it is because we are not aware of our wrong behaviour or it is hard for us to change what we know is wrong. For example, many people find it hard to ask for forgiveness when they do something wrong. But it is what Jesus teaches us to do. It will take some training to be humble to apologise. We can be trained to know how to pray, study God's Word and grow the fruit of the Spirit in our lives with God's help. Be willing to learn. Let God's Word train us so that we can be more like Jesus.

★ ACTION POINT

From Galatians 5:22-23, name one aspect of the fruit of the Spirit that you would like to be trained in (e.g. patience, kindness or self-control). With help from your parents, look for some Bible verses that will help you grow in that area.

★ PRAYER POWER

(Ask your children to pray after you.)

Thank You, Jesus, for training me through Your Word in all the right behaviour and actions. Help me to grow to be more like You every day. Amen.

MONDAY, 23 JANUARY 2017

Balance: In the World but Not of the World

SCRIPTURE

John 17:14-16; James 1:27; 1 John 2:15-17

OBSERVATION

How we live rests so much on how we view this passing world. How should we view it?

Deeper Reflection

We are to live as people who are not “**of**” this world, we are to be unstained from the world, and we are also not to love this passing world. Yet, we are very much “**in**” the world. God loves the world, and we also have a responsibility to share in His heart for the world, caring for those who are orphans and widows of our times: the marginalised and vulnerable. How are we to reconcile all that? Consider the following insights: “The devotional masters write much about training the heart in two opposite directions: *contemptus mundi*, our being torn loose from all earthly attachments and ambitions; and *amor mundi*, our being quickened to a divine but painful compassion for the world. In the beginning God plucks the world out of our hearts – *contemptus mundi*. Here we experience a loosening of the chains of attachment to positions of prominence and power. All our longings for social recognition, to have our name in lights, begin to appear puny and trifling. We learn to let go of all control, all managing, all manipulation. We experience a glorious detachment from this world and all it offers. And then, just when we have become free from it all, God hurls the world back into our heart – *amor mundi* – where we and God together carry the world in infinitely tender love. We deepen in our compassion for the bruised, the broken, the dispossessed. We ache and pray and labour for others in a new way, a selfless way, a joy-filled way. Our heart is enlarged towards those on the margins. Indeed, our heart is enlarged towards all people, towards all of Creation.”¹⁴

APPLICATION

What must I do to live my life with regard to maintaining a balance between keeping my heart from being enchanted with the vain allure of this passing world (*contemptus mundi*) **and** embracing this world in compassion and to love it the way God does (*amor mundi*)?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, teach me to love not the world. Help my heart not to be captivated by the world and not to be too easily attracted to what it offers. At the same time, lead me to love the world the way You do. May my heart resonate with Yours for the world, so that I come to serve the world more wholeheartedly for people to find their wholeness in You. Amen.

Prayer Pointers

- Give thanks:
- Pray for leaders:
- Pray for significant people:
- Pray for those in need:
- Pray for self:

¹⁴ Richard Foster, *Christianity Today*, February 4, 2009.

TUESDAY, 24 JANUARY 2017

Balance: Your Faith Is Personal and Communal

SCRIPTURE

Ecclesiastes 7:18; Acts 2:42-47

OBSERVATION

What does balance mean in relation to how our Christian faith is to be held and expressed?

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Deeper Reflection

We need to grasp this when learning to walk in balance: “The opposite of a true statement is a false statement, but the opposite of a profound truth can be another profound truth.”¹⁵ Walking in balance means identifying opposite profound truths that are seemingly contradictory. We learn how to hold them in tension and gain wisdom through integrating them. Embracing both opposites is often not intuitive. In relation to yesterday’s reflections, for example, we struggle with reconciling the two: Are we to love the world or are we not to? We need to recognise how both are true and both are needed. The greater profound truth is found in learning to embrace both. Very often, it is living in light of only half the whole profound truth that leaves us imbalanced and in error. Today, we apply this in relation to how our faith is to be held and expressed: Is it to be private, personal and individual, or is it to be public, overt and in community? The starting point is that our faith must be **personally held**. It cannot be a borrowed or purely external one on account of our birth or church attendance. It is having a personal relationship with God that matters, not merely belonging to a church community. At the same time, ours is not intended to be an individualistic faith. Authentic private reality will always become manifested publicly. Our faith is to be **expressed in community**, to be enriched by community and to enrich it. What originates in individual hearts is also destined to shape cultures.

APPLICATION

What must I do so that my Christian faith will be both deeply personal without being individualistic and expressed in community without compromising authenticity and personal discipleship?

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PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- Give thanks:

- Pray for pastors and staff:
To have a deep personal relationship with God and strong relationships with one another

- Pray for significant people:

- Pray for those in need:

- Pray for self:

¹⁵ Niels Bohr: S. Rozental (ed.), *Niels Bohr: His Life and Work as Seen by His Friends and Colleagues*, (Wiley, 1967), p.328.

WEDNESDAY, 25 JANUARY 2017

Balance: You Are Dispensable and Irreplaceable

SCRIPTURE

Psalms 75:4-7; Jeremiah 1:1-5; Ephesians 2:10

OBSERVATION

How important am I in the larger scheme of things? Do I make a difference?

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Deeper Reflection

The opposite of a great truth is also a great truth. A paradox is an interweaving of two great and opposite truths.¹⁶ Appreciating balance and growing in wisdom involve embracing paradoxes and seemingly conflicting truths. It means avoiding one-sidedness by grasping the “both...and” rather than just holding on to the “either...or”. It has been said that while no one is truly indispensable, a person is also never completely replaceable. While certain circumstances sometimes call for the special expertise of some, no great man is ultimately needed to the point of utter indispensability. That may be said even of holders of the greatest of offices on earth. Amid the perplexing flurry of the 2016 US elections, we are reminded that the destiny of all US Presidents is to end up as a mere footnote in history.¹⁷ **This, too, shall pass** is true of our toughest circumstances, and also of the greatest among us. At some point, with or without you, life goes on for others. Relax, you are **not** indispensable! At the same time, there is a sense in which we are not truly replaceable. You are unique, given your past, your personality and your proficiencies. You bring your unique self and contribution to bear on the circumstances and people around you. That uniqueness is not something that others can completely replace. For a child, especially, his or her parents are **never** truly replaceable. Your challenge is to find out the areas in which you are least replaceable and to devote yourself to them. Balance means embracing **both** in how we live: Not indispensable **and** not truly replaceable.

APPLICATION

Seek to find rest and learn humility by acknowledging before God your dispensability. Then ask God: What are the areas in which I'm least replaceable?

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PRAYER

Lord Jesus, open my eyes to my dispensability, so that I do not carry inflated views of my own importance and so that I learn to rest in Your sufficiency. Also, help me focus my eyes on the areas You have called me to and gifted me for, and enable my efforts there to translate into blessings for others to the praise of Your Name. Amen.

Prayer Pointers

- Give thanks:

- Pray for leaders:

- Pray for significant people:

- Pray for those in need:

- Pray for self:

¹⁶ James Lucas, *Knowing the Unknowable God: How Faith Thrives on Divine Mystery* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2003), p.6.

¹⁷ www.desiringgod.org/interviews/every-president-will-be-a-footnote

THURSDAY, 26 JANUARY 2017

Balance: Jesus Our Example

SCRIPTURE

John 8:1-11

OBSERVATION

In this account, how was balance expressed in Jesus' life and ministry?

Deeper Reflection

Strengths have a flip side of corresponding weaknesses. People who are tender-hearted and considerate towards others tend not to be bold souls who accomplish the seemingly impossible. Leaders who are visionary and passionate may be rather inconsistent or ill-disciplined with details. The confident tend not to be humble and the humble tend not to be confident. While such one-sidedness seems natural, the concept of balance calls us beyond it to a certain two-sidedness. Consider how such balance is powerfully displayed in the life and ministry of Jesus: "He combines qualities that no one ever has. The accounts of Him in the New Testament speak for themselves. Despite His incredible claims, we never see Him pompous or oppressive or standing on His own dignity. He is absolutely approachable to the weakest and most broken people, yet He is completely fearless before the proud and the powerful. Despite being profoundly human, and becoming weary and lonely and moved to joy and love and anger, we never see Him moody or inconsistent or being strong when He should have been tender or tender where He should be strong. Most interesting of all, in the accounts of His dealings with people, He is continually surprising us, shocking us, yet never disappointing us."¹⁸ "He is tenderness without weakness, strength without harshness, humility without the slightest lack of confidence, holiness and unbending convictions without the slightest lack of approachability, power without insensitivity, passion without prejudice. There is never a false step, never a jarring note. This is life at the highest."¹⁹ Being like Jesus means growing in the two-sidedness of balance.

APPLICATION

How can I give careful attention to the flip side of my natural strengths, in order to grow in the two-sided balance found in Christ-likeness?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- Give thanks:

- Pray for leaders:

- Pray for significant people:

- Pray for those in need:

- Pray for self:

¹⁸ Tim Keller, <http://discover.redeemer.com/Jesus/63/read>

¹⁹ John H. Gerstner, *Theology for Everyman* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), p.45.

FRIDAY, 27 JANUARY 2017

Balance: Looking Forward and Looking Back

SCRIPTURE

Philippians 3:7-16

OBSERVATION

How does this passage reveal the necessity of looking forward **and** looking back in our discipleship journey?

Deeper Reflection

“I know who I want and ought to be, and I am far from being that man; but praise God, I’m also not the man I once was.”²⁰ If discipleship is an ongoing journey toward a destination, we need to constantly look forward **as well as** look back as we trek along. **Looking forward** means that we do not get stuck in the past. It means we refuse to be weighed down by the baggage of past regrets or be unable to relinquish the glory of past acclaim. In looking forward, we see how much distance lies ahead in our journey. We see that we are not yet who we ought to be and we face up courageously to areas of growth in our personal discipleship. At the same time, **looking back** from time to time is necessary. Do not gaze back wistfully at what you left behind, uncertain whether your commitment to Him is worth it.²¹ Instead, look back, as many Psalmists²² have done, to remember God’s track record of faithfulness. Look back also to reflect on how far you have come with Him, with humble gratitude for His work in your life. In our discipleship journey’s long obedience, both seeming opposites are needed. **Looking forward to see how much remains unattained keeps away complacency and slothfulness.** We are kept from being fixated with both what we are proud or ashamed of in our past. **Looking back to see how far we have come protects us from discouragement.**

APPLICATION

Take some time now (and every quarter) to come before God and reflect on how far you have come as a disciple of Jesus, as well as how far you still have to go in order to fully follow Him. Ask God: How can I apply myself more fully to the present with steadfastness and wisdom?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- Give thanks:

- Pray for lay leaders:
To keep growing in their journey of following Jesus

- Pray for significant people:

- Pray for those in need:

- Pray for self:

²⁰ In slightly different forms, this has been attributed both to John Newton and to Martin Luther King, Jr.

²¹ Jesus warned against that in Luke 9:62.

²² For instance, Psalms 103, 105, 111, 114 and 116.

SATURDAY, 28 JANUARY 2017

Balance: God's Sovereignty and Our Responsibility

SCRIPTURE

Acts 27:13-44

OBSERVATION

In this amazing escape from death at sea, was it God's work or human effort that saved the people?

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Deeper Reflection

A question arises: How much of our discipleship depends on human effort and discipline, and how much has to do with God's work in our lives? Similarly, concerning the pre-believers we try to reach, is salvation the work of God? Then how does our testimony matter? Again, don't circumstances and events come under God's sovereign power alone? Does intercessory prayer make any difference? In today's Scripture reading, God revealed to the apostle Paul that he would survive the treacherous storm at sea. Furthermore, in answer to his prayers, all 276 persons on board would be safe.²³ Paul had complete faith in God's promise. Yet when Paul saw the sailors attempt to escape on a lifeboat, he told the centurion and soldiers to stop them. Although Paul believed that God's word would come to pass, he did not shrug passively when the sailors tried to abandon ship. He acted on his understanding that for all on board to survive, the sailors must remain on the ship to maintain operations so that the ship would not run aground. Later, Paul did not leave the people to wallow in self-pity and self-neglect, but encouraged all of them and got them to eat food for strength. Paul did all that was within his power to do in the circumstances. Knowing that God can and will act does not mean we are relieved of our responsibility, whether to testify, pray or act with intentionality. In all that, we act with assurance and restedness of soul, knowing that it is God who is ultimately at work. Trust **and** obey.

APPLICATION

In what current situation do I need to apply myself fully to what is within my responsibility to do and trust **and** wait on God, knowing fully that God's power and grace will be sufficient for me in every circumstance?

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PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- Give thanks:

- Pray for leaders:

- Pray for significant people:

- Pray for those in need:

- Pray for self:

²³ Acts 27:24, 34, 37.

SUNDAY, 29 JANUARY 2017

SCRIPTURE

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OBSERVATION

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APPLICATION

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PRAYER

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THE PAST WEEK

Review

What was my high point and my low point for the week?

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What gave me life and what drained me?

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How was the Spirit of God at work?

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Reflect

What is one key thing that God said to me this week in light of what has happened?

Respond

What is one thing I need to do in light of what God is saying?
COMMIT IN PRAYER

FAMILY DEVOTIONAL • WEEK 5 • JANUARY 2017

EQUIPPED TO DO GOOD WORKS

God's Word trains and prepares us to do good works.

Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Matthew 5:16

★ ACTIVITY BITE

Prepare some jelly beans in a bowl. Take turns as a family describing one good deed you can do for someone and explain why you want to do it. After that, pick one jelly bean for yourself. Everyone is to take turns doing this. See how many jelly beans you can collect after five minutes.

★ CHAT TIME

- Q1: Are you surprised by the many good works we can do for others? Why or why not?
- Q2: Does God want us to do good works, especially to those who don't know Jesus? Why or why not?
- Q3: Is it necessary for us to study God's Word to know how to do good works? Why or why not?

★ LEARNING POINT

Matthew 5:16 says that we are to let the light of Jesus shine in and through our lives. Only through our godly behaviour and actions can others see this light. How can anyone see that God is good if they see us being unkind, full of anger and often caught lying? They will surely not be attracted to want to know Jesus at all. All the teaching, rebuking, correcting and training by God's Word is for us to grow to be more like Jesus in our behaviour and to do the good works that He has prepared for us, so that others will see that God is good.

★ ACTION POINT

Choose to do one good deed for a friend who does not know Jesus. Pray for him or her, so that your friend will be drawn to know Jesus.

★ PRAYER POWER

(Ask your children to pray after you.)

Dear God, thank You for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training me through Your Word so that I can become more like Jesus. Let me shine Your light so that my friends will know who You are. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

MONDAY, 30 JANUARY 2017

Brokenness: The Day of Reckoning

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 25:19-34; 27:21-29, 41

OBSERVATION

What wrongs did Jacob commit against Esau such that Esau wanted to kill him?

Deeper Reflection

The journey of brokenness begins when a day of reckoning comes, when there is a crisis. For Jacob, that day came when his sins caught up with him. His twin brother, Esau, wanted to kill him after their father Isaac passed away. When Jacob and Esau were born, Esau came out first, followed by Jacob who was holding on to Esau's heel. "Jacob" literally means "heel-snatcher". They had been striving in the womb for the privilege of being the firstborn. As Jacob's life unfolded, it became evident that what he lost in the womb, he was determined to gain in the world. Do you sometimes feel short-changed in life? That you should have been entitled to certain privileges or gifts? Do you feel that you want to grab what you feel should be yours? Jacob did just that. He stole Esau's birth right (the firstborn's privileges) and, later, Esau's blessing (family prestige and inheritance). In the words of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, he was "**loving self for self's sake**". Perhaps like Jacob, in our moment of pride, insecurity, lust, anger, bitterness, greed, deception, neglect, irresponsibility or legalism, we have committed sins and the consequences now confront us. Perhaps like Jacob, our knee-jerk reaction is to run away from the consequences of our sins (Gen 27:41-45). Jacob's running away from home is a reflection of him running away from God. Sin always separates us from family, community and, ultimately, God. Sin drives a wedge between us and God, resulting in our loss of security, satisfaction and significance. But, running away from God is ultimately futile (see Psa 139:7-12). Run to God and not from God. Come clean before Him.

APPLICATION

Stop running away, accusing or blaming others, and giving excuses for any crisis you are facing. Ask God for the courage to take responsibility and begin to do some deep soul-searching with the help of the Holy Spirit.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, You know how insecure and insignificant I feel. I have been running away from You and seeking love in all the wrong places. Help me to dispel the illusion that I am in control of my life and to trust Your heart for the love that I seek. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer Pointers

- Give thanks:
- Pray for leaders:
- Pray for significant people:
- Pray for those in need:
- Pray for self:

TUESDAY, 31 JANUARY 2017

Brokenness: Loving God for Self's Sake

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 28:10-22

OBSERVATION

What are the similarities and differences between God's promises to Jacob (vv.13-15) and Jacob's vow (vv.20-22)?

Deeper Reflection

As Jacob was running away from Esau, he must have been gripped with fear. The journey through the wilderness all alone was one fraught with danger – robbers, beasts and the harsh elements. Jacob must have wondered: Will Esau chase after me and catch up? Will I survive this perilous journey? God replaced the refugee Jacob's "nightmares" with a dream. The spiritual reality is that God has always been present in Jacob's life. In the dream, God revealed His presence and gave promises to Jacob. Jacob's response exposes his worldly perspectives. Although Jacob was right in sensing the presence of the Lord there, it seems that Jacob might have put too much emphasis on God's presence being in a **particular** place. In his vow, Jacob appears to harbour doubts as to God's promised presence in **every** place – "**If** God will be with me" – and to bargain with God by promising tithes **if** God fulfils His promises. Evidently, God's word alone was not enough for Jacob. He had to **see** God do it before he would believe. Jacob's vow was faithless and totally man-centred. He was "**loving God for self's sake**" (in the words of St. Bernard of Clairvaux). Despite such a faithless response from Jacob, God did not "call off the deal". God was gracious towards Jacob, knowing this man had a long way to go in learning to trust Him. Over time, Jacob did grow in his faith in God, as reflected in God's self-reference as "**the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob**" (Exo 3:6). Even when we are faithless, God remains faithful to His covenant!

APPLICATION

In my moments of desperation, when I cry out to God for help, am I using God for my own sake? Am I loving God for self's sake?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- Give thanks:

- Pray for pastors and staff:
To serve in a way that reflects a genuine love for God and faith in His promises

- Pray for significant people:

- Pray for those in need:

- Pray for self:

NOTES

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