

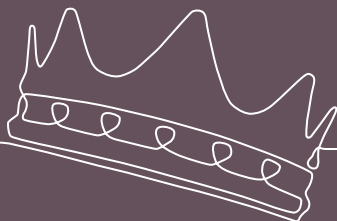
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APRIL  
**2022**  
DEVOTIONAL  
JOURNAL

*For since we believe that Jesus died  
and rose again, even so, through Jesus,  
God will bring with Him those  
who have fallen asleep.*

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**1 THESSALONIANS 4:14**



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**1 THESSALONIANS 4:14**

# MEMORY VERSES

## 2022

*From 1 & 2 Thessalonians*

### ◆ January

*And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit*

– 1 Thessalonians 1:6 (ESV)

### ◆ February

*For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality*

– 1 Thessalonians 4:3 (ESV)

### ◆ March

*That each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honour – 1 Thessalonians 4:4 (ESV)*

### ◆ April

*For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep.*

– 1 Thessalonians 4:14 (ESV)

### ◆ May

*For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. – 1 Thessalonians 5:2 (ESV)*

### ◆ June

*And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.*

– 1 Thessalonians 5:14 (ESV)

### ◆ July

*See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.*

– 1 Thessalonians 5:15 (ESV)

### ◆ August

*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

– 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (ESV)

### ◆ September

*To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of His calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by His power. – 2 Thessalonians 1:11 (ESV)*

### ◆ October

*But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.*

– 2 Thessalonians 2:13 (ESV)

### ◆ November

*But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one. – 2 Thessalonians 3:3 (ESV)*

### ◆ December

*As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good.*

– 2 Thessalonians 3:13 (ESV)

# FOREWORD

BY SENIOR PASTORS

## PREPARING TO MEET KING JESUS

*What do times of crisis and uncertainty compel us towards? They compel us to confront our own mortality, scrutinise our foundations and evaluate our purpose. Most of all, they compel us to seek the face of God.*

As we sought the Lord, He assured us through these verses:

“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

– Matthew 16:18-19 (ESV)

In these uncertain times, we can be rested in Jesus because He has promised that He Himself will build His Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail. The keys of the Kingdom of God

are the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ – His incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension and second coming. And we are to proclaim it! As the Church, it is our responsibility and privilege to do so. When people believe the Good News, they are able to enter God’s Kingdom.

We are reminded of the charge that the Apostle Paul gave to Timothy as the spiritual leader of the church at Ephesus:

“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in

season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”  
– 2 Timothy 4:1-4 (ESV)

Hence, this year’s spiritual burden is “Preparing to Meet King Jesus” — make ready God’s Kingdom people to prepare the world to meet King Jesus in eternity. The world is in darkness and pain. The task is urgent. We believe that we are now in the final hour. We have to prepare ourselves and others to meet King Jesus. This is really what the Church is all about.

How can we prepare ourselves to meet King Jesus?

### **A People Prepared for His Coming: Be Watchful!**

In Luke 1:17, John the Baptist’s calling was to prepare the people for the first coming of our Lord. Like him, we are called to prepare the people for Christ’s second coming. We are to be watchful and persevere in prayer, so as to be ready for the coming of the Lord.

### **A People Prepared to Stand Firm and Take Action: Be Fruitful!**

In times of great distress, those who know their God will stand firm and take action (Dan 11:32). This pandemic is a time of harvest. Many people everywhere are looking for hope. So let us stand firm in our calling as a church

*We have to prepare ourselves and others to meet King Jesus. This is really what the Church is all about.*

(to be disciples of *A Certain Kind* and return the Church to its disciplemaking roots through Authentic Discipleship and Intentional Disciplemaking) and take action to multiply leaders and disciplemakers for great fruitfulness.

### **A People Prepared in Personal Holiness: Be Faithful!**

1 Thessalonians 4:1-3 remind us to guard our hearts and be faithful, for our own personal sanctification and holiness. Let’s be faithful in our personal integrity and walk with God, aligning our lives back to God in holiness and faithfulness.

This Devotional Journal is designed to help you walk daily with God and experience the transforming power of His Word and Spirit as you reflect, pray and obey the Lord in everything. May you be greatly blessed as you prepare yourselves and many others to meet King Jesus!

**In Christ,**  
**Rev Tan Kay Kiong and**  
**Rev Tony Yeo**

# GUIDE TO USING THIS DEVOTIONAL JOURNAL

## Step 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.

#### NEW IN 2022

You can now type in the PDF copy of the Devotional Journal using your digital device as we have allotted fillable boxes for you to journal your thoughts and prayers without space constraints.



#### 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!

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

## Step 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.



#### PRAYER POINTERS FOR 2022

We have provided prayer pointers for Pastors and Staff every Tuesday and for one of the 3 Faith Exploits (Disciple the Generations, Singapore and the Nations) every Wednesday. Every Thursday, a prayer pointer is included for Outreach/Missions/New Life Leaders. On each Friday, there is a prayer pointer for SGI Leaders (e.g. Zone Mentors, CG Leaders and Assistant CG Leaders). A prayer pointer for Church Board Members is included every Saturday. Please pray for each group as well as any specific individuals whom God may bring to your mind.

# PRAY FOR SOUTH EAST ASIA INDONESIA & MALAYSIA

*“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”*

**EPHESIANS 6:12 (ESV)**

**DO NOT MISS THE SPIRITUAL BATTLE BEHIND** every physical endeavour to see the Gospel of Christ reach the lost. There is spiritual conflict over every nation. The evil one is working to blind the eyes of those who have yet to know Christ. That is why before we wrestle in the flesh, we must wrestle in the spiritual realm – on our knees – in fervent and persevering prayer. For the battle belongs to the Lord!

## **PRAY FOR INDONESIA**

A vision for the evangelisation of Indonesia grows even in the midst of intense opposition and persecution. This has brought about unity among the Christian denominations.

## **Pray for:**

- A viable witnessing church for every people group in the country. There are 128 people groups that exceed 10,000 people, but with a Christian population of under 1%.
- A church in every village. The vision is to see at least one church planted in each of Indonesia’s 76,000 villages within one generation. Over 45,000 villages still lack a single church.
- A unified Indonesian prayer movement with a prayer group in every neighbourhood, linked into prayer networks in every city and province. This is quickly becoming a reality as God blesses the burgeoning national prayer network – formed in 1990 and which has now spread to over 450 cities.

## **PRAY FOR MALAYSIA**

The Christian community in Malaysia faces many challenges, including restrictions on religious freedom, social ills, injustices and a growing discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities.

## **Pray for:**

- Unity among Christians. The National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) consists of evangelical churches and organisations focused on building unity, prayer, ministry and mission. The NECF assists evangelicals in transforming the nation by promoting economic sufficiency, justice and advocacy, and national righteousness.
- Godly leadership within the Christian community who are prepared, at considerable cost, to lead and nurture their churches towards spiritual maturity and multiplication.
- More trained Christian workers to arise. Many smaller churches have no trained pastor. Too few respond to God’s call to service because of family expectations, materialism, a lack of role models and the perception that years of theological training are required.

# WORSHIP SONGS

MARCH – APRIL

## ANCIENT OF DAYS

### Verse

Blessing and honour, glory and power  
Be unto the Ancient of Days  
From every nation all of creation  
Bow before the Ancient of Days

### Chorus

Every tongue in heaven and earth shall declare Your glory  
Every knee shall bow at your throne in worship  
You will be exalted, O God  
And Your Kingdom shall not pass away  
O Ancient of Days

### Bridge

Your kingdom shall reign over all the earth  
Sing unto the Ancient of Days  
For none can compare to Your matchless worth  
Sing unto the Ancient of Days

Gary Sadler | Jamie Harvill

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## THROUGH IT ALL

### Verse

You are forever in my life  
You see me through the seasons  
Cover me with Your hand  
And lead me in Your righteousness  
And I look to You  
And I wait on You

### Chorus

I'll sing to You, Lord  
A hymn of love  
For Your faithfulness to me  
I'm carried in everlasting arms  
You'll never let me go  
(Through it all)

### Bridge

Hallelujah  
Hallelujah  
Hallelujah  
Hallelujah

Reuben Morgan

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## PRAISE IS THE OFFERING

### Verse 1

Come and let us sing for joy  
 Let us praise and shout aloud  
 To the lifter of our heads  
 To the Rock we're standing on  
 Your salvation is our song  
 Now we can't stay silent  
 We will sing how

### Chorus 1

Great is Your love for us  
 And great are the things You've done  
 And praise is the offering  
 We bring to You

### Verse 2

Lord, we come to worship You  
 Lord, we bow our hearts in awe  
 By Your love, we are redeemed  
 We are Yours and You're our God  
 Your salvation is our song  
 Now we can't stay silent  
 We will sing how

### Chorus 2

All of our heart and soul  
 And all that You are and more  
 And praise is the offering  
 We bring to You

### Verse 3

Lord, we come to worship You  
 Lord, we bow our hearts in awe  
 By Your love, we are redeemed  
 We are Yours and You're our God  
 We are Yours and You're our God  
 We are Yours and You're our God

Glenn Paekiam | Shannon Alford | Sion Alford  
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## ANTHEM

### Verse 1

So many reasons  
Too many to count  
To say that I love You  
To worship You now  
Your love is perfect  
Your heart is kind  
I'm Yours forever  
Forever You're mine

### Chorus

Jesus, the anthem of my heart  
Jesus, the anchor of my soul  
I'm overwhelmed by all You are  
Oh how I love You

### Verse 2

You call me beloved  
You call me friend  
Your grace says I'm worthy  
You welcome me in  
Now all that I long for  
And all that I need  
Is to be in Your presence  
Forever I fall at Your feet

### Bridge

Faithful to the end  
God You are always good  
Where do I begin  
There's so many reasons to love You  
Your promise never breaks  
Your beauty never fades  
What else can I say  
There's so many reasons to love You

### Interlude

Oh, there's so many reasons to love You  
Oh oh

## Ending

I'm overwhelmed by all You are  
Oh how I love You  
I'm overwhelmed by all You are  
Oh how I love You

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## BLESSINGS

### Verse 1

We pray for blessings  
 We pray for peace  
 Comfort for family, protection while we sleep  
 We pray for healing, for prosperity  
 We pray for Your mighty hand to ease our suffering  
 All the while, You hear each spoken need  
 Yet love is way too much to give us lesser things

### Chorus 1

'Cause what if Your blessings come through raindrops  
 What if Your healing comes through tears  
 What if a thousand sleepless nights are what it takes to know  
 You're near  
 What if trials of this life are Your mercies in disguise

### Verse 2

We pray for wisdom  
 Your voice to hear  
 We cry in anger when we cannot feel You near  
 We doubt Your goodness, we doubt Your love  
 As if every promise from Your Word is not enough  
 All the while, You hear each desperate plea  
 And long that we'd have faith to believe

### Bridge

When friends betray us  
 When darkness seems to win  
 We know that pain reminds this heart  
 That this is not, this is not our home

### Tag

It's not our home

### Chorus 2

'Cause what if Your blessings come through raindrops  
 What if Your healing comes through tears  
 And what if a thousand sleepless nights are what it takes to  
 know You're near  
 What if my greatest disappointments  
 Or the aching of this life  
 Is the revealing of a greater thirst this world can't satisfy  
 What if trials of this life  
 The rain, the storms, the hardest nights  
 Are Your mercies in disguise

Laura Story

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## MY WORTH IS NOT IN WHAT I OWN (AT THE CROSS)

### Verse 1

My worth is not in what I own  
Not in the strength of flesh and bone  
But in the costly wounds of love  
At the cross

### Verse 2

My worth is not in skill or name  
In win or lose, in pride or shame  
But in the blood of Christ that flowed  
At the cross

### Chorus

I rejoice in my Redeemer  
Greatest treasure  
Wellspring of my soul  
I will trust in Him, no other  
My soul is satisfied in Him alone

### Verse 3

As summer flowers we fade and die  
Fame, youth and beauty hurry by  
But life eternal calls to us  
At the cross

### Verse 4

I will not boast in wealth or might  
Or human wisdom's fleeting light  
But I will boast in knowing Christ  
At the cross

### Verse 5

Two wonders here that I confess  
My worth and my unworthiness  
My value fixed, my ransom paid  
At the cross

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## GOD OF AGES

### Verse 1

God of ages  
 Bringing glory here  
 You are good, You are good  
 Son of righteousness  
 You are all I seek  
 With all my heart

### Pre-Chorus

Giver of life  
 Hope for the lost is in You  
 All of the earth  
 Shines with Your light, Your glory

### Chorus

You are the God who lives  
 You are the God who heals  
 You are my hope, my everything  
 You brought salvation to us  
 Offered Your peace to the world  
 You are my Lord, my everything

### Verse 2

In your promise  
 and your faithfulness  
 I will trust all my days  
 King forever  
 Reign in majesty  
 Be glorified

Ben Fielding  
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## HOPE OF THE NATIONS

### Verse 1

Jesus, hope of the nations  
 Jesus, comfort for all who mourn  
 You are the source of heaven's hope on earth  
 Jesus, light in the darkness  
 Jesus, truth in each circumstance  
 You are the source of heaven's light on earth

### Pre-Chorus

In history, You lived and died  
 You broke the chains, You rose to life

### Chorus 1

You are the hope, living in us  
 You are the Rock, in whom we trust  
 You are the light, shining for all the world to see  
 You rose from the dead, conquering fear  
 Our Prince of Peace, drawing us near  
 Jesus our hope, living for all who will receive  
 (Lord we believe)  
 (Lord we believe)  
 (Lord we believe)

### Ending

Lord we believe  
 (Jesus hope of the nations)  
 Lord we believe  
 (Jesus hope of the nations)  
 Lord we believe  
 (Jesus Lord we believe)  
 Lord we believe

Brian Doerksen  
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## THE POTTER'S HAND

### Verse 1

Beautiful Lord, wonderful Saviour  
I know for sure, all of my days are held in Your hand  
And crafted into Your perfect plan

### Verse 2

You gently call me into Your presence  
Guiding me by Your Holy Spirit  
Teach me dear Lord  
to live all of my life through Your eyes

### Pre-Chorus

I'm captured by Your holy calling  
Set me apart  
I know You're drawing me to Yourself  
Lead me Lord, I pray

### Chorus

Take me, mould me  
Use me, fill me  
I give my life to the Potter's hand  
Call me, guide me  
Lead me, walk beside me  
I give my life to the Potter's hand

Darlene Zschech

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## NOTES

FRI  
01

## Open Doors and Closed Doors

**SCRIPTURE** 1 Thessalonians 2:17-18; Colossians 4:3; Acts 16:6-10

### OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about open doors and closed doors in Paul's ministry?

### APPLICATION

What does it mean for me to move in my life and ministry in terms of open doors and closed doors?

### PRAYER

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

### Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for SGI leaders: To follow God according to divine opening and closing of doors
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

### DEEPER REFLECTION

**PRESUMABLY, BOTH PAUL AND THE THESSALONIANS KNEW** what the interference was in “Satan hindered us” in Paul’s repeated attempts to return to Thessalonica (v.18), while we lack this information.<sup>1</sup>

In Paul’s ministry, he experienced both open doors and closed doors. And apparently, he moved in terms of open doors and closed doors, as he prayed for open doors (Col 4:3). During his second missionary journey, Paul was “forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the Word in Asia” (Acts 16:6). And when he attempted to go into Bithynia, “the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them” (Acts 16:7). Then Paul discovered that God was directing him to go to Macedonia (Acts 16:9-10). Towards the end of his third missionary journey, he prayerfully planned to go to Rome (Acts 19:21; Rom 1:10), but he had been “often hindered” by God’s will “from coming to you [Rome]” (Rom 15:22).

In Paul’s failed attempts to reconnect with the Thessalonians, he attributed the blockage to Satan, while attributing others to God. It could be that God gave Paul spiritual insight “to distinguish between providential and demonic happenings”, or “with the benefit of hindsight”<sup>2</sup>. But theologically, God still retains supreme authority while Satan does his part. Once, “even though a door was opened to me in the Lord” in Troas “to preach the gospel”, Paul abandoned it to attend to a more urgent pastoral situation at Corinth (2 Cor 2:12-13; 7:5-7). It wasn’t an act of disobedience, but an act of discerning what was deemed to be of higher priority.

<sup>1</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Thessalonians, The Bible Speaks Today* (IVP, 1991), 63

<sup>2</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Thessalonians*, 63

SAT  
02

## A Disciplemaker's Joy and Glory

SCRIPTURE 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20

### OBSERVATION

What does Paul mean when he said that the Thessalonians were his “crown of boasting” and “glory and joy”?

### APPLICATION

What does it mean for me to look at the people that I have influenced as my glory and joy?

### PRAYER

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

### Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for Church Board: To see God's flock in the church as their joy and glory
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

### DEEPER REFLECTION

#### WHEN WE DISCIPLE PEOPLE AND THEIR LIVES ARE

transformed by God through our ministry and influence, we can look at them as “our crown of boasting” and “our glory and joy” (vv. 19-20). Mark the word **“our”**. The “joy” refers to the present, and the “crown of boasting” and “glory” refers to the future at Christ's Second Coming.<sup>3</sup> Paul's joy in this world and his glory in the next were tied up with the Thessalonians who were transformed by Christ – their “work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope” in the Lord (1 Thess 1:3) – through his ministry.

Does Paul's glory in the Thessalonians conflict with his affirmations of glorying only in Christ and His cross (1 Cor 1:31; Gal 6:14)? Obviously not, otherwise Paul would be self-contradictory. Boasting can be prideful attitudes in our sinfulness, even in our spirituality (Rom 2:17-18, 23). For Paul, “my pride in you” – the Corinthians – was Christ-centred: a pride “which I have **in Christ Jesus our Lord**” (1 Cor 15:31). We can legitimately boast and that boasting is **“in the Lord”** (2 Cor 10:17-18). Paul could say honestly without pride, “I laboured more than all” the other apostles, with the qualification, “yet not I, but the **grace of God with me**” (1 Cor 15:10). Paul's glory was in the Thessalonians themselves, not his own achievements. It is easy to blur the line in this. And that glory and boasting will be “before our Lord Jesus **at His coming**” (v. 19) – not now. This kind of glory and boasting has to do with our perspective, motive and attitude.

<sup>3</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Thessalonians*, 63

SUN  
03

# Sunday Journal

## SCRIPTURE

## OBSERVATION

## APPLICATION

## PRAYER

# THE PAST WEEK

## Review

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

◆ What gave me life and what drained me?

◆ How was the Spirit of God at work?



## THE PAST WEEK

### 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

#### Hope:

Believing that something good can come out of something bad.

#### Memory Verse

"In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."  
- John 16:33 (NIV)

#### \* Bottom Line

Whatever happens, remember how powerful God is\*.

**BIBLE STORY VIDEO**  
<https://cefc.ch/22FD04W1>

#### \* Bible Story

John 11:1-45 - Lazarus Raised from the Dead



#### \* Activity

##### Raise Me!

Prop: A kite

Organise a family outing to fly a kite. Share with everyone that this week's activity is related to John 11:1-45. Let your family members take turns reading the verses.

Discuss after the activity:

- How does it relate to the verses about the rise of Lazarus from the dead?
- What are the similarities and/or differences?

Say, "The kite alone is stationary without life. Just at the right time and with support from us, the kite soars and rises! We are like kites. God holds on to the string and uses His power to keep every kite alive. In His perfect time and control, He raises us and gives us hope!"

#### \* Talk About It

- Was Jesus' timing in this story *perfect*, even though Lazarus had already died by the time Jesus arrived? Why or why not?
- If you were Mary or Martha, how would you have reacted to Jesus' "late arrival"?
- What does this story tell us about God's power? How does that give you hope?

**Parents:** Share with your family members about a time you felt helpless and hopeless. Share how God "rescued" you from the situation in His perfect time. How did the incident change the way you think or behave?

#### \* Prayer

Praise God for giving us hope. Thank God for His promise to help us when we face problems and struggles. Ask God to help us trust Him and keep His promise close to our hearts at all times.

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MON  
04

## Passion for Building Lives

SCRIPTURE 1 Thessalonians 2:17-18; 3:1-2

## OBSERVATION

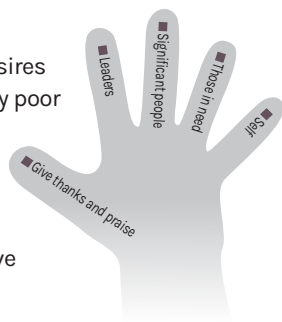
What significant observations can you make about Paul in his ministry to the Thessalonians?

## APPLICATION

How do I feel and respond to people who need help, but whom I am not able to help?

## PRAYER

O God of the nations, who loves mankind and desires all people to be saved, when I see the many, many poor and needy people in the world, and the injustice that they suffer, I feel so helpless, that in my limitations I cannot do much more, except to pray. I pray that You in Your sovereign mercy, wisdom and power, will intervene to help and save these people.



## DEEPER REFLECTION

## PAINFULLY SEPARATED BY FORCE FROM THE THESSALONIANS,

Paul persisted in making every possible attempt to return to Thessalonica to continue his ministry of building the faith of the new believers, but was not successful (vv.17-18). And his repeated efforts “were made more frustrating by the lack of news about the church there”<sup>4</sup> that was undergoing persecution. The burning question in Paul’s heart was, “Are they still standing in their faith?” The suspense grew until “we could bear it no longer” (1 Thess 3:1). This is **godly anxiety for others**.<sup>5</sup> Paul’s godly anxiety for others was displayed on another occasion. Writing to the Corinthians, he gives a long list of his many sufferings for Christ and the Gospel (2 Cor 11:23-27), which he ends with, “And, besides all this, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak without my feeling that weakness? Who is led astray, and I do not burn with anger?” (2 Cor 11:28-29<sup>6</sup>).

Paul’s godly anxiety for the Thessalonians led him to **doing what is best** with all the constraints and limitations upon him: “we thought it best to be left behind in Athens alone, and we sent Timothy” (1 Thess 3:1-2). Paul gave Timothy a “daring assertion” and an “exalted description”<sup>7</sup>: “God’s co-worker in the gospel of Christ.” Paul was deliberate in using “God’s”, to show that he was sending “a gifted and qualified representative”<sup>8</sup>. When Paul could not return to the Thessalonians himself, he sent the next best person for the task (cf. Phil 2:19-20).

<sup>4</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Thessalonians*, 64

<sup>5</sup> G. K. Beale, 1-2 Thessalonians, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series* (IVP Academic, 2003), 95

<sup>6</sup> Reconstruction with ESV and NLT

<sup>7</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Thessalonians*, 64

<sup>8</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Thessalonians*, 64

TUE  
05

## Establishing Our Faith

SCRIPTURE 1 Thessalonians 3:1-2; 1 Peter 5:10

## OBSERVATION

How is faith established?

## APPLICATION

What are the areas in my life where my faith needs to be established?

## PRAYER

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

## Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for pastors and staff: To perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish their faith in trials
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

## DEEPER REFLECTION

**TIMOTHY WAS SENT TO THE THESSALONIANS TO “ESTABLISH**

and encourage you in your faith” (v.2). The Thessalonians’ faith is a key focus in 1 Thessalonians 3: “your faith” is repeated five times (1 Thess 3:2, 5, 6, 7, 10). A key action towards our faith is “establish” (*stērizō*). *Stērizō* means “to cause someone to become stronger in the sense of more firm and unchanging in attitude or belief”<sup>9</sup>. Our faith is established in three ways.

**We establish ourselves in our faith.** The primary building block in establishing our faith is the Word of God: “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17). The object of faith is God. Faith in God grows out of knowing God. Who God is, is represented by what God says. How do we trust in God? By trusting in His Word, where He has revealed Himself. So, devoting time and effort to get into and grow in the Word of God is a critical necessity.

**We establish one another’s faith.** Faith building is a community endeavour, as Paul said to the Roman Christians: “that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine” (Rom 1:12). We do this “through the encouragement of the Scriptures” (Rom 15:4) and by sharing our personal faith journey.

**God establishes us in our faith.** Trials and suffering are key divine means in this: “After” we “have suffered for a little while”, God will “restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish” us (1 Pet 5:10). How will God answer our prayer, “Lord, increase my faith” (Lk 17:5)?

<sup>9</sup> Johannes P. Louw & Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains, Second Edition, Volume 1* (UBS, 1988, 1989), 74:19

WED  
06

## Steadfastness in Discipleship Suffering

SCRIPTURE 1 Thessalonians 3:1-3a; Revelation 2:8-11

### OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about discipleship suffering (v.3; Rev 2:8-11)?

### APPLICATION

What does it mean for me to be steadfast in suffering in my discipleship journey?

### PRAYER

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

### Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for leaders
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for the Generations: To accept discipleship suffering and be steadfast in the Lord
- ◆ Pray for self

### DEEPER REFLECTION

#### WITH GREAT URGENCY, PAUL SENT TIMOTHY TO THE

Thessalonians “to establish and encourage you in your faith” (v.2). The great urgency is reflected in the purpose: “that no one be shaken by these afflictions” (v.3, NRSV). Paul was deeply concerned that the Thessalonians’ “faith” was “shaken” (*sainomai*) by the persecutions that they were undergoing. *Sainomai* means being so emotionally disturbed as to be shaken in one’s belief and give up and turn way from one’s belief.<sup>10</sup>

The contrast of being “shaken” is steadfastness. Steadfastness is enduring and persevering, not giving in, not giving up. Our belief in God and His Word enables us to remain steadfast in suffering. We trust **in** God, and God Himself – the person of God – **is** our trust (Jer 17:7). Suffering hits at what we believe in. Hence, **knowing what we believe in** is a vital key to steadfastness in discipleship suffering. And what we believe in becomes our **conviction** – really believing what we believe in, and our conviction establishes our **commitment** and gives us **confidence**. Discipleship suffering trains and tests our conviction about God, our commitment to God and our confidence in God.

The Lord called the church in Smyrna to “be faithful unto death” in suffering “tribulation” (Rev 2:10). The extent of our steadfastness in discipleship suffering is **“unto death”**. The Lord calls us to trust in Him who is “the first and the last”, and “do not fear” to suffer faithfully “unto death”, because He is the One “who had died and came to life” (Rev 2:8, 10).

<sup>10</sup> Johannes P. Louw & Eugene A. Nida, 31.66

THU  
07

## Preparedness for Discipleship Suffering

SCRIPTURE 1 Thessalonians 3:1-4

### OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about discipleship suffering in verses 2 to 4?

### APPLICATION

How will I prepare myself for suffering in my discipleship journey?

### PRAYER

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

### Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for Outreach/Missions/New Life leaders: To know what it means to be destined to suffer in following Jesus
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

### DEEPER REFLECTION

**PETER GAVE TO HIS FLOCK THAT WAS SUFFERING FOR** their faith this pastoral word: “Beloved, **do not be surprised** at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, **as though something strange** were happening to you” (1 Pet 4:12). Discipleship suffering is a key emphasis in discipling for the early church: “strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). Mark the words, “**we must**”, which speak of the divine “must”. Suffering is a necessity and an inevitability in biblical discipleship. No one enjoys suffering, but we must expect it. Mark also the words, “**many** tribulations”.

Paul gave similar emphasis in discipling the Thessalonians – even when they were new in the faith: “we are **destined** for this” (v.3). The word “destined” is in the passive voice, which points to the divine passive: We are “**destined**” **by God** for suffering. We talk about our destiny, assuming that it is in the Lord and from the Lord. Surely, suffering is included in our destiny, whatever it may be. Do we have this in mind consciously? Paul taught the Thessalonians that tribulation is not just a possibility, but “the Christian’s destiny”<sup>11</sup>. And as a critical necessity, Paul “kept telling” them “beforehand” about this (v.4), that is, “over and again” he “returned to this theme”<sup>12</sup> of Christian suffering. Do we keep talking about this to ourselves and in discipling others as reminders, so that we may be prepared for our “destined” discipleship suffering?

<sup>11</sup> Gary S. Shogren, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2012), 137  
<sup>12</sup> Gene L. Green, The Letters to the Thessalonians, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Apollos, 2002), 162

FRI  
08

## Warfare in Discipleship Suffering

SCRIPTURE 1 Thessalonians 3:2-5; 1 Peter 5:8-10

### OBSERVATION

What can you learn about spiritual warfare in discipleship suffering in these passages?

### APPLICATION

How do I see spiritual warfare in discipleship suffering in my discipleship journey?

### PRAYER

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

### Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for SGI leaders: To discern spiritual warfare in discipleship suffering and respond
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

### DEEPER REFLECTION

**PAUL WAS FEARFUL THAT “SOMEHOW THE TEMPTER HAD tempted”** the Thessalonians and succeeded (v.5). The situation was suffering of tribulation (vv.3-4). This is spiritual warfare in discipleship suffering. The target of Satan’s temptation was the “faith” of the Thessalonians (vv.2, 5). The temptation was “not simply to commit some sin or sins but rather to commit the sin of apostasy”<sup>13</sup> – falling away from the faith. Paul was deeply concerned that none of his new converts were “shaken by these afflictions” (v.3) and gave up and turned away from their faith. The issue is “not moral lapse but continuance in faith”, for “the possibility of apostasy was a clear and present danger”<sup>14</sup> for the Thessalonians.

How does our “adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet 5:8)? By inflicting suffering on God’s people (cf. Rev 2:10). This ferocious and vicious satanic attack comes in “the same kinds of suffering [that] are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world” (1 Pet 5:9). In our discipleship suffering, Peter calls us to “resist” the devil by being “firm in your faith” (1 Pet 5:9). It is our faith that Satan wants to “devour”, not our bodies that are inflicted with pains. But physical pains do bring about mental and emotional distress that can destabilise our faith in God. To be “firm in faith” is to endure and persevere in “the God of all grace” (1 Pet 5:10), whose “grace is sufficient” (2 Cor 12:9) for us, to strengthen, support, sustain and see us through.

<sup>13</sup> Gene L. Green, 165

<sup>14</sup> Gene L. Green, 165

SAT  
09

## The Nature of Growth

**SCRIPTURE** 1 Thessalonians 3:5; 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

### OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about spiritual growth from these two passages?

### APPLICATION

How does the nature of spiritual growth shape my ministering to people's lives?

### PRAYER

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

### Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for Church Board: To follow the divine design for spiritual growth in personal discipleship and discipling others
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

### DEEPER REFLECTION

#### PAUL WAS ANXIOUS THAT HIS “LABOUR WOULD BE IN VAIN”

should Satan succeed in tempting the Thessalonians to fall away from their faith (v.5). We can glean from this situation something about the dynamic nature of spiritual growth. It is helpful for us to have a holistic view of this.

In discipling people, some do the planting and some the watering, “as the Lord assigned to each” person (1 Cor 3:5-6a). So, let us not take full credit for the growth of people whom we have spiritual influence in their lives. There can be no watering without first the planting, and the planting cannot grow without the watering. However, ultimately, it is “only God who gives the growth” (1 Cor 3:6-7) – by working through our planting and watering. But our “reward” from God is only for our “labour”, not the “growth” (1 Cor 3:8), even though our labour might be “in vain” (v.5; cf. Phil 2:16), in that people are not growing or they have fallen away (cf. Matt 13:20-22). So, on one hand, we do not labour in vain in terms of “reward” from God, and on the other hand, we can labour in vain in terms of results. But then, it is “only God who gives the growth” (1 Cor 3:6-7). There is also the place of the tempter’s temptation, which can result in breaking down or building up of faith. And there is also the individual’s responsibility. Growth comes from God (1 Cor 3:6-7), but Paul also admonished the Corinthians for not growing (1 Cor 3:1-4).

SUN  
10

# Sunday Journal

## SCRIPTURE

## OBSERVATION

## APPLICATION

## PRAYER

# THE PAST WEEK

## Review

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

◆ What gave me life and what drained me?

◆ How was the Spirit of God at work?



## THE PAST WEEK

### 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

#### Hope:

Believing that something good can come out of something bad.

#### Memory Verse

"In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."  
- John 16:33 (NIV)

#### \* Bottom Line

Whatever happens, remember God is still working.\*

  
**BIBLE STORY VIDEO**  
<https://cefc.ch/22FD04W2>

#### \* Bible Story

John 12:9-16 - Palm Sunday



#### \* Activity

##### Remember the Fronds

Props: A stalk of fern frond, wax crayons, paper and markers

Provide each family member with a piece of paper. Get them to place a stalk of fern frond under it and rub a crayon on the paper to make the fern's shape appear.

Read John 12:9-16. Discuss how we can praise Jesus. Ask everyone to write praise phrases on each fern leaf with a marker.

Say, "The crowd thought that Jesus was coming to save them from the rulers of Rome and be the king. But instead, He was coming to die to make a way for everyone to have a relationship with God. Sometimes, we expect God to give us what we long for but nothing happens. Fear not! God is still working. He has good plans for us although it may not be in line with our expectations."

#### \* Talk About It

- How did you feel when you faced a tough situation and couldn't see God's hand in it?
- Why are God's plans the best and always better than ours?
- What can we do when we feel disappointed, angry or confused about what's going on in our lives?
- How can we show that we believe God sees the big picture and is still working out a plan for our lives?

**Parents:** Share with your family members about a tough time when things didn't work out the way you planned. How did you feel and react? What did God do to show that He is still working?

#### \* Prayer

Thank God for always looking out for us and walking ahead of us in our plans. Ask God to help us see and walk in His Ways and not ours.

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MON  
11Willingly Led to  
the Slaughter

SCRIPTURE Mark 15:1-5

## OBSERVATION

Why do you think Jesus “made no further answer” and did not try to defend Himself in the face of many accusations and charges?

## APPLICATION

How can I learn to be focused on my God-given mission despite the trials and temptations that come my way?

## PRAYER

O Lord, by Your grace, please make what seems to be impossible (in light of human nature) be possible for me. You know how little I am able to bear and how quickly I become discouraged when adversity rises up against me. Whatever trials may come upon me, help me to view them as pleasing and acceptable, for to suffer and be tested is exceedingly beneficial to my soul. Amen.<sup>15</sup>

## Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for leaders
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

## DEEPER REFLECTION

## THIS WEEK WE WILL READ THE PASSION NARRATIVE IN

Mark’s account of the Gospel and reflect on the journey of our Lord Jesus Christ to the cross and beyond. His trial, crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection. You cannot miss the dramatic twist of events in this final week. It was marked by the brutal irony of people’s extreme and absurd responses to Him. From Palm Sunday to Good Friday. From “Hosanna!” to “Crucify Him!” Adoration to condemnation. Waving palm leaves in their hands to driving cruel nails into His. The crowds following Him to everyone deserting Him. How do we make sense of this apparent madness?

In *The God Who is There*, D.A. Carson wrote that “the man who is utterly powerless is transcendently powerful”<sup>16</sup>. Concerning the final week, all the parallel accounts in the Gospels consistently portrayed a reckless, almost irresponsible, passivity on the part of Jesus. He did not resist arrest or defend Himself. Betrayed by Judas, deserted by all His disciples, delivered to His enemies, denied by Peter, condemned by His people and ultimately even forsaken by His Father. Was everything out of control? Certainly not! Jesus could have availed Himself of more than twelve legions of angels, but chose not to (Matt 26:53-54). The Lamb who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29) could not be more focused on fulfilling His mission on earth than here in these final steps to His slaughter at the cross. Under the mighty hand of God, the very powerlessness of Jesus was His very power. **People may see a senseless slaughter. But the Lamb saw His holy altar.**

<sup>15</sup> Adapted from James N. Watkins, *Thomas à Kempis’s The Imitation of Christ—Classic Devotions in Today’s Language* (Worthy Inspired, 2015), 100.

<sup>16</sup> D.A. Carson, *The God Who Is There* (Baker Books, 2010), 156.

TUE  
12

## The Divine Exchange

SCRIPTURE Mark 15:6-15; Acts 3:13-14

## OBSERVATION

In what ways were Barabbas representative of sinners like you and me?

## APPLICATION

“For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ” (2 Cor 5:21 NLT).

What impact does that fact have on my choices and pursuits in life?

## PRAYER

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

## Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for pastors and staff: To always praise God for His bountiful and infinite goodness towards unworthy sinners and seek to live for the Lord Jesus Christ
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

## DEEPER REFLECTION

**THE CONTRAST IN VERSES 6 TO 15 IS UNMISTAKABLE.**

Two men in Pilate’s custody. Both were leaders, each with a sizable following. Both were accused of being a threat to the Roman government and faced the sentence of crucifixion<sup>17</sup>. Lesser known, perhaps, is the fact that both share the same first name, Yeshua or Jesus<sup>18</sup>. But the similarities end here. The sinful man would soon be released from punishment, but the sinless One would be condemned to die on a cross. **What an irony! What a divine exchange!** The juxtaposition is intentional. Clearly, these men were polar opposites. Bar-abbas, or Yeshua bar Abba (Jesus, the “son of father”), was an infamous Jewish insurrectionist, held in custody for the crimes of treason against Rome and murder. His was the way of violence to justify political ends – to free Jews from Roman oppression. Not so Jesus the Son of God, who walked in the way of love and peace to fulfil the will of His Father. Pilate himself perceived that this “King of the Jews” was harmless to Rome, but the Jewish religious leaders pressurised Pilate to “cancel” Him because they were envious of His influence (v.10). Yet Christ was the One truly able to set His people free from all their sins.

After Barabbas was released at the feast, he slipped into complete obscurity, leaving neither movement nor legacy. After Christ died on the cross – the righteous for the unrighteous – He rose from the grave on the third day, appeared to His disciples and through them turned the world upside down with a revolution of love that continues to this day.

<sup>17</sup> For helpful short articles on the history and science of crucifixion, see <https://www.gotquestions.org/crucifixion.html>; <https://www.apu.edu/articles/the-science-of-the-crucifixion/>.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 27:16-17 NIV (so NRSV, NET).

WED  
13

## The Mocking of God

SCRIPTURE Mark 15:16-20

## OBSERVATION

Why did the soldiers mock Jesus the way they did? (Note: When Jesus was hanging on the cross, other groups of people also mocked Him; see Mk 15:29-32.)

## APPLICATION

Will I commit myself to lift my hands up to God in prayer, praise and thanksgiving even in those times when I do not understand why I am going through pain and suffering?

## PRAYER

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

## Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for leaders
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for the Generations: To learn to trust God and willingly bear whatever difficulty He wants them to go through
- ◆ Pray for self

## DEEPER REFLECTION

**IN CHRISTIANITY REDISCOVERED, SPIRITAN PRIEST AND** missionary Vincent J. Donovan related a shocking dialogue with the tribal Masai people of East Africa. When asked what they thought about God, a young Masai elder stood up and replied, “If I ever run into God, I will put a spear through him.”<sup>19</sup> **Such audacity!**

The cruel rejection and brutal violence against Jesus hours before His death is beyond human imagination and comprehension. Why the need to summon so many Roman soldiers (up to 600 men<sup>20</sup>) against a solitary, peace-loving religious teacher? What prompted such senseless mockery from military men usually indifferent to Jewish religious matters? Were their hostile actions instinctive in a culture of violence? Did they really believe that this powerless man was a rival king who needed to be eliminated as a potential threat to the Roman Emperor? Or could their vehemence stem from a deeper narrative of a broken, suspicious, barbaric and murderous humanity eager to wound each other, and **even God?**

Why do bad things happen to good people? The apologist Clay Jones surveyed the long, horrifying history of grotesque human evil in the form of genocides, war crimes, mass rapes, racism, abortion, etc.<sup>21</sup> Against this backdrop, deeper questions arise. Could it be that, ultimately, humanity’s greatest violence is not directed towards itself, but really against God? Might it be that out of an inability to comprehend our human predicament, people shake their fists at God and curse Him? If so, why do bad things happen to a good God? And why would God allow Himself to be mocked, tortured and even killed by His very own creation?

<sup>19</sup> Vincent J. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered* (Orbis, 2003), 32.

<sup>20</sup> Mark 15:16 – a cohort (Greek *speira*) is a tenth of a Roman legion, normally about 600 soldiers.

<sup>21</sup> Clay Jones, *Why Does God Allow Evil?* (Harvest House, 2017), 47-63.

THU  
14

## The Crucifixion of the Messiah

SCRIPTURE Mark 15:21-32

### OBSERVATION

In this passage, the words “crucified” and “cross” occur repeatedly. What is most striking to you about the crucifixion of King Jesus, the Messiah (Christ) or Anointed One (vv.26, 32)?

### APPLICATION

In what ways must I carry my cross and follow Christ in the current season of my life?

### PRAYER

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

### Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for Outreach/Missions/New Life leaders: To deny themselves, take up their cross daily and follow Jesus to the very end
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

### DEEPER REFLECTION

**PEOPLE GENERALLY DO NOT WELCOME KNOWING THE END** of a story before it unfolds completely. Unless, of course, you were one of the disciples who deserted Jesus after His arrest. Living on the pre-resurrection side of the cross without any foreknowledge that Jesus would rise again on the third day, Golgotha<sup>22</sup> meant for the disciples a brutal finality and certainty. **Jesus died.** Naked and broken. Shamed and cursed on a tree. End of story, end of hope. All their experiences with Jesus – their three years spent together – amounted to a disappointing nothing. What a cruel joke from heaven, it seemed! If only they understood and believed that Jesus would indeed rise again three days later.<sup>23</sup>

One can perhaps never fully appreciate the hope and joy of resurrection until one wrestles with the depth of anguish and despair over the fact that Jesus was crucified by both the Jews (His own people!) and the Gentiles (represented by the Roman soldiers). Crucifixion – the most severe and cruel form of capital punishment that man had devised – meant that Jesus had zero chance of surviving the horrifying ordeal. The Messiah, the God-man, needed to undergo death in order to make the Gospel available to the whole of broken humanity.

The crux of Christian discipleship is that death to self is the spiritual terrain we must traverse before we can attain the peak of spiritual victory and freedom in Christ Jesus. He invites us, “If anyone would come after Me, let him **deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me**” (Lk 9:23). Are you willing to follow Jesus **to the very end**?

<sup>22</sup> Also known as Calvary, which is derived from the Latin translation of “Golgotha”.

<sup>23</sup> Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34. Cf. Mark 14:58; 15:29.

FRI  
15

## Thankful It's God's Friday

SCRIPTURE Mark 15:33-47

## OBSERVATION

What is the theological significance of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross?

## APPLICATION

With whom might God be leading me to share the meaning of Good Friday and Easter Sunday?

## PRAYER

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

## Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for SGI leaders: That they will greatly rejoice and give thanks to God for His glorious work of redemption through the immeasurable sacrifice of Jesus Christ
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

## DEEPER REFLECTION

**JESUS' LAST WORDS ON THE CROSS (AS RECORDED IN**

the four Gospels) carry profound theological insights regarding the salvation of sinners. First, **the Forgiveness from God**. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34). Forgiveness is at the heart of the Gospel message. Forgiveness from God, offered to all humankind. Forgiveness – needed because we all are lost like sheep and know not what we do. Forgiveness – made possible only through the cross of Christ.

Second, **the Finished Work of Christ**. "It is finished" (Jn 19:30). Jesus' work on earth is completed at the cross, His mission fully accomplished. There is nothing more that needs to or can be added to it. Nothing the Church does or neglects can ever enrich or impoverish the finished work of Christ. "It is finished" is as much an accomplished historical reality as well as an everlasting spiritual truth. Jesus died for sins and God's wrath is therefore turned away from everyone who trusts in Jesus for salvation.

Third, **the One Forsaken for Sinners**. "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46; Mk 15:34). These most anguishing words echo the Psalmist's cries of complete abandonment and rejection.<sup>24</sup> About 2,000 years before Christ, on Mount Moriah, God provided Abraham with a ram as a sacrifice in place of his son Isaac.<sup>25</sup> On the same mountain, Jesus Christ, the perfect Lamb of God, was totally rejected and slayed on behalf of sinners, so that people can be forgiven their sins and find acceptance before the Holy God. For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Psalm 22:1.

<sup>25</sup> Genesis 22:8, 13-14.

<sup>26</sup> Hebrews 9:22b.

SAT  
16

## Have You Experienced the Risen Christ?

SCRIPTURE Mark 16:1-8

### OBSERVATION

What were the emotions experienced by the women in this passage when they heard that Jesus had risen from the grave?

### APPLICATION

How have I experienced and been impacted by the risen Christ, and how will I go and tell others about Him?

### PRAYER

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

### Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for Church Board: To continually experience Christ in their lives and proclaim Him to others who have yet to know Him
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

### DEEPER REFLECTION

#### TRUTH MUST BE TOLD AS IT IS, EVEN IF THE WITNESSES

present at the scene were (wrongly) deemed as less reliable by their society because they were female. The credibility of the women's account may have been further doubted as their emotions were at the time highly charged with fear, astonishment and awe.<sup>27</sup>

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is an undeniable historical fact and cornerstone of the Christian faith. Some opponents and sceptics did extensive research of the available evidence in order to refute the resurrection, but instead ended up writing volumes and books to prove that Jesus Christ rose from the dead.<sup>28</sup> Eyewitnesses who saw the resurrected Christ were amazingly transformed from a discouraged and fearful lot<sup>29</sup> into courageous messengers of the Gospel and martyrs for Christ in the face of opposition, persecution and death. For example, Simon Peter – specifically mentioned by the angel (v.7) – had previously denied Jesus three times and was consequently crushed in his spirit. After Peter saw the resurrected Christ and was restored by Him by the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias) one morning (see Jn 21), Peter went on to preach the Gospel to thousands and later died as a martyr.<sup>30</sup> After Saul of Tarsus (later called Paul), encountered the resurrected Christ on the road to Damascus while on a mission to arrest Christians, he became a faithful follower of Christ and a fearless proclaimer of the Gospel to Jews as well as Gentiles (see Acts 9:1-31). Church history testifies to **countless lives of men and women so utterly changed** that nothing short of God's love and power could account for such a transformation.

<sup>27</sup> In fact, the earliest manuscripts of the Gospel according to Mark ended this resurrection account – and indeed the entire Gospel account – rather abruptly (in a sense, hanging in mid-air) at verse 8 with the women fleeing away in fear and astonishment!

<sup>28</sup> See Frank Morison's *Who Moved the Stone?*, Josh McDowell's *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, and Lee Strobel's *The Case for Christ*.

<sup>29</sup> All of Jesus' disciples deserted Him when He was arrested, and after His death they went into fearful hiding (Mk 14:26-50; Jn 20:1-19).

<sup>30</sup> Tradition has it that Peter was crucified upside down upon his request because he deemed himself unworthy to die in the same manner as his Saviour.

SUN  
17

# Sunday Journal

## SCRIPTURE

## OBSERVATION

## APPLICATION

## PRAYER

# THE PAST WEEK

## Review

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

◆ What gave me life and what drained me?

◆ How was the Spirit of God at work?



## THE PAST WEEK

### 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

#### Hope:

Believing that something good can come out of something bad.

#### Memory Verse

"In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."  
- John 16:33 (NIV)

#### \* Bottom Line

Whatever happens, remember that Jesus is alive.\*

#### \* Bible Story

John 18:1-20:18 - Crucifixion and Resurrection

#### \* Activity

##### The Cross

Props: Any material that can be found at home

Read John 18:1-20:18.

Get everyone to use things around the home to make a cross.

Discuss:

- What does the cross mean to you?
- What does it mean to "bear the cross"?

Say, "God loves His people so much that He sent Jesus to die for our sins. Jesus bears the cross for us even when we do not deserve it. All God asks for is our believing hearts and to share the Good News to as many people as possible so that they will be saved."

#### \* Talk About It

- What are some things Jesus has done for us that no one else can do?
- What do the verses tell you about Jesus?
- What do the verses tell you about His resurrection?
- How do the verses help you better understand what Easter is all about?

**Parents:** Share with your family members about an experience in which the belief and knowledge of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection gave you hope to overcome a problem. What did you learn about God from this experience?

#### \* Prayer

Thank God for sending Jesus to be our Saviour even when we do not deserve it. Pray that God will open up opportunities for us to share the Good News with others and give us the courage to talk about Jesus.

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**BIBLE STORY VIDEO**  
<https://cefc.ch/22FD04W3>



MON  
18

## A Remembrance That Is Impactful

SCRIPTURE 1 Thessalonians 3:1-3, 6

### OBSERVATION

What is the significance of what Timothy reported about the Thessalonians?

### APPLICATION

How have my faith and love been tested and proven to be growing?

### PRAYER

God, I confess that there are people whom I struggle much to relate with rightly. So, God, help me to grow in grace, humility, gentleness, patience and forbearing love, and to relate with difficult people in peace.<sup>31</sup> And when my faith is tested, strengthen me to endure and persevere, knowing that You are in the process of building my character to maturity.

### Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for leaders
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

### DEEPER REFLECTION

**TIMOTHY WAS SENT TO THE THESSALONIANS TO “ESTABLISH and encourage”** them in their faith (v.2). And now he had returned with “the good news of” their “faith and love” (v.6). “Faith and love” together are “the sum total of godliness”<sup>32</sup>. “Faith” points to the vertical relationship with God, and “love” to the horizontal relationship among God’s people. Both dimensions of relationship are inextricably interlinked. Our fellowship with one another is in “our fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 Jn 1:3).

Timothy also reported of the Thessalonians’ “pleasant memories” (v.6, NIV) of Paul. This meant a lot to Paul, as he was assured that his forced sudden departure from them did not leave behind a bad memory of him in them. The Thessalonians’ “pleasant memories” of Paul were more than mere warm feelings in their close relationship with him. A “good translation” for “pleasant memories” would be “maintain a recollection”<sup>33</sup>. What did the Thessalonians recollect frequently about Paul? His life and ministry to them. The Thessalonians’ “pleasant memories” “refers to maintaining and practising a teacher’s model or pattern by a disciple, a dynamic that is strongly represented in this letter as well as in Hellenism and Judaism”<sup>34</sup>. “A disciple continued to be guided by the exemplary life of his teacher in his absence by remembering him.”<sup>35</sup> So Paul is saying to the Thessalonians: “You maintain a good memory of us always and use that mental picture as a guide for your own actions.”<sup>36</sup> Ministering from the inside out can produce such “pleasant memories” in the people whom we influence.

<sup>31</sup> Ephesians 4:2-3

<sup>32</sup> John R. W. Stott, Thessalonians, 66 – citing John Calvin

<sup>33</sup> Gary S. Shogren, 140

<sup>34</sup> Gary S. Shogren, 140

<sup>35</sup> Gary S. Shogren, 140 – citing Abraham J. Malherbe

<sup>36</sup> Gary S. Shogren, 140

TUE  
19

## Spiritual Friendship in Discipleship Suffering (1)

SCRIPTURE 1 Thessalonians 3:1-2, 6-8

### OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about Paul's relationship with the Thessalonians?

### APPLICATION

What can I do towards establishing mutual encouragement in the Christian community that I am part of?

### PRAYER

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

### Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for pastors and staff: To be exemplary encouragers to the flock of God's people
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

### DEEPER REFLECTION

#### ONE SIGNIFICANT THING THAT PAUL AND THE THESSALONIANS

had in common was the “destined” suffering of affliction (1 Thess 3:3-4, 7). The “distress and affliction” (v.7) that Paul suffered refers to “the adversity the people of God face before the final end”<sup>37</sup> as well as “the ongoing distresses of Christians during this age”<sup>38</sup> (1 Cor 7:26). Reflected in this fellowship of Christ's suffering (cf. Phil 3:10) is spiritual friendship in discipleship suffering.

The spiritual friendship between Paul and the Thessalonians is marked by **mutual longing**: “[you] long (*epipotheō*) to see us, as we long to see you” (v.6). The verb *epipotheō* that expresses this longing for reunion means “to desire intensely”, and communicates “something of the anxiousness and discontent that come with not getting what one desires”<sup>39</sup>. This shows a high-quality relationship marked by commitment and closeness. And it is not one-sided, but mutual. It certainly takes interest, time and effort to cultivate this kind of relationship. Do we have such mutual longing in our Christian community when we remember and think much of each other?

The spiritual friendship is also marked by **mutual encouragement**. Timothy was sent to the Thessalonians to “encourage” them in their faith (v.2). But now, Paul was in turn “encouraged about you through your faith” “in all our distress and affliction” (v.7). Oftentimes, when we suffer, we feel the struggles and pains more than the fact that we are “standing fast in the Lord” (v.8). But people can see that steadfastness of faith in us and are encouraged in their suffering to be likewise.

<sup>37</sup> Gene L. Green, 167

<sup>38</sup> Gary S. Shogren, 141

<sup>39</sup> Gene L. Green, 167

WED  
20

## Spiritual Friendship in Discipleship Suffering (2)

SCRIPTURE 2 Timothy 4:6-18, 21

### OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about Paul in his imprisonment for the Gospel?

### APPLICATION

What will I do in times of isolation and loneliness?

### PRAYER

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

### Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for leaders
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for the Generations: That the younger generation will look to the experience and wisdom of the older generation
- ◆ Pray for self

### DEEPER REFLECTION

**PAUL HAD ARRIVED AT THE POINT OF “THE TIME OF MY departure has come”** in his life, calling and service to the Lord (v.6). Reflecting on the **past**, he was certain that he was faithful in answering God’s call for his life (v.7). This certainty was followed by his confident anticipation of the **future**: “the crown of righteousness” that God will reward him (v.8). Then Paul returned to the **present** and “to his personal predicament”<sup>40</sup>: his sense of isolation and loneliness. His friends had left him, for good and bad reasons (vv.10-13). He had been opposed by Alexander the coppersmith (v.14). At his first defence, “no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me” (v.16). Feeling terribly cut off and abandoned, exiled from the churches he founded,<sup>41</sup> Paul appealed twice to Timothy, whom he longed to see (2 Tim 1:4): “Do your best to come to me soon” (vv.9, 21). We see here “the urgency of Paul’s affectionate desire to see Timothy”<sup>42</sup>.

The great Apostle Paul was “also a creature of flesh and blood, a man of like nature and passions with ourselves. Although he has finished his course and is awaiting his crown, he is still a frail human being with ordinary human needs. He describes his plight in prison and expresses in particular his loneliness”<sup>43</sup>. The presence of the Lord with us every day (v.17) and the prospect of His coming on the last day are “not intended to be substitute for human friendships”<sup>44</sup> – all the more so in discipleship suffering.

<sup>40</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of 2 Timothy, The Bible Speaks Today* (IVP, 1973), 117

<sup>41</sup> John R. W. Stott, *2 Timothy*, 118

<sup>42</sup> John R. W. Stott, *2 Timothy*, 119

<sup>43</sup> John R. W. Stott, *2 Timothy*, 117

<sup>44</sup> John R. W. Stott, *2 Timothy*, 120

THU  
21

## Thanksgiving and Prayer of Depth

SCRIPTURE 1 Thessalonians 3:8-10

### OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about Paul's thanksgiving and prayer to God?

### APPLICATION

What changes do I need to make in my thanksgiving and prayer to God?

### PRAYER

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

### Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for Outreach/Missions/New Life leaders: To give thanks to God in all things, good or bad
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

### DEEPER REFLECTION

#### 1 THESSALONIANS IS “AT HEART A RECORD OF THE APOSTLES’

gratitude to God. Their thanksgiving must not be glossed over as a formality, as if they were bowing their heads to give thanks before getting to the ‘meat’ of the letter (in 1 Thess 4:1). The giving of thanks and the reports of their prayer are in fact a large part of the letter’s substance [1 Thess 1-3]<sup>45</sup>. Paul expresses his thanksgiving to God at three points in the letter: for the Thessalonians’ “standing fast in the Lord” (vv.8-9) as manifested in their “work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope” (1 Thess 1:2-3), and evidence of the Word of God working in their lives (1 Thess 2:13).

Paul’s thanksgiving to God is marked by **immensity**: “What thanksgiving can we return to God for you?” (v.9). What Paul is saying is, “What kind of thanksgiving could possibly be sufficient?”<sup>46</sup> and “How can we thank God enough for you?” (v.9, NIV). It means that our hearts are so filled and overflowing with deep gratitude to God. Out of this immense thanksgiving is Paul’s prayer with **intensity**: “most earnestly” – “quite beyond all measure”<sup>47</sup>, and “night and day” he prayed for face-to-face meetings with the Thessalonians so as “to fix any deficiencies”<sup>48</sup> in their faith (v.10). Apparently, Paul worked and prayed overlappingly “night and day” (1 Thess 2:9).<sup>49</sup> As his work was with “labour and toil”, so was his prayer. For Paul, this face-to-face meeting with the Thessalonians was critical enough to demand such intensive prayer.

Are our thanksgiving and prayer marked by immensity and intensity?

<sup>45</sup> Gary S. Shogren, 22-23

<sup>46</sup> Gary S. Shogren, 141

<sup>47</sup> Gary S. Shogren, 141

<sup>48</sup> Gary S. Shogren, 142

<sup>49</sup> John R. W. Stott, Thessalonians, 66

FRI  
22

## Influencing Lives to Reproduce “Timothys” (1)

**SCRIPTURE** 1 Thessalonians 3:1-2; 1 Corinthians 16:10-11; Philippians 2:9-11

### OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about Paul and Timothy in these passages?

### APPLICATION

What can I apply in my personal discipleship and discipling others from the models of Paul and Timothy?

### PRAYER

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

### Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for SGI leaders: To seek spiritual reproduction of “Timothys” in Christ in their ministry
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

### DEEPER REFLECTION

#### WE READ IN 1 THESSALONIANS ABOUT TIMOTHY BEING

sent by Paul to the Thessalonians to “establish and encourage” them in their faith (vv.1-2). Timothy is mentioned 24 times in the New Testament. And in all the 24 times, but one (Heb 13:23), Timothy is mentioned in association with Paul, along with Paul’s two letters to him (1 Tim and 2 Tim). There is much that we can learn from this Paul-and-Timothy association about discipling and spiritual reproduction. Let us consider three principles.

**Have a personal vision** for spiritual reproduction. In discipling Timothy, Paul had a clear goal of Timothy “entrusting” – passing on – what he had learned from him to “faithful men” who “will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2). This is known as the four generations spiritual reproduction: Paul-Timothy-faithful men-others. The entrusting is done through teaching the Word of God. In the G-12 movement, a person discipling 12 persons seeks to see these 12 multiply to 144 disciples. Behind this goal is a personal vision of becoming a spiritual grandparent. Do you desire to become a spiritual grandparent?

**Look for keen learners.** Paul “wanted” Timothy to “accompany” him in his missional work, because he saw his potential (Acts 16:1-3). A person with potential is useless unless he or she is keen to learn and grow. But Paul chose a weak Timothy, who was “temperamentally shy, needing affirmation, encouragement and reassurance”<sup>50</sup> (1 Cor 16:10-11; 1 Tim 4:12; 2 Tim 1:6-7), to become his deputy and successor. Did Paul make a bad or wrong choice? Paul cared only about one thing: “likeminded” in Christ-centredness (Phil 2:19-21).

<sup>50</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus, The Bible Speaks Today* (IVP, 1996), 37-38

SAT  
23

## Influencing Lives to Reproduce “Timothys” (2)

SCRIPTURE 1 Corinthians 4:16-17; 11:1; 2 Timothy 3:10-11

### OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about Paul and Timothy in these passages?

### APPLICATION

What can I apply in my personal discipleship and discipling others from the models of Paul and Timothy?

### PRAYER

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

### Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for Church Board: To grow in Christlikeness, such that others can see what following Jesus is like
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

### DEEPER REFLECTION

**THE THIRD PRINCIPLE FOR DISCIPLEMAKING AND SPIRITUAL** reproduction that we can glean from the Paul-and-Timothy association is: **Following Christ is paramount.** At the heart of discipling is: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). It sounds like a very tall order, such that we would ask, “Who is able to do that?”

We need to, first and foremost, ask, “What is a Christian life?” A Christian life is essentially summed up in the two words of Jesus to us: “Follow Me” (Matt 4:19). And in the **“Follow Me”** is the theological reality of **“Christ lives in me”**. Paul defines the Christian life as “no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20). As we follow Jesus by His empowering and life-transforming Spirit, “Christ who lives in me” fleshes out and lives out His life in us, which Paul calls “the life of Jesus manifested in our mortal bodies” (2 Cor 4:10-11). Thus, for Paul, discipling is “I teach **my ways in Christ**. So, be imitators of **me**” and Timothy could represent Paul to teach others (vv.16-17). For in the same spirit, Paul could say about Timothy: **“You, however, followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings”** (2 Tim 3:10-11). The **“my”** is not egocentric. It is a “my” filled with Christ and fleshing out Christ. We know we have reproduced a “Timothy” when the person we are discipling is **“following my...”**.

Personal discipleship is the most basic in discipling others. We disciple others out of following Jesus.

SUN  
24

# Sunday Journal

## SCRIPTURE

## OBSERVATION

## APPLICATION

## PRAYER

# THE PAST WEEK

## Review

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

◆ What gave me life and what drained me?

◆ How was the Spirit of God at work?



## THE PAST WEEK

### 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 4

#### Hope:

Believing that something good can come out of something bad.

#### Memory Verse

"In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."  
- John 16:33 (NIV)

#### \* Bottom Line

Whatever happens, remember God is bigger than your questions.\*\*

#### \* Bible Story

John 20:19-29 - Jesus Appears to Thomas

#### \* Activity

##### Finding Answers

Prop: An uncooked egg

Read John 20:19-29.

Provide each family member with an egg and ask them to make it stand up straight. They are allowed to search for ways to achieve this.

Discuss after the activity:

- Did you have any doubts that it would work?
- What did you do to make it work?
- Where or who did you go to find the solution?

Say, "Often, during challenging times, we doubt if God is there to listen or help. We doubt God's perfect plan for us and choose to go the opposite way. God knows every question or doubt that we have. Just like how we can find answers online to make the egg stand, the Bible is where we can find God's answers to our doubts and questions. We can also go to a trusted adult for answers."

#### \* Talk About It

- Why do you think Thomas doubted that Jesus was alive?
- How did Thomas' doubt turn into faith?
- What are some doubts or questions that you have about God?
- Is it wrong to doubt God or ask questions about why things happen the way they do? Why or why not?
- When you have doubts about God, why is it important to talk about it and ask someone you trust to answer your questions?

**Parents:** Share with your family members about an experience in which you were doubtful about God's plan for you. Where did you go to find answers? What did you learn about God?

#### \* Prayer

Thank God for helping us to understand when we doubt Him.  
Ask God to help us anchor our hope in Him always.

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Adapted by JoshuaWong/CEFC/April2022



**BIBLE STORY VIDEO**  
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MON  
25

## Certain Dynamics Interplaying with Prayer

SCRIPTURE 1 Thessalonians 2:17-18; 3:1-11

### OBSERVATION

Why did it matter to Paul to pray to God to direct his way to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 3:9-11)?

### APPLICATION

What matters most to me in my prayer to God?

### PRAYER

God, my heavenly Father, You know what I need even before I ask You.<sup>51</sup> And Your interest in me includes such trivial things like my sitting down and rising up, and numbering the hairs of my head.<sup>52</sup> So, resting in Your loving care, I seek in prayer for things that matter most, like Your name be hallowed, Your kingdom comes and Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

### Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for leaders
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

### DEEPER REFLECTION

#### PAUL'S GREETING IN HIS LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS,

“Grace to you and peace” (1 Thess 1:1), is no mere social wishes, but a prayer to God. So also, is his benediction, “Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus...” (1 Thess 3:11-13). The pastoral context of Paul asking God “to direct our way to you” (1 Thess 3:11) reveals certain dynamics interplaying with prayer.

**Human effort:** After being forced to leave the Thessalonians abruptly, resulting in a painful separation from them, Paul made attempts “again and again” (vv.17-18a) to reconnect with them. These human attempts were made in the Lord. We can assume that they were made prayerfully. Surely, the Lord was present in these attempts. **Demonic obstruction:** Paul’s relentless attempts were unsuccessful, because “Satan hindered us” (v.18b). God was not absent, but was sovereign over the demonic obstruction. We may ask, “Why didn’t God intervene in His sovereignty?” We may not have an immediate answer to such a question or no answer at all. **Stopgap measures:** Undaunted, Paul did the next best thing. He sent Timothy to the Thessalonians “to establish and encourage” them in their faith (1 Thess 3:1-2). Timothy returned with good news about them “standing fast in the Lord” (1 Thess 3:6-8). But to Paul, what Timothy had done was insufficient. **Fervent praying:** Paul “pray[ed] most earnestly day and night” that God will “direct” his way to the Thessalonians for a face-to-face filling up of “what is lacking” in their faith (1 Thess 3:10-11). Did God answer Paul’s prayer? Yes, but “only about five years later when Paul visited Macedonia twice towards the end of his third missionary journey (Acts 20:1-3)”<sup>53</sup>.

<sup>51</sup> Matthew 6:8

<sup>52</sup> Psalm 139:2; Matthew 10:30

<sup>53</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Thessalonians*, 67

TUE  
26

## Primary Attention on Real Needs

SCRIPTURE 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 3:10-12

### OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about the love of the Thessalonians?

### APPLICATION

In what areas or ways do I want to grow in love?

### PRAYER

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

### Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for pastors and staff: To make love the aim in growing the church and shepherd in love
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

### DEEPER REFLECTION

#### OF TENTIMES IN OUR PRAYER, WE FOCUS MUCH ON FELT

needs – needs that are earthly and physical in nature, rather than real needs – discipleship needs and growth needs. There are vital spiritual realities that God wants us to have. Our heavenly Father who cares for birds, flowers and grass knows and cares for our felt needs (Matt 6:25-32). However, central in this divine care must be us seeking God’s kingdom above everything and living righteously (Matt 6:33). To mature in Christ, we must give primary attention to our real needs. Paul’s prayers for God’s people always focus on real needs.

Paul prayed for the Thessalonians’ growth in love: “may the Lord make you increase and abound in love” (1 Thess 3:12). Paul made this petition in the context of asking God to direct his way to the Thessalonians so that he could supply what was lacking in their faith (1 Thess 3:10-11). The “primary way the young converts will become rooted in faith is by God making their love ‘increase and overflow’”<sup>54</sup>. Bear in mind how Paul describes the love of Thessalonians as “labour of love” (v.3). It is intensive love. But there is still so much more to “increase and abound”. There is “double progress”<sup>55</sup> in this prayer: from increasing to overflowing; and from “for one another” – believers within the church – to “for all” – unbelievers outside the church. God intends that Christians loving one another be witness to the world (Jn 13:34-35). And when we Christians love even our enemies, we are like our Heavenly Father, who is merciful even to evil people (Lk 6:35-36).

<sup>54</sup> G. K. Beale, 108

<sup>55</sup> John R. W. Stott, Thessalonians, 67

WED  
27

## The Love and Holiness Connection

SCRIPTURE 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

### OBSERVATION

What is the connection between love and holiness which are mentioned interrelatedly in Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians?

### APPLICATION

How do I see love and holiness interrelated in practice 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 and praise
- ◆ Pray for leaders
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for the Generations: To consciously emphasise living and growing in love and holiness
- ◆ Pray for self

### DEEPER REFLECTION

**PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THE THESSALONIANS TO "INCREASE and abound in love"** for people both inside and outside the church (v.12) is for a purpose: **"so that** He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father" (v.13). And this purpose will be ultimately and fully fulfilled "at the coming of our Lord Jesus". This is eschatological praying. But it is assumed theologically that we are also to be "blameless in holiness before God" **now** and towards Christ's return.

Paul's prayer shows that there is a connection between love and holiness. Oftentimes, when we think of holiness, our orientation is **Godward** – **vertical holiness** – which is right, and it has to be. Leviticus 19 consists of a variety of commandments in God's call to His people: "You shall be **holy**, for I the LORD your God am holy" (Lev 19:1-2). How is this holiness to be expressed? Revere parents and keep the sabbath (Lev 19:3). Don't worship idols (Lev 19:4). Offer to God acceptable sacrifices (Lev 19:5-8). Care for the needy (Lev 19:9-10). And it is in this divine call to holiness that God gives this command: "You shall **love** your neighbour as yourself" (Lev 19:18). Holiness is also **manward** – **horizontal holiness**.

It is important to note that the increase and overflowing in love in us, and the establishing of our hearts to be blameless in holiness before God **come from God Himself**: "may the Lord...so that He may...". Therefore, we ask God in prayer to meet these real needs – discipleship needs and growth needs – in our lives. This is asking God to transform our lives.

THU  
28Fuller Personal  
Knowledge of God

SCRIPTURE Ephesians 1:3, 15-17

## OBSERVATION

What is the significance of what Paul is asking God for the Church in verses 15 to 17 in the light of verse 3?

## APPLICATION

How do I go about pursuing a greater knowledge of God?

## PRAYER

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

## Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for Outreach/Missions/New Life leaders: To be filled with the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

## DEEPER REFLECTION

**GOD “HAS BLESSED US WITH EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING ...in Christ” (v.3).** Note the terms, “has blessed”, “every” and “in Christ”. We only need to see and know the “every Spiritual blessing” that God has already blessed us with in Christ, and to live in them and live them out.

Paul’s doxology (Eph 1:3-14) is followed by his petition (Eph 1:15-21). And Paul’s first request has to do with personal knowledge of God: “that you may know Him better” (v.17, NIV). This being Paul’s first request underscores its primacy. To know God “means to be in close relationship with Him”<sup>56</sup> – and this knowledge is “linked with His demands [cf. 1 Jn 2:3-4] and often is described as knowing His will”<sup>57</sup> (cf. Col 1:9-10). But we cannot know God unless God makes Himself known to us. God has revealed Himself in the Scriptures. Read the Scriptures with the conscious intent to know God, asking the most important question: “What can I know about God in this text?” True knowledge of God shapes the way we look at reality and how we live our lives. And to know God, we need “the Spirit of wisdom and revelation” (v.17). “Wisdom” is “the wisdom of the deep things of God”<sup>58</sup>. “Revelation” is the Lord opening the Scriptures to us and our spiritual eyes to see Him (Lk 24:27, 31-32). Knowledge of God “is not a fixed quantum but rather something that develops in the life of people as they are obedient”<sup>59</sup>. Knowing God must be our life purpose, priority, passion and pursuit, making verse 17 our constant prayer.

<sup>56</sup> Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Apollos, 1999), 132

<sup>57</sup> Peter T. O’Brien, 133

<sup>58</sup> William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians, The Daily Study Bible* (Saint Andrew Press, 1976), 90

<sup>59</sup> Peter T. O’Brien, 133

FRI  
29

## “So That You Will Know...”

SCRIPTURE Ephesians 1:18-23

## OBSERVATION

What and how does God want us to know according to Paul’s prayer for the Church in verses 18 to 23?

## APPLICATION

What does it mean to me to know what Paul asks of God in verses 18 to 23?

## PRAYER

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

## Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for SGI leaders: To have enlightened eyes of the heart to see the things of God
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

## DEEPER REFLECTION

**IN PAUL’S PRAYER FOR THE CHURCH IN EPHESIANS 1:15-23,** his emphasis is on knowledge: “in the knowledge of Him” (Eph 1:17); “so that you will know what is...” (v.18). “Growth in knowledge is indispensable to growth in holiness. Indeed, knowledge and holiness are even more intimately linked than as means and end.”<sup>60</sup> Spiritual wisdom, revelation and enlightenment are indispensably necessary for such knowledge (Eph 1:17-18). What are we to know?

We are to know **the person of God** (Eph 1:17). It is in knowing God through “the Spirit of wisdom and revelation” that “the eyes of your hearts [are] enlightened” to know three other Spiritual realities (v.18a). To know **our prospect in God:** “the hope of His calling” (v.18b). We know this hope prayerfully as conviction and in experience. To know this hope in experience means “we hope for what we do not see” – the future – and “we wait for it with patience” (Rom 8:25). We will not wait in vain, because “hope does not disappoint us” (Rom 5:5, NRSV).

To know **our preciousness to God:** We are “His holy people who are His rich and glorious inheritance” (v.18c, NLT). Thus, God says to us, “Anyone who harms you harms My most precious possession” (Zech 2:8, NLT). To know **the power of God:** “His incomparably great power for us who believe” (vv.19-23, NIV) – Christ’s resurrection power (v.20a) and reigning power (vv.20b-22). Thus, we can be faithful to Jesus, “the first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life”, until death in whatever tribulation that we suffer (Rev 2:8-10).

<sup>60</sup> John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians, The Bible Speaks Today* (IVP, 1979), 54

SAT  
30

## Divine Mystery in Answering Prayer

SCRIPTURE Genesis 25:21-23

### OBSERVATION

What do you observe about God and prayer?

### APPLICATION

How do the ways that God answers my prayers help me in growing to know Him?

### PRAYER

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

### Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for Church Board: To know God in the inexplicable mystery of God
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

### DEEPER REFLECTION

#### RUNNING THROUGH THE BOOK OF GENESIS ARE FIVE

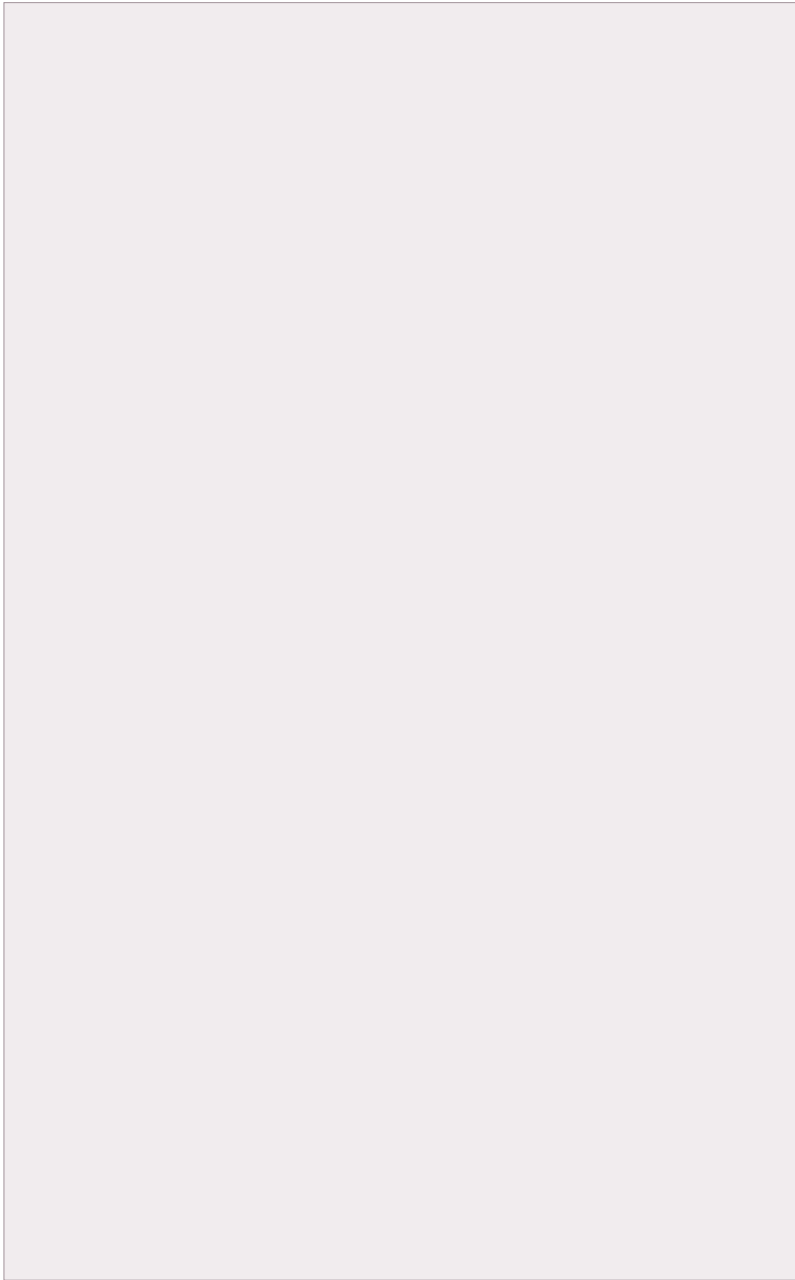
theological elements, which are often interrelated in diverse ways.

**Reality:** Human experiences that we can identify with. **Adversity:** The trials of faith of God's people. **Sovereignty:** God is always in sovereign control over everything. **Destiny:** Under His sovereignty, God is leading His people, in reality and adversity, towards a destiny – fulfilling His covenant purposes. **Mystery:** Divine ways that are inexplicable and unexplained – like how God answers prayer in verses 21 to 23.

Isaac and Rebekah had a problem: Rebekah's barrenness (v.21). So, Isaac prayed. God answered his prayer. Rebekah was pregnant. Problem solved. But the solution came with a problem: "the children struggled together within her" (v.22a). Rebekah was perplexed: "If it is thus [God's answer to prayer], why is this happening to me?" (v.22b, ESV). How did God answer Isaac's prayer? Solving one problem by creating another problem. How do you like God to answer your prayers like that? Isn't it quite scary to pray then?

We must know God here. How God answers our prayers is His prerogative. Yet, so often in our prayer we tell God very specifically what to do. And God answers prayers according to His purposes. When God answered Isaac's prayer to solve a problem and in so doing created another problem, this problem was a problem with a divine agenda: Two nations and peoples were in Rebekah's womb that would be in conflict with each other (v.23). What kind of divine agenda is that? It is God's prerogative. And God's ways are always perfect and right (Deut 32:4).

## NOTES





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