

COVENANT^{EFC}

JULY

2022

DEVOTIONAL
JOURNAL

*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



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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
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(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** TIMOR-LESTE & THE PHILIPPINES

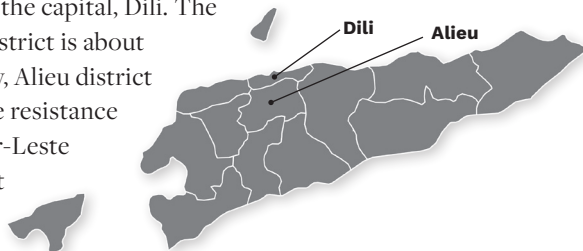
“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

1 PETER 2:9 (ESV)

PRAY FOR TIMOR-LESTE

For Alieu District, which has been adopted by Covenant EFC.

Under the LoveSingapore and Transformation Alliance movement, Covenant EFC has been asked to anchor Alieu district, which is one hour away from the capital, Dili. The population of this district is about 50,000. Interestingly, Alieu district was the centre of the resistance movement, as Timor-Leste became independent from Indonesia in the early 2000s.



Pray for:

- **The Team.** Covenant EFC is planning to send out its first missionary to Timor-Leste, Sarah Chan, who was commissioned on 22 May 2022. Pray for her spiritual, emotional and physical preparations. She will be joined by two other Covenanters in January 2023.
- **The Place.** There are four sub-districts in Aileu. That God will lead us to the sub-district and the person(s) of peace that we can work with.

PRAY FOR THE PHILIPPINES**Pray for:**

- **New president, Ferdinand Marcos Jr.** For the future of the country, as the recent elections have the potential to cause divisions politically, socially and spiritually. There are many uncertainties about the future in terms of the economy and the church. For pastors and leaders to manage these divisions and focus the church on the call of the Church.
- **The new church plants from Destiny Manila.** Praise God that after Covenant EFC conducted a Church Planting Essentials course last year, this church bravely began the process of planting at least 11 new churches – the majority in Northern Luzon. Pray for each of the new church plant, that God will bless and give wisdom regarding how Covenant EFC can support these new spiritual births through future short-term mission trips.
 1. Malasiqui, Pangasinan
 2. Agno, Pangasinan
 3. Sual, Pangasinan
 4. Mangaldan, Pangasinan
 5. Calamba, Laguna
 6. Bulacan
 7. Bacoor, Cavite
 8. Leyte
 9. Sta Nino, Paranaque
 10. Novaliches, Quezon City
 11. Carcar, Cebu

WORSHIP SONGS

JULY - AUGUST

BEFORE YOU I KNEEL

Verse 1

Before You I kneel, my Master and Maker
To offer the work of my hands
For this is the day You've given Your servant
I will rejoice and be glad
For the strength I have to live and breathe
For each skill Your grace has given me
For the needs and opportunities
That will glorify Your great name

Verse 2

Before You I kneel and ask for Your goodness
To cover the work of my hands
For patience and peace to shape all my labor
Your grace for thorns in my path
Flow within me like a living stream
Wear away the stones of pride and greed
'Til Your ways are dwelling deep in me
And a harvest of life is grown

Verse 3

Before You we kneel, our Master and Maker
Establish the work of our hands
And order our steps to seek first Your kingdom
In every small and great task
May we live the Gospel of Your grace
Serve Your purpose in our fleeting days
Then our lives will bring eternal praise
And all glory to Your great name
And all glory to Your great name

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I SPEAK JESUS

Verse 1

I just want to speak the Name of Jesus
 Over every heart and every mind
 'Cause I know there is peace within Your presence
 I speak Jesus

Verse 2

I just want to speak the Name of Jesus
 'Til every dark addiction starts to break
 Declaring there is hope and there is freedom
 I speak Jesus

Chorus

'Cause Your Name is power
 Your Name is healing
 Your Name is life
 Break every stronghold
 Shine through the shadows
 Burn like a fire

Verse 3

I just want to speak the Name of Jesus
 Over fear and all anxiety
 To every soul held captive by depression
 I speak Jesus

Verse 4

Shout Jesus from the mountains
 Jesus in the streets
 Jesus in the darkness over every enemy
 Jesus for my family
 I speak the holy Name
 Jesus

Abby Benton | Carlene Prince | Dustin Smith | Jesse Reeves | Kristen Dutton | Raina Pratt
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AT THE CROSS (LOVE RAN RED)

Verse 1

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

Chorus

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

Verse 2

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

Bridge

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

GOD YOU'RE SO GOOD

Verse 1

Amazing love that welcomes me
The kindness of mercy
That bought with blood, wholeheartedly
My soul undeserving

Chorus

God, You're so good
God, You're so good
God, You're so good
You're so good to me

Verse 2

Behold the cross
Age to age
And hour by hour
The dead are raised, the sinner saved
The work of Your power

Bridge

I am blessed, I am called
I am healed, I am whole
I am saved in Jesus' name
Highly favored, anointed
Filled with Your power
For the glory of Jesus' name

Verse 3

And should this life bring suffering
Lord, I will remember
What Calvary has bought for me
Both now and forever

Brett Younker | Brooke Ligertwood | Kristian Stanfill | Scott Ligertwood

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A THOUSAND HALLELUJAHS

Verse 1

Who else would rocks cry out to worship?
Whose glory taught the stars to shine?
Perhaps creation longs to have the words to sing
But this joy is mine

Chorus

With a thousand hallelujahs
We magnify Your name
You alone deserve the glory
The honour and the praise
Lord Jesus, this song is forever Yours
A thousand hallelujahs
And a thousand more

Verse 2

Who else would die for our redemption?
Whose resurrection means I'll rise?
There isn't time enough to sing of all You've done
But I have eternity to try

Bridge

Praise to the Lord
To the Lamb
To the King of heaven
Praise for He rose
Now He reigns
We will sing forever

Brooke Ligertwood | Phil Wickham | Scott Ligertwood
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BATTLE BELONGS

Verse 1

When all I see is the battle
You see my victory
When all I see is a mountain
You see a mountain moved
And as I walk through the shadow
Your love surrounds me
There's nothing to fear now
For I am safe with You

Chorus

So when I fight, I'll fight on my knees
With my hands lifted high
O God, the battle belongs to You
And every fear I lay at Your feet
I'll sing through the night
O God, the battle belongs to You

Verse 2

And if You are for me
Who can be against me?
For Jesus, there's nothing impossible for You
When all I see are the ashes
You see the beauty
When all I see is a cross
God, You see the empty tomb

Bridge

(An) Almighty Fortress, You go before us
Nothing can stand against the power of our God
You shine in the shadows
You win every battle
Nothing can stand against the power of our God

Tag

O God, the battle belongs to You

Brian Johnson | Phil Wickham

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10,000 REASONS

Chorus

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

Verse 1

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

Verse 2

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

Verse 3

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

Ending

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

Jonas Myrin | Matt Redman

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GOODNESS OF GOD

Verse 1

I love You, Lord
 For Your mercy never fails me
 All my days
 I've been held in Your hands
 From the moment that I wake up
 Until I lay my head
 I will sing of the goodness of God

Chorus

All my life You have been faithful
 All my life You have been so, so good
 With every breath that I am able
 I will sing of the goodness of God

Verse 2

I love Your voice
 You have led me through the fire
 In darkest night
 You are close like no other
 I've known You as a father
 I've known You as a friend
 I have lived in the goodness of God

Bridge

Your goodness is running after
 It's running after me
 Your goodness is running after
 It's running after me
 With my life laid down
 I'm surrendered now
 I give You everything
 Your goodness is running after
 It's running after me

Ben Fielding | Brian Johnson | Ed Cash | Jason Ingram | Jenn Johnson

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SOVEREIGN OVER US

Verse 1

There is strength within the sorrow
There is beauty in our tears
And You meet us in our mourning
With a love that casts out fear

Verse 2

You are working in our waiting
You're sanctifying us
When beyond our understanding
You're teaching us to trust

Chorus

Your plans are still to prosper
You've not forgotten us
You're with us in the fire and the flood
You're faithful forever, perfect in love
You are sovereign over us

Verse 3

You are wisdom unimagined
Who could understand Your ways
Reigning high above the heavens
Reaching down in endless grace

Verse 4

You're the lifter of the lowly
Compassionate and kind
You surround and You uphold me
And Your promises are my delight

Bridge

Even what the enemy means for evil
You turn it for our good
You turn it for our good
And for Your glory

Even in the valley, You are faithful
You're working for our good
You're working for our good
And for Your glory
(Repeat)

Ending

Faithful forever, perfect in love
You are sovereign over us

Aaron Keyes | Bryan Brown | Jack Mooring

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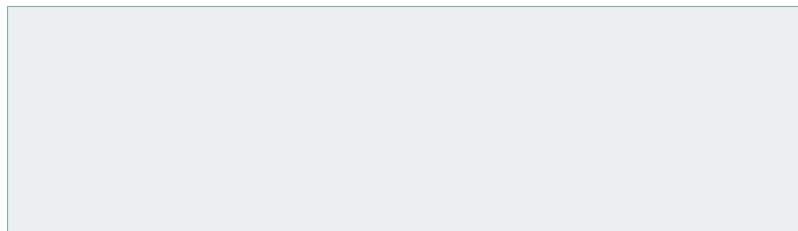
FRI
01

Set Your Mind on Things Above

SCRIPTURE Colossians 3:1-14

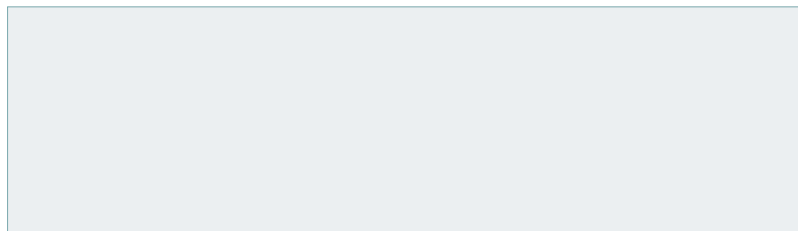
OBSERVATION

Why are Christians to set their minds on “things that are above”?



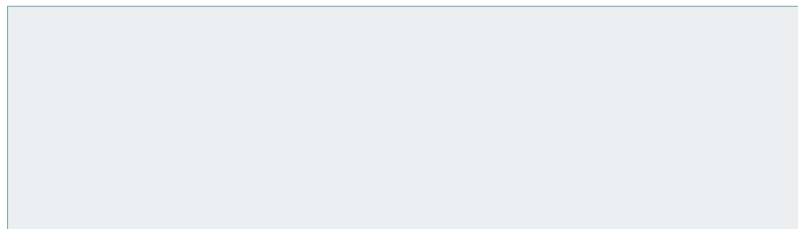
APPLICATION

As a Christian in the marketplace, how will I keep setting my mind on “things that are above”?



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 keep setting their minds on things that are above by continually realigning their beliefs and practices to God's Word
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

THE APOSTLE PAUL COMMANDS CHRISTIANS TO KEEP

seeking and setting their minds on “things that are above” (vv.1-2). The “things that are above” are things in heaven and not on earth (vv.1-2). People who had set their minds on things above included Abraham who sought the City of God¹, King David who sought the dwelling place of God² and the Lord Jesus who sought heaven's joy over a redeemed people³.

Paul gives three reasons to keep setting our minds on things above.

(a) We have been united with Christ – in His death⁴, resurrection⁵ and ascension⁶. (b) We have a new identity in Christ – we are fellow sinners saved by God's grace to live for Christ (v.11); and “God's chosen ones, holy and beloved” (v.12). (c) We have a new destiny in Christ – we shall be with Christ in glory at His Second Coming (v.4). Therefore, we must not look to the things that are on earth for meaning and purpose in life, nor put our hope in them for our identity and security.⁷

Yes, but how? Paul insightfully makes the connection between the heavenly things that should occupy our minds and the day-to-day attitudes and actions that should characterise our lives.⁸ The daily practices that stem from an earthly perspective reinforce that perspective.⁹ Therefore in verses 5 to 14, Paul instructs us to “put to death what is earthly in you”, “put off the old self with its practices” and “put on the new self”. If we do not kill off our sinful practices, they will prevent us from setting our minds on the things above.

¹ Hebrews 11:8-10, 14-16.

² Psalm 27:4.

³ Hebrews 12:2.

⁴ “For you have died...” (v.3).

⁵ “If then you have been raised with Christ...” (v.1).

⁶ “...you also will appear with Him in glory” (v.4).

⁷ For example, see Paul's teachings in Galatians 6:14 and 1 Timothy 6:17-19.

⁸ Paul also made such a connection elsewhere; see Romans 8:5-6.

⁹ Such practices include: to love things and use people; to enjoy sinful pleasures and not worry about God's judgment; and to seek self-fulfilment above all else.

SAT
02

Seek First the Kingdom of God

SCRIPTURE Matthew 6:24-34

OBSERVATION

What does this passage teach us about loyalties, anxieties and priorities?

APPLICATION

How will I daily seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness in my working 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 Church Board: That they will seek first and foremost the Kingdom of God and His righteousness as they serve Him in the marketplace
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

CHRIST'S DISCIPLES MUST SERVE GOD WITH AN UNDIVIDED

loyalty (v.24) and seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (v.33). We **seek first and foremost God's Kingdom**, because it is of greatest and ultimate value. Consequently, we order our priorities to seek God's Kingdom as our greatest treasure (Matt 13:44-46).

If you are a Christ-follower working in the marketplace, will you ask yourself at the start of each workday: **What must I do today that will advance the interests of God's Kingdom?** Not first and foremost your company's interests nor your own personal interests, but the interests of God's Kingdom! Consider the righteous transformation of the workplace through God's principles, the godly conduct of God's servant in the marketplace¹⁰ and the faithful proclamation of God's Gospel in the world. Do not think that you cannot contribute to the work of God's Kingdom, for that is to disregard the fact that God is with you. You may have many real limitations, but God's power is not limited (Eph 1:19-20). Pray and take action. Do not think that you can leave the work to other Christians, for that is to shirk your personal responsibility as a disciple of Christ. "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Matt 5:14-16 ESV).

¹⁰ Consider Ephesians 5:1-21 for instructions on how to live a godly and Spirit-filled life.

SUN
03

Sunday Journal

SCRIPTURE

OBSERVATION


APPLICATION

PRAYER


THE PAST WEEK

Review

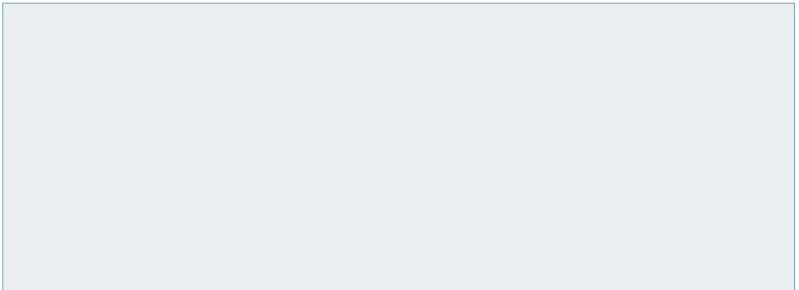
◆ What was my high point and my low point for the week?



◆ What gave me life and what drained me?



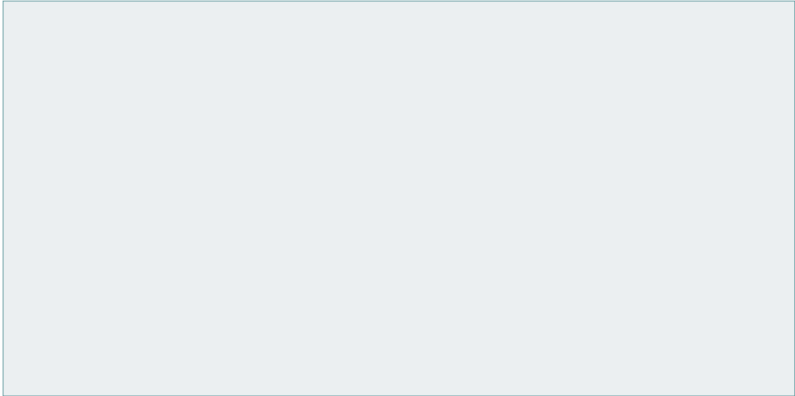
◆ How was the Spirit of God at work?



THE PAST WEEK

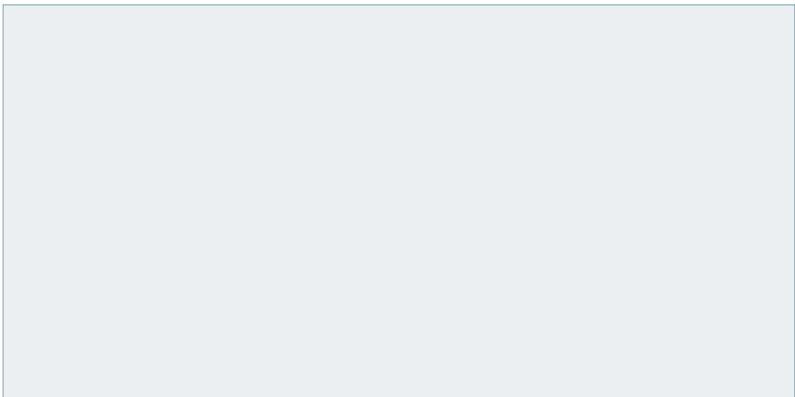
Reflect

- ◆ 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

Make Waves:

What you do today can change the world around you.

Memory Verse

"...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."
- Philippians 1:6 (NIV)

* Bottom Line

Show kindness to everyone.**

* Bible Story

Luke 10:25-37 - The Good Samaritan

* Activity

Case Studies

Prop: Scenario cards

Get your family members to pick a card (the cards can be duplicated). Share what they would do to show kindness in these scenarios by reflecting, "What would Jesus do?"

Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
Hans gets called names by his classmates. He has no friends because he is different.	Gemma lost a family member. She has been quiet in class since.	Greg used unkind words on Kalyn. Kalyn retaliated by hurting Greg's arm with a pencil.

Say, "When the Samaritan helped the injured man, he helped regardless of who the injured man was or where he came from. He only saw an injured man who needed his help. Jesus loves us regardless of who we are or where we come from. Jesus shows compassion and grace to all even when we do not deserve it. Likewise, we are to follow His Ways."

* Talk About It

- What excuses could the Samaritan have made for not helping the injured man?
- We tend to only show kindness to those we like. How do we show kindness to everyone, even those whom we do not like?
- Share three reasons why God wants us to treat others with kindness.

Parents: Share with your family members about an experience in which you made an effort to help someone whom you did not like. You could be that "someone" whom others did not like and others showed grace towards you. How did you feel? What did you learn from this experience?

* Prayer

Thank God for giving and loving us so much even when we do not deserve it. Pray for a willing and humble heart that feels for others and the courage to help.

 **BIBLE STORY VIDEO**
<https://cefc.ch/22FD07W1>



MON
04

Finding Meaning in Our Work

SCRIPTURE Ecclesiastes 2:11, 22; 5:18-20

OBSERVATION

What is one key difference that you notice between Ecclesiastes 2:11, 22 and 5:18-20?

APPLICATION

How do I find meaning in my work, especially at times when it is routine, mundane or tedious?

PRAYER

Father God, as we enter into this week of learning about Your plans and purposes for our work, may Your Word and Spirit be our guides. We pray that You will tutor our hearts and minds to understand that You desire to work in us and through us, so that all that we do in our work will glorify You. Make us faithful disciples in the arena of our workplaces. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Prayer Pointers

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

DEEPER REFLECTION

ASK CHRISTIANS WHAT IS THE FIRST THING THAT COMES

to mind about the book of Ecclesiastes, and the meaninglessness of work often pops up. Although this ancient book of wisdom was written between 2,200 to 2,800 years ago,¹¹ this theme still resonates with many of us today. A 2018 Channel NewsAsia article reported that Singapore had the lowest employee engagement rate compared to other major Asian markets and that up to 75% of workers in Singapore indicated they were “not engaged” at work.¹²

Yet, Ecclesiastes actually tells us that it is not work that is meaningless, but work **apart from God** that is meaningless. It is worth noting that in verses 11 and 22 (which lament the meaninglessness of work), there is no mention of God. But when we come to Ecclesiastes 5:18-20, God is mentioned three times! It is God who allows us to “find enjoyment in all the toil” (Ecc 5:18). It is God who gives us the ability to “rejoice in [our] toil – this is the gift of God” (Ecc 5:19). It is God who “keeps [us] occupied with joy in [our] heart” (Ecc 5:20).

Therein lies the pivotal difference! When we look at work from a human-centric perspective, work will always seem meaningless – no matter how passionate we may feel about our work – especially at times when we get tired, discouraged or bored with what we do. For if we attempt to find meaning in our work itself, it will ultimately elude us. What we need is to find meaning **in the One who gives us the ability to enjoy our work!**

¹¹ <https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/who-wrote-ecclesiastes-and-what-does-it-mean>

¹² <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/commentary/pointless-useless-jobs-disengaged-employees-lacking-motivation-810996> (accessed 2 Apr 2022). “Employees could perceive their jobs are pointless and stop seeing the value of their work, and this could in turn lead them to stop participating actively in their roles.”

TUE
05

Finding Rest in Our Work

SCRIPTURE Exodus 20:8-11; Matthew 11:28-30

OBSERVATION

How does Jesus' teaching in Matthew 11:28-30 relate to the Sabbath commandment given in verses 8 to 11?

APPPLICATION

Why is it important to find rest in my work and how can I find true rest for my soul?

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 grateful to God for their calling, obedient and faithful in their service, and find their rest in the Lord always
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

WHEN I WAS GROWING UP AND LEARNING ABOUT THE 10

Commandments, Commandment number four always struck me as a bit odd and out of place with the rest. I could understand the other commandments, but Sabbath observance did not seem as obviously important. It was only in my later years of running my own business and starting a family that I discovered how crucial it was to find regular rest in the midst of work.

Thomas Cahill remarked that “no ancient society before had a day of rest... The Sabbath is surely one of the simplest and sanest recommendations that God has ever made”¹³. But it was more than a recommendation.¹⁴ God in His wisdom had ordained rest to be part of our work-life rhythm. It was designed for human flourishing.¹⁵ At the beginning of this year, I felt convicted by the Lord to set aside more time for rest every week, even as my work demands, family needs (we just welcomed our third child!) and ministry commitments started to grow. If we do not intentionally carve out time for rest, our work can so easily consume us.

But our rest time can be squandered away. Jesus taught that He is the true source of rest for our souls (Matt 11:28-30). Real rest comes when we spend time with Jesus, who during His earthly ministry prioritised time alone to commune with the Father. In the midst of our work, let us make time to draw near to Him who bids us, “Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28).

¹³ Thomas Cahill, *The Gift of the Jews* (New York: Doubleday, 1998).

¹⁴ It was a strict requirement under the Mosaic Law. Cf. Colossians 2:16-17.

¹⁵ Mark 2:27.

WED
06

Finding Joy in Our Work

SCRIPTURE Philippians 4:4-7

OBSERVATION

Why can a Christian rejoice in the Lord always?

APPLICATION

At times when I feel joyless in my work, what should I do (in light of these verses) to experience joy again?

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 Singapore: That the people will find true meaning, rest and joy in their work through experiencing the presence, grace and peace of the Lord Jesus Christ
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

FOR SOME PEOPLE, IT MAY BE THE MEANINGLESS GRIND

of our daily work that dulls us. For others, it could be the relentless demands of our daily work that drain us. We need to find true meaning and rest in God, so that our work is infused with a holy perspective and healthy rhythm. We must also find **joy** in our work. Finding joy in our work can sometimes be so hard, because we cannot easily brush away the reality of demanding bosses, difficult customers or draining colleagues. However, in verses 4 to 7, the Apostle Paul shows us how Christians can find joy even in the most challenging circumstances.

Paul wrote this joy-filled¹⁶ epistle when he was imprisoned in a dark, cold Roman jail. How was that possible? **“The Lord is at hand”** (v.5) – the Lord is near, ready to intervene in the situation! For Paul, the wellspring of true joy was not a favourable external environment, but the reality that the Lord Jesus is near, ready to intervene on his behalf. As the simple but profound line of a beloved Sunday school song goes: “With Christ in the vessel, we can smile at the storm.”

For Christians today, the principle remains the same: Even in difficult circumstances, we can experience joy when **through prayer** (vv.6-7) we fix our eyes on Him who is with us and for us. Thus, we can **rejoice in the Lord always** (v.4). And when we radiate joy in our work and workplace, the people around us will notice a distinctly different disposition that points them to the reality of God in our lives.

¹⁶ Apparently, Paul’s Letter to the Philippians is the most joyful book in the Bible, with the Greek words for “joy” and “rejoicing” used 16 times in just 104 verses.

THU
07

Seeing Our Work as Sacred

SCRIPTURE Exodus 3:1-10; 4:1-2; 1 Peter 2:9-10

OBSERVATION

From today's verses, what significant observations can you make about the calling and resources of God's representatives to the world?

APPPLICATION

How do I see the significance of my work in connection with God's calling for my life and His Church?

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 use the opportunities and resources that God gives them through their work to reach the wider society and world
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

FINDING MEANING, REST AND JOY IN OUR WORK HAS GOT

a lot to do with Christians' ministry in the marketplace and the task of discipling Singapore. It is only when we have recognised and dealt with the inner life issues pertaining to the paradigms regarding our work that we can have the right perspectives and postures to influence the marketplace and society that God has placed us in. For we reproduce after our own kind. We want to reproduce the right kind of disciples – a Christlike kind!

However, we must not neglect the outer life to which God has also called us, that is, a life of ministry and service to others for the sake of Christ. In our God-given vocation, wherever God has placed us in His service, we are to use whatever God has given us in order to accomplish His will.

Wherever we are. We remember that the great prophet Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt and across the Red Sea. But let us not forget that Moses' commissioning took place amid the daily mundane course of his work.¹⁷ So lest we think that our daily vocations are insignificant, remember that wherever we are, God calls us for His purposes.

Whatever we have. At times, we may feel that the skills in our workplace have little to do with extending God's Kingdom. But look at how God used the simple staff of Moses to perform mighty miracles in His name.¹⁸ So never underestimate the training and experience that your work gives to you, for God is using even these to accomplish His will.

¹⁷ When God called Moses, he was tending sheep for his father-in-law, Jethro (and for the past 40 years too!); see Acts 7:20-34.

¹⁸ Exodus 4:17; 7-10; 14.

FRI
08

Seeing Our Work as Witness

SCRIPTURE Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22-4:1

OBSERVATION

What do these verses teach us about the right perspectives and actions of Christian workers and bosses?

APPLICATION

In what specific ways will I apply these verses to my workplace relationships?

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 SGI leaders: That God will strengthen, encourage and protect all leaders who shepherd God's people
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

GIVEN THAT AT LEAST 85% OF THE CHRISTIAN WORKFORCE spends 60-70% of their waking hours in the marketplace,¹⁹ most of our discipleship is carried out in our workplaces. There are two key principles for Christian workers and bosses: (1) **Service to Christ**; and (2) **Accountability to Christ**. Ultimately, they are serving the Lord (vv.6-7; Col 3:23-24) and will one day have to give a full accounting to Him for **what** they have done in their workplaces and **how** they have done them (vv.8-9; Col 3:25-4:1).

In Colossians 3:23, the word “whatever” covers all possible contexts, such that no work is any more or any less significant in God’s eyes. In the work that we do, we are to work “heartily” – translated from the Greek phrase *ex psyches*, which means “from the soul”. This tells us that our work attitudes come from deep within us and as they manifest in our workplaces they make a tremendous difference in our influence on others.

In their book, *Your Work Matters to God*, Sherman and Hendricks cast a vision of Christian disciples in the marketplace as “people who are known for their hard work, for the excellence of their effort, for their honesty and unswerving integrity, for their concern for the rights and welfare of people, for their compliance with laws, standards and policies, for the quality of their goods and services, for the quality of their character, for the discipline and sacrifice of their lifestyle, for putting work in its proper perspective, for their leadership among coworkers – in short, for their Christlikeness on and off the job”²⁰.

¹⁹ <https://www.theologyofbusiness.com/reasons-why-the-marketplace-is-a-great-place-for-christians/> (accessed 18 Apr 2022). Note that this statistic is given of the American context. It is likely that the working hours of Singaporean Christians would be longer.

²⁰ Doug Sherman & William Hendricks, *Your Work Matters to God* (NavPress, 1990).

SAT
09

Seeing Our Work as Shalom

SCRIPTURE Jeremiah 29:1-7

OBSERVATION

What do you find striking about God's instructions to the Israelites?

APPLICATION

How can my work (even in unfavourable circumstances) bring peace and prosperity to others, especially the people with whom I work and those to whom I render service?

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: In leading the church, to have clarity that comes from God's wisdom, courage that comes from God's leading and compassion that comes from God's love
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

WHAT WE DO IN OUR WORK HERE ON EARTH IS AN INTEGRAL

part of what God has always intended: bringing His *shalom* to a broken world. The Hebrew word *shalom* is often translated as “peace” in English. But as Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. notes, “*shalom* means far more than just peace of mind or ceasefire between enemies. In the Bible, *shalom* means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight – a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts are fruitfully employed... *Shalom*, in other words, is the way things are supposed to be”²¹.

In Jeremiah chapter 29, the exiled people of Israel hear from the prophet Jeremiah that they were to “build houses”, “plant gardens” and “take wives and have sons and daughters” (vv.5-6), so that through their work and lives, they would “seek the *shalom* of the city” (v.7; *shalom* here translated as “welfare” in ESV, NAS, and “peace and prosperity” in NIV, NLT). Now, this would have been understandable if the instructions were given when they were residing in the Promised Land, but these were actually given when they were in exile in Babylon! But God tells the people of Israel then – and reminds Christians today – that wherever God has placed us, we are to use our skills and talents, so that through our work the people around us can be blessed. As Katherine Alsdorf stated, “our work is a critical way in which God is caring for human beings and renewing His world”²². Thus, our work enables us to be agents of God’s divine purpose of *shalom*.

²¹ Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be* (Eerdmans, 1996).

²² Quoted in Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavour* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2014).

SUN
10

Sunday Journal

SCRIPTURE

OBSERVATION

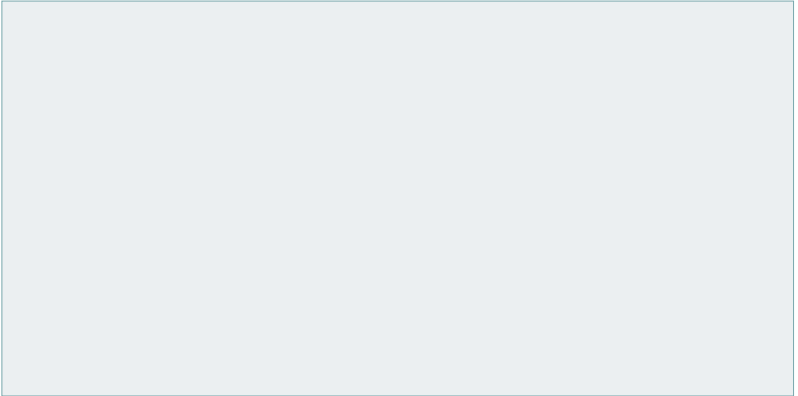
APPLICATION

PRAYER

THE PAST WEEK

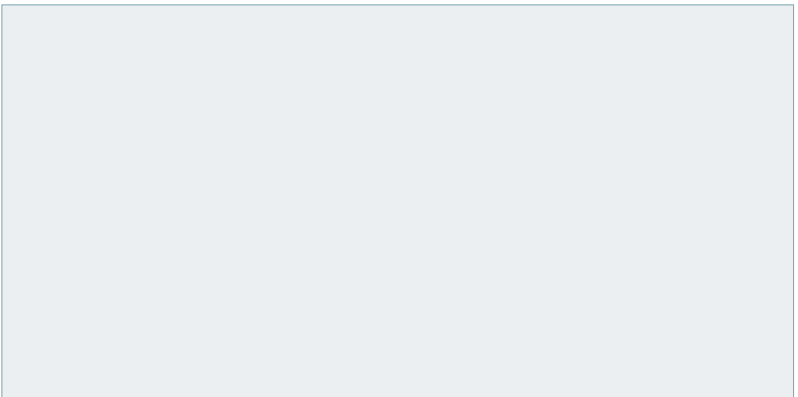
Reflect

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



Respond

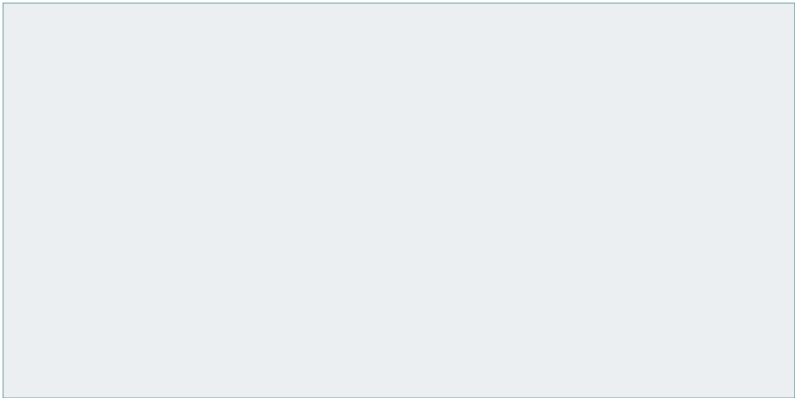
- ◆ What is one thing I need to do in light of what God is saying?
Commit in prayer.



THE PAST WEEK

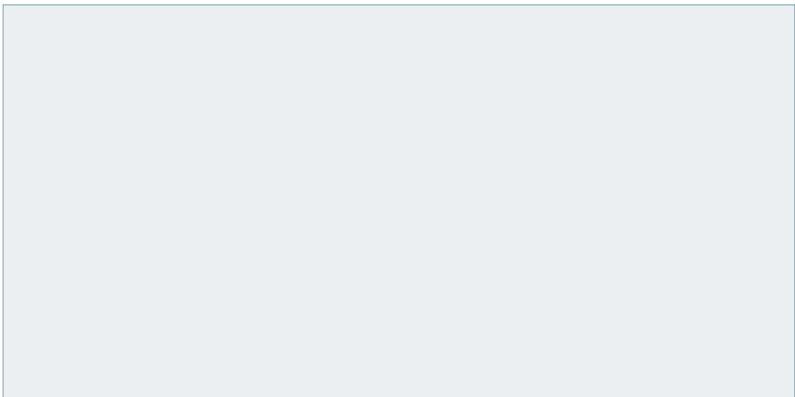
Reflect

- ◆ 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.



Make Waves:

What you do today can change the world around you.

Memory Verse

"...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."
- Philippians 1:6 (NIV)

* Bottom Line

Show God's goodness to others.*

BIBLE STORY VIDEO
<https://cefc.ch/22FD07W2>

* Bible Story

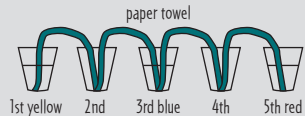
Matthew 5:14-16 - Good Vibrations (City on a Hill)

* Activity

Spread Your Goodness

Props: Five clear plastic cups, blue/yellow/red food colouring and kitchen towels

1. Arrange the plastic cups in a row.
2. Fill the first, third and fifth cups halfway with water.
3. Drip five drops of food colouring into the first cup (yellow colouring), third cup (blue colouring) and fifth cup (red colouring).
4. Take four half sheets of kitchen towels and fold them in half, lengthwise.
5. Place one end of a folded kitchen towel in the first cup and the other end in the empty cup next to it. Do likewise for the rest of the cups (see diagram).



After the activity, get everyone to share:

- What did they learn about spreading goodness?
- What did they observe?

Say, "In this activity, the water is transferred from one cup to another through the kitchen towels. As followers of Jesus, we are to spread God's love and kindness to one another and fill every person we meet with God's grace and compassion. We bring light and colour to others."

* Talk About It

- Where do you see God's goodness in your life right now?
- Who benefits when you live out and spread God's goodness?
- How can you "shine your light" brighter on the people around you?

Parents: Share with your family members about an experience in which you received goodness from someone during a tough period in your life. How did you feel? What did you learn from the experience?

* Prayer

Thank God for His Goodness. Pray that we will be willing to show and spread His Goodness through our actions and love.



MON
11Discipleship Triad
in God's Presence

SCRIPTURE 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

OBSERVATION

What is the significance of Paul placing the three exhortations, “rejoice always”, “pray without ceasing” and “in everything give thanks” together?

APPLICATION

What does it mean for me to practise rejoicing always, praying unceasingly and giving thanks in everything together in my discipleship journey?

PRAYER

Lord, I seek to be continually with You, with You holding my right hand and guiding me until You receive me to glory.²³ I will give thanks to You with my whole heart as I recount all of Your wonderful deeds.²⁴ And I will rejoice in Your steadfast love, because You have seen my affliction and You have known the distress of my soul.²⁵

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 THREE EXHORTATIONS TO THE THESSALONIANS – “rejoice always”, “pray without ceasing” and “in everything give thanks” (vv.16-18) – are written in one sentence in Greek. This shows that the three exhortations are interlinked together, forming a triad. It is a discipleship triad in the presence of God. It is **in the presence of God**, because we are to “rejoice” – not expressing joy in general or having an emotional high consisting of feelings,²⁶ but **“in the Lord”** (Phil 4:4), and it is **to God** that we pray and give thanks.

Paul does not intend “rejoice”, “pray” and “give thanks” to be practised and experienced in a progressive order. Rejoicing in the Lord, praying and giving thanks to God are dynamically interlinked. This means that in practice and experience, we do not have one without the other two. We are to have all three of them together in us. And as we rejoice, pray and give thanks in this dynamic interlink, the three actions dynamically build up each other in our lives.

All the three actions are commonly modified by terms that give the idea of comprehensiveness, totality and absoluteness: “Rejoice **always**”, “pray **without ceasing**” and “**in everything** give thanks”. And the word order in the Greek sentence – “always rejoice, unceasingly pray and in everything give thanks” – emphasises “always”, “unceasingly” and “in everything” in the three actions in and to God. The call to **constancy** is clear. Constancy is developed over time with conscious continual disciplined practice, until this constancy becomes character in us. And it is God who develops this in us as we walk with Him constantly.

²³ Psalm 73:23-24

²⁴ Psalm 9:1

²⁵ Psalm 31:7

²⁶ G. K. Beale, 1-2 Thessalonians, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series* (IVP Academic, 2003), 167

TUE
12

Rejoice in the Lord Always

SCRIPTURE 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; Philippians 4:4

OBSERVATION

What does it mean to “rejoice always”?

APPPLICATION

What areas in my life do I need to rejoice in the Lord always?

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 grow deeper in rejoicing in the Lord always
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

PAUL'S EXHORTATION, "REJOICE ALWAYS" (V.16), IS FOR THE Thessalonians who were suffering "much affliction" (1 Thess 1:6; 2:14; 3:3). It is "not a sugar-coated call for putting on a happy face in the midst of difficulties"²⁷. Paul's "emphasis here is not so much on the experience of joy, but on the active expression of joy"²⁸ in God's presence. This rejoicing is possible when it is expressed in unceasing praying and constant thanksgiving to God (vv.17-18). It is a rejoicing in our relationship and fellowship with God. As human followers of Jesus, we can be emotionally disturbed when undergoing suffering. But we can "rejoice in the Lord" (Phil 4:4) without having to bury our feelings.²⁹ With holistic realism, Peter juxtaposes "rejoice" with "distressed" in undergoing trials (1 Pet 1:6). God considers us "blessed" when we "remain steadfast" in suffering, and in this blessedness, we can rejoice (Jas 1:2-3; 5:11).

Recently, I was reflecting on and seeking to apply Psalm 31:7 in facing the daily emotionally draining challenge over my son in his special needs condition: "I will rejoice and be glad in Your steadfast love, because You have seen my affliction; You have known the distress of my soul." The words "You have seen my affliction; You have known the distress of my soul" minister to me. But I struggled to practise "I will **rejoice and be glad** in Your steadfast love". Then I realised that to practise that, I must learn to see with eyes of faith God's steadfast love and faithfulness in my son's challenging condition. I have not arrived, but am growing, in the practice.

²⁷ Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Eerdmans, 2009), 215

²⁸ Gordon D. Fee, 214

²⁹ Gary S. Shogren, *1 & 2 Thessalonians, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Zondervan, 2012), 224

WED
13

Walking with God, Praying Unceasingly

SCRIPTURE 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Ephesians 6:18

OBSERVATION

What does it mean to “pray without ceasing”?

APPPLICATION

How will I go about cultivating the spirit of praying unceasingly?

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 Singapore: That the churches will pray unceasingly for the salvation of the nation
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

TO “PRAY WITHOUT CEASING” (V.17) CERTAINLY DOES NOT mean we do nothing else but just praying. Rather, it is a spirit that is constantly oriented toward God, being conscious of His presence and in continual communion with Him. In such a spirit, we respond to needs and crises by immediately and spontaneously bringing them to God in prayer. It is as early church father Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215 AD) puts it: “The spiritual man does not use wordy prayer by his mouth. For he has learned to ask of the Lord what is necessary. In every place, therefore, but not ostensibly and visibly to the multitudes, he will pray. While engaged in walking, in conversation, while in silence, while engaged in reading and in works according to reason, he prays in every situation.”³⁰ It is “his whole life is prayer and conversation with God”³¹.

It is to God that we pray. So, we can be praying without ceasing – not as a discipline, but a lifestyle – when we consciously have **God as the centre** of our lives. Prayer is fundamentally **relationship with God** and **reliance on God**. Prayer is relational in nature. Don’t make it a ritual. But relationship with God can be cultivated only with commitment, discipline and effort. So, setting aside time regularly to spend with God in His Word and prayer is vitally necessary – like Daniel (Dan 6:10). Praying without ceasing grows out of this daily spiritual discipline.

Unceasing praying is conversing with God, who is lovingly interested even in our sitting down and rising up (Psa 139:2), about everything in our lives.

³⁰ David W. Bercot, editor, *A Dictionary of Early Church Beliefs* (Hendrickson, 1998), 529

³¹ David W. Bercot, 529

THU
14

Filled with Thanksgiving to God

SCRIPTURE 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Ephesians 5:18-20

OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about giving thanks to God in these two texts?

APPPLICATION

How will I cultivate the spirit of giving thanks to God in all things and at all times?

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 have a heart of constant gratitude to God
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

I WAS SEVENTEEN AND A ONE-YEAR-OLD CHRISTIAN WHEN

I faced my first major trial and was feeling troubled and lost. I looked at the sky and asked God, “God, what shall I do?” God immediately shot into my mind a Bible verse: 1 Thessalonians 5:18. I knew that verse, because I had memorised it. I knew what God was saying to me: “Give thanks.” I went on my knees and did just that. It was a vital discipleship lesson I learned at a very early stage of my Christian life.

A Spirit-filled Christian gives thanks to God **“in all things”** (v.18) and **“for all things”** and **“at all times”** (Eph 5:18-20) – big and small, good and bad. But we cannot thank God “for” absolutely “all things”, including blatant evil, because the holy and just God cannot condone evil. We give thanks to God “for all things” that are consistent with God’s character. However, we can give thanks to God “in” everything, even when we suffer evil. In so doing, we are acknowledging, trusting in and submitting to God, who is sovereign over all things. Thanksgiving is Christocentric – “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” and theocentric – “to God, even the Father” (Eph 5:20), “the Father of lights” who gives all good things and perfect gifts (Jas 1:17). Thanksgiving is “to give glory to God” (Lk 17:18).

Giving thanks to God “is the will of God” (v.18). So, giving thanks to God puts us at the centre of the will of God – the most secure place that we can ever be in.

FRI
15

The Word of God: Listen

SCRIPTURE 1 Thessalonians 5:19-20

OBSERVATION

What do Paul's instructions, "Do not quench the Spirit" (v.19) and "Do not despise prophecies" (v.20), mean?

APPLICATION

What should be my posture in listening to the teaching and preaching of the Word 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 SGI leaders: To grow in sensitivity to God speaking in their hearts
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

PAUL'S INSTRUCTIONS, "DO NOT QUENCH THE SPIRIT" (V.19) and "Do not despise prophecies" (v.20), are both interrelated. They are to be observed in the public worship of a community of God's people.

We need to understand "prophet" and "prophecy" biblically in their primary and secondary sense. In the primary sense, the Old Testament prophets and the apostles are "the foundation" of the church, the new covenant Israel (Eph 2:20), in salvation history; they were "organs of direct revelation" from God, and "infallible teachers"³² who were also writers of God-breathed Scripture (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:19-21). In the secondary sense, all God's people in the post-Pentecost era receive the Holy Spirit and can "prophesy" (Acts 2:16-18).

The common but flawed understanding of "prophet" and "prophecy" is defined by the English dictionary, namely, in terms of predicting the future. But biblically, to "prophesy" is to proclaim what God has spoken (Am 3:8). The "primary function" of the Old Testament prophets was not predictors of the future, but "to *speak for God* to their own contemporaries"³³. "Prophecy" in the post-Pentecost era is "know and speak God's mind and will"³⁴, for edification, exhortation and instruction for learning in the church (1 Cor 14:4, 19, 31). It "may include various kinds of God-given, revelatory speech, including applied pastoral preaching"³⁵.

"Do not despise prophecy" means to treat with respect, to listen to any utterance or message which claims to come from God through the "sovereignty and freedom of the Holy Spirit"³⁶, and not to reject it outright, nor accept it outright.³⁷ Hence, to "despise prophecies" may be tantamount to "quench the Spirit".

³² John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Thessalonians, The Bible Speaks Today* (IVP, 1991), 127

³³ Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth, Fourth Edition* (Zondervan, 1981, 1993, 2003, 2014), 188

³⁴ John R. W. Stott, 127

³⁵ Anthony C. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical & Pastoral Commentary* (Eerdmans, 2006), 237

³⁶ John R. W. Stott, 131

³⁷ John R. W. Stott, 127, 128

SAT
16

The Word of God: Discern

SCRIPTURE 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22

OBSERVATION

What are the “good” (v.21) and “every form of evil” (v.22) that Paul is referring to?

APPLICATION

How do I go about “testing everything” in hearing the teaching and preaching of the Word 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 Church Board: To grow in discernment through the Scriptures
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

WE HAVE THE COMPLETED CANON OF SCRIPTURE, THE

written Word of God, and affirm the supremacy and sufficiency of Scripture. So, the secondary kind of prophecy, as portrayed in 1 Corinthians 14, is not comparable to that of the biblical prophets. However, “God undoubtedly gives some” with the prophetic gift and ministry “a remarkable degree of insight either into Scripture itself and its meaning, or its application to the contemporary world, or into His particular will for particular people in particular situations”³⁸. We can legitimately call such insight “prophetic insight”³⁹.

But regarding such “prophecies” we are to “test everything” (v.21a) – “to sift” them, “to weigh carefully what is said” (1 Cor 14:29, NIV). We are to discern the true and the false, the right and the wrong. And through such testing of prophetic utterances, we are to “hold fast to what is good” (v.21b). Apparently, when Paul uses the word “good” (*kalos*) here, he was using “the imagery of testing coins”⁴⁰. For the word *kalos* “was used of what was ‘genuine as opposed to counterfeit coin’”⁴¹. So, Paul implies that “every form of evil” that we are to “abstain from” (v.22) is a counterfeit of truth.

We are to test prophetic utterances against the Scriptures, like the Bereans. The Bereans “received the word” preached by Paul and Silas “with great eagerness, **examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so**” (Acts 17:10-11). They did not assume that what was spoken was true, just because the preachers were Paul and Silas. They were not gullible, but critical – and with critical teachability.

³⁸ John R. W. Stott, 128

³⁹ John R. W. Stott, 128

⁴⁰ John R. W. Stott, 129

⁴¹ John R. W. Stott, 129

SUN
17

Sunday Journal

SCRIPTURE

OBSERVATION

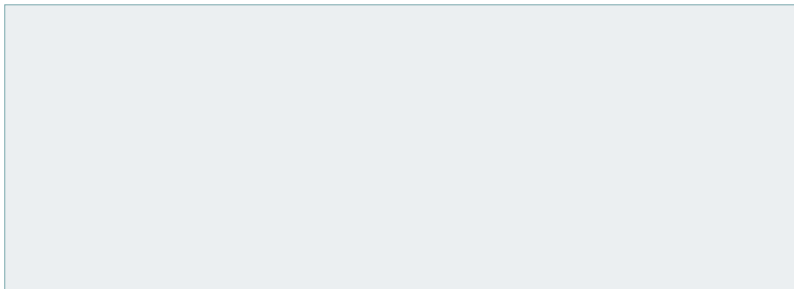
APPLICATION

PRAYER

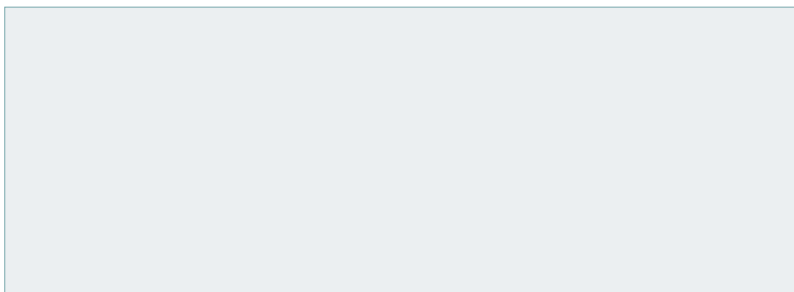
THE PAST WEEK

Review

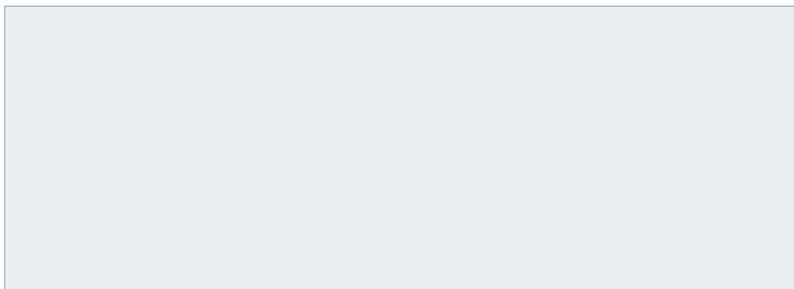
◆ What was my high point and my low point for the week?



◆ What gave me life and what drained me?



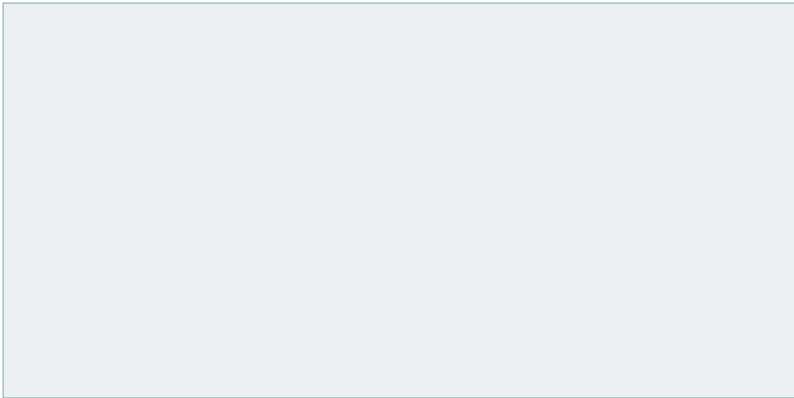
◆ How was the Spirit of God at work?



THE PAST WEEK

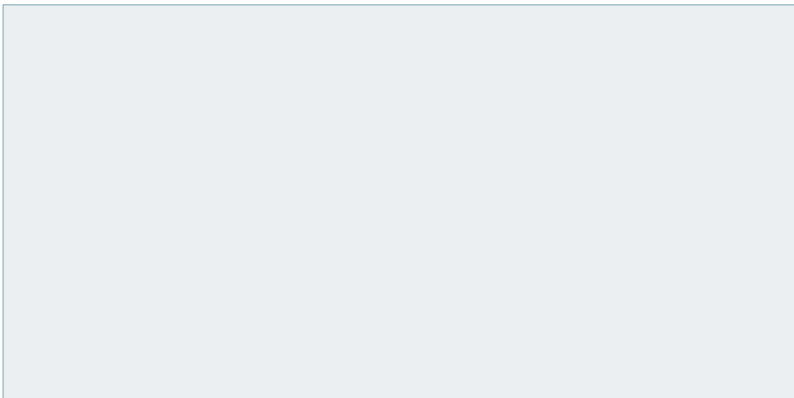
Reflect

- ◆ 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.



Make Waves:

What you do today can change the world around you.

Memory Verse

"...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."
- Philippians 1:6 (NIV)

* Bottom Line

Be faithful so others can count on you.*

* Bible Story

1 Samuel 18-20; 2 Samuel 9 – David and Jonathan

* Activity

Minefield

Props: Many disposable cups and some blindfolds

Pair up your family members. One partner should be blindfolded, while the other becomes his or her guide. Imagine that the floor is a minefield and place disposable cups around it. Ask the guide to direct the blindfolded partner to the other side of the floor without bumping into anything. The blindfolded partner is not allowed to talk and can only listen and trust the other partner to guide him or her.

Get everyone to share their thoughts after the game:

- How did you know if your partner was trustworthy?
- Is it hard for you to be faithful to your friends? Why or why not?

Say, "The friendship between David and Jonathan was extraordinary. Jonathan honoured his friendship with David despite Saul's persistence to kill him. Jonathan helped and protected David in many ways. Are you a friend like Jonathan whom everyone can trust and count on? Jesus is our greatest friend. When we pray, we know Jesus hears us."

* Talk About It

- How were Jonathan and David good examples of faithful friends?
- What is one good thing that comes out of being a faithful friend?
- What happens if others cannot count on us?
- Why should someone who follows and loves Jesus be known as a faithful person?

Parents: Share with your family members about an experience in which you or a friend demonstrated faithfulness. What happened? How did the experience affect you?

* Prayer

Thank God for His faithfulness. Ask God to guide us in showing the same behaviour towards others so that more people will get to experience His love.

BIBLE STORY VIDEO
<https://cefc.ch/22FD07W3>



MON
18A Framework for
Understanding Sanctification

SCRIPTURE 1 Thessalonians 4:1-3; 5:23; Hebrews 10:10, 14

OBSERVATION

What do these passages say about sanctification?

APPLICATION

How will I walk in sanctification with a more holistic understanding of it?

PRAYER

Holy God, gracious Father, I thank You for the immeasurable riches of Your grace in kindness toward us in Christ, that You have washed us, sanctified us and justified us in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ through His blood and in the Spirit of God.⁴² Empower me by the Holy Spirit indwelling me and sanctify me in the truth by Your Word⁴³, that I may walk in holiness.

Prayer Pointers

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

DEEPER REFLECTION

PAUL PRAYS FOR THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE THESSALONIANS

(1 Thess 5:23). A framework for biblical understanding of sanctification will be helpful.

We are to walk in sanctification. Paul exhorts the Thessalonians to “abstain from sexual immorality”, as there were some who had yielded to their sexual passions in a way that characterised “those who do not know God” (1 Thess 4:3-5).⁴⁴ The ground for sexual purity is God “has called us in holiness” (1 Thess 4:7). The holy God has redeemed us into a relationship with Him and this relationship is a holy relationship.

Our human part to walk in sanctification is not meant to be the starting point in God’s calling us to holiness. The starting point is **God has sanctified us in Christ**. This is what God says in His Word: “But you were washed, you **were sanctified**, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 6:11); “we **have been sanctified** through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10:10); “for by a single offering He has perfected for all time those who **are being sanctified**” (Heb 10:14). This is foundational in our holy relationship with God when we are cleansed from sin and made fit for the holy presence of God.⁴⁵

But ultimately, **God is the source of our sanctification**. It is “the God of peace Himself” who sanctifies us (1 Thess 5:23), even when we in obedience walk in holiness. The intensive pronoun, “Himself”, lays stress on God’s role in our sanctification rather than our human ability and effort.⁴⁶

⁴² Ephesians 2:7; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Hebrews 10:10

⁴³ John 17:17

⁴⁴ Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Apollos, 2002), 187

⁴⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Eerdmans, 1964), 236

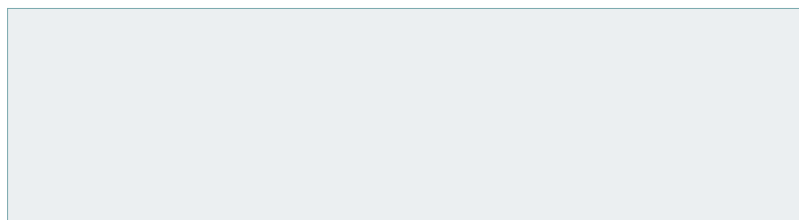
⁴⁶ Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *1-2 Thessalonians, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Baker Academic, 2014), 417

TUE
19God's Sanctifying
Work in Us

SCRIPTURE 1 Thessalonians 5:23

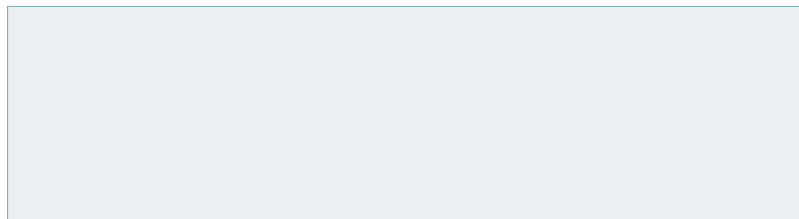
OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about God's work of sanctification in us?



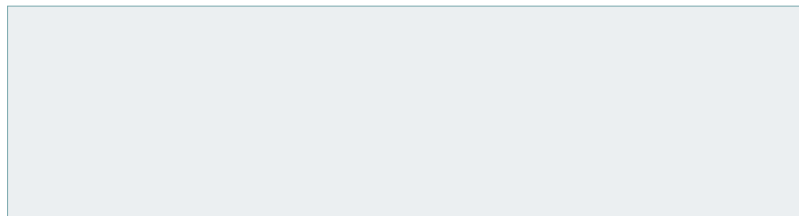
APPLICATION

How will I walk in sanctification in light of Paul's prayer for the sanctification of the Thessalonians?



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: That God will establish their hearts blameless in holiness before Him⁴⁷
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

PAUL PRAYS FOR THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE THESSALONIANS

twice in his letter (v.23; 1 Thess 3:12-13). Apparently, Paul “makes this a regular topic in his prayer”⁴⁸ for the Thessalonians. Is this so for us – for ourselves and for others?

The God who sanctifies us is “the God of peace”. “Peace” here is “almost synonymous with Christian ‘salvation’”⁴⁹, as in “having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1). Paul’s prayer has two parallel parts: “sanctify” and “be kept blameless”, “completely” and “your whole spirit and soul and body”.

The early church fathers mostly held a tripartite view of our humanness: “spirit and soul and body”⁵⁰. But the New Testament usually describes our humanness as having two parts: the one material – body, and the other immaterial – soul and spirit. “Soul” and “spirit” are often synonymous in Scripture, as in Mary’s prayer: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour” (Lk 1:46-47). But God has created us as whole persons and Paul has the whole person in mind in his prayer.

When God sanctifies us as whole persons, our “inner being” (spirit and soul) is “renewed”, but our “outer being” (body) is “decaying” (2 Cor 4:16). So, while we become weaker on the outside, we become stronger on the inside. This divine sanctification is eschatological in nature: toward “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v.23). And it is only on that day that Christ “will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body” (Phil 3:21).

⁴⁷ 1 Thessalonians 3:13

⁴⁸ Gary S. Shogren, 233

⁴⁹ Gene L. Green, 267

⁵⁰ John R. W. Stott, 133

WED
20

Divine Faithfulness in Divine Call

SCRIPTURE 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

OBSERVATION

How are verses 23 and 24 related?

APPLICATION

How do I understand God's call for me in theological and practical terms?

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 Singapore: That God will in His faithfulness fulfil His redemptive purposes for Singapore
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

PAUL'S PRAYER FOR DIVINE SANCTIFICATION (V.23) IS

grounded on “He who calls you” (v.24). Central in our lives must be **“God has called me”**. This means our lives must be utterly theocentric and consciously theological. God “has called” us to “holiness” (1 Thess 4:7). Holiness is not just about sexual purity (cf. 1 Thess 4:1-8), but “be holy in all your conduct” (1 Pet 1:15-16). Biblical holiness encompasses everything in our lives, including our eating and drinking (1 Cor 10:31).

There are two interrelated parts in God’s call: **we answer** God’s call for us and **God fulfils** His call for us. This call to holiness is answered by us and fulfilled by God in the already-and-not-yet eschatological tension that God has designed, and in our three-steps-forward, two-steps-back discipleship reality. And complete sanctification will happen only “at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”.

Paul’s emphasis here is God’s part: “He who calls you...”. The first word and the last word in a Greek sentence show where the emphasis is. The first word and the last word in verse 24 are “faithful” and “will-do” respectively: **“Faithful [is] the one calling you, who also will-do [it].”**⁵¹ Note the double emphasis on God’s faithfulness. Firstly, the **character of God**: God is “faithful”. Secondly, the **certainty about God**: He “will do” it. And the divine certainty is tied to the divine character. The double emphasis on God’s faithfulness gives us a double assurance of God’s faithfulness. Verses 23 to 24 are filled entirely with God’s acts and accomplishments. And like Paul, we pray, trusting in God’s trustworthiness.

⁵¹ Robert K. Brown and Philip W. Comfort, *The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament* (Tyndale House, 1990), 718

THU
21

Divine Faithfulness in Eschatological Realism

SCRIPTURE 1 Corinthians 1:4-12

OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about Paul's ministry to the Corinthians?

APPPLICATION

How do I need to rethink my ministry?

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 how to live as an eschatological realist in this world
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

AMONG ALL THE CHURCHES THAT PAUL PLANTED AND BUILT

which we know of from the New Testament, the one that gave him most headache and heartache was probably the church in Corinth. He “stayed a year and six months” in Corinth “teaching the Word of God among them” (Acts 18:11). And Apollos, “an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures”, was with the Corinthians, teaching them the Word of God (Acts 18:24, 27-28; 1 Cor 3:5). With such good teaching of God’s Word by such good teachers, we would reasonably expect this church to grow and mature spiritually. But no, they were living “as people who are still worldly – mere infants in Christ” (1 Cor 3:1, NIV).

Paul was an **eschatological realist** in both discipleship and ministry. In 1 Corinthians, Paul wrote to address certain serious pastoral problems in the church, the root cause of which was their spiritual immaturity. While knowing full well the Corinthians’ spiritual condition, Paul began his letter with a highly positive note (vv.4-9). Paul’s ministry was eschatological in nature, marked by an eschatological vision and eschatological confidence. He could see in his ministry to the problematic Corinthians the Lord sustaining them, keeping them firm and strong, “**to the end, blameless** in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v.8). Then, standing on this eschatological assurance, Paul went head-on to deal with reality: the problem of divisions in the church (vv.10-12). That’s **eschatological realism**. But for Paul, eschatology and reality are tied together by “**God is faithful**”, “who called us into the fellowship of His Son” (v.9).

FRI
22

Christ's Commitment to His Church

SCRIPTURE Ephesians 5:25-30

OBSERVATION

How does Christ show His commitment to His church?

APPLICATION

How does Christ's commitment to His church shape my view of the church, of which 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 SGI leaders: To lead with confidence in Christ's commitment to build His church
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

THE CHURCH IS IMPERFECT ON EARTH, BUT CHRIST IS perfecting His church eschatologically (cf. 1 Thess 5:23-24). It is Christ's commitment to His church – a commitment expressed in seven acts.

Christ **loved** His church (v.25a) “with an everlasting love” (Jer 31:3): “having loved His own...He loved them to the end” (Jn 13:1). And this love means Christ “**gave Himself up** for her” (v.25b). Christ has given all that He could give: His whole person. He has given us the best: “Himself”, who is God Himself.

Through His death, Christ **cleanses** His church from her unholiness and **sanctifies** her – setting her apart to God for His purposes (v.26). This cleansing and sanctifying is an ongoing process of transformation until the future consummation when we mature to “the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13; 2 Cor 3:18). Christ “cleanses” and “sanctifies” us through the Word of God (Jn 15:3; 17:17) and the Holy Spirit working in us (1 Cor 6:11; Tit 3:5). Thus, daily spiritual renewal is vitally necessary (Rom 12:1-2; 2 Cor 4:16).

Christ **nourishes** the church by protecting and providing her with everything necessary for her growth to maturity, and **cherishes** her as His precious possession (vv.29-30). We, as Christ's church, will certainly eventually become “without spot or wrinkle” and “holy and blameless” “in all her glory” (v.27), despite our long history of being often plagued by sins, struggles, shortcomings and setbacks. **Christ Himself will present to Himself** His church to have such glory and beauty. Such is our hope and it must be our vision. Let us not lose heart with ourselves.

SAT
23

Divine Authority of the Scriptures

SCRIPTURE 1 Thessalonians 5:25-28

OBSERVATION

What is the significance of Paul's charge to the Thessalonians in verse 27?

APPLICATION

What should be my attitude when I read Paul's letters in the New Testament?

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 lead with the divine authority of the Scriptures
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

AT THE CONCLUSION OF HIS LETTER, PAUL ASKS THE

Thessalonians to “pray for us” (v.25). He makes no specific prayer requests as in his other letters (2 Thess 3:1-2; Eph 6:19; Col 4:3-4). It could be that the Thessalonians were to pray for him as the Holy Spirit leads. In calling them to greet “all the brothers” with a holy kiss (v.26), Paul is calling them to “avoid discrimination and favouritism”⁵², which will cause disunity.

Of great significance is Paul’s solemn charge to the Thessalonians “to have this letter read to all the brothers” (v.27). The words “I put you under oath” (*enokrizō*) are weighty. *Enokrizō* means “to demand that a person take an oath as to the truth of what is said or as to the certainty that one will carry out the request or command”⁵³. Here is “as to the certainty that one will carry out the request or command”. The charge is made “before the Lord”, making it all the more weighty. Failing to read the letter is tantamount to disobedience to God.

Paul instructs the Thessalonians to test the words of prophecy given in their public worship, so as to sift the good from the evil (1 Thess 5:19-22). But not so for his letter. Paul expects them, not just to read, but to believe and obey all that is written in it. This reflects Paul’s apostolic authority, given as divine authority, even as some of his letters are classified as “Scriptures” (2 Pet 3:15-16).

Do we see ourselves under such a solemn charge to read the Scriptures?

.....

⁵² John R. W. Stott, 134

⁵³ Johannes P. Louw & Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains, Second Edition, Volume 1* (UBS, 1988, 1989), 33-467

SUN
24

Sunday Journal

SCRIPTURE

OBSERVATION

APPLICATION

PRAYER

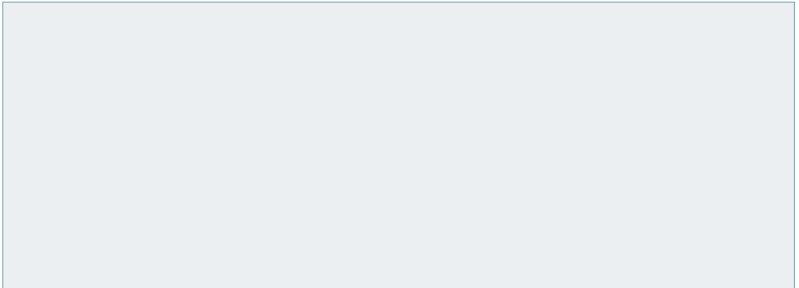
THE PAST WEEK

Review

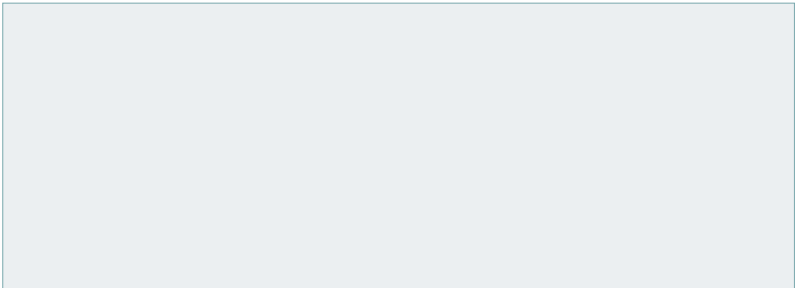
◆ What was my high point and my low point for the week?



◆ What gave me life and what drained me?



◆ How was the Spirit of God at work?



THE PAST WEEK

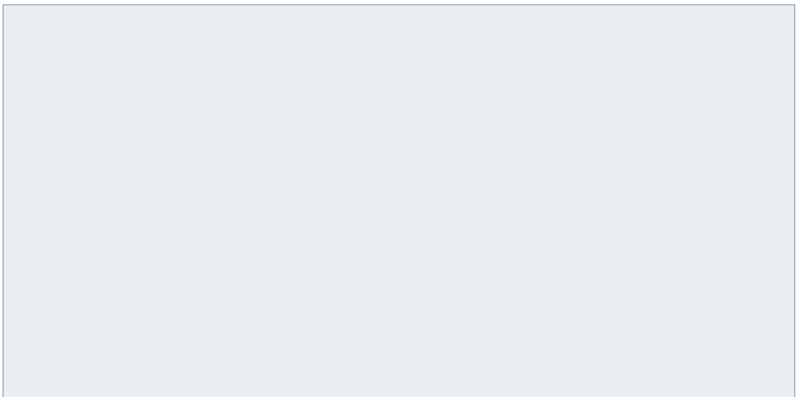
Reflect

- ◆ 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

Make Waves:

What you do today can change the world around you.

Memory Verse

"...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."
- Philippians 1:6 (NIV)

* Bottom Line

God can give you the strength to be gentle.*

* Bible Story

Mark 10:13-16 – Jesus and the Little Children

* Activity

Pass an Egg

Props: Fresh eggs and soup spoons

Get your family members to stand in a line. Provide everyone with a spoon. Pass an egg from the first person to the last person in line without breaking it. When it reaches the last person, get him or her to place the egg in a bowl.

Ask everyone to share their thoughts after the game:

- What did the game teach you about being gentle?
- What happens if you are rough when handling the egg?
- Does being gentle mean you are weak?

Say, "It takes lots of strength and concentration to handle the egg gently. Being gentle does not mean we are weak or soft. It shows that we have self-control. This is what God wants us to do. In Mark 10:13-16, Jesus reminds us to show gentleness and care for others, like how we hold and talk to a child, so that others will see His goodness through our actions."

* Talk About It

- How did Jesus show gentleness in Mark 10:13-16?
- Why is gentleness a strength?
- What are the consequences if you are not gentle with your words or the way you treat others?

Parents: Share with your family members about an experience in which you demonstrated gentleness. How did your actions help yourself and others?

* Prayer

Pray for wisdom to handle every conflict with gentleness. Ask God to open our hearts to the Holy Spirit so that we will do and say the right thing to others.

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Adapted by Joshua Wong/CEFC/July2022

 **BIBLE STORY VIDEO**
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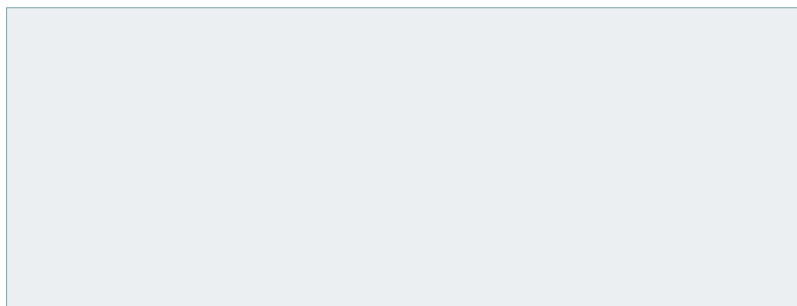
MON
25

When the Tribulation Still Persists

SCRIPTURE 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2:14; 2 Thessalonians 1:4

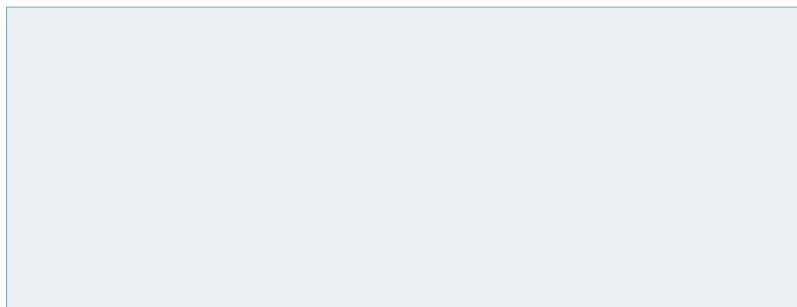
OBSERVATION

What was the pastoral situation that Paul addresses first in 2 Thessalonians 1:4?



APPLICATION

What will I do if my suffering still persists?



PRAYER

O Lord, my soul faints with longing for Your salvation, but I have put my hope in Your Word. My eyes fail, looking for Your promise; I say, "When will You comfort me?"⁵⁴ Yet, it is good for me to be afflicted so that I may learn Your decrees. The law from Your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold.⁵⁵

Prayer Pointers

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

DEEPER REFLECTION

SHORTLY AFTER PAUL, SILAS AND TIMOTHY HAD PLANTED

the church at Thessalonica and began to build the new believers in the faith, they faced strong opposition for proclaiming the Gospel (Acts 17:1-8). They were then forced to leave the still very young church abruptly (Acts 17:9-10). When they left Thessalonica, the Thessalonian believers were suffering “much tribulation” for their faith (v.6; 1 Thess 2:14). Subsequently, Paul made attempts to return to Thessalonica, to continue to establish their faith, for fear that their faith would be shaken by the persecution that they suffered (1 Thess 3:5). However, those attempts made were not successful, because “Satan hindered us” (1 Thess 2:18). So Timothy was sent instead to Thessalonica “to strengthen and encourage you in your faith” (1 Thess 3:3-4). Then Timothy returned to Paul and Silas at Corinth with the good news of the Thessalonians growing in faith, love and hope in the Lord (1 Thess 1:3), and that they were standing firm in the Lord amidst their suffering (1 Thess 3:6-8). In response to the good news, as well as to address certain pastoral problems in the church, Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians in Corinth.

Since Paul’s first letter was sent and received by the Thessalonians, “probably only a few weeks or months later, news reached him in Corinth that matters had got worse”⁵⁶. In 2 Thessalonians chapter 1, we read of the Thessalonians’ “persecutions and afflictions” (2 Thess 1:4). Apparently, they had been “asking questions about the rationale of their afflictions”⁵⁷. Then Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians, in part, to address these questions.

⁵⁴ Psalm 119:81-82 (NIV)

⁵⁵ Psalm 119:71-72 (NIV)

⁵⁶ John R. W. Stott, 140

⁵⁷ John R. W. Stott, 140

TUE
26

How God Answers Our Prayers

SCRIPTURE 1 Thessalonians 3:6-10; Matthew 7:7-11

OBSERVATION

Why did God not answer Paul's prayer (v.10) such that he did not need to write a second letter to the Thessalonians?

APPPLICATION

What has been my experience of God answering my prayers?

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 trust and rest in God's wisdom in answering their prayers
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

WHEN PAUL RECEIVED THE GOOD NEWS OF THE SUFFERING

Thessalonians still standing firm in the Lord (vv.6-8), he “pray[ed] most earnestly day and night” that God will “direct” his way to them for a face-to-face filling up of “what is lacking” in their faith (1 Thess 3:10-11). Paul prayed that God will “direct” his way to the Thessalonians because “Satan hindered” him in his earlier attempts (1 Thess 2:18). That Paul prayed “most earnestly day and night”, shows that the face-to-face filling up of “what is lacking” in the Thessalonians’ faith was a critical and urgent matter.

Did God answer Paul’s prayer? For the moment, no. Did God not have the sense of urgency as Paul? Did God not see Paul’s request as critical for the Thessalonians’ faith? As some weeks or months went by, news reached Paul in Corinth that “matters had got worse”⁵⁸ in the church in Thessalonica. Paul must have wished that he could go to Thessalonica to deal with the pastoral situation personally. But he could not. And God had not answered his prayer to “direct” his way to them, despite praying “most earnestly day and night”. And so, for now, all Paul could do was to write to the Thessalonians a second letter, 2 Thessalonians, to address the “matters had got worse” situation.

God did answer Paul’s prayer though, but “only about five years later when Paul visited Macedonia twice towards the end of his third missionary journey (Acts 20:1-3).”⁵⁹ In His love and wisdom, God “gives **what is good** to those who ask Him” (Matt 7:11).

⁵⁸ John R. W. Stott, 140

⁵⁹ John R. W. Stott, 67

WED
27

Standing Firm in the Truth

SCRIPTURE 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4; 2:15-17; 3:3-5

OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about the Thessalonians' discipleship journey in what Paul writes to them in these passages?

APPPLICATION

What does it mean for me to stand firm in the truth?

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 Singapore: That Christians will be Christ's truthful witnesses in society by standing firm in the truth
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

PAUL'S SECOND LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN THESSALONICA

can be summed up as a discipleship call to **stand firm in the truth**: “So then, brothers, **stand firm** and **hold to** the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter” (2 Thess 2:15). The “traditions” that Paul “taught” the Thessalonians, in “spoken word” or “letter”, are no mere man-made traditions. They are **the truth**. Paul “command[s]” the Thessalonians to “keep away” from those who were not “walking...in accord to the tradition that you received from us” (2 Thess 3:6). Such “traditions” are to be obeyed because there are the truth – the source of which is God.

The eternal destiny of humanity is determined by two responses to **the truth**: “receive the love of the truth so as to be saved” (2 Thess 2:10) and “believe the truth” (2 Thess 2:12, 13 – “faith in the truth”). Not loving and believing the truth is the same as “not obey[ing] the gospel of our Lord Jesus”, resulting in “do not know God” (2 Thess 1:8). In contrast to “to be saved”, those who do not love and believe the truth will “perish” (2 Thess 2:10) and “be judged” (2 Thess 2:12). There is no sitting on the fence as far as the truth is concerned. One either “believe[s] the truth” (2 Thess 2:12) or “believe[s] what is false” (2 Thess 2:11).

2 Thessalonians is characteristically marked by thanksgiving (1:3; 2:13) and prayer (1:11-12; 2:16-17; 3:1-5, 16), which mainly have to do with standing firm in the truth.

THU
28

Standing Firm: God's Righteous Judgment

SCRIPTURE 2 Thessalonians 1:1-10

OBSERVATION

How does Paul respond to the persistence of the Thessalonians' suffering for their faith?

APPPLICATION

What does it mean for me to suffer with a theocentric perspective and attitude?

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 rest in God's righteousness in suffering any injustice
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

SUFFERING SHOULD BE EXPECTED IN BEING PART OF THE

kingdom of God: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:10). And it is a divine necessity: “through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). What does it mean to suffer for the sake of righteousness? Suffering for righteousness’ sake happens when we suffer unjustly. Living righteously is delightful, but suffering in unjustness is painful. The pain can increase as the suffering in unjustness persists, and then there is the divine silence and inactivity with regards to divine vindication. And as the divine silence and inactivity prolong, we can feel so overwhelming that we begin to wonder about or question the righteousness and justice of God.

The “persecutions” and the “afflictions” that the Thessalonians suffered for their faith (1 Thess 1:6; 2:14) persisted (v.4). They were enduring the tribulations with steadfastness, but still apparently, they had been “asking questions about the rationale of their afflictions. Why were they having to suffer so much?”⁶⁰ Paul answers their questions by pointing them to the two-pronged “righteous judgment of God” (v.5): God will “**repay** with affliction those who afflict you” (v.6) and “grant **relief** to you who are afflicted” (v.7). But the repayment and the relief may not come any time soon as we wish. They will certainly come “when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven” (v.7). Meanwhile, as we persevere on in our suffering, we pray that God will “direct” our hearts “to the perseverance of Christ” (2 Thess 3:5).

⁶⁰ John R. W. Stott, 140

FRI
29

Standing Firm: Deception and Falsehood

SCRIPTURE 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about deception and falsehood?

APPLICATION

How can I keep myself from falling into deception and falsehood?

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 be kept from falling into deception and falsehood
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

1 AND 2 THESSALONIANS ARE HIGHLY ESCHATOLOGICAL.

Paul writes specifically on eschatology at two points in 1 Thessalonians (4:13-18; 5:1-11), aside from every chapter of the letter ending with an eschatological note (1 Thess 1:10; 2:19-20; 3:13; 4:17; 5:23), and at two points in 2 Thessalonians (1:5-10; 2:1-12). Biblical eschatology is not primarily about “fulfilment of end-time prophecies”, which tends to be a common misunderstanding among Christians. There is much theology in the New Testament letters, but their theology is “always ‘task theology’, theology being written and brought to bear on the task at hand”⁶¹. In 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Paul applies eschatology to pastoral work in particular discipleship situations. We can call it disciplinmaking with eschatology.

Christian fake news was going around that “the day of the Lord has come” (v.2). And the Thessalonians were “quickly shaken in mind” and “alarmed” (v.2), because they were not “caught up...in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” as they were taught (1 Thess 4:17). Paul addresses this issue by pointing to them two major tell-tale signs before Christ’s return (v.3): “the apostasy” and the appearance of “the man of lawlessness” – “the antichrist” (1 Jn 2:18). And Paul recalls briefly what he had taught the Thessalonians about this final enemy of God, behind whom is “the activity of Satan” (vv.4-12).

Paul’s focus here is deception (vv.3, 10) and falsehood (vv.9, 11). And thus, his exhortation: “Let no one in any way deceive you” (v.3) and “stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught” – “the truth” (vv.10, 12, 13, 15).

⁶¹ Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for Its Worth, Second Edition* (Zondervan, 1981, 1993), 48

SAT
30

Standing Firm: Word of God

SCRIPTURE 2 Thessalonians 3:1-15

OBSERVATION

What is the recurring idea in verses 1, 4, 6, 12 and 14?

APPLICATION

How will I make the Word of God constantly central 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 Church Board: That God’s Word be constantly central in their lives
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

THE VISIBLE “MAN OF LAWLESSNESS” HAS YET TO BE

revealed before Christ’s Second Coming, but the invisible “secret power of lawlessness is already at work” (2 Thess 2:7-8, NIV). The expression “is already at work” means it was during Paul’s time and continues until today. This “secret of power of lawlessness” is parallel to what Jesus says about the end-times: “lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold” (Matt 24:12). It is an “ambiguous situation, in which evil is both operative and held in check [2 Thess 2:6-7]”⁶². How then are we to live in such end-times? God has given us a guiding light and compass: “the word of the Lord” (v.1). And that means the Word of God must be central in our lives.

The centrality of the Word of God is a key motif in 2 Thessalonians 3 (vv.1, 4, 6, 12, 14). Paul asks the Thessalonians to pray for him, that in his ministry “the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified” (v.1, NASB). Paul had “confidence in the Lord” that the Thessalonians “are doing and will do the things that we command you” (v.4). While the Word of God was central in the church in Thessalonica, there were among them those who were “leading an undisciplined life” (vv.6, 11), living their lives “not according to the tradition” that Paul taught (v.6). And such people Paul “command[s] and exhort[s] in the Lord” to repent (v.12). And failing to obey God in Paul’s “command” will lead to serious consequences (v.14).

⁶² John R. W. Stott, 181

SUN
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Sunday Journal

SCRIPTURE

OBSERVATION

APPLICATION

PRAYER

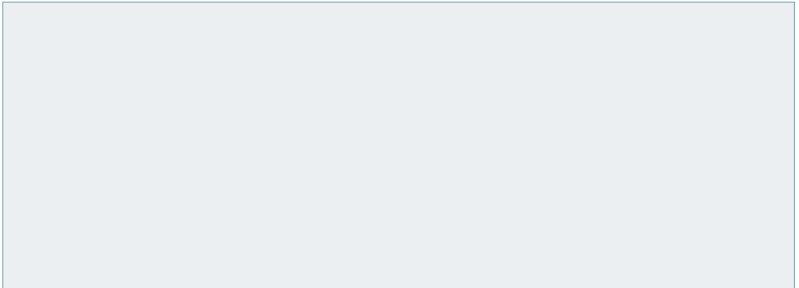
THE PAST WEEK

Review

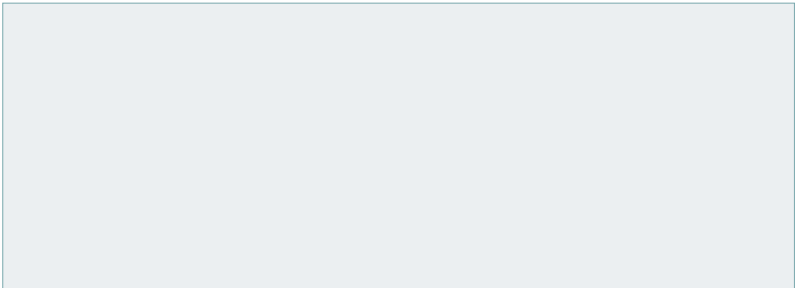
◆ What was my high point and my low point for the week?



◆ What gave me life and what drained me?



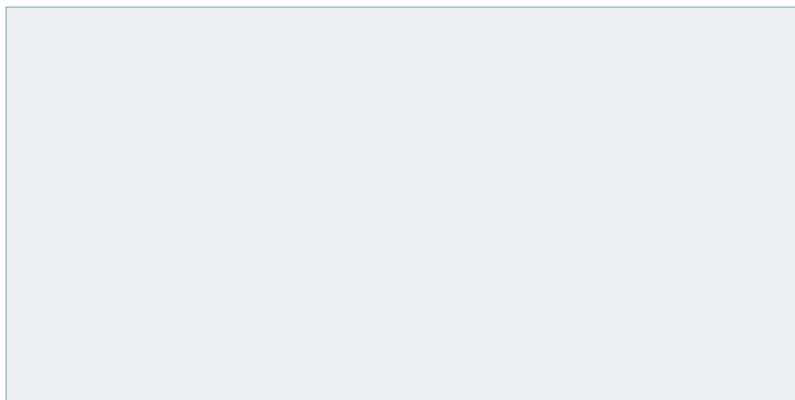
◆ How was the Spirit of God at work?



THE PAST WEEK

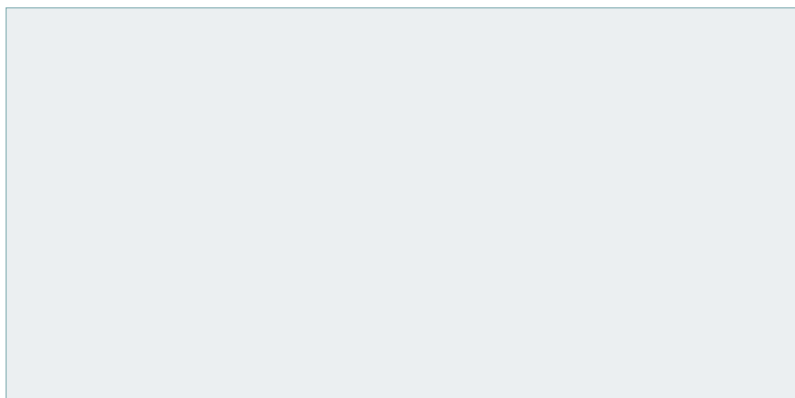
Reflect

- ◆ 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 5

Make Waves:

What you do today can change the world around you.

Memory Verse

"...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."
- Philippians 1:6 (NIV)

* Bottom Line

God gives you the power to have self-control.*

* Bible Story

James 3:1-6 - Taming of the Tongue

* Activity

Power of Words

Props: Paper, scissors and coloured pencils/crayons

Provide each family member with a piece of paper. Ask everyone to draw a picture that covers the whole paper. Then, cut the drawing into small pieces. Get everyone to try to piece their picture back together again.

Get everyone to share their thoughts after the activity:

- How did the picture look after you tried to fix it back again?
- Given how words cannot be taken back, what did you learn about using the right words when communicating with others?

Say, "The picture represents the words we use with others. Once it is cut into smaller pieces, it is almost impossible to make it whole again. Even when we attempt to repair it, there are still lines on the picture and it is no longer the same. Likewise, when we lose control and use harsh words on others, we cause damage to them. James 3:1-6 reminds us that our tongues are powerful weapons. We are to use it to encourage and build up a person. Therefore, think before we speak."

* Talk About It

- What happens when you lose self-control?
- How can you help others to exercise self-control?
- Have you ever lost your temper and regretted your words or actions?
- How does it help to PAUSE before speaking or taking action?

Parents: Share with your family members about an experience in which you lost control of a situation. How did your words or actions affect you and others? What did you do to make amends?

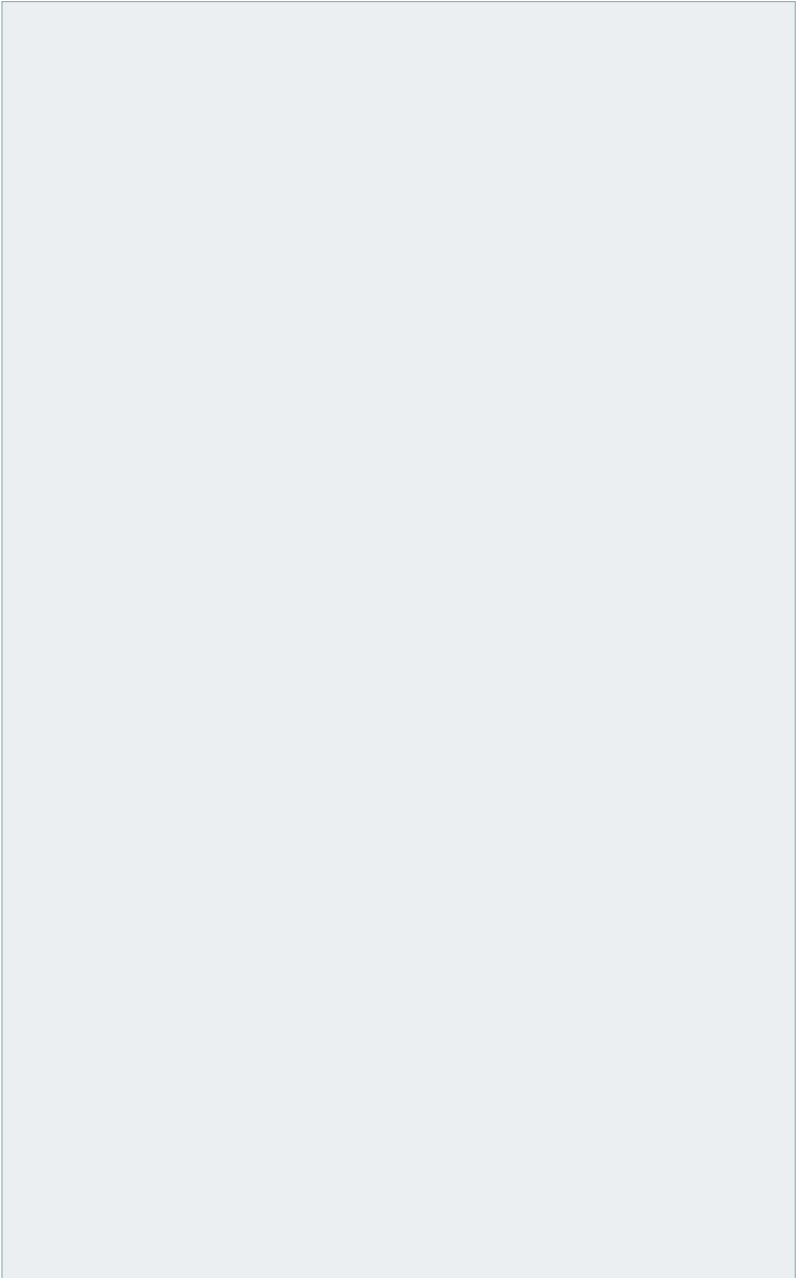
* Prayer

Thank God for His guidance. Pray for a tongue that only speaks words that build up and encourage others.

 BIBLE STORY VIDEO
<https://cefc.ch/22FD07W5>



NOTES



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