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# 2023

## devotional journal

*If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.*

**DANIEL 3:17-18 (ESV)**



# april

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2023  
devotional journal

april

*If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.*

**DANIEL 3:17-18 (ESV)**

**JANUARY**

But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself.

***Daniel 1:8 (ESV)***

**FEBRUARY**

As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

***Daniel 1:17 (ESV)***

**MARCH**

He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding

***Daniel 2:21 (ESV)***

**APRIL**

If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.

***Daniel 3:17-18 (ESV)***

**MAY**

How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures from generation to generation.

***Daniel 4:3 (ESV)***

**JUNE**

He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions.

***Daniel 6:27 (ESV)***

**JULY**

And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

***Daniel 7:14 (ESV)***

**AUGUST**

And the kingdom and dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.

***Daniel 7:27 (ESV)***

**SEPTEMBER**

O Lord, hear; O Lord; forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name.

***Daniel 9:19 (ESV)***

**OCTOBER**

Then he said to me, "Fear not Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard and I have come because of your words."

***Daniel 10:12 (ESV)***

**NOVEMBER**

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

***Daniel 12:2 (ESV)***

**DECEMBER**

And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

***Daniel 12:3 (ESV)***

# preparing to meet king jesus: into your hands

Since 2021, our theological burden and impetus towards Vision 2028 & Beyond is Preparing to Meet King Jesus. Every year, we also ask God to show us a specific spiritual emphasis that we must pay attention to as we continue in our mission. For this year, it is **Preparing to Meet King Jesus: Into Your Hands.**

Hence, we will be studying the Old Testament book of Daniel this year.

The phrase "Into Your Hands" was inspired by Daniel 6:26-27, which reads: "I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end. He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions."

As the lyrics of the song "Ancient of Days" by CityALight declares, "Though the nations rage, kingdoms rise and fall, there is still one King, reigning over all. So I will not fear for this truth remains: That my God is the Ancient of Days." Indeed, just as every king and every kingdom are ultimately in the sovereign hands of God, we entrust ourselves into the hands of God.

As we entrust **ourselves** – every leader, child, marriage, family and every generation – into God's Hands, let us also entrust **our mission** to make disciples into His hands.

Salvation is no small thing. We have a mission to be witnesses and we must act with a sense of urgency. Will we be found sleeping on our watch? May we not forget our call and mission as the Church – to be witnesses for Christ.

*May you entrust yourself into  
His sovereign hand daily as you  
prepare to meet King Jesus!*

## **Into His Hands: We Pray and Obey**

As disciples of Christ, how do we submit our lives, our families and our mission into the sovereign hand of God? We follow His leading, as we simply pray and obey. Whatever circumstance we are going through – in our family or work – let's pray and obey the Lord's leading. Whatever sphere of influence that we can be salt and light, let's pray and obey the Lord's leading. Whoever God brings across our path to share the Gospel, let's pray and obey the Lord's leading.

Based upon our core values, may we fulfil our mission through the 3 Faith Exploits anchored on Jesus' Great Commandment (Matt 22:36-40) and Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20)!

## **Our Core Values:**

- Truth centred upon the Word of God
- Community centred upon the worship of God
- Stewardship centred upon the will of God

- Balance centred upon the wisdom of God
- Brokenness centred upon the way of God

## **Our Mission:**

Returning the Church to its discipling mission through authentic discipleship and intentional discipling so as to reproduce disciples of a certain kind and to multiply them to win the world for Christ!

## **Our 3 Faith Exploits:**

1. Disciple the Generations
2. Disciple Singapore
3. Disciple the Nations

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. May you entrust yourself into His sovereign hand daily as you prepare to meet King Jesus!

## **In Christ,**

Rev Tan Kay Kiong and  
Rev Tony Yeo

senior pastors,

foreword

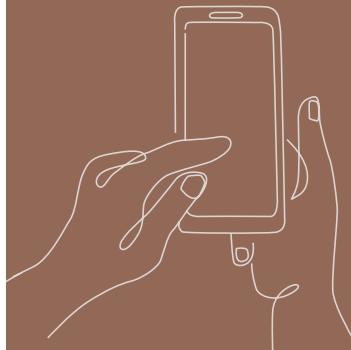
# guide to using this devotional journal

## 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.
- Ask God to open your heart to hear Him.

## 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!



You can continue to 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.

## 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 2023

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.

step one

step two

# pray for east asia

*“...for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.”*

**1 CORINTHIANS 16:9 (ESV)**

**T**herefore, we must pray! Within the East Asia region, Covenant Missions currently prays for and does work in several countries. The main goal for East Asia’s work plan is to grow Disciplemaking Church Plants (DCPs). Our approach is to share the Gospel and make disciples through small groups.

## PRAY FOR

### Mongolia:

- That PDW, the country coordinator for Mongolia, will be able to manage his responsibilities amidst a busy work schedule.
- For a suitable local partner to run the Intentional Disciplemaking Church (IDMC) Conference 2023 in Mongolia.
- For a suitable partner to publish Reverend Edmund Chan’s book, *Mentoring Paradigms*, in Mongolian (the translation was completed some time ago).

### Taiwan:

- For a country coordinator for Taiwan.
- For the formation of a working committee to grow DCPs in Taiwan.
- For God to raise up Covenanters who are willing to go and serve on the ground.

- For continued engagement with existing Taipei IDMC partners and the outcome of various ones starting DCPs in smaller towns or cities.

### Japan:

- Thank God for providing sister Mie as the country coordinator and for bringing together the working committee.
- Thank God for confirming the macro direction for our work in Japan. That God will guide and empower Covenant EFC:
  - a) To plant DCPs through building friendships, sharing the Good News of Jesus and making disciples
  - b) To work with His appointed contacts in the Greater Tokyo area
  - c) To build friendships with young Japanese unbelievers around 35 years old or below.
- For God to raise up and empower Covenanters who will go to Japan to both work as marketplace personnel and be the pioneers of DCPs.

### An East Asian Country:

- For three new DCPs in the megacities by the end of 2023.
- For God’s protection and empowering for sisters C1 and C2 who live and minister in the country. For God to give them wisdom and courage to navigate an extremely restrictive regime.
- For God’s leading in our exploration with local partners to start three new DCPs in the northwest of this country where the harvest is plentiful.
- For Covenant Missions to effectively deliver online discipleship content from IDMC Conference 2022 to our local partners and Christian networks by May 2023.
- For the safety and health of brother C3 as he continues to conduct training both in person and via Zoom for church leaders in this East Asian country.

saturday

01

## Discipleship Focuses in Discipleship Trials

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 3:24-30

### OBSERVATION

What significant observations can make in Nebuchadnezzar's acknowledgement of God in verses 28 to 29?

### APPLICATION

What areas in my life do I need to learn to put my trust in God?

### PRAYER

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

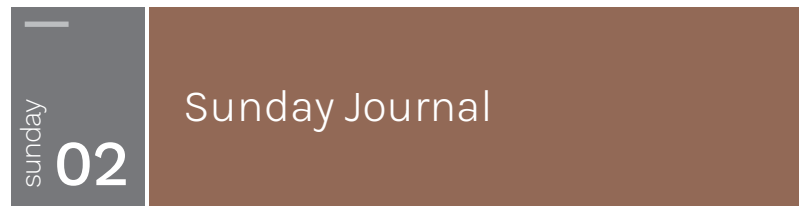
prayer pointers

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for Church Board: To grow in trust in God from strength to strength
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**T**he miraculous deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the blazing furnace resulted in Nebuchadnezzar acknowledging “the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego” (vv.26, 28-29). This pagan acknowledgement of God highlights five discipleship focuses in discipleship trials.

**Commitment of God:** The expression, “the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego” (vv.28, 29), points to God’s covenant relationship with the three youths, which is fundamentally marked by God’s faithful commitment to them. And their commitment to God as “servants of the Most High God” (v.26) stands on the divine commitment. **Trust in God:** The three youths “put their trust in Him” (v.28). We can trust in God because of His commitment to us as “our God” (Dan 3:17). Trusting in God means we “do not lean on your own understanding” and “do not be wise in your own eyes” (Prov 3:5-7). Hence, to trust in God is to live by the **Word of God**. The faithful trio “trust in Him” by “violating the king’s command” to worship his golden statute (v.28). In so doing, they obeyed God’s command to worship no other god “except their own God” (v.28; Exo 20:3). Living in the world, we are often caught in the contest between the word of men and the Word of God. **Sacrifice to God:** “they yielded up their bodies” (v.28). Fundamental in biblical discipleship is “present your bodies” to God “as a living sacrifice” (Rom 12:1). This is what worship is. Therefore, central in biblical discipleship is the **glory of God**: “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego” (v.28).



## 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.



## Week 1 FAMILY DEVOTIONAL

### HUMILITY:

Putting others first by giving up what you think you deserve.

#### Memory Verse

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves" – Philippians 2:3 (NIV)

#### 1 Bottom Line

Jesus put others first.\*

#### 2 Bible Story

John 13:1-17 – Washing His Disciples' Feet

#### 3 Activity

##### Serving Others First

Props: A variety of dishes at home or in a restaurant

Practise serving others first. Get each family member to take turns scooping food from the dishes onto another person's plate. Let the other person eat first before you eat your share. After the activity, get everyone to talk about their experiences.

Say, "Jesus is more powerful than anyone in this world, yet he knelt and washed the disciples' feet. He did it because He loved them. As His followers, we ought to learn to be Christ-like even if it is hard. When we put others first, we bring joy and peace to them. That brings joy and peace to us too. Most importantly, others experience God's love through our actions."

#### 4 Talk About It

- What lesson was Jesus trying to teach the disciples by washing their feet?
- How have you put someone else first recently?
- Why do you think some people are easier to put first than others?
- Why do you think it's so hard to put others first?

**Parents:** Share an experience in which your needs were put first or when you found joy putting the needs of others first. How did you feel on either occasion? How does that change the way you act towards yourself or others?

#### 5 Prayer

Pray that God will give us opportunities to learn to put others first, so that His love will be glorified through our actions.

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Adapted by JoshuaWong/CEFC/April 2023



Click or scan this QR code for this week's Bible story video!

monday  
03

# History in the Cradle of Destiny

**SCRIPTURE** Genesis 2:1-25

## OBSERVATION

In what ways do you see that creation has potential (“potential” is defined as “having or showing the capacity to develop into something in the future”)?

## APPLICATION

In what ways has God created me unique and with potential, and how might He be calling me to use that to serve Him?

## PRAYER

Dear Lord God, You hold all of history and destiny in Your hands. You created everything with good potential. You created me with good potential. Please fill me with Your Spirit afresh each day, that I may live for You and bear witness to Your majesty in all that I think, do and say. Thank You for loving me and that in You I have a steadfast hope. Amen.



prayer pointers

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

## deeper reflection

Verses 1 to 3 actually belong with the preceding chapter. It speaks of God “resting” after completing the creation of the heavens and the earth – this language in the ancient world pictures God as the divine king taking up residence in His divine temple-palace (the world) which He has finished constructing.<sup>3</sup> The world is ready, primed for its destiny, at the beginning of biblical history.

And what a destiny! There is life – life that can be fruitful and multiply. Verses 4 to 25 tell us that there are bountiful resources flowing to the four corners of the earth. Not only are there vegetation, animals, livestock and birds, but also human partners as God’s representative images to steward creation (cf. Gen 1:26). God’s human partners are given the capacity to be fruitful and multiply (cf. Gen 1:27-28), along with the rest of God’s good creation.

Embedded within the narrative is what biblical scholars call the creation and cultural mandates. Humanity is to be fruitful, multiply, steward and cultivate the earth as God’s image-bearers. We are to be co-creators with God in the work that we do in His created world – including the creation of godly culture and the explorations in arts and sciences – using resources well for the mutual flourishing of all humanity and creation.

The garden of Eden was a very good place, but it was not finished. God’s reign was to be extended through His human images to the ends of the earth. It was merely the beginning, full of potential; the beginning of history cradled within a good and glorious destiny.

<sup>1</sup> Taken from the Google English dictionary, provided by Oxford Languages.

<sup>2</sup> John H. Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, Volume 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 23.

tuesday

04

## History Derailed from Destiny

**SCRIPTURE** Romans 1:18-2:11**OBSERVATION**

What is the shocking contrast between today's Scripture passage and the picture we saw in yesterday's passage?

**APPLICATION**

Spend a few moments in silence meditating on the utter holiness of God, then do as the Holy Spirit leads or prompts you.

**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 themselves to God, that they may know His grace, power and leading to fulfil His calling individually and as a church
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**P**aul's list of indictments in verses 21 to 31 is long. I wonder, as you were reading, how many of them you felt apply to you. I find myself guilty among those who continue to do the very things we know that God does not approve of (v.32).

Perhaps we, as Christians, have tended to underestimate or underdefine sin. Perhaps we, as Christians, are too eager to brush aside sin and appeal to the grace of God. Perhaps we, as Christians, have forgotten the wrath of God (Rom 2:1-11). Perhaps we, as Christians, have undermined the Gospel of grace by omitting true repentance and sincere faith.

Perhaps we, as Christians, have not let the fact sink in, that sin has derailed history from its glorious destiny. And that we are part of it, having no excuse.

Biblical scholar Don Carson's little-known collaborative song with Sandra McCracken has lyrics which are appropriate for our reflection and prayer:

I used to nurture bitterness,  
To count up every slight.  
The world's a moral wilderness,  
And I have felt its blight.  
Self-pity ruled, resentment reigned;  
No one understood my pain.  
I spiraled down in murky night,  
Insisting that I had the right  
To hate and hate again.

I am ashamed;  
O, my Lord, forgive.



Click or scan this  
QR code to listen  
to the song.

wednesday

05

## History as the Theatre of Destiny

**SCRIPTURE** Genesis 50:15-26

### OBSERVATION

What do you recall is the historical backdrop, the context behind Joseph's declaration in verse 20?

### APPLICATION

Recalling my past and considering my present, what redemptive work do I see God doing in my life?

### PRAYER

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

prayer pointers

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for leaders
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for the Nations: That God will work through the tough and good times, through His people, to accomplish His mission of saving many lives
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

Joseph could have held a grudge. His brothers certainly thought so (v.15). Sure, Joseph was partly at fault for his brothers' jealousy. But it was not easy to forget the personal betrayal and rejection, the loneliness and pain of separation from family, the grief that his father had to go through, and the hard years spent in prison suffering the loss of freedom. Not even when Joseph became the second most powerful man in all of Egypt (Gen 41:41-44).

Yet Joseph chose to forgive his brothers. However, Joseph's remarkable response was not merely a matter of "Oh it's all ok, look at where I am now!", "Let's just let bygones be bygones", "We're still family after all" or "I'll be nice to you to honour the memory of our dead father". Instead, Joseph realised that despite human sin and the messiness of all that had happened, God continued to remain in careful control not just over Joseph personally and over Jacob's family, but over the "many lives" (including Egyptian) that have been saved by Joseph's coming to Egypt.

Joseph's confidence in God's sovereignty and promises led him to ask the Israelites to swear an oath that they would carry his bones from Egypt back to the promised land of Canaan. In God's orchestration, Egypt would not be Joseph's final resting place. Despite the splendour, power and generations that Joseph enjoyed in history, he knew that his destiny lay elsewhere, because "God will surely come to your aid" (vv.24, 25 NIV). History, according to Joseph and from the perspective of the sovereign God, remains the theatre of destiny.

thursday

06

## History and the Christ of Destiny

**SCRIPTURE** Galatians 3:23-4:9

### OBSERVATION

According to the Apostle Paul, what is the significance of Jesus Christ?

### APPLICATION

What does being a son or daughter of God mean to me personally?

### 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 keep holding out the Gospel of redemption and sonship by faith to those who are still held in spiritual slavery
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

In this very profound passage, the Apostle Paul combined two metaphors: inheritance and slavery. The children of God in the Old Covenant were held under the law (v.23). Even though children are heirs, they are no different from slaves because children are not yet old enough to receive their inheritance as sons (Gal 4:1). Here, Paul metaphorically depicts the law as the guardian of the children, who are still too young to receive the inheritance. Then, he mixes in the metaphor of slavery – slaves need to be redeemed before they can be set free.

Now we can see what Jesus Christ has done. **The time has come** for the sons of God, no longer children, to receive their inheritance. The guardian (the law) is no longer needed because the children have grown up. But there is a second metaphor – slavery. A redemption price must be paid – this is paid by God, who sent His Son to redeem us (Gal 4:4-5). Because we are redeemed, we are adopted by God as sons and daughters, and receive the inheritance of the Spirit.

We can explain the above in this way: **When the set time had fully come** (in history), God sent His Son Jesus Christ (destiny). History was placed firmly back in the cradle of destiny by the Christ of destiny. You and I – sons and daughters of God through faith in Christ (Gal 3:26) – are called to walk according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh (Gal 5:16-26), as heirs of the promise (Gal 3:29).

friday

07

## History Rushing to Its Final Destiny

**SCRIPTURE** Colossians 1:15-29; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, 50-58

### OBSERVATION

What is the final destiny of all creation?

### APPLICATION

Consider verses 28 to 29 and 1 Corinthians 15:58. What holds me back from the intensity of commitment to God as seen in the Apostle Paul's example and exhortation?

### 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 stand firm, always devoting themselves wholeheartedly to the work of the Lord, thus inspiring fellow Christians to do likewise
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

There are many things we do not know about what the end of history will look like. But we do get some sneak previews in our Scripture passages today. Verses 15 to 23 provide us a compelling end-to-end summary of the grand Biblical narrative. At least two things are worth pointing out.

First, the emphasis is on **“all creation”**. Jesus is the firstborn over “all creation” (v.15). He created “all things”. “All things” were created through Him and for Him. He is before “all things”. In Him, “all things” hold together. It only makes sense, therefore, that God would reconcile “all things” through Jesus Christ. This is the vast cosmic expanse of redemption, the vast cosmic efficacy of Jesus' blood shed on the cross (v.20). Paul would even go on to say that the Gospel has been proclaimed to “all creation” under heaven (v.23; the same Greek words for “all creation” as those used in v.15).

Second, God's mission is **“reconciliation”**. Paul begins with the cosmic reconciliation of all things (vv.19-20), then moves to the reconciliation of human beings who have faith in Christ (vv.21-23). All belong to God (recall Monday's devotional), and therefore all are to be reconciled by God through the death of Christ (vv.20 and 22)<sup>3</sup>.

Being reconciled to God, we have a task reclaimed from the original mandates in Genesis 1-2. We, like Paul, become servants of this Good News. We willingly join in Christ's afflictions (v.24) to present the Word of God in its fullness (v.25). Our goal? To present everyone fully mature in Christ (v.28). Now, that, is a final destiny worth pursuing.

<sup>3</sup> Note the phrases, “by the blood of His cross” (v.20) and “in His body of flesh by His death” (v.22).

saturday

08

## History and Destiny to the Praise of God's Glory

**SCRIPTURE** Ephesians 1:1-23

### OBSERVATION

Why did God choose us in Christ?

### APPLICATION

How can I grow in my knowledge and worship of God, and help my family and CG members do the same?

### 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: For spiritual wisdom and revelation to know the hope of God's calling, the riches of His glorious inheritance and the greatness of His power for them
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**B**iblical Theologian Don Carson calls the Apostle Paul's prayer in verses 15 to 23 "a model of how to pray under the sovereignty of God"<sup>4</sup>. It is important to realise that the prayer flows forth from the praise in verses 3 to 14. Paul's premise is simple: God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ. But God has not blessed us merely for our own benefit, nor merely that we would be a blessing (although these are both right and good). God has blessed us to the praise of His glory (vv.6, 12, 14)!

At the beginning, centre and end of all history and destiny is **doxology**. Praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Conversion is not the end goal; **worship** is. Adoring praise offered up wholeheartedly, joyfully and perseveringly, by a mature people of God formed in Christ as His eternal possession, His spotless bride, the body for which Christ is the head. A people for whom God has exerted His incomparably great power with which He also raised Christ from the dead (vv.19-20).

The convergence of history and destiny is seen in verse 10. On Thursday, we saw how God sent Jesus Christ in the fullness of time. Here in verse 10, we see that there is another time that God has predetermined. **A time when everything will reach their fulfilment, bringing unity to "all things" in heaven and on earth under God's Messiah, to the praise of God's glory!**

Let these truths ring in your heart as you listen to this song by Bob Kauflin and Tim Chester of Sovereign Grace Music.



Click or scan this QR code to listen to the song.

<sup>4</sup> D.A. Carson, *Praying with Paul: A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, 2nd Edition (Baker Academic, 2014), 147.

sunday

09

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.



Week 2

## FAMILY DEVOTIONAL

### HUMILITY:

Putting others first by giving up what you think you deserve.

#### Memory Verse

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves"  
– Philippians 2:3 (NIV)

#### 1 Bottom Line

Celebrate because Jesus is alive.\*

#### 2 Bible Story

Matthew 27:32-28:6 – Crucified and Risen

#### 3 Activity

##### Carry the Cross

Props: A backpack, books, water bottles and dumbbells

Get your family members to read Matthew 27:32-28:6. Ask everyone to imagine how it would feel to carry a heavy weight for hours and what it means to carry the cross. Then, have everyone carry a backpack filled with bottles of water, books and dumbbells and move around the house for five minutes or more.

After the activity, ask everyone to share their thoughts about the events leading up to Jesus' death and resurrection.

Say, "Though He knew He was going to be crucified, Jesus showed humility to others who hurt him. Jesus wants us to persevere as we walk through difficult times. However there is something worth celebrating. Jesus' resurrection tells us we can put our hope in Him. He is in control over everything."

#### 4 Talk About It

- Why is Jesus' death important to us?
- Why is Jesus' resurrection something to celebrate?
- If you had been the first one to see Jesus alive on Easter morning, what would you have done?
- What are some ways that Jesus showed humility through the events in today's story?

**Parents:** Share how being parents require a huge amount of humility. What keeps you going? How did God help you?

#### 5 Prayer

Thank Jesus for showing the greatest act of humility by dying on the cross for all. Ask Him to help us be Christ-like even when times are hard.



Click or scan this QR code for this week's Bible story video!

monday

10

## What Is Truth?

**SCRIPTURE** John 18:28-40

### OBSERVATION

How was Pilate's judgment of Jesus a travesty of truth and justice?

### APPLICATION

How committed am I to the truth in all my dealings with others even when it will cost me significantly and personally to be truthful?

### PRAYER

Lord Jesus, empower me with Your Spirit that I can be like You in my response to others. In times of tension and conflict, help me to remain calm, strong and committed to the truth even when others do not treat me with kindness, honesty or fairness. Strengthen my resolve to be true to You above all and find the grace and wisdom to do the right thing in Your eyes. In Your name, amen.

prayer pointers

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

## deeper reflection

**T**his week we explore the concepts of “truth” and “morality” and consider how we as Christians should think about them. Morality is essentially concerned with questions of right and wrong. It has been defined as “the end result of ethical deliberation, the substance of right and wrong”<sup>5</sup>. Every person possesses some moral knowledge or opinion as a part of their worldview. Truth, on the other hand, can be defined as “what is”; it explains how things really are and is independent of subjective opinion or belief.<sup>6</sup> What is **true** corresponds with objective reality. Morality and truth are related but that is not always obvious or agreed upon. For example, in our postmodern age, many espouse a worldview that sees morality as situational and relative – this is understandable considering their philosophy that there is no higher, absolute truth; it is merely relative, a subjective opinion.<sup>7</sup>

The question concerning the nature of truth finds expression in the exchange between Jesus and Pilate. Pilate's question, “What is truth?” (v.38) has reverberated down the centuries. He appeared to be impatient and not genuinely interested in the answer to the question or hearing Jesus' response. Right after he said that to Jesus, he went back outside and told the Jews, “I find no guilt in Him.” (v.38). Pilate then proceeded to release a convicted robber instead of Jesus as a goodwill gesture to the Jews at Passover, in violation of his own judgment that Jesus was innocent. Thus, Pilate demonstrated cynicism towards the importance of truth – to him it was a fluid concept that could be conveniently adapted as and when needed for political expediency.

<sup>5</sup> Scott B. Rae, *Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics* (4th ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2018 [1995]), p.20.

<sup>6</sup> For example, the earth revolves around the sun even if you think differently because you see the sun “rising” and “setting”.

<sup>7</sup> In the postmodern worldview, truth is what each individual believes it to be; there is no objective moral truth. One often hears this: “truth is just truth to you” and “you have your truth and I have mine.” Cf. Michael W. Gohcen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), esp. pp.109-114.

tuesday

11

# Truth Matters!

**SCRIPTURE** John 8:12-59

## OBSERVATION

According to Jesus, from what are believers set free when they “know the truth” (see vv.31-36)?

## APPLICATION

Examine yourself before God: What areas of my lifestyle or behavioural habits are currently in bondage to sin? Receive freedom from sin by bringing them to God and asking Him for forgiveness and deliverance.

## 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 walk closely with the Lord, and to build trusted and accountable relationships with one another and those directly under our spiritual care
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**W**e need a right view of truth, especially because we face an onslaught from the postmodern worldview.<sup>8</sup> Why does knowing and seeking to uphold truth matter so much?

- **Truth is an anchor in an age of relativism.** How else can we wisely decide in matters of right and wrong? In a world without moral absolutes, anarchy would rule and lawlessness pervade society.
- **Truth brings life and freedom to people.** The Bible makes many truth claims. Some seem audacious.<sup>9</sup> We are challenged to closely examine these truth claims for they shape the answers to life’s big questions concerning the meaning, morality and destiny of life. Truth matters! Fundamentally, we must decide whether Jesus is who He says He is: Either Jesus is the Lord and the Saviour of the world, or He is not. There is no third option.<sup>10</sup>

In verse 12, Jesus asserted that He is “the light of the world” and that His followers will have “the light of life”, that is, the light that produces life.<sup>11</sup> At the heart of Jesus’ dialogue with the religious leaders is His startling claim that His disciples “will know the truth, and the truth will set them free” (v.32). Jesus was referring to people who were enslaved to their sins. They will receive freedom from the slavery and penalty of sin when they believe in Him and abide in His Word (vv.31-36). Here, Jesus highlighted an important truth: **the fundamental problem of humanity is not essentially moral; it is spiritual.** People will be greatly blessed when they trust and follow Jesus as His disciples, understanding His will and keeping His word.

<sup>8</sup> See footnote 3 of yesterday’s journal entry.

<sup>9</sup> For example, Jesus is the only way to God.

<sup>10</sup> In logic, this is known as the law of the excluded middle.

<sup>11</sup> D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), p.338.

wednesday

12

## Who Is Truth?

SCRIPTURE John 14:1-11

## OBSERVATION

What makes it difficult for non-Christians to accept Jesus' claim: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (v.6)?

## APPLICATION

Pray for the salvation of your non-Christian family members and friends, and share Jesus' words in verse 6 with at least one of them this week.

## 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 Nations: For people everywhere to be increasingly receptive to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the face of natural calamities, political turmoil, armed conflicts and economic uncertainties
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

Truth is often understood as **propositional** in nature. In Christianity, a prior and more important understanding of truth is that it is **relational** in nature. In other words, before we examine the propositional truths in the Bible for doctrine, we need to recognise that truth is found in the person of Jesus Christ, the God-man who came to redeem us from our sins.

In today's Scripture passage, Jesus was hours away from the cross. He was "troubled in His spirit" because of His forthcoming betrayal by Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples (Jn 13:21). Yet Jesus spoke to the disciples of His impending departure and addressed their anxiety. He comforted and assured the disciples by His promised return to take them to be with Him in His Father's house (vv.1-3). Following this, Jesus made another amazing "I am" truth claim: "**I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.**" (v.6).<sup>12</sup> Jesus is the way to God because He is the truth and the life of God. Jesus is the truth in that He embodies divine truth and is the supreme revelation of God. As the Word, Jesus is God's gracious self-disclosure, divinity who became a human being (cf. Jn 1:14).<sup>13</sup>

When we believe in God, we do not believe in a set of propositions. **We believe in a person** – the divine-human being, our Lord Jesus Christ. Sadly, many non-Christians have difficulty believing and accepting the exclusiveness of Jesus' claim.<sup>14</sup> They have yet to accept Jesus as the truth and respond to His invitation to have a relationship with Him.

<sup>12</sup> Right after that, Jesus reiterated His deity in a conversation with Thomas and Philip: "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also..." (v.7); "Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father...I am in the Father and the Father is in Me..." (vv.9-11).

<sup>13</sup> John 1:14 depicts Jesus as the "Word" – God's powerful self-expression in creation, revelation and salvation in the Old Testament – who made His dwelling among humanity and who is the "glory" (revelation) of God Himself: see Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, p.116.

<sup>14</sup> Such exclusiveness is considered arrogant and parochial in an age which values inclusiveness and acceptance. But this is to fail to understand the nature of truth: to have two different claims to be the same truth is untenable; truth, by definition, is exclusive.

thursday

13

## God's Word as Truth

SCRIPTURE John 17:1-11, 17-21

## OBSERVATION

What was a key purpose for Jesus' prayer for the sanctification of His disciples (see vv.7-8, 17-21)?

## APPLICATION

How is the truth of God's Word impacting my daily life – for example, decisions and actions at work and at home, and missions engagements for Gospel witness in the world?

## 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 good role models in leading church members to be faithful Christ-followers who live godly lives, proclaim the Gospel and make disciples of Christ
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

Besides truth being personified in Jesus (the living Word of God), spiritual and moral truths are found in the Bible (the written Word of God). Within its sacred pages, God revealed His moral standards, which are grounded in His unchanging character of holiness and righteousness. God's Word guides us in our reasoning and decision-making regarding moral choices, as we discern **what is** (a description of truth and reality) and **what ought to be** (a prescription of right and wrong). In biblical ethics, what God requires of His people, He has in Christ already done for us,<sup>15</sup> shown us by His example<sup>16</sup> and by His Spirit empowered us to do.

Jesus wants His disciples to be set apart for holy purposes. He asked the Father, “**Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth**” (v.17). This work of regeneration by God's Word<sup>17</sup> is effected through the Spirit of truth<sup>18</sup>. Verses 17 to 21 tell us that the sanctification of believers is **for witness to the world**. Earlier, Jesus prayed, “**I have given them the words that You gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from You; and they have believed that You sent me**” (v.8). Receiving God's Word equates to knowing and believing the truth, which leads to **obeying** the truth. Our understanding of Scripture as divine truth is fundamental and indicative of our acceptance of God and His authority over our lives. This the Lord desires, not just for His disciples to-date, but **for all people in the world** who have yet to come to believe in Him.

<sup>15</sup> Loving God with our whole being and loving our neighbour as ourselves (Matt 22:37-40; 5:17-18).

<sup>16</sup> For example, Jesus instructed His disciples to wash one another's feet, but not before setting Himself as an example for them to follow (Jn 13:12-15). Similarly, Jesus' commandment for them to love one another (Jn 13:34) came after He first loved them (Jn 15:9; 17:26; cf. 1 Jn 4:11, 19).

<sup>17</sup> See Jesus' conversation with Peter in the upper room in John 13:6-10 (cf. Jn 15:3; Eph 5:26).

<sup>18</sup> See John 14:16-17; 15:26; 16:13.

friday  
14

## Applying the Truth

SCRIPTURE John 15:1-17

## OBSERVATION

How does a Christian disciple grow in dependence on God and fruit bearing (e.g. love, joy, etc.)? What will that growth process entail?

## APPLICATION

In what areas of my life do I need to grow in obedience to God and love for Him and His people? What will I do to grow in these areas?

## 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 mature in Christ-like character and develop greater capacity to care for their CG members and lead them to grow spiritually
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

Verse 1 is the final “I am” saying of Jesus, where He declared that He was the **true vine**. In the Old Testament, the vine and vineyard metaphors were often used to represent Israel, which was chosen as a covenant people, planted and tended by God to bear fruit, but failed to do so (e.g. Psa 80:8-19; Isa 5:1-7). In stark contrast, Jesus is the true vine in that He fulfilled God’s purpose for ancient Israel and produces genuine fruit. An important point of Jesus’ teaching is that believers are to live in union with Christ (“Abide in Me, and I in you”, v.4). Otherwise, we will be like unfruitful branches, rendered useless and discarded.

There are three interlocking exhortations by our Lord in this text:

(1) **Abide in Christ** (vv.4-7); (2) **Abide in Christ’s words**<sup>19</sup> (v.7); and (3) **Abide in Christ’s love** (vv.9-10). Common to abiding in Christ and abiding in His love is **obedience** to Christ’s words (vv.7, 10). The results of obedience to our Lord’s commandments is the assurance of answered prayers, much fruitfulness, glory to the Father and proof that we are authentic disciples (vv.7-8). Tremendously precious too are the promises that we will dwell in the love of the Son (v.10), possess the fullness of joy (v.11) and be called a friend of our Lord (v.14).

Let us be a church family that seeks to follow Christ and become more like Him. Can you imagine what our lives will be like if we faithfully apply the truths that we have gleaned from the Bible? Let us **press in for greater fruitfulness** in the days ahead!

<sup>19</sup> And the corollary will be true: Christ’s words abide in us.

saturday

15

## Rejoicing in the Truth

SCRIPTURE John 4:1-42

## OBSERVATION

How did the behaviour of the Samaritan woman change after her encounter with Jesus?

## APPLICATION

How can I conduct spiritual conversations with my non-Christian friends and relatives to lead them to meet Jesus for themselves, and avoid getting myself stuck in unhelpful theological or philosophical debates?

## PRAYER

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

prayer pointers

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for Church Board: To grow as Christ-like, servant-leaders who are dependent on God, united and wise in decision-making as they lead our church
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

The story of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman draws together all the threads of our biblical reflections this week. This unnamed woman meets a unique Jewish man who broke all the cultural taboos.<sup>20</sup> The man wanted a drink of water but in turn offered her water that she would never thirst again. She tried to turn the conversation into a theological debate;<sup>21</sup> instead, she ended up enlightened with the truth about worship.<sup>22</sup> She began to view Jesus as the embodiment of truth and the promised Messiah. The Samaritan woman was confronted with the truth: she has had five husbands, and the one currently living with her is not her husband.<sup>23</sup> She later went into the town and invited people to come and see Jesus. Remarkably, **"because of the woman's testimony"**, many Samaritans believed in Jesus (v.39)! And many more believed – **"because of His word"** – after they heard directly from Jesus (vv.40-42).

What a spectacular transformation – from a dejected, rejected woman who intentionally avoided people by going at the hottest hour to draw water, into an enthusiastic, joyful herald of **the Good News of the Messiah who has come!** Initially a person with a radically different worldview,<sup>24</sup> her life was redeemed and radically transformed after being confronted with the Truth.

Our Christian worldview is coherent and corresponds with the truth – the life-changing truth of Jesus' redemptive work on the cross, His resurrection and coming return. This truth is as relevant today as it was two thousand years ago! Let us joyfully spread the truth so that through us many more people may believe in **Christ the Saviour of the world!**

<sup>20</sup> Women seldom spoke to male strangers and Jewish people generally do not consort with Samaritans due to historical animosities between these two ethnic groups of Semitic people.

<sup>21</sup> This was the longstanding debate between the Jews and the Samaritans concerning the exact location for the worship of God (vv.20-24).

<sup>22</sup> "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (v.24)

<sup>23</sup> See verses 17 to 18.

<sup>24</sup> Most commentators see her as an immoral woman ashamed to meet other townsfolk; she was also a Samaritan, with strikingly divergent historical and theological perspectives.

sunday

16

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.



Week 3

## FAMILY DEVOTIONAL

### HUMILITY:

Putting others first by giving up what you think you deserve.

#### Memory Verse

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves"  
– Philippians 2:3 (NIV)

#### 1 Bottom Line

Put others first because Jesus put you first.\*

#### 2 Bible Story

Philippians 2:3-8 – Humble Like Jesus

#### 3 Activity

##### Humility Begins With Everyone

Props: Any YouTube video on geese flying in a "V" formation

Ask your family to watch the video. Then, discuss how each goose shows humility to one another during their migratory flights. Get everyone to share an experience in which they were shown humility or demonstrated humility to others.

Say, "Was Jesus afraid when He knew it was time to face the cross? Anyone would be, but that did not deter Jesus from fulfilling God's will. He is willing because He puts us first. He wants us to be free from sins so that we can enjoy God's peace and happiness. Being humble does not mean we put ourselves down all the time. It is about considering the needs of others before ours when a situation calls for it."

#### 4 Talk About It

- What did you learn about humility from these verses?
- Share an incident when you put someone else first or someone put you first.
- What are some ways we can follow Jesus' example of putting others first?
- Does being humble mean putting ourselves down, for example telling ourselves that we are worthless? Why or why not?

**Parents:** Share an incident which helps you understand the true meaning of being humble. How does being humble bring joy and peace to you and others?

#### 5 Prayer

Pray for God's guidance and wisdom to exercise humility towards others.



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monday

17

## Man: In God's Creation

**SCRIPTURE** Genesis 1:1; Psalm 19:1-2; Romans 1:20**OBSERVATION**

What does creation tell us about what the Creator is like?

**APPLICATION**

Spend some time in nature and draw close to the Creator. Consider what the things that you see tell you about God the Creator and respond by praising Him.

**PRAYER**

O God, Creator of all things and King over all the earth, help us to magnify and exalt You, for You are great and do wondrous things. Open the eyes of our hearts, that we may be thrilled again by your glory and goodness. May we remember and rejoice that You made us, and we belong to You, through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

prayer pointers

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

## deeper reflection

In our Devotional Journal this week we will be embarking on a series entitled “Origin and Design: where did we come from?”. To make sense of our world and our place in it, we have to start with the doctrine of creation. We must begin at the beginning! For in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (v.1).

Two significant implications arise from the doctrine of creation. First, **the transcendence of God**. The Psalmist David rejoices that “the heavens declare the glory of God” (Psa 19:1a)! The eternal power of God, even though invisible, is clearly seen through all that God has made (Rom 1:20). God is transcendent: He is lofty and exalted, and completely different from the world that He has made. We grasp this intuitively every time we behold the beauty of creation and our hearts cry out: “WOW!”

The second implication is **our dependence on God**. This remains true whether or not we acknowledge it, and whether we accept or reject God! The world and all that is in it – including us – are His handiwork (Psa 19:1b), and He upholds the universe by His powerful word (Heb 1:3). Our lives and times are in His hands.

So, my friends, do not delay. Let's respond to God today as all creatures should – by honouring our Creator and giving thanks to Him (cf. Rom 1:21). Let's come to Him in thanksgiving for all that He is and all that He does. And let's remember that it is God who sustains us day by day, moment by moment, through all the hills and valleys of life.

tuesday

18

## Man: On God's Mind

SCRIPTURE Psalm 8:3-4

## OBSERVATION

How do you think the Psalmist felt when he asked the question: "What is man that You are mindful of him?"

## APPLICATION

Find an opportunity today to tell someone that God cares for him or her. Ask "Is there anything that I can pray for you?" and if possible pray right there and then for that person.

## 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 remember that God cares for them and to entrust all their cares to God
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

Verse 4 contains a searching question that has been pondered by theologians and philosophers across the ages: "What is man that You are mindful of him?" What is the nature of man, and what is our place in the universe?

Two secular philosophical schools answer this question. The first is **secular humanism**, which has a very **high** view of man. Christian apologist Francis Schaeffer explains that, according to humanism, "man is the measure of all things".<sup>25</sup> Man is at the centre of his universe, and achieving human happiness and flourishing are key. The second school, **anti-natalism**, has a **low** view of man. Anti-natalists believe that human beings should not even reproduce, because in their minds the world of nature is better off without human beings!<sup>26</sup>

The **Christian worldview** provides a strikingly different perspective. Psalm 8 invites us to understand humanity by understanding humanity's Maker. The Psalmist's rhetorical question "what is man?" overflows from **a heart of gratitude toward a great and gracious God**. Peter Craigie says it well: "In contrast to God, the heavens are tiny, pushed and prodded into shape by the divine digits; but in contrast to the heavens, which seem so vast in the human perception, it is mankind that is tiny."<sup>27</sup> Why then would the Creator of the vast universe care for tiny and finite creatures like us? We should not matter in the grand scheme of things! We do not deserve God's loving attention! And yet He loves us, as the pinnacle of His own creative work. How awesome is that?

<sup>25</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005).

<sup>26</sup> "Anti-Natalists: The People Who Want You to Stop Having Babies," BBC News, August 13, 2019, sec. BBC Trending, accessed January 19, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-49298720>

<sup>27</sup> Craigie, P. C. (2004). *Psalms 1-50* (2nd ed., Vol. 19, p. 108). Nashville, TN: Nelson.

wednesday

19

## Man: Valued in God's Eyes

**SCRIPTURE** Palm 8:5; Ephesians 1:3-10

### OBSERVATION

What do verse 5 and Ephesians 1:3-10 tell us about what God has done for us, because He values and loves us?

### APPLICATION

How does my tremendous value in God's sight impact the way I view myself and others?

### 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 Nations: That people from every nation, language and tongue will come to know the God who loves us more than we can imagine
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**P**salm 8:5-8 gives us two wondrous truths about our place in God's creation. We will cover the first truth today and the second tomorrow. The first truth is: **our value is given by God**. Verse 5a tells us that God has made humanity a little lower than the "heavenly beings" (or "angels", NIV). The Hebrew noun translated into these two terms is *elohim*, which can also be translated as "God". Thus, one reading of verse 5a is that humanity was made a little lower than God Himself! By God's design, we are closer to God than anything else in the created order.<sup>28</sup> God, **the King of all**, graciously **crowns us** with the glory and honour that only He has the right to bestow!

When we deeply understand that we are worth **that** much to God, it profoundly changes the way we live. We can stop being insecure about ourselves and envious of others. We can cease trying to shore up our self-worth in all kinds of unhelpful ways, such as through worldly achievement, the accumulation of wealth or looking for love in all the wrong places.

Also, we can be empowered to love and honour other people, regardless of whether the world deems them lovely or honourable, because they too are wonderfully created by God. We can value those whom society despises or marginalises. We can love and serve others out of the reservoir of God's redemptive love. For God has forgiven our sins and **redeemed** us in Christ from everything that makes us unworthy of God; through faith in Christ, we have become God's sons and daughters (Eph 1:5-7)! Hallelujah!

<sup>28</sup> Longman, T., III. (2014). *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary*. (D. G. Firth, Ed.) (Vol. 15-16, p. 81). Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press.

thursday

20

## Man: Given God's Mission

**SCRIPTURE** Psalm 8:6-8; Genesis 1:28; 2:15**OBSERVATION**

What are the similarities between verses 6 to 8 and Genesis 1:28?

**APPLICATION**

How can I live and work in a way which obeys God's command to fill the earth and subdue it?

**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 the church as a faithful example of what it means for Christians to be Christ's living witnesses in Singapore and among the nations
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

The second truth that verses 5 to 8 reveals about our place in God's creation is that **our mission is given by God**. The Psalmist declares that God has given mankind dominion over all the works of His hands (v.6). This is not just a statement about humanity's status, but about the **role** we are to play in God's creation! The Psalmist is echoing commands that God gave in the creation narrative in Genesis chapter 1: Mankind is to **fill** the earth, **subdue** it and have **dominion** over creation (Gen 1:28).

The word "dominion" may make some of us uncomfortable. Is God giving us a command to exploit the world He created? Not at all! The command to have dominion is **to tend and care for** creation as wise and loving **stewards** appointed by God. We are to exercise care, just as our Creator King cares for us. As Genesis 2:15 pictured it, we are to till the earth and bring forth its potential.

What does this mean for our lives? First, it suggests that we have a Christian duty **to care for creation**, in whatever way we can.<sup>29</sup> Why? Because it is **God's** creation that He will one day make new. Second, it means that **our work matters to God**. You may be a baker, maximising the potential of Sarawak pineapples by turning them into pineapple tarts. Or a teacher, bringing forth the best in your students. Or a homemaker, looking after the needs of your family. Whatever your vocation, you can work for God's glory and fulfil God's command to subdue the earth!

<sup>29</sup> See <https://omf.org/us/5-ways-to-participate-in-creation-care-where-youre-planted/> for more ideas on how to care for creation as a Christian.

friday

21

## Man: Bearing God's Image (1)

SCRIPTURE Genesis 1:26-28

## OBSERVATION

What do you think is the connection between (a) being made in the image of God, and (b) obeying God's command to have dominion over the earth?

## APPLICATION

How can I renew my mind through Scripture and grow in reflecting God's image?

## 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 continually grow to reflect the image of God more and more
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

God designed mankind to bear His image and likeness (v.26). Mankind alone, in all creation, is given this privilege and responsibility! Thus, as Christ-followers, we need to understand the doctrine of the *Imago Dei* (image of God). What does it mean for us to bear God's image? In what ways do we share God's likeness? There are certainly many attributes of God we don't have, such as omniscience and omnipotence. In the final two Devotional Journal entries for this week, we will look at three ways that we share the image of God: the functional, ontological and relational.

**Functional.** The command for us to have dominion over all of God's creation (v.26) immediately follows God's resolution to make humanity in His image. Hence, our **functional role** in exercising dominion over God's creation is part of what it means to resemble God.<sup>30</sup>

**Ontological.** Ontology refers to being – who we are. Like God, we are beings with **free will and rationality**.<sup>31</sup> Because God gave us free will, we have a genuine choice to obey or reject Him. God doesn't coerce us into loving Him. God also gave us rational minds, that we may "think His thoughts after Him"<sup>32</sup>! We have a Christian duty not just to love God with all our heart and soul, but also with all our minds (Matt 22:37). We are not called to park our brains outside the church door. May God renew our minds through Scripture<sup>33</sup> and enable us to understand His character, His works and His world, so that we may discern how to be better witnesses of His in these challenging and chaotic times.

<sup>30</sup> Refer to yesterday's Devotional Journal (20 April 2023) for more on our role in creation.

<sup>31</sup> Merrill, E. H. (2003). Image of God. In T. D. Alexander & D. W. Baker (eds.), Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch (p. 443). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>32</sup> This phrase was coined by the astronomer Johannes Kepler, who believed that all scientific research and discovery was "thinking God's thoughts after Him".

<sup>33</sup> Romans 12:1-2.

saturday

22

## Man: Bearing God's Image (2)

**SCRIPTURE** Colossians 1:15-18; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18**OBSERVATION**

What does 2 Corinthians 3:18 tell us about how we are transformed into the image of God?

**APPLICATION**

Reflect and pray: what area of my life is the Spirit of God wanting to transform, so that I may display the image of God more fully in my life?

**PRAYER**

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

prayer pointers

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for Church Board: To be united and wise in determining church policies, that we may more fully love God and love people
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**R**elational. Finally, let's consider the relational aspect of the *Imago Dei*. As the great 20<sup>th</sup> century theologian Karl Barth said, the *Imago Dei* means that God can **relate personally** with us, speak to us and make covenants with us.<sup>34</sup> In today's church, we are used to the idea of relating intimately with God. We sing about God as our Father and Friend, and rightly so! But do we also recognise how surprising and humbling it is for us, finite and fallen creatures, to be granted such privileged access to God? **What is man**, that God would grant us His covenantal faithfulness?

Our reflection on the *Imago Dei* must conclude with Christ. Christ is the ultimate expression of God's covenantal faithfulness and the **true image** of the invisible God (v.15)! When we see Christ, we see what our heavenly Father is like (Jn 14:9). We, on the other hand, reflect God very poorly. Due our sinful nature, the image of God in us is marred. Not eliminated altogether, but distorted, like a reflection in a broken mirror. But in Christ, the spotless Lamb of God, the image of God is completely unspoiled.

Thanks be to God, through Christ we can be reconciled to the Father! Through Christ we can enter into a living relationship with God, and pass from death into life! Through the sanctifying work of God's Spirit, we can be transformed more and more into the likeness of Christ (2 Cor 3:18)! The distorted image of God in us can now be restored, for by His stripes we are healed (Isa 53:5). This is the glorious Gospel of God!

<sup>34</sup> Barth, K. *Church Dogmatics*, III. 1.183-87.

sunday

23

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.



Week 4

## FAMILY DEVOTIONAL

### HUMILITY:

Putting others first by giving up what you think you deserve.

### Memory Verse

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves"  
– Philippians 2:3 (NIV)

### 1 Bottom Line

Put others first by helping them understand.\*

### 2 Bible Story

Luke 24:13-35 – Road to Emmaus

### 3 Activity

#### Sharing the Good News

Props: Bibles

Ask your family members to refer to the Bible and prepare a narration about the story of Jesus and His death and resurrection in three minutes or less. Encourage everyone to be expressive and use props as they tell the story.

Say, "When we receive excellent exam results, we can't wait to share the good news with our family. Likewise, Jesus' resurrection is the Good News and God wants us to share the story of Jesus with as many people as possible. When we share, we are putting others first. We show that we care about their future."

### 4 Talk About It

- Why do you think Jesus was disappointed with the men for not having a better understanding of the events that took place in Jerusalem?
- Why does God want us to understand the things in the Bible?
- What will you share about Jesus with others?

**Parents:** Talk about your experience of sharing the Good News with others. How was the response? How did you feel?

### 5 Prayer

Ask God to give us the courage and wisdom to talk to others about Jesus. Pray that God will open their hearts and that they will see Jesus as their Saviour.



Click or scan this QR code for this week's Bible story video!

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monday

24

## Personal Testimony of King Nebuchadnezzar

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 4:1-3; Jeremiah 6:22-26

### OBSERVATION

How would the Jews who suffered from the merciless cruelty of the Babylonian armies respond to Nebuchadnezzar's testimony of the "signs and wonders" that God had done for him?

### APPLICATION

How do I relate with the "Nebuchadnezzars" in my life who have hurt me deeply?

### PRAYER

Lord, You are full of compassion and merciful, and You know fully the pains that I suffer from people who hurt me very deeply. I know that I should love them even as You have commanded us to love our enemies and forgive them as You have forgiven me of my sins. But I struggle greatly to do so. So, strengthen me and help me to do that.

prayer pointers

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

## deeper reflection

**D**aniel 4 is a long personal testimony of King Nebuchadnezzar: "It has seemed good to me to declare..." (v.2a). And the subject of his testimony is: "the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me" (v.2b).

Nebuchadnezzar's testimony was both good news and bad news. The good news was the pagan king was converted to Jewish monotheism, and "there is joy in the presence of angels over" this "one sinner who repents" (Lk 15:10). And the bad news was this pagan king was converted to Jewish monotheism. It was bad news to certain Jews. To some Jews this was too good to be true, but there were those who refused to believe it because they did not want it to be true.<sup>35</sup> These were the ones who had lost their loved ones when Nebuchadnezzar and his "cruel" armies invaded their land and killed with "no mercy" (Jer 6:22-23), and they themselves were dispossessed of their homeland and now living in exile in Babylon. These were the ones who, so filled with hatred for the Babylonians, prayed, "O daughter of Babylon, you devastated one...How blessed is the one who takes your babies and smashed them against the rocks!" (Psa 137:8-9).

Is there a "Nebuchadnezzar" in your life? People who have hurt you so deeply, that you think you have good reason to despise and even hate them, that you wish only for God's justice to fall on them quickly. Understandably, it is not easy to forgive such people. But we begin with "God in Christ has forgiven us" (Eph 4:32).

<sup>35</sup> Gordon Wong, *Faithful to the End: The Message of Daniel for Life in the Real World* (Genesis, 2006), 54

tuesday

25

## Knowing God in Progressive Process (1)

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 2:1-3, 24-30, 46-47

### OBSERVATION

What was Nebuchadnezzar's relationship with God like?

### APPLICATION

How do I respond to divine revelation, whether from the Scriptures or experience?

### 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 see God clearer and know Him better
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**N**ebuchadnezzar is the main character in Daniel 1 to 4. Nebuchadnezzar, together with God, is mentioned in all the four chapters, while Daniel is not mentioned in chapter 3 and Daniel's three friends not in chapter 4. In fact, Nebuchadnezzar is mentioned briefly in Daniel 5 in the post-Nebuchadnezzar period (Dan 5:18-21). From one perspective, we see in Daniel 1 to 4 Nebuchadnezzar's spiritual journey with God in three parts. Daniel 1 to 4 shows "a progressive sharpening" of Nebuchadnezzar's "awareness of the God who is dealing with him"<sup>36</sup>, which climaxes with his personal testimony in Daniel 4. Do you see in your life a progressive sharpening of your awareness of the God who is dealing with you, such that you can say, "I have grown to know God personally better and deeper"?

In Daniel 2, God visited Nebuchadnezzar in a nightmare that troubled him and gave him insomnia (v.1). But Nebuchadnezzar did not know that it was a divine visitation with a divine purpose. Nebuchadnezzar became a **helpless king**; he was "anxious to understand the dream" (v.3), but no one could interpret it for him (vv.26-27). But through Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar met the **God who reveals**, who "has made known" to him His plan of world history (v.28). Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged God as "a God of gods and a Lord of kings" (v.47). But this "can hardly be taken as an acceptance of monotheism"<sup>37</sup>.

Divine revelation does not necessarily always lead people to know God. God must open our eyes to see Him (Lk 24:31-32). But are we like Zaccheus, doing our utmost to see Jesus (Lk 19:3-6)?

<sup>36</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *Hearing the Message of Daniel: Sustaining Faith in Today's World* (Zondervan, 2017), 88

<sup>37</sup> Ernest C. Lucas, *Daniel*, *Apollos Old Testament Commentary* (Apollos, IVP, 2002), 80

wednesday

26

## Knowing God in Progressive Process (2)

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 3:1-7, 19-30

### OBSERVATION

What was Nebuchadnezzar's relationship with God like?

### APPLICATION

What are some negative attitudes that I have toward God that I need to change?

### 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 Nations: That God will open their eyes to see Him
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**T**hrough Daniel the **God who reveals** “mysteries” met the **helpless king** in understanding his disturbing dream and freed him from his distress (Dan 2:1-3, 28). God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar His plan of world history, symbolised by “a single statue”, with its golden head representing the Babylonian king (Dan 2:31-33, 36-38). But Nebuchadnezzar did not want to be just a golden head. He wanted to be “a statue of gold” (v.1), indicating that it would be he, not God, who would determine world history.

Having found relief from his distress over his troubling dream, Nebuchadnezzar soon forgot the God who relieved him. His earlier acknowledgement of God, “the revealer of mysteries”, as “a God of gods and a Lord of kings” was shallow and hollow (Dan 2:47). Are you like Nebuchadnezzar? Or Israel in the days of Judges, who cried out to God in their troubles, but soon forgot Him after He had delivered them, and only to seek Him again in the next crisis (Judg 3:9, 12-15)?

Nebuchadnezzar, a helpless king who was relieved from his troubledness by God, became a **hostile king** toward the servants of God. When Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to worship his golden statue, he was “filled with rage” and threw them into the blazing furnace (vv.19-23). But God showed Himself to Nebuchadnezzar as the **God who rescues**, who miraculously “delivered His servants” – in a way that “no other god is able to deliver” (vv.24-25, 28-29). Nebuchadnezzar responded with worship: “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego” (v.28). Nebuchadnezzar had progressed in knowing God from Daniel 2.

thursday

27

## Knowing God in Progressive Process (3)

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 4:1-3, 37

### OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about Nebuchadnezzar and God?

### APPLICATION

How do I deal with pride in my life?

### PRAYER

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

prayer pointers

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for Outreach/Missions/New Life leaders: To know their humble Lord, Jesus of Nazareth
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**G**od cannot be real to us in experience, unless God lets us experience Him in reality. We cannot know God, unless God makes Himself known to us – in the Scriptures where He has revealed Himself and in experience. Such divine revelation in reality is a gift of God’s grace. God continued to bestow such divine grace on Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4.

In Daniel 4, Nebuchadnezzar came to know that “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble”, and that when he humbles himself under the mighty hand of God, God may exalt him at the proper time (1 Pet 5:5-6). This “king of kings” (Dan 2:37) became a **humiliated king** in Daniel 4, who encountered God in this third time as the God who “is able to humble those who walk in pride” (v.37). Nebuchadnezzar had the issue of pride in his life which God would deal with. When God deals with the issues in our lives, His interest is not just on our issues. **God wants us to know Him** through His process of dealing with our issues – as with Nebuchadnezzar. But God’s dealings with us can be painful (cf. Heb 12:11).

God wanted Nebuchadnezzar to know that He is the **God who rules**: “His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom” (v.3). God had already revealed this truth directly to Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2:36-45. But Nebuchadnezzar did not get it. And so, in his pride he made a statue of gold (Dan 3:1). But now in Daniel 4, Nebuchadnezzar came to know this truth through personal experience as a humiliated king.

friday  
28

## God Fulfilling His Missional Purpose

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 3:1, 4-7; 4:1-3

### OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about Nebuchadnezzar's actions toward the nations and the peoples under his rule on the two different occasions?

### APPLICATION

What are the recent changes in my life that indicate my spiritual growth?

### 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 transformed through daily spiritual renewal
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**W**e must learn to read the Old Testament with a certain theological perspective. The terms “nations” and “peoples” are frequently mentioned in the Old Testament. When we come across these two terms and their equivalents, we must think of the Abrahamic Covenant: That through Abraham and his descendants, Israel – and the Church, the New Covenant Israel (Gal 3:7-9) – “all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Gen 12:3; Gal 3:14). In other words, think of **missions**.

Nebuchadnezzar demanded “**the nations and peoples of every language**” to worship his golden statue, or they would be burned in the furnace (vv.1, 4-6). Sometime later, Nebuchadnezzar declared “**to the nations and peoples of every language, who live in all the earth**”<sup>38</sup> the “signs and wonders” that God had done for him (Dan 4:1-2). We can see the radical change in Nebuchadnezzar from Daniel 3 to Daniel 4. Certainly the nations and the peoples under his rule noticed this change. And through his personal testimony in Daniel 4, Nebuchadnezzar pointed to the nations and the peoples that it was God who changed his life. Now, think of the Abrahamic Covenant and what God was doing here. God was fulfilling His missional purpose through Nebuchadnezzar.

Instead of being a **blessing** to the nations, Israel was now under God’s covenant **curse** of exile in Babylon for their covenant unfaithfulness. But it was right in Israel’s failure that God was fulfilling His missional purpose in the Abrahamic Covenant through Nebuchadnezzar, whom God used to execute His curse on Israel. God’s sovereignty in an irony! God’s purposes can never be thwarted.

<sup>38</sup> all the earth” refers to the Babylonian Empire

saturday

29

## God's Grace in Our Lives

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 4:1-2; 1 Corinthians 15:9-10**OBSERVATION**

What significant observations can you make about the “me” in the two passages?

**APPLICATION**

What is my attitude toward the great things that God has done for me?

**PRAYER**

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

prayer pointers

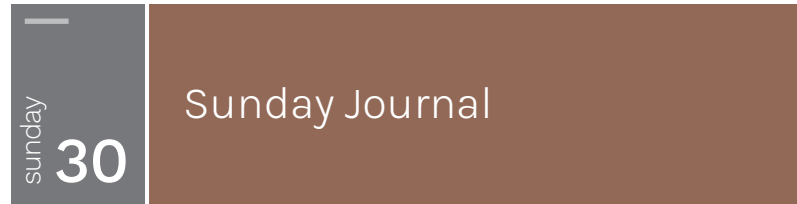
- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for Church Board: To be humble in God's grace in God's mighty works through them
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**N**ebuchadnezzar's testimony of “the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me” (v.2) points to the **grace of God**. The “**me**” in “the Most High God has done **for me**” can be a humble “me” or a proud “me”.

The **proud “me”** thinks that God has done great things – “the signs and wonders” – for me because I am faithful to God and I deserve it. God does do great things for us because we are faithful to Him. But God can choose not to and He is not to be questioned. And whether we deserve it or not, it is purely God's call, and never a matter for us to think about. It is purely God's sovereign grace. “Sovereign” means it is God's prerogative: He does whatever He pleases (Psa 115:3). “Grace” means no one deserves anything from God.

The **humble “me”** asks, “Why me, Lord?” when God does great things for me. The humble “me” recognises that I have nothing and I can do nothing to get God to do great things for me. The attitude of the humble “me” is always, “I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that You have shown to Your servant” (Gen 32:10). And when the humble “me” does great things for God, this “me” recognises that **what I can do** is divine empowerment and **what I have done** is divine fulfilment. But the humble “me” does have a healthy ego: “By the grace of God, I am what I am” (1 Cor 15:10).



## 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.



Week 5

## FAMILY DEVOTIONAL

### HUMILITY:

Putting others first by giving up what you think you deserve.

### Memory Verse

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves" – Philippians 2:3 (NIV)

### 1 Bottom Line

Put others first by making things right.\*

### 2 Bible Story

John 21:1-19 – Jesus Restores Peter

### 3 Activity

#### Restoration

Props: LEGO® bricks or equivalent

Ask your family members to use their creativity to build something using the LEGO® bricks. Then get everyone to dismantle it. Ask everyone to restore it to what he or she had created within five minutes.

After the activity, get everyone to relate the experience with God restoring His relationship with us.

Say, "It takes effort to nurture a relationship. God values our relationship with Him. This is the reason He still calls us to Him even though we sin or stay away at times. If we care about a person, we will choose to make things right and restore the relationship. The good news is that we do not have to do it alone. God is by our side, giving us the courage and wisdom to restore our relationships with our loved ones and others."

### 4 Talk About It

- How do you benefit by being the first one to step out and make things right with others?
- If God wants us to make things right with others, what does that tell you about how much God values relationships?
- What can prevent us from making things right with others?
- Can our motives be for selfish reasons even when we're doing something to make things right? Why or why not?

**Parents:** Share how you overcame pride and set things right with a family member or friend. What gave you the courage to do it?

### 5 Prayer

Thank God for drawing us back to Him constantly. Ask Him to help us put our pride aside and put things right with others.

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NOTES

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