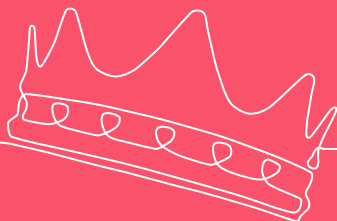


COVENANT^{EFC}

DECEMBER
2022
DEVOTIONAL
JOURNAL

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

2 THESSALONIANS 3:13



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*As for you, brothers,
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Also available at www.cfc.org.sg and "Covenant EFC" mobile app.

MEMORY VERSES

2022

From 1 & 2 Thessalonians

◆ January

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

– 1 Thessalonians 1:6 (ESV)

◆ February

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

– 1 Thessalonians 4:3 (ESV)

◆ March

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

◆ April

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

– 1 Thessalonians 4:14 (ESV)

◆ May

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

◆ June

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

– 1 Thessalonians 5:14 (ESV)

◆ July

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

– 1 Thessalonians 5:15 (ESV)

◆ August

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

– 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (ESV)

◆ September

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

◆ October

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

– 2 Thessalonians 2:13 (ESV)

◆ November

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

◆ December

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

– 2 Thessalonians 3:13 (ESV)

FOREWORD

BY SENIOR PASTORS

PREPARING TO MEET KING JESUS

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

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

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

– Matthew 16:18-19 (ESV)

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

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

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

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

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

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

How can we prepare ourselves to meet King Jesus?

A People Prepared for His Coming: Be Watchful!

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

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

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

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

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

A People Prepared in Personal Holiness: Be Faithful!

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

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

In Christ,
Rev Tan Kay Kiong and
Rev Tony Yeo

GUIDE TO USING THIS DEVOTIONAL JOURNAL

Step 1

PREPARE YOUR HEART IN GOD'S PRESENCE

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

NEW IN 2022

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



SOMETHING TO PONDER

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

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

Step 2

ALLOW GOD TO **S.O.A.P.** YOU WITH HIS WORD AND SPIRIT

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



PRAYER POINTERS FOR 2022

We have provided prayer pointers for Pastors and Staff every Tuesday and for one of the 3 Faith Exploits (Disciple the Generations, Singapore and the Nations) every Wednesday. Every Thursday, a prayer pointer is included for Outreach/Missions/New Life Leaders.

On each Friday, there is a prayer pointer for SGI Leaders (e.g. Zone Mentors, CG Leaders and Assistant CG Leaders). A prayer pointer for Church Board Members is included every Saturday. Please pray for each group as well as any specific individuals whom God may bring to your mind.

PRAY FOR

THE NEXT GENERATION MISSIONS

*“The world is on lockdown,
but missions is not.”*

This was the 2020 Missions Week focus. With the COVID-19 pandemic, our short-term mission trips, including The Next Generation (TNG) ones, had to be put on hold as international borders were closed. But missions was not on lockdown. Our young people began taking the initiative to get connected with the friends they got to know in their previous mission trips through digital platforms. Online get-togethers and online youth conferences were organised. A prayer initiative was started. The youths were able to encourage their friends who were in countries where the COVID-19 situation was more devastating.

Here at home in Singapore, a group of youths rallied their peers and families in the church to get involved in a National Day Project Appreciation¹ through fundraising, baking cookies, making cards and packing care packs. Close to 2,000 care packs were given to migrant workers living in dormitories. Some of the youths even joined the volunteers to give out the care packs to the workers.

The heart for missions begins at a young age. Time and opportunities will cultivate and grow the passion for missions in the hearts of our next generation.

In the National Missions Study 2019² done by Singapore Centre for Global Missions (SCGM), the survey results on Singapore's missional force showed that we are facing an ageing missional force. Less than 3% of missionaries surveyed are below the age of 30 years old. There is therefore a need to mobilise and challenge TNG to answer the missional call to be part of the missional force in the missions field.

We thank God for a group of young people who responded to the missional call in the 2020 Missions Week. Some will have a longer journey. While others are more ready to give of their time to explore short-term missions attachment to ascertain their missions calling. We desire to see the next wave of missionaries rising up among TNG!

PRAY

1. Give thanks for the young people who have taken the initiative to stay connected with their friends in our partner churches in the current challenging times. For the continual strengthening of such cross-cultural peer discipleship.
2. For God to cultivate the missional heart in our next generation where they learn to give, pray, bless and go.
3. For God to stir up the hearts of young people who have a passion for cross-cultural missions. That they will step out in faith and obedience to heed God's missional call to preach the Good News in a cross-cultural context, both overseas and in Singapore.
4. For God to raise up the next wave of missionaries among TNG.

¹ #BlessMigrantWorkers by TNG

² <https://www.scgm.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/NMS2019-Report.pdf>

WORSHIP SONGS

NOVEMBER – DECEMBER

ANCIENT GATES

Verse 1

There is singing at the ancient gates
There's a melody of ceaseless praise
Age to age, the sound is only growing stronger

There's a throne beneath the Name of Names
There is seated on it One who reigns
And His Kingdom now is here and getting closer

Chorus 1

Praise Him like we're there in glory
Here and now He's just as holy
Jesus He's so worthy of it all

Verse 2

He exists in everlasting light
So on heaven's streets, there is no night
Every tear is wiped away
We'll know no sorrow

Worship Him with joyful sound
Sing until your voice gives out
No matter where or who's around
Release your worship

Chorus 2

Bring your song, He loves to hear it
Bring Him every prayer-soaked lyric
Jesus, He's so worthy of it all

Bridge

The One who was

The One who is

The One who is to come

Brooke Ligertwood | Jason Ingram | Scott Ligertwood

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CCLI Song # 7192505

CCLI Licence # 324618

GLORY HONOUR POWER

Verse 1

Most worthy, worthy of praise
Exalted above all things my God
You are my God

Verse 2

Your splendor and majesty
Your wonder fills everything my God
You are my God

Chorus

Holy is the Lord
Holy is the Lord Almighty
Seated on the throne
Seated on the throne of Glory
High and lifted up
Your presence fills the temple
When we worship You
Oh, we worship You

Verse 3

Creation points to the King
The heavens can't help but sing to You
To You, our God

Bridge

Hallelujah to the One who came and made a way
Hallelujah to the One who died and rose again
Hallelujah to the only Name above all names
Glory and honour and power forever

Jeff Pardo | Melody Noel | Tiffany Hudson

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HOSANNA (PRAISE IS RISING)

Verse 1

Praise is rising
Eyes are turning to You
We turn to You
Hope is stirring
Hearts are yearning for You
We long for You

Pre-Chorus

'Cause when we see You
We find strength to face the day
In Your presence
All our fears are washed away
(Washed away)

Chorus

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

Verse 2

Hear the sound of
Hearts returning to You
We turn to You
In Your Kingdom
Broken lives are made new
You make us new

Ending

Hosanna, hosanna

Brenton Brown | Paul Baloche

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CCLI Song # 4662491

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DID YOU FEEL THE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE

Verse 1

Did you feel the mountains tremble?
Did you hear the oceans roar?
When the people rose to sing of
Jesus Christ, the risen One

Verse 2

Did you feel the people tremble?
Did you hear the singers roar?
When the lost began to sing of
Jesus Christ, the saving One

Pre-Chorus 1

And we can see that God You're moving
A mighty river through the nations
And young and old will turn to Jesus
Fling wide you heavenly gates
Prepare the way of the risen Lord

Chorus

Open up the doors and let the music play
Let the streets resound with singing
Songs that bring Your hope and
Songs that bring Your joy
Dancers who dance upon injustice

Verse 3

Do you feel the darkness tremble
When all the saints join in one song?
And all the streams flow as one river
To wash away our brokenness

Pre-Chorus 2

And here we see that God, You're moving
A time of jubilee is coming
When young and old return to Jesus
Fling wide you heavenly gates
Prepare the way of the risen Lord

Martin Smith

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CCLI Song # 1097028

CCLI Licence # 324618

BLESSED BE YOUR NAME

Verse 1

Blessed be Your Name
In the land that is plentiful
Where Your streams of abundance flow
Blessed be Your Name

Verse 2

Blessed be Your Name
When I'm found in the desert place
Though I walk through the wilderness
Blessed be Your Name

Pre-Chorus

Every blessing You pour out, I'll
Turn back to praise
When the darkness closes in, Lord
Still I will say

Chorus

Blessed be the Name of the Lord
Blessed be Your Name
Blessed be the Name of the Lord
Blessed be Your glorious Name

Verse 3

Blessed be Your Name
When the sun's shining down on me
When the world's all as it should be
Blessed be Your Name

Verse 4

Blessed be Your Name
On the road marked with suffering
Though there's pain in the offering
Blessed be Your Name

Bridge

You give and take away

You give and take away

My heart will choose to say

Lord blessed be Your Name

Beth Redman | Matt Redman

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CCLI Song # 3798438

CCLI Licence # 324618

HALLELUJAH TO THE LAMB

Verse 1

Lord I stand in the midst of a multitude
Of those from every tribe and tongue
We are Your people
Redeemed by Your blood
Rescued from death by Your love
There are no words
Good enough to thank You
There are no words to express my praise
But I will lift up my voice
And sing from my heart
With all of my strength

Chorus

Hallelujah hallelujah
Hallelujah to the Lamb
Hallelujah hallelujah
By the blood of Christ we stand
Every tongue every tribe
Every people every land
Giving glory giving honour
Giving praise unto the Lamb of God

Verse 2

Lord we stand by grace in Your presence
Cleansed by the blood of the Lamb
We are Your children
Called by Your Name
Humbly we bow and we pray
Release Your power
To work in us and through us
Till we are changed to be more like You
Then all the nations will see
Your glory revealed
And worship You

Bridge

Every knee shall bow
Every tongue confess
That You are Lord of all

Debbie Graafsma | Don Moen

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CCLI Song # 2316323

CCLI Licence # 324618

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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CCLI Song # 7190270

CCLI Licence # 324618

O PRAISE THE NAME (ANÁSTASIS)

Verse 1

I cast my mind to Calvary
Where Jesus bled and died for me
I see His wounds, His hands, His feet
My Saviour on that cursed tree

Verse 2

His body bound and drenched in tears
They laid Him down in Joseph's tomb
The entrance sealed by heavy stone
Messiah still and all alone

Chorus

O praise the Name of the Lord our God
O praise His Name forevermore
For endless days we will sing Your praise
Oh Lord, oh Lord our God

Verse 3

Then on the third at break of dawn
The Son of heaven rose again
O trampled death where is your sting?
The angels roar for Christ the King

Verse 4

He shall return in robes of white
The blazing sun shall pierce the night
And I will rise among the saints
My gaze transfixed on Jesus' face

Benjamin Hastings | Dean Ussher | Marty Sampson

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CCLI Song # 7037787

CCLI Licence # 324618

THE COMPASSION HYMN

Verse 1

There is an everlasting kindness
You lavished on us
When the radiance of heaven
Came to rescue the lost
You called the sheep without
A shepherd to leave their distress
For Your streams of forgiveness
And the shade of Your rest

Verse 2

And with compassion for the hurting
You reached out Your hand
As the lame ran to meet You
And the dead breathed again
You saw behind the eyes of
Sorrow and shared in our tears
Heard the sigh of the weary
Let the children draw near

Chorus

What boundless love, what fathomless grace
You have shown us, O God of compassion
Each day we live an offering of praise
As we show to the world Your compassion

Verse 3

We stood beneath the cross of Calvary
And gazed on Your face
At the thorns of oppression
And the wounds of disgrace
For surely You have borne our suffering
And carried our grief
As You pardoned the scoffer
And showed grace to the thief

Verse 4

How beautiful the feet
That carry this Gospel of peace
To the fields of injustice
And the valleys of need
To be a voice of hope and healing
To answer the cries
Of the hungry and helpless
With the mercy of Christ

Keith Getty | Kristyn Getty | Stuart Townend

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CCLI Song # 5468807

CCLI Licence # 324618

LIVING HOPE

Verse 1

How great the chasm that lay between us
How high the mountain I could not climb
In desperation, I turned to heaven
And spoke Your Name into the night
Then through the darkness Your loving-kindness
Tore through the shadows of my soul
The work is finished, the end is written
Jesus Christ, my living hope

Verse 2

Who could imagine so great a mercy?
What heart could fathom such boundless grace?
The God of ages stepped down from glory
To wear my sin and bear my shame
The cross has spoken, I am forgiven
The King of kings calls me His own
Beautiful Saviour, I'm Yours forever
Jesus Christ, my living hope

Chorus

Hallelujah, praise the One who set me free
Hallelujah, death has lost its grip on me
You have broken every chain
There's salvation in Your Name
Jesus Christ my living hope

Verse 3

Then came the morning that sealed the promise
Your buried body began to breathe
Out of the silence, the Roaring Lion
Declared the grave has no claim on me
(Repeat)
Jesus Yours is the victory

Ending

Jesus Christ, my living hope

Oh God, You are my living hope

Brian Johnson | Phil Wickham

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CCLI Song # 7106807

CCLI Licence # 324618

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

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NOTES

A large, empty rectangular box with a light pink background and a thin red border, intended for taking notes.

THU
01

1-2 Thessalonians Revisited: Entreating with Thanksgiving

SCRIPTURE 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18; 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17; 3:16

OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about prayer and thanksgiving to God in these passages?

APPLICATION

What changes do I need to make with regards to prayer and thanksgiving to God in my discipleship journey?

PRAYER

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

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for Outreach/Missions/New Life leaders: To be empowered to pray in the Holy Spirit
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

PAUL'S THANKSGIVING AND PETITION TO GOD ARE PROMINENT

in 1 to 2 Thessalonians – found at nine locations in the eight chapters.¹

Reflected from this are the **attitude**, the **aim** and the **anchor** in prayer.

Always thankful is one's **attitude**: “We ought always to give thanks to God for you” (1 Thess 1:2; 3:9; 2 Thess 1:3; 2:13). Out of this lifestyle, Paul teaches us, “In everything give thanks” (1 Thess 5:18). Another attitude is **praying earnestly**. Paul “pray[s] most earnestly night and day” that he might return to Thessalonica to further build up the Thessalonians’ faith (1 Thess 3:10-11). But God did not answer his prayer until five years later (Acts 20:1-3).²

The **aim** is **transforming life**. The Thessalonians’ lives were marked by their “labour in love” (1 Thess 1:3). But Paul exhorted them “to do this more and more” (1 Thess 4:9-10), and prayed that “the Lord make you increase and abound in love” (1 Thess 3:12-13). And God answered his prayer immediately: “your love is increasing” (2 Thess 1:3).

The **anchor** is in **knowing God**. Paul anchors his prayer in who God is, especially Christ and God the Father “who loved us” (2 Thess 2:13, 16-17; 3:5; cf. 1 Thess 1:4). He prays that “the Lord direct your hearts... to the steadfastness of Christ” to establish further the Thessalonians’ “steadfastness and faith” in enduring afflictions (2 Thess 1:4; 3:5). And he anchors in “the God of peace” (1 Thess 5:23; 2 Thess 3:16) and the God who is “faithful” (1 Thess 5:24; 2 Thess 3:3). In knowing God, we pray and through prayer we know God better.

¹ 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3; 3:9-13; 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 2:13, 16-17; 3:1, 5, 16

² John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Thessalonians, The Bible Speaks Today* (IVP, 1991), 67

FRI
02

1-2 Thessalonians Revisited: Enlarging the Borders

SCRIPTURE 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

OBSERVATION

How does the passage show the enlarging of borders in Paul's ministry of the Gospel?

APPLICATION

How would I like to see my life and ministry being enlarged?

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 God will enlarge their spiritual influence on the people under them
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

PAUL CAME TO THESSALONICA TO EVANGELISE THE CITY.

Then he **established** the new believers into and as a “church” (1 Thess 1:1), constituting of former idol-worshippers (v.9), “devout Greeks” and “leading women” (Acts 17:4). And from here was the **enlarging** of the borders of Paul’s ministry of the Gospel – into Macedonia and Achaia (v.7) and “everywhere” (v.8).

In this enlarging is the enlarging of the **Word of God**. “Our gospel came to you” (v.5) was enlarged to “the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you” (v.8). We must pass on the Word of God that we are growing in to establish other believers and evangelise the unsaved. There is the enlarging of the **walk with God**. Having observed “what kind of men” Paul and his co-workers “proved to be among you” (v.5b), the Thessalonians “became imitators” of them (v.6), and in turn “became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia” (v.7) and their “faith has gone forth everywhere” (v.8). This enlarging of borders is fundamentally and ultimately the **work of God**. It is the powerful activity of the Holy Spirit through people “with full conviction” in their belief and walk with God (v.5). This enlarging movement took place in a particular life situation: “in much affliction” – but “with the joy of the Holy Spirit” (v.6). This is a **way of God** in His sovereign freedom and wisdom.

We can echo Jabez’s prayer in this way: “Oh that You would bless me and enlarge the border of my life and ministry!” (1 Chron 4:10).

SAT
03

1-2 Thessalonians Revisited: Exaltation of God

SCRIPTURE 1 Thessalonians 2:12; 2 Thessalonians 1:9-12

OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about the glory of God in these passages?

APPLICATION

What does the glory of God mean to me in my discipleship journey?

PRAYER

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

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for Church Board: To walk in a manner worthy of God's kingdom and glory
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

IN OUR SALVATION IN CHRIST, GOD CALLS US TO HIS GLORY:

“God, who **calls** you into His kingdom and **glory**” (1 Thess 2:12), and “He **called** you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the **glory** of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess 2:14). 1 to 2 Thessalonians shows us four dimensions of the glory of God that He calls us to.

The glory of God that **we receive from God**: “that you may **obtain** the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess 2:14). The glory of God that **God reveals in us**: “when He comes on that day to be glorified **in His saints**” (2 Thess 1:10), and “the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified **in you**” (2 Thess 1:12). It is noteworthy that these two dimensions of the glory of God follow the relationship between Jesus and His Father: “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and **God is glorified in Him**; if God is glorified in Him, God will also **glorify Him in Himself**, and will glorify Him immediately” (Jn 13:31-32).

The glory of God is **God reigning over us**. Clearly God's “kingdom and glory” that He calls us to are interrelated (1 Thess 2:12). Being in God's kingdom is being under God's kingship. The glory of God is **God residing with us**. The “presence of the Lord” that we will be in at Christ's Second Coming is also “the glory of His might” (2 Thess 1:9).

Recognise that this glory of God in our present journey and as our future destiny in Christ is **God's “grace”** (2 Thess 1:12).

SUN
04

Sunday Journal

SCRIPTURE

OBSERVATION

APPLICATION

PRAYER

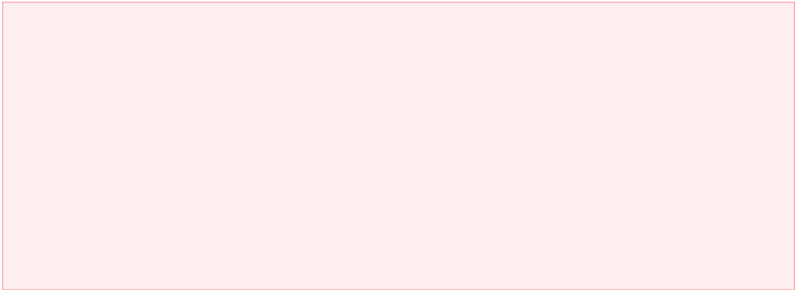
THE PAST WEEK

Review

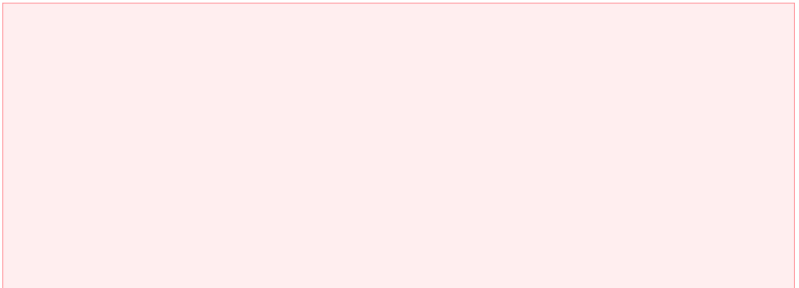
◆ What was my high point and my low point for the week?



◆ What gave me life and what drained me?



◆ How was the Spirit of God at work?



THE PAST WEEK

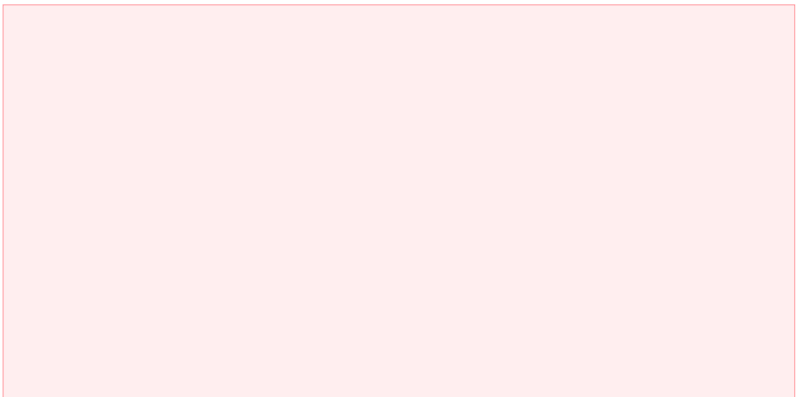
Reflect

- ◆ 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

Christmas:

Celebrating Jesus,
God's Greatest Gift

Memory Verse

"Today in the town of David a Saviour
has been born to you; he is the Messiah,
the Lord." – Luke 2:11 (NIV)

* Bottom Line

God always has a plan.*

* Bible Story

Isaiah 9:6-7 – O Come, Emmanuel

* Activity

Connect the Dots

Props: Connect-the-dots worksheets and pens

Download some worksheets from the Internet and provide each family member with one. Ask everyone to complete the picture by joining the dots. The person who does so in the shortest time wins the competition.

Say, "The book of Isaiah talked about the coming Saviour and was written before Jesus was born! Right from the beginning, God already had a plan to save everyone. Just like the activity, when we received the worksheet, we had no idea what the picture would look like. After every dot is connected, the picture is finally revealed to us. We can trust that God already knows what the picture will look like. He will guide us to connect every dot to guide every step we take."

* Talk About It

- What are your plans for Christmas?
- How do you feel when you don't know what God's plan for you is?
- What was God's ultimate plan for giving us Jesus?
- How can you trust that God has a plan for your life?

Parents: Share an experience in which you listened and followed God's plan even though it was hard. How did it end? What did you learn from the process?

* Prayer

Thank God for being our Rock. Pray for faith that looks up to God in everything we do regardless of how challenging it may be.

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Adapted by JoshuaWong/CEFC/December 2022

 **BIBLE STORY VIDEO**
<https://cefc.ch/22FD12W1>



MON
05

The Beginning of Christmas

SCRIPTURE John 1:1-3

OBSERVATION

According to verses 1 to 3, what is the Word like and who is this Word?

APPLICATION

Pause to give thanks for how God the Creator has provided for your needs and the needs of your family.

PRAYER

You were the Word at the Beginning, one with God most High. Lord Jesus Christ, we bow humbly before You in worship and adoration, for You are before all things and in You all things hold together (Col 1:17). Help us to exalt You as our Creator King and enable us to dethrone anything in our lives that attempts to take Your rightful place. Amen!



Prayer Pointers

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

DEEPER REFLECTION

THIS WEEK, WE WILL JOURNEY TOGETHER WITH A

Devotional Journal series leading up to Sunday's sermon entitled "the Christmas that changed the world". Let's begin with this question: has Christmas changed *your* world? If Christmas is just an annual event to you, the answer is probably "no". We feel good when Christmas comes every year, enjoy the parties and presents...and then it goes by and life goes on. We turn our attention to the worries of the year ahead.

But if Christmas is not just an event, but a celebration of Christ, then your answer changes drastically! Who is this Christ? Not merely the cute baby in the manger, but the awesome Cosmic Creator – the Word at the beginning! To the Jewish reader, verse 1 immediately brings to mind the first words in Genesis.³ The Jews referred to the books of the Bible by their opening words, and "in the beginning" was the Jewish name for Genesis.

The baby in the manger was not made – but rather the Maker of all things (v.3). That Christ is described as the Word points to how God powerfully created the world and everything in it – just by speaking it all into being (see Gen 1:3)! This Advent season, as we prepare our hearts to celebrate Christmas and point others to Christ, let us begin by worshipping the glorious Creator who continually sustains all that He has made. Pause and give thanks today, for everything good, delightful and needful in our lives comes from Him.

³ Beasley-Murray, G. R. (1999). *John* (Vol. 36, p. 7). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

TUE
06

The Light of Christmas

SCRIPTURE John 1:4-5

OBSERVATION

What do verses 4 to 5 tell you about light and how this light is connected to the life that comes from God?

APPLICATION

Pray for a friend, family member or colleague who is in a dark place and needs the light of Christ.

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 continue to lead by God's light and life, leaning on His grace constantly
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

CHRISTMAS IS, IN SOME WAYS, A FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS.

Just look at the fabulous Orchard Road Christmas light-up or the fairy lights on our Christmas trees. Pretty lights cheer us up!

Light isn't just **beautiful**, however, it is absolutely **needful**. Without sunlight, plants and other photosynthetic organisms would not be able to convert solar energy into the chemical energy needed to sustain life in every cell. No light, no life.

There is also a **spiritual** connection between light and life. John the Evangelist writes: "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men" (v.4). God alone has life in Himself (Jn 5:26). This life is light to us because it is His **revelation**. Just as light is needed to illuminate our path on a dark night, we need the light of God's salvation when we are trapped in sin's darkness.

And here's the good news. The moral and spiritual darkness we see in the world and in our own hearts has not defeated the light (v.5)! No matter how overwhelming the darkness might feel to us, the truth is that it is no match for the true light. This is because darkness is simply the absence of light – it flees when light comes! No matter how resistant our friends or family members might be to the light of Christ, we can continue to intercede with hope. And in dark and troubling situations, we can sing with the hymnwriter Maltbie Babcock:

This is my Father's world:

O let me ne'er forget

That though the wrong seems oft so strong,

God is the Ruler yet.

WED
07

The Witness of Christmas

SCRIPTURE John 1:6-8

OBSERVATION

What was the purpose of John's assignment as a witness?

APPLICATION

Prepare your personal testimony - a short story of roughly three minutes that you can easily share with someone to tell him or her about what God has done in your life.

PRAYER

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

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for leaders
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for the Generations: That God will use each of us, from all the different generations – children, youth, working adults and seniors – as His witnesses wherever He sends us
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

THE FIRST FIVE VERSES OF JOHN’S GOSPEL ARE A HYMN OF

praise to the eternal Word. John the Evangelist interrupts this heavenly hymn to introduce another John – John the Baptist.⁴

John the Baptist, the forerunner to Jesus, was **sent from God** (v.6), commissioned to a specific task. In this respect, he is like the Lord Jesus himself, also sent by God the Father (Jn 3:17). What was John’s task? To bear **witness** (or testify) to God’s light (v.7). The word “witness” is a term from the law-courts⁵: John the Baptist is pictured here as a witness in the stands. He provides evidence according to what he knows and has experienced. John the Baptist was not the light, but only a witness to it.

Like John the Baptist, we too are sent by God – to our families and places of work. The Greek verb *apostello*, which means “sent”, is where we get the English word “apostle” from. In a sense, we are all God’s apostles, those He sends! Like John the Baptist, we are sent to testify to the light of God, so that others might come to believe in the Lord (v.7). We testify through our words and deeds. Take heart – we don’t have to be **perfect** in order to be witnesses for Christ. God can use us, even with our fears and failures, for He is the light. Not us.

⁴ Beasley-Murray, G. R. (1999). *John* (Vol. 36, pp. 11-12). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

⁵ Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John* (p. 120). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

THU
08

The (Rejected) Gift of Christmas

SCRIPTURE John 1:9-13

OBSERVATION

What do verses 10 to 11 tell us about the world's response to God?

APPLICATION

B.L.E.S.S. someone in your community this Christmas season, so that he or she may be more receptive to the Gospel of Christ.

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: That they will have the wisdom to discern wise strategies for Gospel ministry in our culture
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

IF YOU WATCH ENOUGH AMERICAN TELEVISION, YOU WOULD

be familiar with the stereotypical scene where a child excitedly rips open a Christmas present only to find out that it is (another) ugly knitted sweater. The child's face falls in disappointment and he mumbles an insincere "thank you". The gift is completely not what he had hoped for!

Christ's gift of life and light can also appear to some as a present that they never asked for or wanted. We should not be surprised when people reject the Lord – because the Bible plainly states that this **will** happen! This rejection is ironic for two reasons, according to John. First, although humankind is **created** by God, we fail to recognise the **Creator** (v.10). Second, although humankind **belongs** to God, God Himself finds no **belonging** with us (v.11). Instead of receiving Him, we reject Him!

In our postmodern age, the rejection of God may not be an outright attack on Christianity. It is more likely to be a dismissive reduction of faith to a matter of personal preference – something along the lines of "good for you if Christianity floats your boat, but it's just not my thing".

What then is our Christian response? We must not lose hope in sharing the Gospel, even if rejection is likely. This is because John reminds us, that if people **do** believe, He gives them the right – the amazing privilege – to become children of God (v.12)! What a privilege it would also be for us, as God's children, to welcome someone else into the family of God and see that person experience God's life and light!

FRI
09

The Mystery of Christmas

SCRIPTURE John 1:14

OBSERVATION

What does verse 14 tell us about who the Son of God is, what He is like and what He has done for us?

APPLICATION

Live incarnationally this Advent and Christmas season, by blessing someone in a practical way and showing that person what Jesus is like.

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 have God's empowering to help us grow as incarnational witnesses for Christ
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

THOUGH WE MAY NOT ADMIT IT, WE CHRISTIANS MAY BE tempted to think that the Christmas message is somewhat boring. Baby in a manger? Shepherds and angels? Yeah, we've heard the story a million times.

But when we pause to meditate on verse 14, we will find that the “over-familiar” Christmas story is full of mystery and wonder. For John tells us that “**the Word became flesh**”. This is the mystery of the **incarnation** (this word literally means the “in-fleshing”). The God who is infinitely wise and powerful humbled Himself and He clothed Himself in our frail and finite flesh. The eternal God subjected Himself to the limitations of time. How that happened is beyond us!

John also talks about the mystery of **Immanuel** (“God with us”), for he writes that “the Word became flesh and **dwelt among us**”. The Greek verb *skēnoō* literally means that the Word lived in his tent amongst us.⁶ This evokes the image of God dwelling with the Israelites, through the Tabernacle, as they wandered in the desert. Wow! Why should the high and holy God of Heaven choose to live among us and enter our dirt? Being close to God is a privilege we can neither earn nor fully comprehend.

The mysteries of the incarnation and Immanuel are not abstract theological concepts, but have immense implications for us today. We can live incarnationally by identifying with others, **blessing** them in Christ and simply **being with** them, just as Christ came to be with us.

⁶ Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John* (p. 127). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

SAT
10

The Grace of Christmas

SCRIPTURE John 1:15-18

OBSERVATION

What does it mean for God's grace to come to us through Jesus Christ (vv.16-17)?

APPLICATION

Pray for divine opportunities to make the Lord known this Christmas season.

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 be strengthened by the Lord's grace as they carry out their responsibilities
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

PICTURE YOURSELF AT A CHRISTMAS FEAST WITH YOUR family, saying grace before the meal. This thanksgiving prayer is called “grace” because it acknowledges that “all that we need and cherish, comes from the Lord in token of His love”⁷. Every blessing – the gifts of family, fellowship, food and fun – is a gift of grace!

In meritocratic Singapore, many people find it hard to accept grace. We have a deep cultural belief that everything that we have is earned solely through our own merit and effort. Often, we are blind to how much in our lives is truly a result of grace. Verse 16 gives us a reality check, for it reminds us that “from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace”.

Jesus Himself is the ultimate gift of grace, because the unseen Father has been made known to us (*exēgēsato*) by Jesus (v.18)! From the Greek verb *exēgēsato* we derive the English word “exegesis”: we could say that **Jesus exegetes God to us**.⁸ To put it simply, Jesus tells us what the Father is really like.

God's gracious gift of Jesus the Son makes that first Christmas world-changing. This Christmas, you can be part of God's work to change someone else's world. Will you tell someone, through your words and deeds, what God the Father is really like?

⁷ These lovely words are from the lyrics of the choral anthem “Look at the World” by John Rutter.

⁸ Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John* (p. 135). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

SUN
11

Sunday Journal

SCRIPTURE

OBSERVATION

APPLICATION

PRAYER

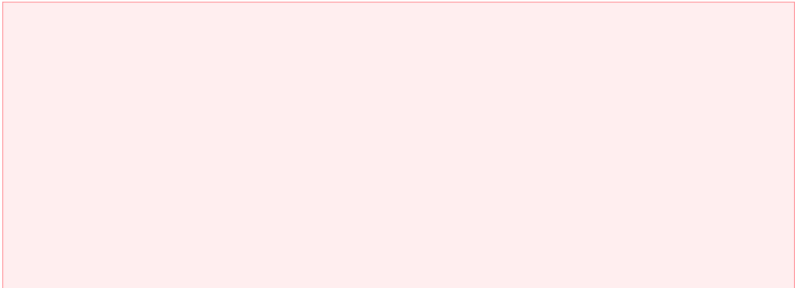
THE PAST WEEK

Review

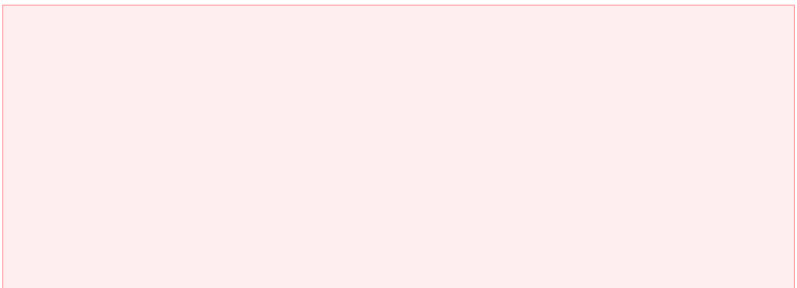
◆ What was my high point and my low point for the week?



◆ What gave me life and what drained me?



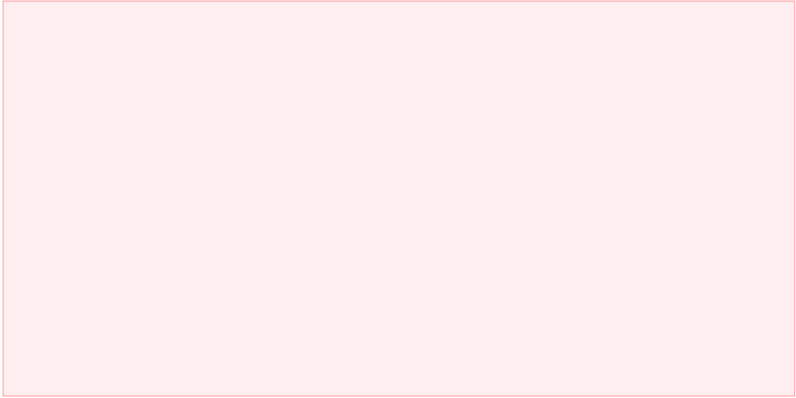
◆ How was the Spirit of God at work?



THE PAST WEEK

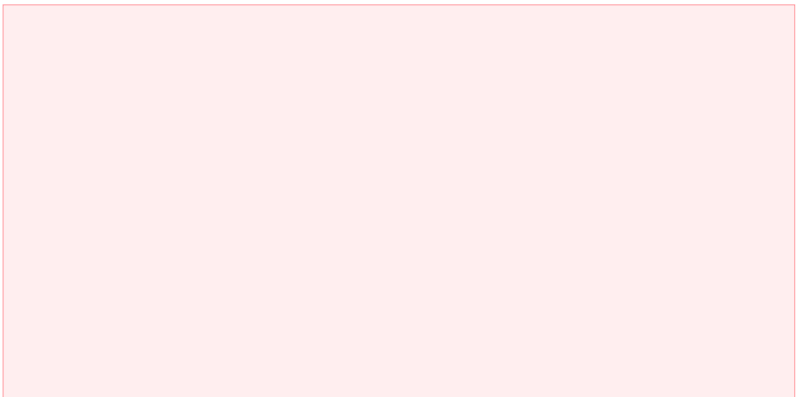
Reflect

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



Respond

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



Family Devotional

Week 2

Christmas:

Celebrating Jesus,
God's Greatest Gift

Memory Verse

"Today in the town of David a Saviour
has been born to you; he is the Messiah,
the Lord." – Luke 2:11 (NIV)

* Bottom Line

Anything is possible with God.*

* Bible Story

Luke 1:5-66 – Breath of Heaven

* Activity

The Knots

Props: Ropes of either thin or medium thickness

Tie a few knots on each rope. Make enough of these for each family member and get them to untie them. The person who unties the knots within the shortest time wins. Invite everyone to share their thoughts after the game.

Say, "Every knot on the rope represents things that are impossible for us. Our God can do the impossible. When we place our focus on God, He can do the impossible for us. Sometimes, God does not answer right away. If we think of past incidents in which God made the impossible possible, we know that God listens and will help us in His ways."

* Talk About It

- How do you think you would have responded if you were Zechariah, Elizabeth or Mary?
- How do you think Zechariah felt when he was not able to speak?
- Do you think it was easy for Zechariah to believe the angel and trust God? Why or why not?
- What are some amazing things that God has done for you or your family?
- If God doesn't answer our prayers in the way we hope, does it mean that God isn't listening? Why or why not?

Parents: Recall a personal experience in which God did the impossible! How did God help you in this experience? What did you learn from it?

* Prayer

Praise our God who can do the impossible! Ask Him to help us to listen and obey His words as we learn to wait patiently for His guidance.

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Adapted by JoshuaWong/CEFC/December 2022


BIBLE STORY VIDEO
<https://cefc.ch/22FD12W2>



MON
12

Begin in Prayer

SCRIPTURE Colossians 4:2-4

OBSERVATION

What can we learn about prayer from **how** Paul prays and **what** he prays for?

APPLICATION

Pray that God will grant you divine appointments and opportunities to declare Christ to someone this week.

PRAYER

Lord, forgive my prayerlessness. Sometimes I don't pray, because I don't believe enough that You hear and answer prayer. Other times I don't pray, because I believe so much in my own goodness or greatness that I feel no need to depend on You. Stir up within me a passion to meet You in prayer. Move me to pray for the people that are upon Your heart. Amen.

Prayer Pointers

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

DEEPER REFLECTION

COVENANT EFC HAS ADOPTED A MODEL OF RELATIONAL

evangelism called B.L.E.S.S. – Begin in Prayer, Listen, Eat with a friend, Serve a friend and Share your story. This week, our devotions will focus on these five components. In Covenant EFC we believe wholeheartedly in relational evangelism, because the Gospel is about God drawing us into relationship with Himself and with one another! Sharing the Gospel is not just about persuading someone else to agree cognitively with some Christian doctrinal statements.

When we do any Gospel work, we must begin in prayer. This is because the Gospel goes forth by God’s initiative and through God’s power. Paul instructs the Church in Colossae to pray for the evangelists, that God may open to them “a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ” (v.3). Let us pray that the hearts of our pre-believing family, friends, colleagues and neighbours will be an open door that the Gospel can enter. Many of them may in fact be hardened to Christ because they are steeped in worldviews that reject God of the Bible – secular humanism, scientific materialism, postmodernism or other religious worldviews. These worldviews include many assumptions about life that are difficult to let go of. Therefore, it is only by God’s gracious power that hearts are softened to the Gospel message.

As Paul exhorts, let’s also be **steadfast** in prayer (v.2), not giving up easily even when the prayers seem to have no impact. We can pray with **thanksgiving** because we trust in a good God who is always working out His good purposes!

TUE
13

Listen

SCRIPTURE Acts 17:16-34

OBSERVATION

How did the Apostle Paul seek to understand the culture and worldview of the Athenians?

APPPLICATION

Take time this week to really pay attention to what someone else is saying, and to understand that person's perspective, thoughts and feelings.

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 able to listen to our culture and evaluate it through the lens of Scripture
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

IN HIS 1937 CLASSIC, “HOW TO WIN FRIENDS AND INFLUENCE

People”, Dale Carnegie gave this advice: “you can make more friends in two months by becoming genuinely interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you.”⁹

Listening attentively and sincerely is essential to relationship-building. In our digital age, many of us have lost the art of listening, for we are glued to our devices and drowned in a world of over-stimulation.

The Apostle Paul spent time with the Athenians, to know them and their way of life, before presenting the Gospel to them. He conversed with their philosophers and listened to their views (vv.17-18). He studied and understood their religious practices (v.23). And he found a bridge into their culture, a way to connect with the questions that they were concerned about (v.23)! The bridge was the inscription **to the unknown god**, which Paul used to proclaim to the Athenians the God that they had never known.

Listening to and understanding someone else will always require an investment of time and energy. But this is a worthy investment, because the act of listening conveys respect and love. Listening shows that we are willing to take the other person seriously and are genuinely interested in them as **people**. When we listen to others for the sake of the Gospel, they start to learn that **God** is genuinely interested in their lives, before we even say a word.

⁹ “The Digital Age: The First Duty of Love is to Listen”, The Gottman Institute, accessed 12 October 2022, <https://www.gottman.com/blog/the-digital-age-the-first-duty-of-love-is-to-listen/> 2022.

WED
14

Eat with a Friend

SCRIPTURE Luke 5:27-32

OBSERVATION

Why is it significant that Jesus ate with the tax collectors?

APPLICATION

Enjoy some bonding time with a pre-believing family member, friend or colleague (it may or may not involve eating!)

PRAYER

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

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for leaders
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for the Generations: That the different generations in our church will be able to understand and relate closely with one another
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

WRITING A DEVOTIONAL ENTRY THAT ENCOURAGES

Singaporeans to eat feels like an unnecessary exercise. After all, many Singaporeans live to eat! We discuss our dinner menu before we finish lunch. Eating has more than a material significance, however; it also has a social significance. In all societies of the world, ancient and modern, eating is a primary way of entering into and sustaining relationships.¹⁰ In fact, the English word “companion” is derived from the French and Latin words meaning “one who eats bread with another”.

Verse 30 tells us that Jesus joined a lavish dinner banquet thrown by Levi the tax collector. The few verses before this provide the context of this feast – Jesus had called Levi the tax collector and Levi left his lucrative profession to follow Jesus (vv.27-28). In that society, tax collectors were heartily disliked: they were seen as collaborators with the Roman authorities and as extortioners. The Talmud classified them as robbers!¹¹

So why was Jesus at the banquet? Not to dine on wagyu and lobster, but to enter into fellowship with those despised in Jewish society. His motivation was compassion: to call sinners to repentance (v.32). He saw beyond their social stigma to their deep spiritual need. Will we follow in the footsteps of our Lord and become a compassionate companion of someone who needs the Saviour?

¹⁰ Holt, Simon. 2011. “Eating”, in *The complete book of everyday Christianity*, R. J. Banks and R. Paul Stevens, eds., 322-328. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press

¹¹ Morris, L. (1988). *Luke: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 3, p. 139). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

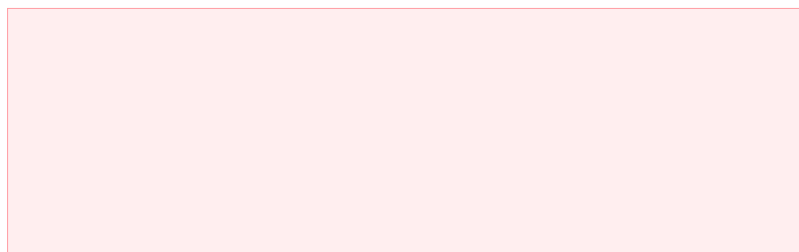
THU
15

Serve a Friend

SCRIPTURE Mark 10:35-45

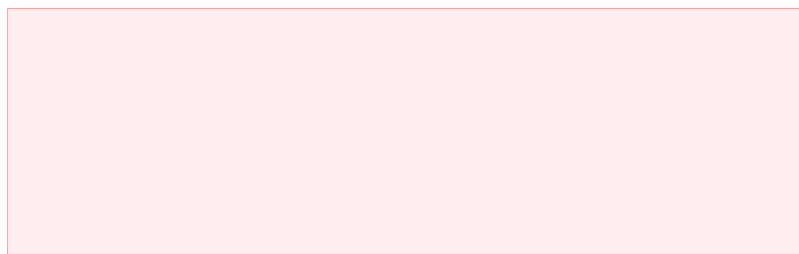
OBSERVATION

How is greatness defined in verses 43 to 44?



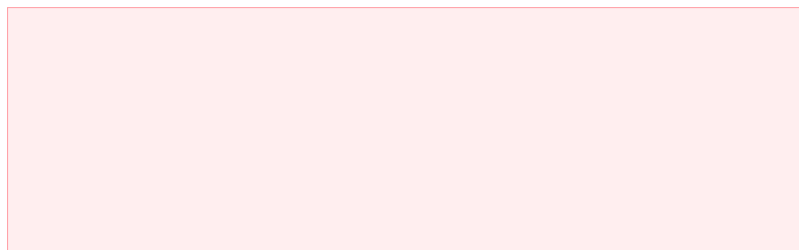
APPPLICATION

Perform an act of kindness that serves the need of a friend or family member.



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 lead our church to serve the community around Covenant EFC, in the love of Christ
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

THE PHRASE “SERVANT LEADERSHIP” WAS COINED BY

Robert K. Greenleaf in 1970.¹² Greenleaf’s model of servant leadership may be applied to secular contexts today, but its roots are found in the life and teaching of Christ, who came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (v.45).

Jesus seized a teachable moment to instruct his disciples about servant leadership. James and John, members of Jesus’s inner circle, had come to him with an audacious request: to be honoured with thrones to the right and left of Jesus when Jesus ushered in the Kingdom of God and was crowned as King (v.37). They were happy to exalt Jesus, as long as they were exalted too! Jesus responded to his disciples’ worldly request by first **rejecting** the world’s system of greatness: “but it shall not be so among you!” (v.43a) Next, he **redefined** being great as becoming a servant, or worse, a slave (v.43b-44). In the Roman Empire, slaves had the lowest status and no rights at all – and seemed like the antithesis of greatness!

Jesus’s teaching on being a servant is profound and profoundly difficult to live out. Yet, if He has commanded it, He will empower us to serve others as He has served us. Will we obey and find practical ways to serve someone today? Not just someone we like and love, but the last, least and the lost? May we thereby point them to the Servant King!

¹² “What is servant leadership?”, *Robert K. Greenleaf Centre for Servant Leadership*, accessed 12 October 2022, <https://www.greenleaf.org/what-is-servant-leadership/>

FRI
16

Share Your Story

SCRIPTURE John 4:27-30, 39-42

OBSERVATION

What did the Samaritan woman do after her conversation with Jesus and what were the effects of her actions?

APPLICATION

Pen down a one- to two-page testimony of God's story in your life that can be shared with someone in five minutes.

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 renewed and refreshed as they reflect on God's story in their lives
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

IT IS USEFUL FOR EVERY DISCIPLE OF CHRIST TO WRITE

down a one- to two-page personal testimony that details what our lives were like before Christ, how we came to know Christ and what changed as a result of knowing Christ. There are two reasons for this.

First, this personal testimony helps us remember. In the hustle and bustle of life, we often get bogged down by so many burdens that we forget the central story of our lives: how we were saved by the Lord and are continually being sanctified. Returning to God's story in our lives helps us to renew our perspective, especially when we go through trying and painful seasons.

Second, this personal testimony may help someone else to encounter Christ. Your personal experience with Christ is irrefutable – it is **your** story. No one can say it didn't happen or isn't true. Your story may give hope to a pre-believing and help that person understand more concretely the difference that Christ makes. The Samaritan woman, having encountered the Lord, went back to her town and told the townspeople – “come, see a man who told me all I ever did.” (v.29). She couldn't keep her life-changing experience of Jesus to herself. And her story went viral! The townspeople left the town and came to Jesus (v.30) and believed in Jesus because of the woman's testimony (v.39). Furthermore, her testimony led many of them to hear the word of the Lord for themselves and therefore believe (vv.41-42). Do not underestimate how God can work through your testimony!

SAT
17

B.L.E.S.S. and Bless the Lord Because You Have Been Blessed

SCRIPTURE Ephesians 1:3-14

OBSERVATION

What are the “spiritual blessings in the heavenly places” (v.3) that Paul lists in this passage?

APPLICATION

Sing a song of praise to the Lord for all His blessings that have been given to you in Christ.

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 be full of the joy of the Lord as they serve, because we are richly blessed in Christ
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

IT'S EASY FOR B.L.E.S.S. OR ANY OTHER EVANGELISM

strategy or tool, to become a mere church programme. We sometimes end up doing B.L.E.S.S. out of a spirit of **compulsion**: because our leaders nag us to. Or worse, we may end up doing B.L.E.S.S. out of a spirit of **competition**: we think we can earn brownie points before God and pat ourselves on the back because we are more diligent in evangelising than “that Christian brother or sister over there”. We forget that salvation is from first to last a gift from the Lord and not a work of man.

The antidote to compulsion and competition is to return frequently to the glorious truth that we ourselves have been BLESSED by God in Christ (v.3). This is not a banal or basic truth; we can spend the rest of our lives – and eternity – discovering its depths. The blessings are abundant! God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before Him (v.4). That means you and I were chosen, before we had any conscious existence (and way before we could respond to Him) to be God’s own special possession! Also, in Christ we have redemption through His blood and the forgiveness of our trespasses (v.7). What a wonder it is to remember that God has forgiven us, and continues to forgive us, though we fail again and again. The only rational response to God’s blessing is to join the Psalmist in exuberant praise: bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! (Psa 103:1)

SUN
18

Sunday Journal

SCRIPTURE

OBSERVATION

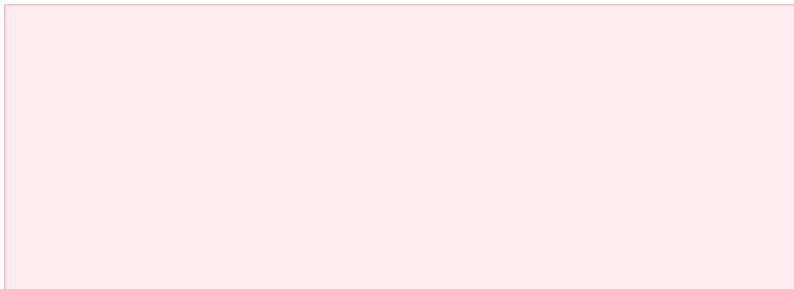
APPLICATION

PRAYER

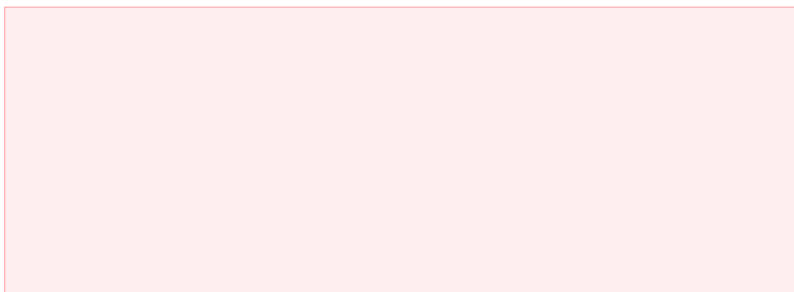
THE PAST WEEK

Review

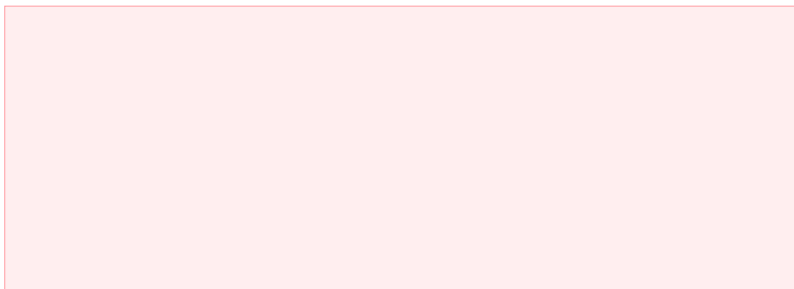
◆ What was my high point and my low point for the week?



◆ What gave me life and what drained me?



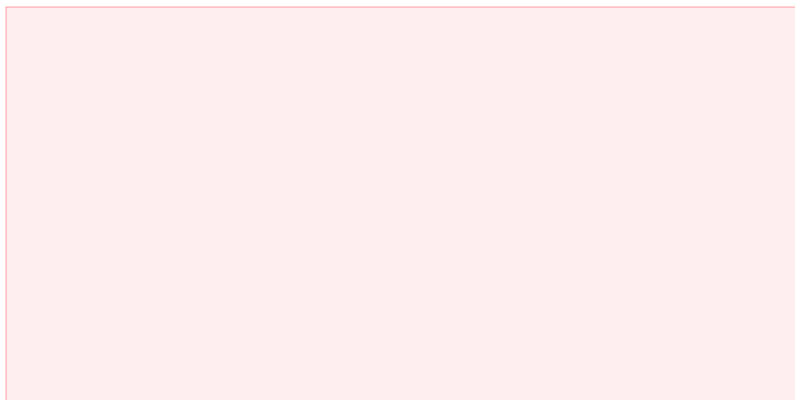
◆ How was the Spirit of God at work?



THE PAST WEEK

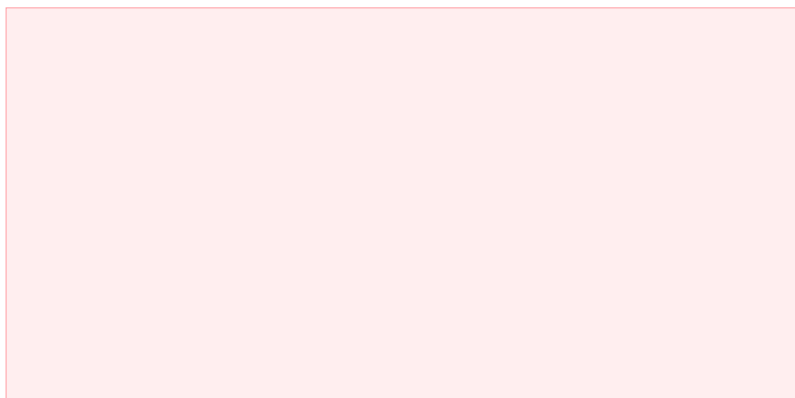
Reflect

- ◆ 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.



Christmas:

Celebrating Jesus,
God's Greatest Gift

Memory Verse

"Today in the town of David a Saviour
has been born to you; he is the Messiah,
the Lord." – Luke 2:11 (NIV)

* Bottom Line

Jesus is the greatest gift.*

 **BIBLE STORY VIDEO**
<https://cefc.ch/22FD12W3>

* Bible Story

Luke 2:1-7 – A Very Special Gift



* Activity

Gifts for All

Props: Strips of paper, pens and items with special significance around the house

Write the names of each family member on separate strips of paper and fold it. Get everyone to randomly pick one strip of paper. Ask everyone to give an item at home which has a special meaning to this person and share why they chose it.

Say, "God loves us so much that He sent His only son to us so that our sins are forgiven. Jesus is the greatest gift God has given to us. It is like the special item we chose for our loved ones. We are God's loved ones!"

* Talk About It

- Do you prefer to receive or give gifts? Why?
- What's the greatest gift you have ever received?
- What do you like about giving someone a gift?
- Why is Jesus the greatest gift to us?

Parents: Share about the best gift you have received. Why was it significant to you?

* Prayer

Thank God for giving us the greatest gift – Jesus! Thank Him for forgiving our sins. Pray that we will learn to be like Jesus who is loving and forgiving.

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Adapted by JoshuaWong/CEFC/December 2022



MON
19

His Story, Our Story

SCRIPTURE Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-3

OBSERVATION

How did Luke describe the purpose of his writing and the way he compiled the story of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke?

APPLICATION

Am I growing in my understanding of God's story through Christ and helping others know with "certainty what they have been taught" (v.4)?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, let me not get so caught up with the festivities as we approach Christmas. Instead, help me to remember the true reason for the season and be ready to share my story of how I came to know you. I bring before you my relatives and friends who still do not know you and pray that they will have a chance to hear about you this Christmas. In your name we pray, amen.

Prayer Pointers

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

DEEPER REFLECTION

LUKE IS A HISTORIAN. LUKE'S CONTRIBUTION CAME AFTER

diligent research. His sources were eyewitnesses with first-hand knowledge of Jesus' life and ministry. Luke's Gospel was historically grounded, accurate and purposeful. If not for Luke, we'll not have the Christmas story of Jesus' birth¹³. If not for Luke, we'll not have some of the stories that augment the Christmas story, and for that matter, the beginning and growth of the early church in Acts.¹⁴ Luke was also a theologian. He wanted to teach the recipients of his Gospel about God and the ways of God through Christ. He was interested in confirming Theophilus in his faith.

Luke can be said to use history to inform his theology. There are distinct emphases: the themes of prayer, salvation and God's special interest in the marginalised people in first-century Jewish Palestine (e.g., the sick, tax-collectors, women and children). Luke also emphasises the work of the Holy Spirit more than the other Synoptic Gospel writers.¹⁵ This has two important applicational implications: (1) We can trust the Bible as historically reliable; and (2) We can share our story. Luke has a story of Jesus and the church (in Acts). If there's a central theme in Luke-Acts, it might be "salvation". Luke-Acts is the story of the "Saviour" (Lk 1:69; 2:11; Acts 5:31; 13:23), the story of those who are being saved (e.g., Lk 19:1-10; Acts 2:47), and traces how salvation extends from Israel to the ends of the earth (Lk 1:77; 2:30; Acts 1:8; 13:47). What's your story? Are you purposefully sharing your redemptive story and how it weaves into the story of Jesus this Christmas?

¹³ Only Matthew, besides Luke, has several verses describing the birth of Jesus; cf. Matthew 1:18-25.

¹⁴ It is almost universally recognised that Luke wrote Acts as a sequel to his Gospel; cf. Luke 1:3 with Acts 1:1.

¹⁵ The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke form the Synoptic Gospels.

TUE
20

The Amazing Plan and Purpose of God in Our Lives

SCRIPTURE Luke 1:5-25

OBSERVATION

Being pious and walking blamelessly as law-abiding Jewish priests did not spare Zechariah and Elizabeth from major disappointments in life (i.e., they were childless).

APPLICATION

Do I faithfully serve God in the face of setbacks and disappointments whether in life or in 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 pastors and staff: To have a close walk with God and strong relationships as they serve together
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF JOHN THE BAPTIST'S BIRTH IS

part of God's grand plan for Israel and signals the renewed activity of God to his people promised in the Old Testament. This concerns the promised coming of Jesus (2 Sam 7:12-13, 16), the One John will precede as forerunner (vv.16-17, 76; cf. Mal 4:5-6). Although God is concerned about fulfilling his promises to Israel (at the national level), he is also meeting the personal needs of a righteous couple in Zechariah and Elizabeth (at a personal level).

In the birth narratives, Luke introduces the parents of John the Baptist as pious, law-abiding Jews faithfully serving as priests despite Elizabeth's barrenness. Zechariah is at the high point of his priestly career when chosen by lot to offer incense in the holy place of the temple.¹⁶ As he does so, the angel Gabriel appears and announces the promise of a son to him and his wife in their advanced years; this child is to be called John, who will turn many in Israel back to the Lord and "make ready" a people prepared for the Lord (vv.16-17). Although Zechariah had been praying for a child for many years (v.13), he was unable to immediately believe that his prayers had been answered (v.20). The fulfilment of God's plan is not contingent on Zechariah's ability to trust God for what he prayed for. Zechariah's prayer had evidently made a difference as God had heard his prayers (v.13). This is the mystery and invitation of prayer: we persevere in prayer (human responsibility) and God will always still accomplish his good purpose in our lives (divine sovereignty).

¹⁶ Probably only once in a lifetime does a serving priest get chosen by lot for the honor to offer incense in the holy place; cf. *m. Tamid* 5:2-6:3.

WED
21

Submission and Trust in the Goodness of God

SCRIPTURE Luke 1:26-56

OBSERVATION

In the face of much uncertainty and confusion, Mary was willing to submit to the will of God for her life (v.38).

APPLICATION

Is God wanting me to submit to him in obedience and trust in some area of my life?

PRAYER

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

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for leaders
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for the Generations: That parents will be godly role models and see discipleship of their children as their primary responsibility and have creativity and wisdom to do it effectively in their homes
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

THE ANGEL GABRIEL SIMILARLY APPEARED TO MARY, A young maiden betrothed to be married. His announcement must have been disturbing, as she was told that she'll be pregnant with child when she had not known any man. Besides, this was no ordinary child. He will be "great" and "called the Son of the Most High (God)" (v.32). And the Lord God will give to him the "throne of his father David...and his kingdom there will be no end" (v.33).

It's usually easier to submit to God's will when you understand what it entails; but it's less easy to do so when the journey ahead is less clear. What will her betrothed think when he finds out that she is pregnant with child (though not his)? Will she forfeit her marriage and be ostracised by her community? As Christians, we're sometimes challenged to follow the Lord's will when personal sacrifices are called upon and obedience to the Lord may bring hardships and fears, whether real or imagined. In such times, truly knowing who God is and putting our faith in His goodness and grace will help us submit to Him (cf. vv.46-55). Also, God often uses significant people to encourage us: like an Elizabeth who is ahead of Mary in her lived experience. When Mary came to her, Elizabeth was "filled with the Holy Spirit" and remarked to Mary that she will be "blessed" when she "believed" that the Lord would fulfil His word to her (v.45). That's why we all need a community like a CG and godly mentors who can share how they've navigated life's challenges as Christians.



**SCAN OR CLICK
TO LISTEN TO THE SONG!**

Be Born in Me (Mary) by Francesca Battistelli

THU
22

Fulfilling Our Roles in the Kingdom of God

SCRIPTURE Luke 1:57-80

OBSERVATION

John the Baptist's birth, recognised as remarkable and having the Lord's favor, was essentially to prepare the way for another, Jesus Christ himself (v.76).

APPLICATION

Am I readying myself, like John the Baptist, to "make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Lk 1:17) through praying, studying and teaching the Word as we await the coming of King Jesus?

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 effective strategies and the right motivation to lead our church to proclaim the Gospel to unbelievers and disciple the nations
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

THE PARALLEL ACCOUNTS OF JOHN (THE BAPTIST) AND

Jesus follow the prologue: the **prophecy** of the birth of John is followed by the **prophecy** of Jesus' birth; the birth of John (vv.57-66) has a parallel in the birth of Jesus (Lk 2:1-21); Mary's Song – the Magnificat (“glorifies”) – is paralleled in Zechariah's Song – the Benedictus (“praise be”). Why the precedence of John the Baptist over Jesus in their birth accounts? If the Gospels are essentially a record of Jesus' life and ministry, why did Luke start his birth narratives with the prophecy of the birth of John the Baptist?

Perhaps one explanation is this: John the Baptist is intentionally depicted as the one who has come to fulfil his role as the **forerunner** of Jesus the Christ, as promised in Scripture (Lk 1:17, 76; cf. Matt 3:1-3). This is certainly plausible in view of Luke's description of how he carefully researched and thoughtfully recorded eyewitness testimonies (the text reads “carefully and methodically write” in the original Greek language); cf. Luke 1:1-4. If correct, this has several implications: (1) John the Baptist's precursory role was clearly articulated in God's plan; (2) John fulfilled his given role without comparison nor complaint (see Matt 3:11-12; Jn 3:30); and (3) John came to reconcile fathers to children, make wise the disobedient and to “make ready for the Lord a people prepared”. Do we know and are actively and joyfully fulfilling our God-given roles in the Kingdom of God? Are we readying ourselves and others to meet King Jesus? It may simply be sharing our story this Christmas. Let's be ready!

FRI
23

Songs That Mark Our Lives

SCRIPTURE Luke 1:46-55, 67-79; 2:22-40

OBSERVATION

Whether it was Mary, Zechariah, Simeon or Anna, they all sang songs of salvation concerning the coming of the Christ-child, the fulfilment of the long-awaited promise of the God of Israel.

APPPLICATION

Do I intuitively turn to Scriptures to connect the blessings of God – or indeed life's circumstances – to what God is saying to me as a disciple of Christ?

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 as authentic disciples, mature in Christlike character and effective in leading others to grow spiritually
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

LUKE'S INFANCY NARRATIVE FOCUSES ON THE INTERTWINING

destinies of Jesus and John the Baptist. The stories of their births are extended into three hymns of praise in Mary's "Magnificat", Zechariah's "Benedictus" and Simeon's "Nunc Dimittis". These songs focus on the hope of Israel's restoration, the joy of eschatological salvation and identification of Jesus as the promised Davidic Messianic-Saviour. Mary's song is a hymn of praise and thanksgiving, an expression of trust in God. These three songs in Luke's infancy narratives are full of theology, instructing us on the nature of God and what he has done (e.g., God is Saviour, compassionate, mighty and holy).

What about us? Do we have songs that are theologically rich and shape the fabric of our devotional life? Do we have songs that inform us about God's character and serve to anchor our lives in good times and in challenging times? Reverend Dr David Wong, veteran pastor and respected author and leader in church circles in Singapore, recently shared with a group of pastors that he has a song each year to anchor his life and ministry. This is a wonderful practice as it serves as a compass for God's guidance and provides comfort and encouragement in times when God's grace is needed the most. What about you? Do you have some special Scripture or a song or two that mark your life as milestones of God's grace and goodness? Begin to ask God for these Scriptural texts (that we can memorise) and songs (that we may regularly sing) to mark your life.

SAT
24

The Christ of Christmas Is for Everyone

SCRIPTURE Luke 2:1-21

OBSERVATION

Though often overlooked in their time, humble shepherds were the first recipients of this “good news of great joy” that “a Saviour is born in the city of David, who is Christ the Lord”.

APPPLICATION

Do we celebrate the joy of Christmas without any thought of those who may be left out during this festive season?

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 be united and wise in deliberating decisions and formulating church policies as we face a changing and challenging future ahead
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

CHRISTMAS IS MEANT TO BE A JOYOUS TIME OF THE YEAR.

But it is also a most difficult time of the year for many people: the destitute, the sick, the prisoners and foreigners who are unable to return home to be with loved ones. In verses 1 to 21, we read about the angelic hosts appearing in glory and proclaiming the Good News of the Saviour’s birth to lowly shepherds.¹⁷ They were told that the birth of the Christ-child had taken place, but not in a palace or amidst pomp and pageantry. The shepherds immediately and hastily left to witness the nativity scene in Bethlehem for themselves.

The simplicity of the scene of “a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger” was remarkably inviting for these shepherds, if nothing else for its ordinariness. Yes, the story behind Christmas is **remarkable** though a **simple** one. It is **remarkable** because God chose to become a human being and came as a humble infant to an ordinary Jewish family. Perhaps the majestic hymn of praise by the heavenly hosts to signal the coming of this Christ-Child (vv.13-14) is this: to underscore that this infant Jesus is no less divine even though he chose to be “born in the likeness of a human” (Phil 2:5-11; cf. Col 1:15-20). The Christmas story is also a **simple** one: on Christmas day “is born in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord” (v.11). Let’s take every opportunity to share the joy of this “good news” with everyone, especially with those who are often overlooked in our midst. Be blessed this Christmas!

¹⁷ It is a well-known theological emphasis of Luke to focus on the poor, the needy and the marginalised people in his Gospel.

SUN
25

Sunday Journal

SCRIPTURE

OBSERVATION

APPLICATION

PRAYER

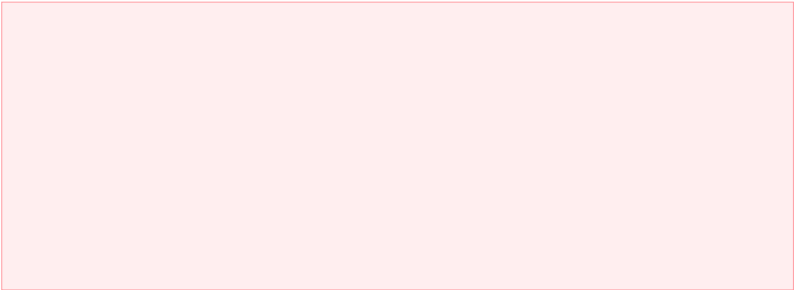
THE PAST WEEK

Review

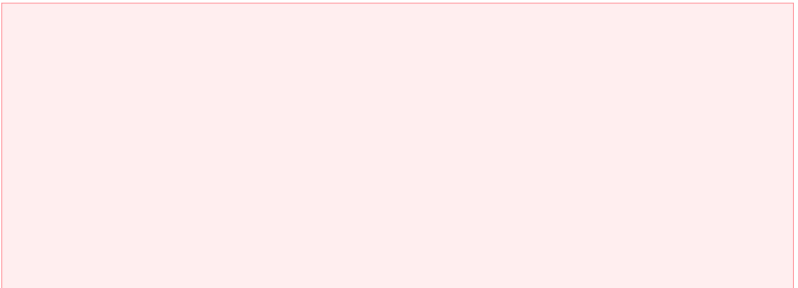
◆ What was my high point and my low point for the week?



◆ What gave me life and what drained me?



◆ How was the Spirit of God at work?



THE PAST WEEK

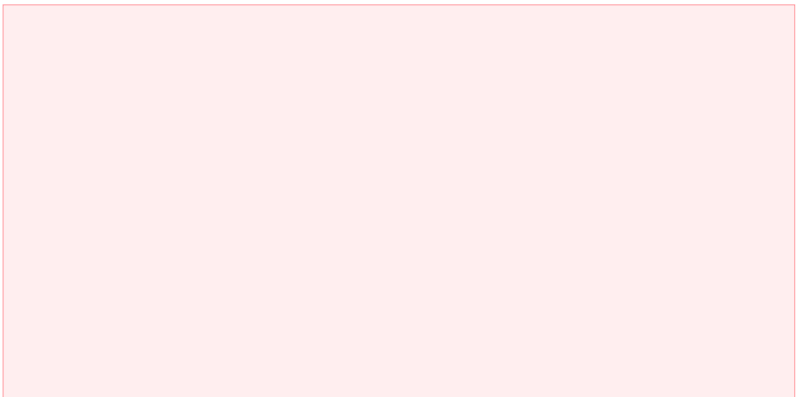
Reflect

- ◆ 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

Christmas:

Celebrating Jesus,
God's Greatest Gift

Memory Verse

"Today in the town of David a Saviour
has been born to you; he is the Messiah,
the Lord." – Luke 2:11 (NIV)

* Bottom Line

The Good News is for everyone.*


BIBLE STORY VIDEO
<https://cefc.ch/22FD12W4>

* Bible Story

Luke 2:8-20 – Over the Hills and Everywhere



* Activity

The Good News

Props: Drawing/writing/painting materials and a large piece of white paper

Discuss with your family members what the Good News means. Gather everyone to create a painting, drawing or a piece of writing about The Good News. Decide how the Good News can be shared through painting, drawing or writing to others.

Say, "When Jesus came to Earth, He gave the people hope! The hope Jesus gives to us is forever. Through Jesus, we are saved from sin and have this close relationship with Him. As followers of God, we are to share the Good News with many more."

* Talk About It

- What is the Good News?
- Why does it matter whether or not we share the Good News?
- Does anything hold you back from telling people about Jesus? If so, why?

Parents: Share an experience in which you shared the Good News with someone. What challenges did you face? What went well? What could you have done better? How was God involved in this experience?

* Prayer

Pray for God's wisdom and courage to share the Good News with others so that more will know His name and glory.

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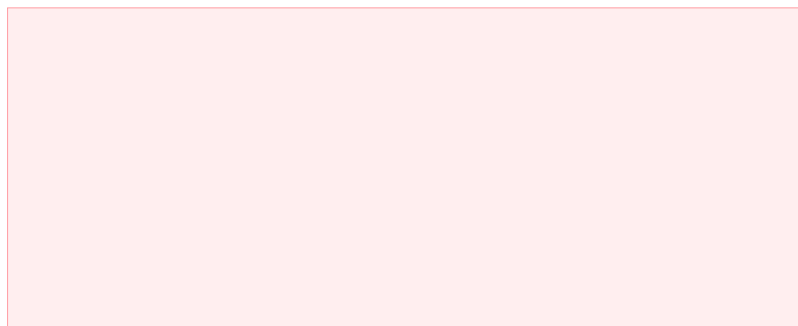
MON
26

The Hand of God in Creation

SCRIPTURE Isaiah 48:12-13; Job 12:7-10; Psalm 8:1-4

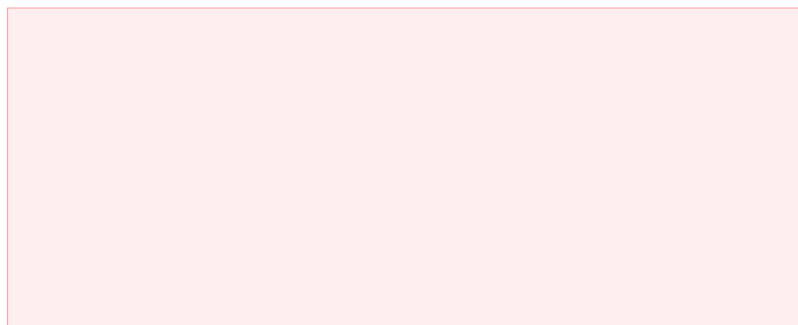
OBSERVATION

What do these passages tell us about God as Creator?



APPLICATION

Take a short walk and intentionally observe nature and life around you, and praise the Lord who created all things by His mighty hand.



PRAYER

Dear God, how majestic is Your name in all the earth. Your hands that flung stars into space stoops to wash undeserving feet. I worship You as Creator of all; I praise You for the work of Your hands; I thank You for Your bountiful care. Help me to remember You my Maker, even today, and to cast my cares into Your hands.

Prayer Pointers

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

DEEPER REFLECTION

All things bright and beautiful,
 All creatures great and small,
 All things wise and wonderful,
 The Lord God made them all.

Each little flower that opens,
 Each little bird that sings,
 God made their glowing colours,
 God made their tiny wings.

God gave us eyes to see them,
 And lips that we might tell:
 How great is God Almighty,
 Who has done all things well.¹⁸



**SCAN OR CLICK
 TO LISTEN TO THE SONG!**

All Things Bright and Beautiful by John Rutter,
 The Cambridge Singers, City of London Sinfonia

“According to Scripture, the world we live in is God’s creation. It is the visual, fragrant, audible, touchable and tastable manifestation of God’s love.”¹⁹ “For in [the Messiah] all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things *hold together* (Col 1:16-17).”

¹⁸ Extract “All Things Bright and Beautiful”, by Cecil Frances Alexander (1848), Public domain.

¹⁹ Norman Wirzba, *From Nature to Creation: A Christian Vision for Understanding and Loving Our World* (Baker Academic, 2015), 31.

TUE
27

The Hand of God Against Sin

SCRIPTURE Psalm 75:6-8; Genesis 2:16; 3:6; Jeremiah 15:1-7

OBSERVATION

How do these passages define sin?

APPLICATION

As we come to the close of the year, reflect on whether there is any area of sin in your life that you need to repent of.

PRAYER

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

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for pastors and staff: To reconsecrate their lives in holiness before God as we prepare for 2023
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

GENESIS 3:6 DOES NOT MENTION ANY HANDS, BUT YOU CAN use your imagination to trace the actions. The woman **took** some of the fruit from the tree that God had forbidden and **ate** it. She also *gave* some to her husband and he **ate** it. Each one of these actions portrays human hands exalted up against the will of God, thus incurring the wrath of God, in whose hands are the cup of judgment (v.8).

This cup of judgment is still being poured out against sin today. In Hebrew, the second half of Jeremiah 15:6 says literally to God's disobedient covenantal people, "**My hand is stretched out** against you and I will ruin you." Our God does not condone sin, for sin ruins His good creation and purposes. He must act against sin.

Amazingly, God's action against sin leads Him to take upon Himself the burden of sin. In a passage that reminds us of Genesis 3:6, Paul in Philippians 2:6 describes Jesus the Messiah as not considering equality with God something to be **grasped** or **taken**. He has done it for us, and died on the cross to resolve the problem of sin. God struck Himself with His powerful hand against sin, for the judgment and salvation of the world.

WED
28

The Hand of God in Covenantal Relationship

SCRIPTURE Exodus 15:1-6; Deuteronomy 7:7-9; Psalm 136:10-12

OBSERVATION

What did the Lord's hand do for the Israelites?

APPPLICATION

Reflect on how you have seen the providential hand of God in your life this year.

PRAYER

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

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for leaders
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for the Generations: To be united in practical love and deep relationships with each other, because we all share a covenantal relationship with our God
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

THE THREE PASSAGES SPEAK OF GOD’S DELIVERANCE OF the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. In the broader picture, God was calling out a people that they may worship Him and follow His ways. This is the meaning of being in a covenant – bringing what was once non-family to become family. Isn’t it incredible that our God yearns to bring us into a covenant with Himself?

Creation once began in covenant with God, but because of humanity’s rebellion, fell out of that covenant and was separated from God. Yet, through the Biblical story, God repeatedly initiates covenants – with Noah and all creation, with Abraham, with Moses and the Israelites and with David – all as part of a grand plan to reconcile all things to Himself. This plan finally leads to the New Covenant, where salvation is extended to all, whether Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female (Gal 3:28).

So together we sing with Moses and the Israelites, “The LORD is my strength and my defense; He has become my salvation. He is my God, I will praise Him, my father’s God, and I will exalt Him (v.2).”

THU
29

The Hand of God in Jesus Christ

SCRIPTURE John 20:26-28; Psalm 31:1-5, 14-18

OBSERVATION

Where do you find the hand of God in these passages?

APPLICATION

What does it mean for you to personally commit your time and spirit into God's hands?

PRAYER

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

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for Outreach/Missions/New Life leaders: To be sensitive to the Lord's leading and courageously walk into open doors so that the Gospel can be proclaimed in word and in deed
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

I LOVE THE PICTURE OF THOMAS PUTTING HIS FINGER

into the nail-holes in Jesus' hands. John has set up from the beginning of his Gospel account that Jesus is none other than YHWH God-in-the-flesh (e.g., Jn 1:1,18). John's readers thus must interpret Jesus no less than God throughout the 21 chapters. Here, it is the God of the universe standing before a man, offering His hands to be inspected by a man. The same hands of God hung from the cross, nailed there by the hands of man.

What glorious mystery! The world created and sustained by God's hands for His purpose is now once more committed into God's hands for its redemption. And our God in humility offers his hands to us and says "come, take a look." There is only one pair of hands worthy to hold the universe together and He has done it.

There is additional mystery. The man hanging from the cross cries out to God in Luke 23:46, quoting Psalm 31:5 – "Father, into Your hands I commit my Spirit." Unspoken is the second half of Psalm 31:5 – "Deliver me, LORD, my **faithful** God." Because of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, who was **not** delivered from death for our sakes, today we can say together with the Psalmist, "I trust in You, LORD; I say, 'You are my God.' My times are in Your hand (Psa 31:14-15)."

FRI
30

The Hand of God Through the Church

SCRIPTURE Acts 4:27-31; 5:12-14; 11:19-21

OBSERVATION

What do you see the hand of God doing through the church in these passages?

APPLICATION

How might God want you to participate in building His church and proclaiming the Gospel in the coming year?

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 find joy and refreshment in serving, and that the Lord's hand might be with them to provide wisdom, patience and love for the people under their care
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

IN GREEK, ACTS 5:12 BEGINS WITH “THROUGH THE HANDS OF the apostles, many signs and wonders were performed...”. Consider how this parallels and yet differs from verse 30, where the believers pray for the hand of God to be stretched out to perform healing and signs and wonders through the name of God's holy servant Jesus. The implication should be obvious – Jesus' ministry is now continued through the church, that is, you and me.

Acts 11:21 gives us a little bit more insight. The Gospel has spread to Antioch as the disciples were scattered due to persecution and the church was growing there. The reason given by Luke (who wrote Acts) is simply: “The Lord's hand was with them.” God's kingdom work is not finished on the cross. It continues in the life of the Church, which is the body of Christ. We are the hands and feet and mouths that Jesus has entrusted to continue His work until He comes again.

Yet we do not do it in our own strength, but by the strength of God's own hand. The same hands that shaped creation, are stretched out against sin, extended to us in covenant, nailed to the cross for redemption and is now upon believers in Jesus Christ, so that God's purposes continue to march forward. What a privilege, what a task. Lord, have mercy on us!

SAT
31

The Hand of God in Fulfilling God's Purposes

SCRIPTURE Revelation 5:1-10; 21:1-8

OBSERVATION

Use a little imagination once more – where do you see the hand of God in verses 1 to 10?

APPLICATION

What feelings does Revelation 21:1-8 evoke within you as you meditate on it and why?

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 have godly wisdom to lead Covenant EFC well in navigating changing circumstances and cultures as we enter into another year, faithfully committing the future into God's hands
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

TYPICALLY, SCROLLS ARE NEITHER WRITTEN ON BOTH SIDES, nor sealed with seven seals (although we do have one archaeological example of it).²⁰ With these two descriptions, John the Seer immediately understands that the scroll contains heavenly business, held in the right hand of God, concerning God's purposes for all of creation. So John weeps when no one can open the scroll – it means that God's purposes cannot be fulfilled. Everything is futile.

However, someone steps up. The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, who is also the slain Lamb. Jesus the Messiah is worthy! In another mysterious juxtaposition, the Son of God, who is Himself God, takes the scroll from the hand of God on the throne, while all creation and all peoples fall down in worship.

Revelation 6 to 19 tells of the events associated with the opening of the scroll, where we see judgment intermingled with salvation. God's people triumph by patient endurance and faithfulness (Rev 13:10), by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony, not loving their lives even unto death (Rev 12:11). In doing so, they prove themselves true followers of the slain Lamb – a strange triumph.

Until in Revelation 21:1-8 we catch a glimpse of the glorious purposes written in the scroll – a new heaven and new earth. A new creation, the new Jerusalem, coming down to earth out of heaven. Like it was at the beginning in Eden, God once more fully dwells among His faithful people, while anything unholy is destroyed. God's purposes, fulfilled by the hand of God! "Amen, come Lord Jesus!" (Rev 22:20).

²⁰ Clinton E. Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 283-284.

NOTES

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NOTES

A large, empty rectangular box with a light pink background and a thin red border, intended for taking notes.

NOTES

A large, empty rectangular area with a light pink background and a thin red border, intended for writing notes.

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