

MAY

DEVOTIONAL JOURNAL 2017

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

HAGGAI 1:4 (ESV)

COVENANT EFC

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Also available at www.cefc.org.sg and "Covenant EFC" mobile app.

MEMORY FOCUS

EZRA & HAGGAI (ESV)

2017

JANUARY

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

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

M A Y – J U N E

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 us 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 Baloche
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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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CCLI Song # 3148428

THE LION AND THE LAMB

Verse 1

He's coming on the clouds
Kings and kingdoms will bow down
And every chain will break
As broken hearts declare His praise
For who can stop the Lord almighty

Chorus

Our God is the Lion
The Lion of Judah
He's roaring with power
And fighting our battles
And every knee will bow before Him
Our God is the Lamb
The Lamb that was slain
For the sin of the world
His blood breaks the chains
And every knee will bow before the Lion and the Lamb
Oh every knee will bow before the Lion and the Lamb

Verse 2

So open up the gates
Make way before the King of kings
Our God who comes to save
Is here to set the captives free
For who can stop the Lord almighty

Bridge

Who can stop the Lord almighty
Who can stop the Lord (almighty)

Brenton Brown | Brian Johnson | Leeland Mooring
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IN CHRIST ALONE

Verse 1

In Christ alone, my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song
This cornerstone, this solid ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm

What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings ceased
My Comforter, my all in all
Here in the love of Christ I stand

Verse 2

In Christ alone who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones He came to save
Till on that cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live

Verse 3

There in the ground His body lay
Light of the world by darkness slain
Then bursting forth in glorious day
Up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am His, and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ

Verse 4

No guilt in life, no fear in death
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from His hand
'Til He returns, or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand

Keith Getty | Stuart Townend
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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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FOREVER (WE SING HALLELUJAH)

Verse 1

The moon and stars they wept
The morning sun was dead
The Saviour of the world was fallen
His body on the cross
His blood poured out for us
The weight of every curse upon Him

Verse 2

One final breath He gave
As heaven looked away
The Son of God was laid in darkness
A battle in the grave
The war on death was waged
The power of hell forever broken

Pre-Chorus

The ground began to shake
The stone was rolled away
His (perfect) (reckless) love could not be overcome
Now death where is your sting
Our resurrected King has rendered you defeated

Chorus

Now forever He is glorified
Forever He is lifted high
And forever He is risen
He is alive and He is alive
(Repeat)

FOREVER (WE SING HALLELUJAH) - CONT'D

Bridge

We sing hallelujah
 We sing hallelujah
 We sing hallelujah
 The Lamb has overcome
 (Repeat)

We sing hallelujah
 We sing hallelujah
 We sing hallelujah

Ending

And now death, where is your sting
 Our resurrected King has overcome
 He's overcome oh

Brian Johnson | Christa Black Gifford | Gabriel Wilson | Jenn Johnson | Joel Taylor | Kari Jobe
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WHAT A BEAUTIFUL NAME

Verse 1

You were the Word at the beginning
 One with God the Lord Most High
 Your hidden glory in creation
 Now revealed in You our Christ

Chorus 1

What a beautiful Name it is
 What a beautiful Name it is
 The Name of Jesus Christ my King
 What a beautiful Name it is
 Nothing compares to this
 What a beautiful Name it is
 The Name of Jesus

Verse 2

You didn't want heaven without us
 So Jesus You brought heaven down
 My sin was great Your love was greater
 What could separate us now

Chorus 2

What a wonderful Name it is
 What a wonderful Name it is
 The Name of Jesus Christ my King
 What a wonderful Name it is
 Nothing compares to this
 What a wonderful Name it is
 The Name of Jesus
 What a wonderful Name it is
 The Name of Jesus

Bridge 1

Death could not hold You
 The veil tore before You
 You silence the boast of sin and grave
 The heavens are roaring
 The praise of Your glory
 For You are raised to life again

WHAT A BEAUTIFUL NAME - CONT'D

Bridge 2

You have no rival
 You have no equal
 Now and forever God You reign
 Yours is the kingdom
 Yours is the glory
 Yours is the Name above all names

Chorus 3

What a powerful Name it is
 What a powerful Name it is
 The Name of Jesus Christ my King
 What a powerful Name it is
 Nothing can stand against
 What a powerful Name it is
 The Name of Jesus

Ending

What a powerful Name it is
 The Name of Jesus
 What a powerful Name it is
 The Name of Jesus

Ben Fielding | Brooke Ligertwood
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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

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THE CHURCH BEYOND

PRAY FOR CAMBODIA

“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)

Cambodia is one of the world’s poorest countries. From 1975 to 1979, the Khmer Rouge sought to eradicate all religions and only a few thousand Christians survived the genocide. The last 25 years has, however, seen unprecedented church growth.

Praise God:

- For this church growth, that the great suffering of Cambodians in the past has been transformed into great responsiveness to the Gospel, with believers now comprising 3.5% of the population.



Pray:

- For deep healing from the trauma of their losses and suffering, because the scars of genocide still remain.
- For a government that not only seeks the good of all, but is effective in improving the well-being of all Cambodians.
- For the light of the Gospel to shine so that the sinful and immoral structures of society as well as individuals may be decisively changed. Pray for the 60% of the population who are 25 years old or younger. They are easy prey to drug trafficking, sex trade and child labour.
- For continued freedom to wisely and appropriately spread the good news as the government has banned door-to-door evangelism and the public distribution of tracts.
- For Covenant EFC’s missionary family who runs a school in Cambodia, that they will effectively disciple the children and the teachers. Cambodia desperately needs to build up a godly generation who will be able to lead the country forward.

MONDAY, 1 MAY 2017

Obedience to God

SCRIPTURE

Haggai 1:5-12

OBSERVATION

What is significant about the way verse 12 transits from verse 11 (in the context of vv.5-11)?

Deeper Reflection

What an immediate turn from the divine “Consider your ways!” (vv.5-11) to the human “obeyed the voice of the LORD” (v.12)! The Word of God is heeded “so swiftly and spectacularly”¹. The obedience here has a dual nature: The Word of God is **powerful** and the people’s hearts are **prepared**. However, there is this contrast in reality: God’s Word is constant, our hearts are not. Thus, the obedience “is in itself a work of God”². God called Ezekiel to speak His Word to His “rebellious” people “whether they listen or not” (Eze 2:7). And indeed, they did not listen; and thus, God sent them into exile in Babylon. Yet in this apparently hopeless spiritual state is the **promise of God**: “I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes and be careful to obey My rules” (Eze 36:27, ESV). Obedience is caused by God through His Spirit dwelling in us. And accordingly, we **pray to God** that He will “incline our hearts to Himself, to walk in all His ways” (1 Kin 8:57-58; Psa 119:36). But, we still have our part to play which God requires; and yet we cannot obey God by our own effort, except by dependence on God’s faithful promise through our desperate prayer.

APPLICATION

In what ways do I struggle in being obedient to God and how will I deal with them?

PRAYER

Lord, I struggle to live a life of obedience to You. Help me to want to walk in obedience; because, Lord, You who know all things know that deep, deep inside me, I want to walk in obedience. Empower me by the Holy Spirit and incline my heart to Yourself to walk all Your ways. Amen.



¹ Robert Fyall, *The Message of Ezra & Haggai*, The Bible Speaks Today (IVP, 2010), 159

² Robert Fyall, 159

TUESDAY, 2 MAY 2017

Reverence Before God

SCRIPTURE

Haggai 1:12

OBSERVATION

What is the relationship between the Word of God and reverence before God in verse 12?

Deeper Reflection

The people of God responded to His Word through Haggai with obedience to God and reverence before Him (v.12). The Hebrew phrase used here is literally “to fear before [in the presence of] the LORD”³. How does this divine presence result in human reverence? The people feared God because they recognised the awesome presence of God in judgement⁴ – which they experienced in the recent past through the drought (Hag 1:9-11). When Ananias died under God’s judgement, “great fear came over all who heard it” (Acts 5:3-5). And similarly, when it happened to his wife, Sapphira, “great fear came upon the whole church” (Acts 5:9-11). God’s presence in judgement is rather rare in our consciousness. Our emphasis on God’s presence is almost always only on the positive side of it. We are more familiar with “Fear not, for I am with you” rather than “Fear Me, for I am with you”. And we often talk about feeling God’s presence and not fearing God’s presence. It is noteworthy that this awesome presence of God is manifested when the Word of God is spoken. Israel “showed reverence before the LORD” when they heard “the voice of the LORD” (v.12).

APPLICATION

How do I link the presence of God with the reverence for God 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:
To deepen their reverence for God in His presence

- Pray for significant people:

- Pray for those in need:

- Pray for self:

³ Mark. J. Boda, *Haggai, Zechariah*, The NIV Application Commentary (Zondervan, 2004), 107; J. Alec Motyer, *Haggai, The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical & Expositional Commentary, Vol. 3* (Baker, 1998), 982

⁴ Mark. J. Boda, 108

WEDNESDAY, 3 MAY 2017

Presence of God

SCRIPTURE

Haggai 1:13-14; Exodus 3:11-12; Judges 6:15-16; Acts 18:9-10

OBSERVATION

What observations can you make about the presence of God in Haggai 1:13, Exodus 3:11-12, Judges 6:15-16 and Acts 18:9-10?

Deeper Reflection

After the people of God had shown their obedience to God with reverence before Him (Hag 1:12), He spoke to them, “I am with you” (v.13). The presence of God in judgement (Hag 1:12) has now become the reassuring presence of God. “I am with you” is from a legacy of divine assurance to those called by God to do His work – like Moses (Exo 3:11-12), Joshua (Josh 1:5, 9), Gideon (Judg 6:15-16) and Jeremiah (Jer 1:8, 19), who were fearful or felt inadequate. We see the continuity of “I am with you” in the New Testament and today – like Paul “in weakness and in fear and in much trembling” (1 Cor 2:3) when he was ministering in Corinth (Acts 18:9-10), and the disciples of Jesus (including us today) in fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20). It is important to note that in Scripture, this reassuring presence of God is usually for His servants – that is, in the context of serving God. This simple promise consists of two words in Hebrew: “I-am” and “with-you”, which identify “the two partners [‘I’ and ‘you’] in this new project”⁵ of temple rebuilding. “I am with you” is a partnership-presence, with God working in us, with us, for us and through us, as we do His work in Him (v.14).

APPLICATION

What does it mean to have the reassurance of God’s presence with me as I serve Him?

PRAYER

Lord, I ponder on Your presence with great gratitude to You. You are Emmanuel, God who so humbly condescends to be with us sinners. Through You, by Your blood I can draw near to the holy presence of God with confidence. You have promised to be with me always. I dare not, and help me not to, O Lord, presumptuously take Your presence for granted. Amen.

Prayer Pointers

- Give thanks:

- Pray for leaders:

- Pray for significant people:

- Pray for those in need:

- Pray for self:

⁵ Mark J. Boda, 108

THURSDAY, 4 MAY 2017

Return for Renewal

SCRIPTURE

Haggai 1:2, 12-14

OBSERVATION

What is the significance of the change in Haggai's description of the people of God from "this people" (v.2) to "all the remnant of the people" and "their God" (vv.12, 14)?

Deeper Reflection

Haggai chapter 1 begins with God speaking to His people words of judgement and rebuke for soul-searching and repentance (Hag 1:2-11), but ends with "I am with you" (v.13) in response to their obedience (v.12). There is a **return to covenant faithfulness**, which changes how God looks at them: from the derogatory "this people" (v.2) to embracing them as "the remnant" (vv.12, 14). The remnant is the group of God's people who have undergone covenant discipline and emerged as purified and sanctified for service to their God⁶ (see Isa 10:20-22). God does judge us, as He deems right, when we have sinned against Him. But His judgement is redemptive – "so that we will not be condemned along with the world" (1 Cor 11:31-32). And He disciplines us as His beloved children "for our good, so that we may share His holiness" (Heb 12:4-6, 10). Return to covenant faithfulness results in **renewal in covenant relationship**. To the formerly indifferent and apathetic people, God identifies Himself as "their God" again (vv.12, 14), as He was – "the God of Israel" – at the very beginning (Ezr 1:3). We often need this return for renewal, because we are prone to straying away from God like lost sheep (Psa 119:176).

APPLICATION

In what ways do I need to return to covenant faithfulness to God and renewal in covenant relationship with God?

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:

⁶ Mark J. Boda, 107

FRIDAY, 5 MAY 2017

How God's Word Works

SCRIPTURE

Haggai 1:1, 12-13; Jeremiah 1:1-2

OBSERVATION

What does “the voice of the LORD their God and the words of Haggai the prophet” (v.12) tell us about the Word of God (cf. Jer 1:1-2)?

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.....

.....

Deeper Reflection

When “the word of the LORD came by the prophet Haggai” to the people (v.1), they “obeyed the voice of the LORD... and the words of Haggai the prophet” (v.12). Mark the word “and”. There is a very close association between the voice of God and the words of Haggai. God is speaking, but what the people audibly hear with their ears are human words in a human voice. But it is more than human sounds that they hear; they inaudibly hear in their hearts the “voice” of God. This is how the Word of God works. This has important implications for speaking and hearing in the ministry of God’s Word. In speaking, we ought to ensure that we speak from Scripture sharply and substantially, so that the hearers walk away primarily with Scripture speaking to them. Peter’s sermon on Pentecost was filled with Scripture (Acts 2:14-36), and the effect was that the hearers “were pierced to the heart” (Acts 2:37). A very common response to good preaching and teaching today is “I enjoyed it”. Beware, that it is not us only wanting our “ears tickled” and subtly turning “away [our] ears from the truth” (2 Tim 4:3-4).

APPLICATION

In what ways do I need to change the way I listen to the preaching and teaching of God’s Word and share God’s Word with others?

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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 lay leaders:
To put God’s Word at the centre of their lives

- Pray for significant people:

- Pray for those in need:

- Pray for self:

SATURDAY, 6 MAY 2017

How Changing Lives Works

SCRIPTURE

Colossians 1:19-23, 28-29

OBSERVATION

What is the theological connection between the words “to present”⁷ in verses 22 and 28?

Deeper Reflection

In biblical discipling, changing lives has three dimensions of activity that interplay with each other. **Discipling work:** Paul makes disciples with the Word of God, as indicated by “proclaim”, “admonishing” and “teaching” “with all wisdom” (v.28a). His ministry is highly intensive at two levels and they work together: the human – “I toil, struggling”, and the divine – “His power, which mightily works within me” (v.29). The focus of Paul’s ministry is a person – “proclaim **Him**” (v.28), and the aim is “to present everyone mature in Christ” (v.28b, ESV). We see here certain fundamentals in Christocentric discipling. **Divine work:** In redeeming us, God seeks “to present” us “before Him, holy and blameless and beyond reproach” (v.22). We saw earlier the human “to present” on Paul’s part (v. 28), and now the divine “to present”. Both are theologically and spiritually interrelated. The divine “to present” (v.22) is conditional: “if you continue in the faith” (v.23) – the **disciple’s walk**. Whether the people we disciple at our level best are growing or not, we can neither take the credit nor the blame, as if we are the sole deciding factor. We are responsible for only what we are responsible for.

APPLICATION

In what areas do I need to pay particular attention to in discipling or influencing others?

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:

⁷ The same word in Greek in the two verses

SUNDAY, 7 MAY 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 • MAY 2017

DOES GOD ALLOW ME TO HAVE FREE CHOICE?

God gives us the power to choose to follow Him.

Scripture: Genesis 2:16-17; Galatians 5:13-17

★ ACTIVITY BITE

Imagine you are making sandwiches and you can fill them with any ingredients you want. Be very imaginative.

★ CHAT TIME

Q1: Do you think your sandwich will taste nice with all the different fillings you put inside? Why?

Q2: If you have the freedom to make any decision you want, what are some choices which may not be good for you?

Q3: How does Galatians 5:13-17 guide us in making good choices?

★ LEARNING POINT

When God created man, He made him in His own image. This means that we have some abilities that are like God's, such as being able to feel, think and decide. Having free will is the ability to make choices. However, every decision will have its consequences. Sadly, Adam and Eve made the wrong choice of disobeying God which resulted in terrible separation from Him. We are thankful for Jesus as we can now choose to accept Him into our lives. We can still choose to follow our own selfish desires, but to follow what God says in His Word is the best choice you could ever make.

★ ACTION POINT

Think of some wrong choices you have made that have gotten you or someone else into trouble. Tell God that you are sorry about it and what you would do to make things right again.

★ PRAYER POWER

(Ask your children to pray after you.)

Dear God, I am sorry for the wrong choices I have made. Help me to follow Your Word so that I can make choices that please You. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

MOTHER'S DAY



This coming Sunday, 14 May is Mother's Day. As such, this week's devotions have a special section *A Note to Mothers*. The other parts (*Observation, Deeper Reflection and Application*) are still applicable to everyone, whether single or married, male or female.

The six devotions follow the theme "ABCDEF" as follows:

Monday – Abide in the Lord

Tuesday – Believe God Will Enable

Wednesday – Consecrate Yourself Fully

Thursday – Delight in His Goodness

Friday – Equip for the Battle

Saturday – Forgive as He Forgave

This theme is to encourage mothers in their parenting journey and to encourage everyone who is a disciple of Christ to live a life pleasing to the Lord.

"... but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised."

PROVERBS 31:30

MOTHER'S DAY WEEK – MONDAY, 8 MAY 2017

Abide in the Lord

SCRIPTURE

John 15:4-5

OBSERVATION

Why is abiding in Christ important?

Deeper Reflection

John 15:1-17 is Jesus' analogy of the vine and the branches and it is one of the central themes in His Farewell Discourse. He calls us to **abide** in Him like the branch that will abide in the vine (Christ Himself). In practical terms, to **abide in Christ** is to remain in a daily dependent relationship with Jesus. To abide is to create space for Him to remain in us fully. This is so that we will bear spiritual fruits in our lives (v.5). The fruit-bearing here is primarily about winning lost souls. However, it can also refer to bearing the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23) in our lives. We cannot bear spiritual fruit without being dependent on, and obedient to, God.

A Note to Mothers

Mothers tend to be the primary disciplers of their children. Recently, I asked the seven kids in my covenant group (CG) about the time they prayed to receive Christ. All except one said it was through their mothers when they were under seven years old. These mothers have reproduced spiritual fruit in their children! In order to disciple our children, mothers need to first have a personal walk with Christ. We can then model for our children what it means to abide in the Vine.

APPLICATION

In what ways is it visible to others that you are abiding in Christ?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, it is my desire to keep abiding in You. Help me to have my soul full of Your life, so that in what I say, what I think and how I behave, You will always be my key focus. Let my life glorify You by my obedience. Amen.

Prayer Pointers

- Give thanks:

- Pray for leaders:

- Pray for significant people:

- Pray for those in need:

- Pray for self:

MOTHER'S DAY WEEK – TUESDAY, 9 MAY 2017

Believe God Will Enable

SCRIPTURE

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

OBSERVATION

According to the apostle Paul, what is the purpose of the “thorn in the flesh”?

Deeper Reflection

The “thorn of the flesh” for Paul was a “messenger of Satan”, **sovereignly given by God** because God knew Paul needed it. Although we don't know what this thorn was exactly, one thing is for sure, “it was to prevent Paul from imagining himself to be a spiritual superhero, and revealed to him the reality of his human mortality and weakness... The thorn kept him pinned close to the Lord, in trust and confidence”⁸. Just how did Paul respond to this “thorn”? It must have been so tormenting that he pleaded three times for it to be removed but all he heard from God was, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (v.9). Paul responded with gladness and delight, knowing that he would be made strong by God when he was weak (v.10). He believed that **God would enable him** to overcome his challenges.

A Note to Mothers

More often than not, we get discouraged because our children tend to bring out the worst in us. Some of us may even think that our children are like “thorns in our flesh”. In moments like these, do remember God's promise that His grace is sufficient for us. We cry out to God to help us manage the challenges from our children. Let's accept the challenges, especially if our children have a special need, as a gift of a handicap to us to keep us in constant touch with our limitations (v.9, MSG).

APPLICATION

Recount the times that God's grace has been made sufficient for you. Take time to give thanks for each of them.

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 experience the grace of God in their challenges
- Pray for significant people:
- Pray for those in need:
- Pray for self:

⁸ Paul Barnett, *The Message of 2 Corinthians*, The Bible Speaks Today (IVP, 1988), 178.

MOTHER'S DAY WEEK – WEDNESDAY, 10 MAY 2017

Consecrate Yourself Fully

SCRIPTURE

1 Peter 1:14-16

OBSERVATION

According to verses 14 to 16, what does God require of us?

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Deeper Reflection

The call of God for us is a call to be like Him: Be holy because He is holy. This is a tall order! How can one be holy like God? Simply put, to be holy is to live **a consecrated life** that separates oneself from the world and all the practices that don't please God. A consecrated life seeks to be made one with Jesus so that the nature that controls Him will control us.⁹ When Jesus is truly the Lord of our lives, we will be able to love the Lord our God with our heart, soul, strength and mind, and to love our neighbour as ourselves (Matt 22:36-40). A consecrated life is a life that imitates the love of grace that saved us, the love of God's compassion poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.¹⁰ It is a life that will surrender to God daily.

A Note to Mothers

Our children are constantly observing how we live our lives. They can see whether we are living out our faith in Christ consistently or are just paying lip service to what we believe. For example, telling them not to be on social media yet we are on our mobile devices even during meals. If we want to see our children's faith grow in the Lord, we need to model for them by consistently living a consecrated life to God.

APPLICATION

What are the areas in your life that you need to consecrate afresh to the Lord?

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PRAYER

Lord Jesus, I come to You just as I am, confessing all my rebelliousness and weaknesses. I am unable to live a holy life that reflects Your holiness. I ask for Your forgiveness for the wrongs I have done, whether or not I am aware of them. I pray for Your help to live a life that will please You daily. Amen.

Prayer Pointers

- Give thanks:

- Pray for leaders:

- Pray for significant people:

- Pray for those in need:

- Pray for self:

⁹ Oswald Chambers, February 8, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Discovery House, 1992).

¹⁰ Edmund Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (IVR 1988), 67.

MOTHER'S DAY WEEK – THURSDAY, 11 MAY 2017

Delight in His Goodness

SCRIPTURE

James 1:17

OBSERVATION

What does verse 17 tell us about God's nature?

Deeper Reflection

The ways of God may often seem mysterious to us, but the nature of God is clear in this verse. The emphasis is on God as the **giver**, who gives good and perfect gifts to His children. We need to remember that He does not give us gifts based on who we are or what we have done. He gives out of His grace, beyond what we deserve. The second aspect of His nature is described in the phrase “**the Father of lights**”. God, who created every light, the sun, moon and stars, is also the light of life that we live by. The Father sacrificially gave His Son, Jesus, to us and brought light into our dark and sinful world (Jn 8:12). We can expect His light to shine into our lives and bring godly insight, as well as provide guidance. The third aspect of God's nature is His **unchanging character**, such that in Him there is “no variation or shadow due to change” (v.17). Because He is unchanging, we can have the security to know He is always good, always loving and always giving to us, even when the world around us appears to be increasingly unpredictable and troubled over time.

A Note to Mothers

Our children are God's perfect gifts to us, even though we may often find them imperfect. As mothers, we can ask God to guide us in the journey of stewarding our children and give us the joy of watching His perfect work in transforming their lives.

APPLICATION

Who are you thankful for in your life today? Give thanks for them and spend some time praying for them.

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:

MOTHER'S DAY WEEK – FRIDAY, 12 MAY 2017

Equip for the Battle

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 18:31-34, 39

OBSERVATION

What does the Psalmist tell us about how God prepares us for life?

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Deeper Reflection

David wrote Psalm 18 as a thanksgiving to God for delivering him from Saul and his enemies. David was a man “after God’s own heart” (Acts 13:22), but his life was filled with many battles and constant opposition. David’s life mirrors the reality of our existence – that we often face uphill battles in our daily lives. But David could testify not only that God ultimately delivered him, but that God was there from the beginning, to train and equip him for the battles he had to face. It is easy to be daunted by the challenges of life and to fear the future, but the assurance given in verse 39 is that God Himself prepares us and provides us the strength to overcome. God walked with David every step of the way, from the preparation for battle, to the battle itself and all the way to the ultimate victory. God has also given us the chance to be victorious warriors. Because Christ has overcome, we can be assured that we ourselves can be overcomers (Jn 16:33).

A Note to Mothers

Where do we draw strength from in our mothering? Are we depending on our own efforts and experience or do we wait on God for the strength and wisdom to disciple our children? It is through God that we can overcome and also teach our children to be overcomers themselves. Will you allow yourself to be trained by God Himself today?

APPLICATION

What battles are you fighting now? What assurances do you have in overcoming them?

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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 lay leaders:
To be trained and strengthened by God for His purposes

- Pray for significant people:

- Pray for those in need:

- Pray for self:

MOTHER'S DAY WEEK – SATURDAY, 13 MAY 2017

Forgive as He Forgave

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 18:21-35

OBSERVATION

What can we learn about genuine forgiveness from verses 21 to 35?

Deeper Reflection

The parable of the unforgiving servant employs the literary device of contrast to teach its hearers an important principle. We see strong contrasts in the sizes of the two debts owed and in the natures of the two responses to the debtors. The servant asked for an extension of time, but the king gave him so much more than he asked for. He forgave the servant the entire debt! The reality was that the servant in all likelihood could never pay back this huge debt as the sum was equivalent to the wages of several life-times for the common worker. Yet somehow the servant could not appreciate how much he had been forgiven. That is why he mercilessly demanded full repayment of the tiny debt his fellow servant owed him. Similarly, our inability to appreciate how much our heavenly Father has forgiven us often keeps us permanently needing to strive and perform, while making us demanding, grudging and unforgiving towards those we think are indebted to us. Forgiveness has to begin with understanding how much we have been forgiven.

A Note to Mothers

Can we keep our homes as debt-free zones? Our homes are in deep need of grace, acceptance and love. It is very easy to bury hurts and hide unforgiveness while trying to maintain the “peace” in the family. But simmering resentment taints relationships and hurts those closest to us. Will we allow ourselves to experience the redemption of God’s unconditional love and forgiveness and thereby extend the same to those close to us?

APPLICATION

Who do you need to forgive? How can you show unconditional love to this 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:

SUNDAY, 14 MAY 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 • MAY 2017

WHY IS IT WRONG TO DISOBEY GOD?

Obedience to God is meant to bless us.

Scripture: John 14:15; Deuteronomy 28:1-14

★ ACTIVITY BITE

With different coloured markers, draw some of Singapore's road signs and describe what they mean. Talk about the kind of accidents that can happen if you disobey them.

★ CHAT TIME

Q1: Why do we need road signs on our streets?

Q2: Knowing that accidents can happen if these signs are ignored, why do some people still choose to disobey them?

Q3: Referring to Deuteronomy 28:1-14, what are the good things we can experience if we always obey God?

★ LEARNING POINT

The meaning of disobedience is the failure or refusal to obey rules or someone in authority. God is our authority and He has set up laws and commands for us to follow. These rules keep us from doing wrong things that may harm ourselves or others. They are also meant to bless us when we follow them. When we disobey God, we are telling Him not to interfere with our choices because we want to be in control of everything. In other words, we want to be the god of our own lives. Even disobeying our parents is disobedience towards God. Disobedience is sin. As God cares for us deeply, He wants us to obey Him in everything.

★ ACTION POINT

Think about the times when you have disobeyed your parents or didn't do what God wanted you to do. Be determined to do the right thing by following His Word. Choose one thing you can do this week as an act of obedience to God.

★ PRAYER POWER

(Ask your children to pray after you.)

Lord Jesus, thank You for showing me that disobedience to You is sin. Help me to change my ways. I want to obey You in everything. Amen.

MONDAY, 15 MAY 2017

Compassionate Service

SCRIPTURE

Mark 6:30-46

OBSERVATION

What strikes you about the way Jesus responded to the people?

Deeper Reflection

When the disciples returned from a period of busy, intensive and emotionally draining ministry, Jesus wisely advised them to retreat to somewhere quiet so that they could rest for a while (v.31). But the multitudes of people in need were waiting for them even before they could alight from their boat (vv.33-34)! Ministry needs are never-ending. Even when we are tired and fatigued, there can be many people in need of our attention, assistance and ministry. Sometimes we really wish that they would disappear for a while! However, there is one thing that can push us into continued action and to pay attention to their needs despite our own. It is compassion. Compassion moves us to dig deep into our reserves of energy and resources. Compassion drives us to serve beyond our call of duty. When Jesus saw the crowd and their need for direction, protection and provision, He was filled with compassion (v.34). Moved by compassion, Jesus met their needs. Like Jesus, when we allow compassion to take hold of us, we will be able to focus on others rather than on ourselves. We will have the energy to go that extra mile for a friend in need, the time to pray with a colleague who is going through a rough patch, the joy and strength to nurture a young believer in her spiritual journey, or the perseverance to follow through a volunteer programme that will make a big difference to a young life. Without compassion, our lives go on with our personal needs dictating our choices and we move about oblivious to all the needs around us.

APPLICATION

Take time now to think of someone in your midst, maybe a family member, friend or colleague, who is currently in need of some encouragement or help, and take specific steps to meet that need.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, please fill my heart with compassion for others around me and take away my apathy so that I can be sensitive to their needs. Grow in me a compassionate heart to serve You by serving people selflessly. 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, 16 MAY 2017

Humble Service

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 131:1-3

OBSERVATION

For the Psalmist, King David, what transformation has taken place and where?

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Deeper Reflection

David's words of humility and trust in Psalm 131 speak directly to our pride and desire to control. As Charles Spurgeon wisely commented, "It is one of the shortest Psalms to read, but one of the longest to learn."¹¹ David was not boasting before the Lord. Rather, it was an honest declaration of a totally humbled man. If anyone in Israel had reasons to be proud, it was David. Although he began as a humble shepherd, yet he later became Israel's great king. However, David learnt not to place his trust in his own achievements, but rather to put total reliance on God (v.1b). Consider how you are serving our Lord today. Examine the condition of your own heart when you serve. Scripture reminds us to, above all else, guard our hearts, for everything we do flows from it (Prov 4:23). Perhaps we are serving with strife or discontentment. Let us ask God to tutor our souls, so that we can be like a weaned child, fully contented with our portion. Not that we do not desire growth, but we place our trust, hopes and dreams fully in the Lord who makes our cup overflow with His blessings. As we cultivate a servant heart, we will find ourselves wanting to love and serve God and people selflessly with a humble service that pleases, reflects and glorifies the Lord.

APPLICATION

In what areas of my life do I need to learn humility and trust in order to grow as a humble servant of the Lord?

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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 serve one another with humble hearts

- Pray for significant people:

- Pray for those in need:

- Pray for self:

¹¹ Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, Psalm 131.

WEDNESDAY, 17 MAY 2017

Joyful Service

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 100:1-5

OBSERVATION

Why should we serve the Lord with joy and gladness?

Deeper Reflection

We may face many challenges along the way as we serve. Perhaps an over-committed schedule, physical or emotional exhaustion, difficult people, injustice and a lack of appreciation, among others. These cause weariness and discouragement, and rob us of our joy in serving God. “Serve the LORD with gladness!” (v.2) – the verb here is an imperative. It is a command, not a suggestion. God doesn’t delight in murmuring, grumbling or glum service, because our service is also our worship to Him. Consider Deuteronomy 28:47-48: “Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, because of the abundance of all things, therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger and thirst, in nakedness, and lacking everything. And he will put a yoke of iron on your neck until he has destroyed you.” That is a sobering thought for us to reflect on the manner in which we have served God thus far this year. Our motivation to serve God joyfully is our gratitude for His goodness, love and grace towards us. Doing our duty without love is a chore, but doing our duty with love for God is a delight. In the process of serving God, there can be fun, excitement and enthusiasm in our hearts if we remain in close fellowship with Him and grow in our knowledge and experience of Him through our service. Our joy must not be determined by our circumstances, but instead be based on the goodness, power and purposes of God (consider Acts 16:22-25). Let us make authentic joyful service our goal!

APPLICATION

What are the joy robbers in my service to God and how can I guard against them?

PRAYER

*Father, may the joy of serving
You be my strength. Please
help me to experience
abiding joy in my heart
despite the challenges I face.
Search my heart and restore
lost joy. Please forgive me
for the times I grumbled and
complained when I served.
Open my eyes to see that
serving You is not a burden,
but a great privilege. 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:

THURSDAY, 18 MAY 2017

Serve in God's Grace

SCRIPTURE

1 Timothy 1:12-16

OBSERVATION

Why did Paul consider himself as a recipient of God's mercy and grace?

Deeper Reflection

Like Paul, we are not worthy to be servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. All of us were once upon a time unrepentant rebels and sinners against Him. We were proud and arrogant. We were ignorant of the truth. While we may not have persecuted Christians in the way Paul did in his earlier days, we were nonetheless blameworthy for rejecting God's Word and His messengers. But the Lord Jesus has shown mercy and grace towards us. Not only have we been redeemed by Christ's blood shed on the cross, but we have also been qualified by Him and called as His servants to make His salvation known among the nations! What mercy and grace God has poured out on us! The more messed up the life of the Lord's servant was in the past, the more the grace of the Lord overflows for him or her. As a result, that servant's redeemed life can all the more shine forth the patience and love of Christ to people who have yet to believe in Him for eternal life. As the Lord's servants, we are to be living testimonies of His mercy and grace towards sinners. We remember our past not because we are proud of it, but because it reminds us that we serve in God's grace as His unworthy servants. And when we serve in God's grace, we know that there is absolutely nothing in and of ourselves that we can boast about. We will boast only in the Lord. That the Lord is merciful and gracious, patient and kind, full of love and faithfulness.

APPLICATION

In recent times have you sought to take the credit and glory for your successes? Confess before God, ask for His forgiveness and seek His help to serve in His 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:

FRIDAY, 19 MAY 2017

Serve with Deep Devotion

SCRIPTURE

Luke 2:36-38

OBSERVATION

What made the prophetess Anna serve with deep devotion, even into her old age?

Deeper Reflection

Anna the prophetess faithfully served in the temple for many years after she became a widow. Even at an old age of 84 (alternatively, about 105),¹² she was not described as being tired and homebound, nor retiring from service at the temple. Luke in verses 37 and 38 described her as actively and devotedly “**worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day**” (v.37)! While she was at the temple, Anna was also actively looking out for opportunities to testify about Israel’s Redeemer. The New Living Translation elaborates: “She came along just as Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph, and she began praising God. She talked about the child to everyone who had been waiting expectantly for God to rescue Jerusalem.” (v.38, NLT). Those acts of service evidently invigorated Anna. Despite her age, she remained active, spiritually alert and selfless in service. She immediately recognised who this child Jesus was and spoke of His significance to the people at the temple. The child Jesus is the Redeemer whom Israel has been waiting for! The prophetess received such spiritual insight and understanding as to the Messiah, no doubt as a result of her faithful, daily devotion to God in worship, fasting and prayer over many decades. Further, her great love for God and deep devotion to Him, continually energised her spirit of service to others who came to the temple to worship God.

APPLICATION

How can I serve God with deep devotion?

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 serve God out of a heart of deep devotion to Him

- Pray for significant people:

- Pray for those in need:

- Pray for self:

¹² A literal translation of the Greek is “living with her husband for seven years from her virginity and she was a widow for 84 years”. Some respected Lukan scholars like Darrell L. Bock and Ian H. Marshall also take the view that the 84 years is a reference to the length of her widowhood. If that is correct, then Anna was about 105 years old. However, Anna’s age at that time could also be 84 years, because the final phrase could also be taken to mean “she was widowed until the age of 84”, which seems to be the view taken by the translators of the ESV, NAS and NIV versions.

SATURDAY, 20 MAY 2017

Serve with Faithful Stewardship

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 25:14-30

OBSERVATION

What does the master expect of his servants?

Deeper Reflection

Here, “talent” does not mean some skill or ability, but is a large monetary unit worth about 20 years’ wages for a labourer. The master did not instruct his three servants as to what to do with the given talents nor did he tell them how long he would be away. He simply entrusted his property to them. Two of the servants invested the money and doubled the amount entrusted to them. When the master returned, he responded to each of the two faithful servants with identical words: “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.” (vv.21, 23) The third servant buried the money and did nothing with it. The master called him a “wicked and slothful servant” and took away the one talent and gave it to the servant with the 10 talents. The master’s reward for good and faithful stewardship is more responsibility! This does not mean that the master rewards faithfulness with hardship through more work. Rather, the master rewards faithfulness with an increased capacity to do the master’s will and please Him. A good and faithful Christian’s desire in life is to please and glorify God his Master. As we serve God with faithful stewardship of the resources (time, people, wealth and abilities) He has entrusted to us, we can be sure that our lives will please and glorify God in increasing measure as He Himself enables and empowers us. At the end of all our achievements in life, may we say sincerely with heartfelt gratitude, “To God be the glory!”

APPLICATION

In what areas of my life do I need to grow in faithful stewardship in order to serve God better?

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, 21 MAY 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 • MAY 2017

IS GOD SAD WHEN I DISOBEY HIM?

God feels sad when we do bad or wrong things.

Scripture: Zephaniah 3:17; Ephesians 4:29-32

★ ACTIVITY BITE

On a piece of paper, draw many round faces that show different feelings like happiness, sadness, worry, anger and more. Cut them out. Ask your family members to pick the face that matches how they feel. Ask them to share why they are feeling that way.

★ CHAT TIME

Q1: What are some things we do that make God sad? Why does God feel sad when we do or say certain things?
Q2: Why is it not good for us to do things that make God sad?
Q3: How can we make God happy again?

★ LEARNING POINT

The Bible tells us that God has feelings. He can be happy, sad or angry just like us. When we do or say things that are wrong, He feels sad. When we disobey Him, He feels sad because we are choosing to do what we want by rejecting His guidance. Sins not only hurt God but also hurt others and ourselves. But God is forgiving and very patient. He will wait for us to feel sorry for our wrongdoing. He feels happy when we choose to do what is right again and He will always be there to help us do that.

★ ACTION POINT

Draw a sad face to represent God. Next to the face, write down the things you have done that may have made God sad. Ask God to help you to stop doing them and start doing the things that will make Him happy again.

★ PRAYER POWER

(Ask your children to pray after you.)

Dear God, I am very sorry I made You sad because of my disobedience. Help me do what is right again so that You will be happy. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

MONDAY, 22 MAY 2017

“How Do You See It Now?”

SCRIPTURE

Haggai 2:1-4

OBSERVATION

What is the significance of God’s question to His people “How do you see it now?” (v.3) in the context of verses 1 to 4?

Deeper Reflection

As God “stirred up the spirit” of His people, they “worked on” rebuilding the temple (Hag 1:14-15). But one month later, that commitment turned into discouragement (vv.3-4). The “seventh month” (v.1) was also the month Solomon had dedicated the temple to God 400 years before (1 Kin 8:2). This evoked the memory of those “who saw this temple in its former glory” but now see it “like nothing in comparison” (v.3). The new temple would never be like the old. The reality was they had no resources like Solomon to pay foreign skilled workers (2 Chron 2:7-10) and to cover the temple’s interior with gold (1 Kin 6:21, 22).¹³ Disappointment led to discouragement. And it was precisely at this point that God asked His people: “How do you see it now?” It is a **perspective** question. It is so easy for us to hold this faulty view of discipleship: that when we follow the Lord faithfully, things will become better in our lives. And the “things” we have in mind are external in nature. God is more interested in what happens **in** us rather than what happens **to** us. If this is our **conviction**, we should not be surprised when things on the outside get worse instead; we should also recognise that things are getting better inside us (cf. 2 Cor 4:16).

APPLICATION

What are some perspectives on life that I need to change to be what God wants me to be?

PRAYER

Lord, teach me and help me to understand with strong conviction that following You is all about walking the pathway of the cross. Oh, that I can truly say, “I am determined to know nothing in life except Jesus Christ and Him crucified!”¹⁴ Help me to see beyond the cross with hope to the resurrection and to know the power of Your resurrection. Amen.

Prayer Pointers

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

¹³ Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (IVR, 1972), 46

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 2:2

TUESDAY, 23 MAY 2017

“Take Courage and Work”

SCRIPTURE

Haggai 2:1-4; Deuteronomy 30:6, 8

OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about the divine encouragement, “Take courage” in verses 1 to 4 and Deuteronomy 30:6, 8?

Deeper Reflection

The builders of the temple were discouraged because “the initial phase of clearing rubble” was “extremely arduous”¹⁵. Rebuilding a 66-year-old ruin¹⁶ “without any mechanical aids, would tax the endurance of even the most enthusiastic”¹⁷. Thus, came the necessary divine encouragement: “Take courage, and work” (v.4). Likewise, we who are building the new covenant temple – the church (Eph 2:20-22; 4:11-13), also need the same encouragement: “Take courage, and work.” Building the church to spiritual maturity involves various kinds of church ministries. But in Pauline ecclesiology, building our marriages and families is a vital part of building the church (Eph 5:22 – 6:4). In this aspect, we often face challenges that discourage us, and “Take courage, and work” is the Word of God that is much needed here. To take courage means: Do not lose heart, do not give up, but press on with perseverance until the end. The basis of “Take courage” is “I am with you” (v.4). As in the similar divine encouragement given to Joshua, “I am with you” means “I will not fail you or forsake you” (Deut 31:6, 8), however great the challenges may be.

APPLICATION

How is the divine word “Take courage, and work” relevant to me?

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 courage in following and serving the Lord

- Pray for significant people:

- Pray for those in need:

- Pray for self:

¹⁵ Mark J. Boda, 117

¹⁶ The temple was destroyed in 586 BC and the rebuilding resumed here in 520 BC.

¹⁷ Joyce G. Baldwin, 46

WEDNESDAY, 24 MAY 2017

“The Promise Which I Made with You”

SCRIPTURE

Haggai 2:1-5

OBSERVATION

What was God saying to His people when He mentioned: “the promise which I made with you when you came out of Egypt” (v.5)?

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Deeper Reflection

God gave His people a double assurance of His presence with them: “I am with you” (v.4) and “My Spirit is abiding in your midst” (v.5) – and with it a double encouragement of “Take courage” and “Do not fear”. God’s presence with His people was “the promise” – “the very thing I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt”¹⁸ (v.5). What God was saying to them was: “This promise remains the same today.” When Israel worshipped the golden calf at Mount Sinai (Exo 32), God’s response was: “I will not go with you” in entering the Promised Land (Exo 33:1-3). But Moses interceded for Israel. God changed His mind, and He pardoned their sin and went with them “even though the people were so obstinate” (Exo 34:9). Since then over the centuries, Israel has “been guilty of every known sin, unfaithfulness, distrust, disloyalty, neglect and betrayal of their God. But human sin and frailty cannot overthrow God’s faithfulness. The promise still stood”¹⁹. Along with God’s faithfulness is His graciousness: “His anger lasts only a moment, but His favour lasts a lifetime” (Psa 30:5, NIV).

APPLICATION

How does the truth of God that He will keep His promise of His presence with His people despite our frailty and failures affect my discipleship journey?

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PRAYER

I will give You thanks, O Lord, for although You are angry with me, Your anger will turn away and You will comfort me. For God, You are my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid. You are my strength and song, and have become my salvation. And with joy I will draw living water from the wells of salvation.²⁰ Amen.

Prayer Pointers

- Give thanks:

- Pray for leaders:

- Pray for significant people:

- Pray for those in need:

- Pray for self:

¹⁸ J. Alec Motyer, 988

¹⁹ J. Alec Motyer, 988

²⁰ Isaiah 12:1-3

THURSDAY, 25 MAY 2017

“I Am Going to Shake...” (I)

SCRIPTURE

Haggai 2:5-8

OBSERVATION

What is the relevance of God’s Word to His people when He says He is “going to shake the heavens and the earth” and “all the nations” (vv.6-7)?

Deeper Reflection

God said to His people: “I am going to shake the heavens and the earth” and “all the nations” (vv.6-7). Here we ask the question of **relevance**: What did these words mean for the people then, and what do they mean for us today? God spoke these words to a people living in fear. He encouraged them earlier, “Do not fear” with His assurance of “I am with you” (v.5). The people of God were living in the small struggling province of Yehud. They were dwarfed by the mighty Persian Empire and surrounded by stronger provinces, and this became “their greatest fear”²¹. God called His people to look at His greatness, and to look at the greatness of these nations through His greatness – so great, that He could easily “shake” the entire universe and “all the nations”, however powerful they were. To God, “the nations are like a drop from the bucket...a speck of dust on the scales” (Isa 40:15). God called His people to live by this theological perspective and paradox: While it is true in one sense that they were smaller and weaker than the nations around them; but in ultimate reality, they were greater and stronger than them. And for this to be true for us, we must see as God sees.

APPLICATION

What does the supreme greatness of God mean to me in practical terms?

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:

²¹ Mark J. Boda, 123

FRIDAY, 26 MAY 2017

“I Am Going to Shake...” (2)

SCRIPTURE

Haggai 2:5-8; 2 Peter 3:10-13

OBSERVATION

How has the Word of God in verses 6 to 7 (“I am going to shake the heavens and the earth” and “all the nations) been fulfilled or will be fulfilled?

Deeper Reflection

God said, “I am going to shake the heavens and the earth” and “all the nations” (vv.6-7). Here we ask the question of **fulfillment**. The people to whom these words were spoken were ruled by the Persians. They were subsequently ruled by the Greeks who toppled the Persians, and then by the Romans who overthrew the Greeks. We see only a partial fulfilment of these words. These nations were shaken, but not “all” the nations. When the kingdom of God came in Jesus (Mk 1:15), the Romans were ruling the world. The kingdom of Jesus is a kingdom that “will have no end” (Lk 1:31-33), but He died on a Roman cross. Certainly, at this point, not “all” the nations had been shaken. But at Christ’s Second Coming, “the kingdom of the world” will become “the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ...and He will reign forever and ever” (Rev 11:15), and there will be “new heavens and a new earth” with the present cosmos destroyed (Rev 21:1; 2 Pet 3:10-13). The nature of God’s promises is: we “died in faith without receiving the promises” (Heb 11:13-16). This is eschatological living: living in the present from the future. Meanwhile at present, Jesus is “the ruler of the kings of the earth” (Rev 1:5).

APPLICATION

In what ways am I living in the present from the future?

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 live life with an eschatological vision

- Pray for significant people:

- Pray for those in need:

- Pray for self:

SATURDAY, 27 MAY 2017

“I Will Fill This House with Glory”

SCRIPTURE

Haggai 2:3-9

OBSERVATION

What is the significance of what God said about the glory of His temple in verses 3 and 7 to 9?

Deeper Reflection

The glory of the temple has three chronological markers: its “former glory” (v.3) as seen in Solomon’s Temple (1 Kin 5-8), its present glory (v.3) and its “latter glory” (v.9) – both seen in the Second Temple.²² The present glory of the Second Temple was “like nothing in comparison” to the glory of Solomon’s Temple (v.3). But God will fill the Second Temple with a glory (“latter glory”) that will be greater than the glory of Solomon’s Temple (vv.7, 9). This happened in part when Herod undertook extensive works over 46 years (Jn 2:20) to beautify the structure of the Second Temple.²³ “What wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!” was how Jesus’ disciples saw this temple (Mk 13:1). But this wasn’t the ultimate “latter glory” of the temple. The ultimate temple is Jesus (Jn 2:19-21). This temple is the very presence of God, Emmanuel (Mt 1:23). And its glory is the greatest glory, because it is the very glory of God: “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory” (Jn 1:14). This glory was manifested in Jesus, as a lowly carpenter who lived in the unknown and insignificant town of Nazareth, and most definitively on the cross.

APPLICATION

How do I understand the glory of God?

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:

²² Bible scholars call the temple that was built after the exile the Second Temple.

²³ Robert Fyall, 170

SUNDAY, 28 MAY 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.

WHAT MUST I DO IF I AM WRONG?

Confessing what you did wrong is the first step in doing what is right.

Scripture: 1 John 1:9

★ ACTIVITY BITE

On a piece of paper, write down the words “I am sorry because...”. Hold this piece of paper in front of you with the words facing out and complete the sentence. Pass the paper to the next person for him or her to do the same thing. Pass it around until everyone has a chance to say something. You can go a few rounds if you want.

★ CHAT TIME

- Q1: How do you feel if someone apologises for the wrong things done against you?
Q2: What will happen to relationships if everyone refuses to apologise to each other?
Q3: Why is it necessary for us to confess our sins to God?

★ LEARNING POINT

When we do wrong to others, we hurt their feelings. The relationship can be affected too. The first step towards doing what is right is to confess what you have done and ask the person to forgive you. It will be hard to do, but it is very necessary as this will remove hurt feelings and restore the relationship again. After that, make an effort to do what is right to each other. It is also good to confess our sins to God because it brings us closer to Him.

★ ACTION POINT

Write the words “I will...” below “I am sorry because...”. Now repeat the activity again but this time, add what you will do to make things right.

★ PRAYER POWER

(Ask your children to pray after you.)

Thank You, Jesus, for teaching me how to confess my sins and make things right again with others. I want my heart to be right so that it will make You happy. Amen.

MONDAY, 29 MAY 2017

Priests Teaching the Word of God

SCRIPTURE

Haggai 2:11-13; 2 Chronicles 15:1-3

OBSERVATION

What is the link between God, the law and the priests in 2 Chronicles 15:3?

Deeper Reflection

God spoke to His people about holiness and unholiness by asking “the priests what the law says” about that (vv.11-13). Why ask the priests? A primary function of a priest is teaching the Word of God. A spiritual state of “without the true God” and “without law” is linked to being “without a teaching priest” (2 Chron 15:3). Under the new covenant, every believer is a priest (1 Pet 2:5). Do you see yourself as “a teaching priest”? Every disciple of Christ is called to “make disciples”, which includes the critical component of “teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19-20). Hebrews 5:12 tells us that we are to grow spiritually to such a time (“by this time”) that we “ought to be teachers” of the Word. Teaching the Word of God is a basic ministry of every growing disciple of Christ (cf. Col 3:16). If we are learning God’s Word, living by it and growing in it, we can teach others when we are a few steps ahead of them in spiritual growth. The least we can do is to teach a new believer. We may fear teaching the wrong things. That is why we need to be equipped in the Word. In fact, teaching the Word can help us to grow in the Word.

APPLICATION

What does it mean for me to be a teaching priest?

PRAYER

Lord, let it be that whenever I open the Scriptures, I do so with a seeking heart. Open my eyes to see the immense riches of Your living Word. Give me understanding; build in me convictions; empower me to live by Your Word, and that out of this I may share Your Word with others and be a channel of Your blessings for their growth in the Lord. Amen.

Prayer Pointers

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

TUESDAY, 30 MAY 2017

False Assumption in Religious Activities

SCRIPTURE

Haggai 2:11-14; Leviticus 6:25-27

OBSERVATION

What was Haggai seeking to communicate in verses 11 to 14?

Deeper Reflection

What is set apart to fulfil a sacrificial purpose is holy. So, the animal used for a sin offering is “most holy” (Lev 6:25), and the portion to be eaten by the priests is “holy meat” (v.12; Lev 6:26). When the priest carries the “holy meat” in the fold of his garment, the garment becomes holy, for whatever touches the “holy meat” will become holy (Lev 6:27a). However, when that holy garment touches an object, that object will not become holy (v.12). And when an unclean person touches anything, that thing becomes unclean (v.13). God is saying through this parable (vv.12-13) that holiness cannot be transmitted, but defilement can; just as health is not contagious, but disease is. The divine principle of holiness, stipulating that holiness cannot be transmitted, warns us against a danger in our practice of the Christian faith: We uncritically and unconsciously assume that our religious (“holy”) activities are acceptable to God because they are carried out in the name of God and in a religious setting. It is a false assumption. Our “multiplied sacrifices” and “multiplied prayers” are abominable to God when we are not right with Him and our hearts are not right before Him (Isa 1:10-11, 15).

APPLICATION

How will I know if my worship and service to God are acceptable to Him?

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 God with their hearts right before Him.

- Pray for significant people:

- Pray for those in need:

- Pray for self:

WEDNESDAY, 31 MAY 2017

Holy Presence with Unholy People

SCRIPTURE

Leviticus 16:1-3, 14-16

OBSERVATION

What observations can you make about the Day of Atonement in verses 1 to 3 and 14 to 16?

Deeper Reflection

The divine principle of unholiness, stipulating that unholiness can be transmitted, applies to humans (Hag 2:13). But it also, in a way, applies to God Himself. God allows only the high priest to enter the Holy of holies, and only once a year, on the Day of Atonement (vv.1-3; Heb 9:7). God, in a very concrete way, shows just how holy He is. On the Day of Atonement, blood is sprinkled on the mercy seat in the ark of the covenant to “make atonement for the Most Holy Place, because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites” (v.16, NIV). And “the tent of meeting...dwells with them in the midst of their uncleanness” (v.16, ESV), and thus “contaminates” the holy presence of God. In those days, “every leper” must be sent “outside the camp so that they will not defile their camp where I dwell in their midst” (Num 5:2-3). Then we see a definitive divine turnaround. Jesus – Emmanuel, “God with us” (Matt 1:23), “stretched out His hand and touched” a leper to cleanse him (Matt 8:2-3). The Holy touching the unholy. But this points to the cross, where the Holy became unholy for the unholy, so that the unholy can become holy in Christ (2 Cor 5:21) before the “Holy, Holy, Holy” God (Isa 6:3).

APPLICATION

How do I see God and relate with Him as I ponder on how both holiness and unholiness were present on the cross?

PRAYER

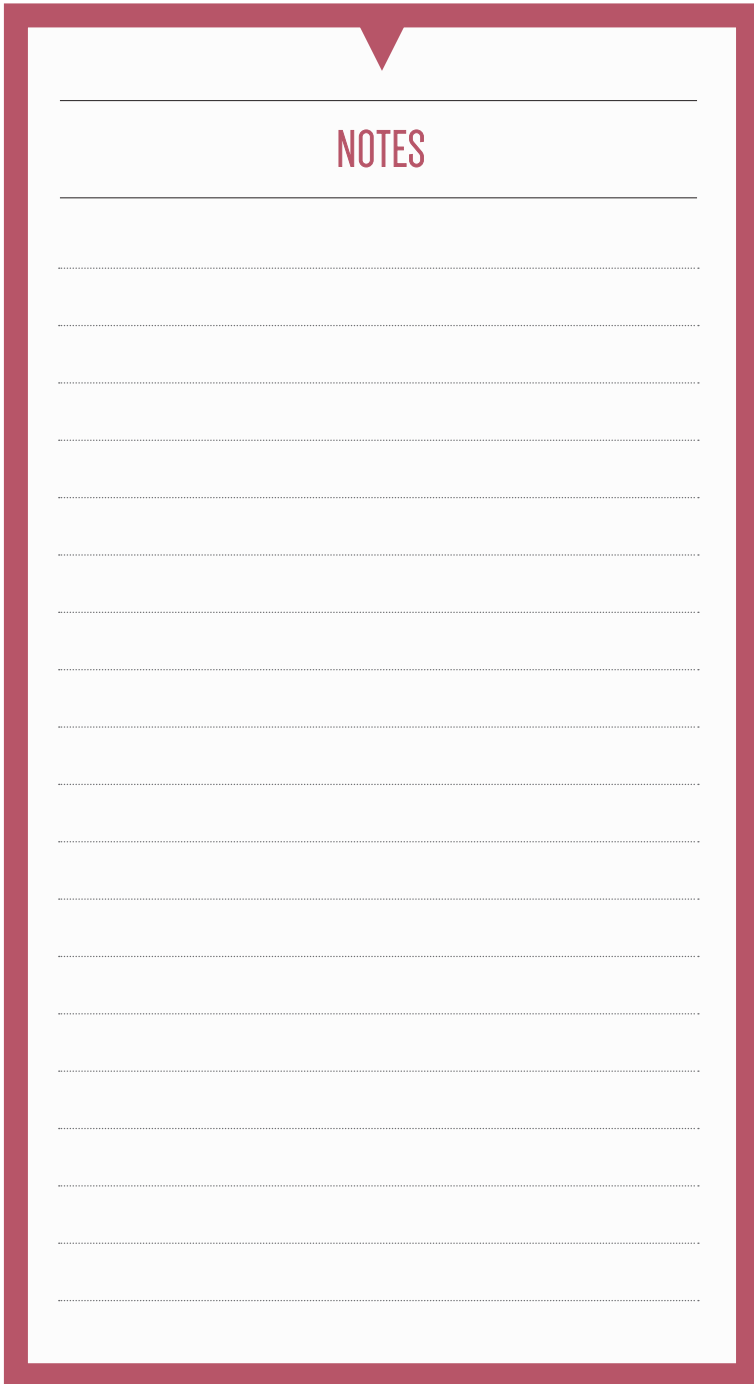
Jesus of Nazareth, Lord of the Cross, what have You not suffered, what have You not given for me? I can never comprehend You, but I can love You and wonder at the depth of the darkness that You entered on the cross, and the depth of Your love that held You there.²⁴ So, Lord, I want to live, no longer for myself, but for You, who died and rose on my behalf.²⁵ Amen.

Prayer Pointers


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

²⁴ Adapted from Angela Ashwin, *The Book of A Thousand Prayers* (Zondervan, 1996, 2002), 338

²⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:15



NOTES



NOTES

The image shows a vertical rectangular frame with a thick red border. At the top center of the frame, there is a downward-pointing triangle. Below this triangle, the word "NOTES" is written in a bold, red, sans-serif font. The word is centered between two solid horizontal lines. Below these lines, the rest of the frame is filled with a series of horizontal lines, alternating between solid and dotted lines, providing a structured area for writing notes.

NOTES

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