

Meditations for Lent
2008 Edition

Preface

Lent (n) – an annual season of fasting and penitence in preparation for Easter, beginning on Ash Wednesday and lasting 40 weekdays (*does not include Sundays*) to Easter, observed by *various churches*. (Webster, *italics mine*)

How did Lent come about? The early church in the 3rd century organized had these “school of instruction” for those wishing to become Christians which later became formalized into new classes preparing people for baptism held each year before Easter, which developed into Lent. Today, Lent is a period where “we return to the Lord through prayer and silence, through reading and meditating on Scriptures, through our self-examination, confession and repentance, and through a firm resolve to live once again for God wholeheartedly in every area of our lives.” (Rev. Peggy Seow, Lent 2007 Editor)

What better way to return to the Lord than to look at the life of Christ and the cross, to revisit the gospel again which is of first importance (1 Corinthians 15:1-3) not merely for evangelism but for our lives as we seek to follow Christ faithfully. And so the theme for this year’s Lent is the question that Christ posed to His disciples – Who do you say that I am? Our response to that that question will ultimately determine the direction of our lives and ministry. C.J. Mahaney in his book *The Cross Centered Life* (p20-21) writes, “If there’s anything in life that we should be passionate about, it’s the gospel. And I don’t mean passionate only about sharing it with others. I mean passionate about thinking about it, dwelling on it, rejoicing in it, allowing it to color the way we look at the world. Only one thing can be of first importance to each of us. And only the gospel ought to be.”

Thank God for the provision of a team of four (Mr. Daniel Ong, Rev. Ting Moy Hong, Miss Ng Wai Ling, Dr. Herbert Tan) who have walked with God and sought Him with their heart, mind and soul to

be able to come up with these meditations. Their writings have personally challenged my heart tremendously, sometimes to tears. I hope that these will contribute significantly to all readers that they may experience God in a personal and powerful way and have their lives transformed again and again by Christ and the finished work on the Cross of Calvary.

The format follows that of Lent 2006 but we have added a new feature called Family Time. We want to encourage those who are parents, to spend some time not merely journeying alone but with your family through Lent. That section contains suggestions for doing things together as a family in response to the meditation for the day.

As Lent covers 40 weekdays, we have not written any meditations for Sundays but there is a special section at the end of each Saturday meditation that gives suggestions for Sundays as you meet with the larger family of God for worship and listening to His Word preached.

May God bless us richly as we invite the Holy Spirit to journey with us, and as we journey with our families through this period of Lent, rediscovering again the heart of God in Christ and the Cross.

Dr. Herbert Tan
Editor

Foreword

Grace and peace in the name of the Christ, Jesus!

Each time we venture into a new calendar year, Lent soon comes around and greets us. Some shoo her away, even burying her in some instances. Some just pass by her. Others keep her at arm's length. But in fact, many choose to meet her, and engage with her over this 40-day period. And for these Lent-companions, Lent is challenging, exhilarating, and life-transforming.

“Who do you say that I am?”, is the question Jesus confronts us with this season of Lent. Who ... I AM ? You say? Jesus and I. What's the connection? What did He say and live out? What's your confession? How are you living this out?

We want to thank the team of writers for sharing these devotions with us. We pray that through these lessons, you may be confronted by the Christ Jesus each day in a real way. And thus confronted, you may confess your failings, re-affirm your relationship and faith-commitments, and 'walk the talk' as a bond-servant of the Risen Lord, our Master.

Blessed reading, reflection, praying and living!

In Christ,

Dr. Samuel Ong
Chairman
Board of Worship and Music TRAC

Wednesday, February 6, 2008

Matthew 16:13-20; Proverbs 30:7-9; Ecclesiastes 12:1

Who Do People Say...?

I have found I can carry on my Christian life without much persecution. Those I live amongst, with whom I work, are relatively decent and easy to get along with. But there are times we have to declare our allegiance in no uncertain terms.

Jesus' question, 'who do you say that I am?' is one that everyone must answer for themselves. It challenges us to the roots of our discipleship. Other people's answers might help us in our reflections and shed some light on our own ultimate response. Perhaps that is why Jesus asked the disciples to define their faith in Him on a personal level rather than rely on

what others had to say about Him. Jesus challenged them to base their definition of who He was on the reality of what they had seen, heard, and experienced about Him.

Peter had to make a leap of faith. As he answered, he not only acknowledged the true identity of this man, this God, with whom he had been living, but also found his own deeper identity. This identity does not depend on his own qualities and qualifications, but only on Peter's openness to God's revelation and graciousness. In acknowledging Jesus, he is also acknowledged and given a central role in God's plan.

Over to You

Who do you say that Jesus is? Have you experienced the reality of who Christ is? How will you live that response? If you know that He is 'the Christ', then thank the Father for giving you this revelation and ask Him to use you today to pass on this knowledge to others.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, this question You asked Your disciples is the question that I have to answer, regardless of what any one else has to say: 'Who do you say that I am?' With Peter, and with Your Father in heaven, I affirm that You are the Christ, the anointed One, the Son of the living God, the Son whom the Father loves. May Your name be praised forever, Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Family Time

People had many different ideas about who Jesus might be. Imagine the responses you might receive if you asked others, 'Who do you say that I am?' Record on paper the responses from each family member. End in prayer thanking the Father for 'the Christ' whom you know in your life.

Thursday, February 7, 2008

Matthew 21:1-17; Psalm 31

Who is This?

In these two incidents from the Gospel, we see Jesus in the mainstream of prophetic tradition, communicating God's message not only through His words (teaching, stories) but also through His actions.

The act is simple: riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. To the people of the time the meaning was obvious. They all knew the prophecy (Zech. 9:9), and they thought they knew what it meant: Jesus was declaring Himself at last as king. They were excited, elated. Here was their king, the promised Messiah, who would overthrow the Romans so the Jewish people could be a nation again. It would mean an end to the profit-eering of the collaborators. A new age!

For the crowds celebrating, death was the last thing on their minds, but for the One who was at the centre it was in sight.

In the second incident, Jesus' dramatic cleansing of the temple was seen by His disciples as a prophetic sign of God's action. The temple was understood as the dwelling place of God among His people. Jesus' act of judgment in the temple is meant to be a sign and warning to the people that God takes our worship very seriously. Jesus' cleansing of the temple is also a prophetic sign of what He wants to do with each of us. He ever seeks to cleanse us of sin and make us living temples of His Holy Spirit.

Over to You

Does the King of glory find a welcome entry in your heart and home?
Do you give the Lord Jesus full reign in your heart and in your home?
And do the walls of your home and your church echo with the praise
of His glory? Are our churches places of true worship?

Prayer

Lord, when You rode into Jerusalem, the people celebrated Your coming, sang your praises and offered their homage. Yet, so soon, they rejected Your authority and spurned Your love. As we honour You today, welcoming You as Saviour and King, may we hold faithfully to You in loving obedience, serving You gladly all our days, rejoicing in the coming of Your Kingdom, where You reign for ever and ever. Amen.

Family Time

How does it feel to be welcomed? Jesus welcomes all. How do we welcome Him (and His followers)? Do the following activity. Have the children take turns leaving the room and reentering. As each child enters, everyone in the group greets the child saying, 'Welcome, (the child's name). Welcome, follower of Jesus.' End with praise and thanksgiving.

Friday, February 8, 2008

Matthew 21:18-22; Luke 13:6-9; Psalm 1

Little Faith, Big God

The cursing of the fig tree follows from the incident at the temple. Like the temple, the fig tree is beautiful to look at, with its covering of green leaves. Like the temple also, the fig tree bears no fruit. The lack of fruit is a scriptural motif that is quite disturbing. In Matthew's Gospel, particularly, it denotes a lack of faith, a lack of comprehension and an inability to offer or receive the gifts of the kingdom. The withering of the fig tree is a clear demonstration of the fate of those who do not believe, and who bear no fruit. It is a mini-sermon, reminding God's people that true religion bears fruit. To ignore this truth is religious complacency. It may also

foreshadow the destruction of the Jerusalem temple.

After this incident Jesus reinforced the necessity of prayer and faith, essential not just for survival, but for growth to maturity and fruitfulness (see John 14:9-14; 15:1-4). Later on, after His resurrection and ascension, this reliance on prayer and faith became the pattern for the apostles and the early church.

Of course, we stumble at the idea of commanding mountains to dive into the sea. But that preposterously dramatic scene should challenge us to question our assumptions and expectations of how God will work, and to drive us to our knees in faith, to remind us that nothing is impossible to God.

Over to You

Do you come to Jesus today with questions bubbling in your inner self? Perhaps you have doubts, or are unsure of why He works as He does? He can take your questioning. Come to Him now in all honesty, and present your questions.

Prayer

Lord, increase my faith and make me fruitful and effective in serving You. Help me to forgive others just as You have been merciful towards me. Amen.

Family Time

Talk about the idea that fruit trees are expected to bear fruit so are we. Illustrate with a juicy fruit and its goodness. In telling the story about the fig tree, Jesus was really talking about us and about God. God has 'planted' us on this earth and He expects us to produce good fruit in our life. What kind of fruit does God expect? "Dear Jesus, help us to have the kind of fruit in our lives that would be pleasing to our Heavenly Father. Amen."

Saturday, February 9, 2008

Matthew 21:23-27; John 17; Revelation 5:12-13

True Authority

Those who held power and authority – the chief priests and elders – deeply resented the encroachment of Jesus on their turf. From the outset of His ministry they had openly accused Him of being a usurper, a blasphemer, and one of Satan’s henchmen. If Jesus really had come from God, they were in deep trouble because they had refused to believe Him.

Why did the religious leaders oppose Jesus and reject His claim to divine authority? Their view of religion did not match with God’s word because their hearts were set on personal gain rather than truth and submission to God’s plan and design for their lives. Jesus knew the central issue in the hearts of His

accusers. They had not repented when John the Baptist preached to prepare people for Christ’s coming. They had not repented when Jesus Himself preached the good news. That’s why He speared them with a question they were afraid to answer – He wanted them to examine their own hearts. That’s why He refused to declare His authority; He would declare it when they placed him on trial.

Their answer was a lie. Sometimes ‘I don’t know’ is a fair answer, but not when we refuse to believe the evidence because the truth will compel us to repent. Each encounter with Jesus forces us to ask if His is the only rightful authority over our lives.

Over to You

Are you willing to take a stand for the truth, even when it costs? Or do you look for the safe way out? Do you know the joy and freedom of living according to God's truth?

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, You are the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Let Your light shine in my heart and mind that I may know Your truth and will for my life and find freedom and joy in living according to it. Amen.

Family Time

Ask the children to draw an 'authority' figure – at home, in school, in society, and invite an explanation. Compare that person's authority (real or imagined) to Jesus' authority. "Dear Lord, we thank You for sending Jesus, Your only Son. And we thank You that You gave Him the power and authority to do all things. Amen."

For Sunday

Reflect how Jesus in His authority should be worshipped.

Monday, February 11, 2008

John 12:20-26; Psalm 2

Costly Discipleship

There are two extremes in one's view of living the Christian life. One trumpets an 'easy believism': God is good, life is good and all good things will come our way. Here we have faith without responsibility or suffering. The other promotes a titanic heroism: the Christian life is tough, full of commitment and self-denial. Here we have faith without joy and celebration, and sometimes without grace. John's account avoids both extremes. In subtle ways John tells that following Jesus is the call to all.

This good news calls for something deeper than mere enthusiasm. It calls for identification with Jesus, who in giving His life for the world will die and rise again. For Jesus, that meant that His own life had to be given up, the 'seed' of His body

had to die and be buried, so that something more wonderful ('much fruit') could come into being. Jesus' willingness to endure the coming horror of the cross is the ultimate expression of sacrificial love. And the image of the grain wheat symbolizes what is true of Christ, and what must be true in our own experience. For us, the letting go of the old life and its tired, meaningless and decadent ways, makes us candidates to embrace the fuller life that Christ offers. While the new life is one of serving God, the community of faith and the wider society, and involves obedience to the person and words of Jesus, there are blessings for those who live the new life. Those who serve and give, receive their reward:

eternal life and the Father's benediction.

Over to You

How have you experienced sacrificial love? Ask God to show you how to love sacrificially the person closest to you today.

Prayer

Lord, let me be grain sown in the earth, to be harvested for You. I want to follow wherever You lead me. Give me fresh hope and joy in serving You all the days of my life. Amen.

Family Time

When Mum and Dad were ill, have you ever been asked to help out with some of their jobs they were not able to do? What about your brother and sister? Have you ever had to pitch in and help to do their jobs? These jobs are not always pleasant are they? They also mean we have to give up something we enjoy to find time to do their chores. Tie in the notion of sacrifice with family chores. And remind them Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice for us, so we could enjoy the ultimate reward: heaven. Close the session with prayer.

Tuesday, February 12, 2008

John 12:27-50; Hebrews 2

What Response Shall I Make?

Light and darkness is an important theme in John's gospel. This is paralleled by other pairs of opposites: those who believe and those who don't; those who see and those who are blind; those who place themselves under judgment and those who are saved. So Christ brings division – an idea we find unacceptable with our emphases on harmony, toleration, equality and oneness. But harmony can't gloss over serious differences, and oneness can't be achieved simply at the level of feeling, but that of truth.

Thus there is something essentially disturbing about the One who brings the light. We don't just bask in its comforting glow. While we may want Christ to be the harmonizer, He fails to dance to our tune. There are

painful divisions – here and also in the world to come. The light of Christ is not simply about ethereal happiness and harmony. There is the pain of truth, choice and commitment, and with that, the possibility of the pain of alienation, misunderstanding and rejection. Jesus knew that pain, and therefore suffered not only on the cross but throughout His whole life and ministry. Like the Jewish leaders, we would also like to avoid pain and are faced with difficult choices in following Jesus. While people say they like the light, they may not like its consequences. We carry within us the secret of the kingdom, but we may not be readily welcomed as we would like. Nevertheless, we carry - and must share - the message of hope and light.

Over to You

Reflect on the fact that so many experienced Jesus' ministry (heard His teaching, saw His miracles) and yet didn't believe.

Prayer

"Holy God, you have shown me light and life. You are stronger than any natural power. Accept the words from my heart that struggle to reach You. Accept the silent thoughts and feelings that are offered to You. Clear my mind of the clutter of useless facts. Bend down to me, and lift me in Your arms. Make me holy as You are holy. Give me a voice to sing of Your love to others." (Ancient Christian prayer, written on papyrus)

Family Time

Share experiences of encountering darkness, and basking in the light. Illustrate by switching off the house lights and switching them on again. Note the reaction. Point out the idea and significance of 'light' and 'darkness' from Scripture. End by singing: 'Shine, Jesus Shine' or 'I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light' (UMH 206)

Wednesday, February 13, 2008

John 12:1-11; Luke 7:36-50; Psalm 48

The Fragrance of True Worship

The story appears with differences of detail, in other gospels. John's story is about a woman (Mary, presumably the sister of Lazarus) who was deeply devoted to Jesus and who sensed that His suffering and death were near. Now, she felt, was the time to anoint Him with the 'costly perfume' she had kept for this moment. (Could it, one wonders, have been the ointment that would have anointed the body of her brother, had he not been brought back from the dead?)

In any case, such questions are irrelevant to the main thrust of this lovely story. It's about *worship* – costly worship, worship that is filled with the beauty of true love and devotion, worship that is, as some would see it, extravagant and extreme.

Two points need to be made clear. First, Jesus wasn't indifferent to the problems of poverty. No one who reads the gospels could have any doubt that Jesus cared for the poor, perhaps beyond any others – 'the poor have the good news preached to them'. Secondly, this story is not an endorsement of a kind of self-indulgent spending on religious adornment like copes of gold or thick pile carpets in the sanctuary! It is about the *pure* extravagance of gratitude, a worship that doesn't even ask, 'What does it cost?' Jesus loves it when we give sacrificially, whether that's of our money, our time, our energy or our fear of losing the approval of our peers.

Over to You

How is your worship? Is your life a broken jar, the contents poured out in joyful abandonment to the Lord? What would it mean to throw off caution and worship God 'extravagantly'?

Prayer

Dear Lord, please show me the things I consider dear and precious that need to be broken so that I, too, may do a beautiful thing to You. The most costly gifts I can give You are my life and my love in ways that are pleasing to You. I give You also the gifts and treasures You have given me, and I offer them up for Your use. Today let the fragrance of my brokenness bring joy to You. Amen.

Family Time

What is the most extravagant gift you've ever received from a family member? As a family, what extravagant gift could you joyfully offer to Jesus this week? "Dear Jesus, You gave Your life to show Your love for us. May we also give our lives to You as an expression of our love. Amen."

Thursday, February 14, 2008

Matthew 26:14-16; Luke 22:3-6; Psalm 41

Jesus is Betrayed

Why did Judas betray his Master? No one knows for certain why he did it. Was his treachery motivated by greed, bitter disappointment with Jesus or hatred because of disillusionment?

Money seems to be one motivation. He was 'treasurer' for the band of followers and looked after their finances. Instead of money being spent *on* Christ it is received as payment for the betrayal *of* Christ. It may be that Judas never intended for his Master to die. Maybe he thought Jesus was proceeding too slowly and not acting

aggressively enough in setting up his messianic kingdom. Perhaps Judas wanted to force Jesus' hand by compelling Him to act. The Gospels do not tell us, but Judas has become a symbol of treachery.

The pathway to betrayal begins quite innocently: feelings of neglect, resentment, being out of sorts with the world or the church (or family or loved ones). Discussions are entered into and before long it is too late. The deal has been done. We have switched sides. We did not spot the warning signs, and Satan won the victory. Be warned.

Over to You

How does my attitude toward money indicate my spiritual condition and my relationship to the crucified Jesus? To what extent do you *betray* Jesus?

Prayer

“God our Father, we are exceedingly frail and indisposed to every virtuous and gallant undertaking. Strengthen our weakness, we beseech You, that we may do valiantly in this spiritual war; help us against our own negligence and cowardice, and defend us from the treachery of our unfaithful hearts; for Jesus Christ’s sake.” (Prayer of Thomas a Kempis, 1380-1471)

Family Time

How hard is it to simply be with your family members? Take some time to do just that. Bring out a board game. And have a ‘Game Night’ to have fun with each other. Close the evening with a short explanation on what betrayal can mean in a family – relationships, time, and money. Have a moment of silent prayer, a chance to be with God, ask for forgiveness in areas where we have betrayed our family and the Lord.

Friday, February 15, 2008

Luke 22:7-14; Proverbs 9:4-6

Significant Times

Passover was the great feast of the Jewish people. It commemorated the miracle of being freed from the slavery of Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea under the leadership of Moses. As a reminder of the unleavened Passover bread, every Jewish household prepared for the festival by rummaging through the whole house to ensure that there was no leaven remaining in any cupboard or larder. Any that was found had to be got rid. By a strange irony the chief priest and teachers of the Law were orchestrating another successful celebration, preparing a platform for their eloquent exposition of Scripture to the expectant crowds, hoping at the same time

to get rid of Jesus. He was the leaven that had to be removed.

Peter and John prepared by following the instructions of Jesus. The strange thing was that as they went they found the way had already been prepared for them. And what happened with the preparations for the meal was happening also on the broader scale. A divine plan was being unfolded.

Jesus knew the Passover pointed towards deliverance from sin, the once for all sacrifice which He was about to fulfill. He was preparing a meal for His followers, to remember the true Passover of His broken body, His blood poured out to provide the way from death to eternal life.

Over to You

The blood of Jesus prepares us to live as the body of Christ. We can choose to be self-serving, or be delivered from self. Think of each door through which you will pass today, and pray that through the blood of Jesus, you will be a bringer of God's faithfulness, love and power.

Prayer

Lord, You have done so much for me. I often think I have nothing to offer You. The thought that You long for my friendship is almost overwhelming because You've given so much and I've given so little. I love to be in Your presence. I rejoice that You want to be with me. Help me to devote a portion of each day to commune with You. Amen.

Family Time

We know that significant events occur, and whether it's a birth, exams, festivals or retirement, we have to prepare for them. What is the next significant event in your family? How do you think God wants to help you prepare for it? Enjoy as you discuss putting your plan into action!

Saturday, February 16, 2008

John 13:1-20; Psalm 147

Love in Action

Love is an important theme in John's writing; love pervades the Gospel, and the first letter of John.

What is the supreme demonstration of love? Is it simply the foot-washing, or is it something more? For John, actions are often signs. This act demonstrates the true nature of service and leadership. It forces us to reconsider our own relationships with one another. It especially forces those of us in leadership to think again about the way in which we exercise that leadership. To read these verses again reflectively and prayerfully, asking God to bring

home the force of that challenge would be no bad thing. This action also speaks of cleansing. Jesus wants to bring something new into lives which have been soiled by sin.

In both these ways, this action is pushing us forward to the cross, where the full extent of His love is really shown. For where else do we see the quality of servant leadership more obviously acted out? And where else are we to find cleansing?

So here, Jesus is reminding us that His life was lived with death in view, and that the die is now cast and the great climax of His life – and of ours – is imminent.

Over to You

Ask the Lord what things He would have you do today to bless others. How do you plan to 'wash the feet' of others this week? How will this act of love help you to prepare for Easter?

Prayer

"Lord, grant that Your love may so fill our lives that we may count nothing too small to do for You, nothing too much to give, and nothing too hard to bear" (Prayer of Ignatius of Loyola, 1491-1556)

Family Time

Reenact this simple but powerful scene amongst family members. Ask the question: 'Who is a servant?' and invite responses. Explain the meaning of servanthood. End the evening in prayer.

For Sunday

Find some time to serve another member of the larger family – God's family – in church.

Monday, February 18, 2008

John 13:21-30; Psalm 23

Jesus was Betrayed!

John 13:21 records: Now Jesus was in great anguish of spirit and He exclaimed, "The truth is, one of you will betray me!"

Betrayal is a universal human experience. A friend betrays his friend to protect his own interest. Colleagues betray colleagues for personal gain. Spouses betray spouses. Parents betray children and children betray parents' trust. Pastors betray their congregation's love and respect in their folly and congregations betray pastors by running them down instead of supporting them. Politicians betray the people's trust for political and monetary gains.

Christ was not spared betrayal. It is even more painful to be betrayed by someone close, as was His experience; what more when Christ knew who He

was, yet, His other disciples knew not! Christ was in great anguish. If He had lashed out at Judas, we would readily understand. It is hard to forget those moments when we were betrayed; the pains are hard to heal, if they do.

We marvel at Christ's response to Judas, His betrayer. When His disciples failed to notice His signal to point out the betrayer, Christ let it go. We marvel at His attitude towards His disciples who were somewhat indifferent and slow. How could He do it? There was something much greater than His personal painful experience of betrayal in His mind. Christ was determined to do His father's purpose (see John 13:1-3). He trusted in His Father's way and purpose. Like the

words of the psalmist, the Lord being His shepherd, He lacked nothing; even though He walked through the valley of the shadow of death, He feared no evil. He trusted God to spread a table for Him in the presence of His enemies. Governed by His concern for His Father's purpose, He viewed His personal

experience from the perspective of the greater purpose of God, eternal goodness and mercy. This way, God's purpose is not hindered but prospered. We cannot stop those betraying us but we can stop ourselves from letting their betrayal hinder God's purpose in our lives.

Over to You

Find yourself one betrayed? Remember Christ and His response to His betrayal. Pray and plead with God to show you God's greater purpose in your situation.

Prayer

Lord, You, who, in spite of Your painful experience chose to let God's purpose prevail, may You be pleased to grant me grace to rise above my painful experience and situation so as to allow Your love and purpose be accomplished and made known.

Family Time

Talk about Christ's experience in John 13 amongst yourselves as a family. Consider Christ's love for his disciples. Let Christ's experience spur greater love and faithfulness for one another and God's purpose.

Tuesday, February 19, 2008

Luke 22:24-30; 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Jesus, the Greatest!

Held together, popular ideas on leadership and Jesus' teaching on greatness, we find Jesus' thoughts of great and greatness rather counter-culture. Common and popular perception of great and greatness has much to do with the person, his caliber and popularity. However, Jesus' teaching on greatness has much to do with the person in relation to how he serves and benefits others. Jesus explained His theory with His own life. He came not to be served but to serve and gave His life as a ransom for others. Jesus served the people and His disciples. His being a servant to them is the end in itself, not a means to the end; likewise His giving of His life as a ransom for all. The result of His service is seen in His disciples 'continued with Him in

His trials' (v28). They had not done so out of obligation or compulsion. That proves Christ's greatness. Even if and when they deserted Him (as is seen in the passion narratives) Christ nevertheless persisted in serving them by giving His very life in order to give them life. Expecting nothing in return from His disciples or people, He only continued to serve them. This is greatness.

Christ's servant-leadership calls us to evaluate our service and leadership, whatever it may be; whichever level of leadership we are in. Great are we in the eyes of Christ when we choose to doggedly serve the good of those we profess to serve. Great are we in the eyes of Christ when we choose to continue to serve when others consider us fools and

insignificant because we choose to serve and not to be served.

Over to You

What is one good thing you could do for those whom you consider subordinate to you or one who is insignificant in your life today?

Prayer

Dear Lord, please grant me grace to serve as You served.

Family Time

Discuss and seek out another family whom you could serve together as a family, one whom you know who would not be able to give in return to your family's service.

Wednesday, February 20, 2008

John 13:31-35; Psalm 133

Jesus Commanded Us to Love as He Loved

As we come to the end of our life, we naturally think of doing and saying the most important things to those closest. Jesus knew that He was leaving His disciples. His death was near. What might be the great advice or commandment He could give to them? He gave them a new commandment – “love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.” Notice that the commandment was not to be powerful and influential persons. Notice that the commandment was not to build churches or a mega church. Notice that the commandment was not to set up a powerful ecclesiastical empire. Notice that the commandment was not to

carry out explosive evangelisms. The commandment was simply to love one another as Christ Himself has loved us. Pay attention to Christ’s words that, it is by loving one another as Christ has loved us whereby others may know that we are Christ’s disciples. When evangelism is done out of love, when doing church is done out of love and with love, when family relations are governed by this commandment, we must be ready for the explosion of church growth. Obeying Christ’s commands leads to unity amongst Christians. Such loving unity cannot but attract others to Christ.

Let Christ’s new commandment compel us to ‘put the horses before the cart.’ First things first – obey Christ’s

commandment, then others may know that we are His disciples and be attracted to be one too.

Over to You

Courageously ask yourself if you are obeying Christ's new commandment? Give thanks to God if you are, and if you are not, would you begin today?

Prayer

Spirit of the Living God, may You empower me to obey Christ's commandment to love as He loved more fully and joyfully.

Family Time

Share how Christ's commandment may be more evidently obeyed in your family. End family time with prayer for one another so that Christ's commandment may be joyfully embraced and expressed.

Thursday, February 21, 2008

Matthew 26:30-35; Luke 22:31-34; Psalm 139:1-6

Jesus Knows Us, Yet...

Jesus' words to the disciples remind us of times we fail to stand up and be counted for Him. They remind us of promises we gallantly made when all is well but they are left unfulfilled when doing so inconvenience or threaten our security or popularity. Worse still, keeping our promises with Christ courts trouble. Our denial of Christ may not be like that of the disciples' or of Peter's but we know deep within us when we did that at different times for various reasons. We feel terrible. Wanting to make amends and wishing we could relive those moments so that we might be given a second chance to stand

up for Him, reality tells us it is not possible all the time. We are left regretting.

Yet, Christ's words to the disciples reveal Christ's compassion for them. He knew them and the struggles they had to face. Likewise, Christ knows us. Before a word is on my tongue, He knows it altogether. He saw the spiritual forces that go against us and He stands by us even though we do not stand by Him all the time. Such is our God. Christ, the one who knows us, continues to invite us to stand by, stand for, stand up and be counted for Him and His kingdom's sake.

Over to You

Decide today to stand up and be known by others who Christ is and all that He stands for in your workplace, in your home and society.

Prayer

Lord, in times when my spirit is willing but my flesh is weak, may You be my strength to empower me to be Your true disciple.

Family Time

Share with one another those moments when you made a stand for Christ. Give thanks to God for His grace that enabled you to do so. Share with one another one of your decisions/action that denied Christ. Pray for one another and encourage one another to continue to be steadfast for Christ.

Friday, February 22, 2008

John 14:1-31; Psalm 4

Jesus, our Comfort and Confidence

We cannot escape times and moments of aloneness that are filled with a sense of abandonment. They are times when we have to make very difficult decisions or even unpopular decisions we believe to be right to others' annoyance and hostility. There are times when the significant people in our lives misunderstand us. There are times when we stand at the crossroads of our lives, unsure which path to take. There are times when we feel that we are victims of office politics. There are times when we face bad news of life such as having to cope with a dreaded disease or financial crisis. We feel alone and much abandoned. We are troubled. These realities of life are unavoidable but the truth that is equally real and

unavoidable is that Jesus will not leave us desolate; He will come to us (John 14:18). Jesus was preparing His disciples for those moments when they would experience aloneness, hostility and desolation. His words to the disciples "Let not your hearts be trouble. Believe in God, believe also in me" are His words to us too! Listen to Him!

Jesus does not abandon us. He comes to us and comforts us but we need to stay with Him. We need to choose to place our confidence in Him even when we do not see what lies ahead of us. We need to choose to place our confidence in Him when life makes very little sense. When we anchor our lives on God, God's word and His commandment by keeping them, we would be able to sail through troubled times

having our hearts governed by the peace that only Christ gives. Hence, Jesus said, "Peace, I leave with you; my peace I give to you;

not as the world give do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid..."

Over to You

Commit your cares and troubles to Jesus today. Listen to Him speak His comfort and peace to you.

Prayer

Come, Holy Comforter. Pray that You speak to me Christ's peace and comfort.

Family Time

Share with one another one thing that troubles you, keeping you restless. Pray for one another as you renew your confidence in Jesus and let Christ's peace be restored in each heart.

Saturday, February 23, 2008

John 15:1-25; Romans 8:31-39

Jesus the Vine, We the Branches

Tired of doing many things DIY? Frustrated by lukewarm responses you get from people you are ministering to? Finding yourself at the verge of burnt-out juggling so many needs in your church and family? Feel like giving up on leaders for their uncaring attitude towards national issues of our country? You are not alone!

Many of us begin well with what we believe God has called us to do, with our hearts intact, intimately connected to Jesus. As we go along, distractions come, real and fierce. They come from inside and outside of us. Our foolishness often gets the better of us. Very subtly, without realizing it, we are disconnecting from the Lord. Depending less and less on Him, we go on, on our own steam, relying more on

our ability and capacity to strategize in different forms. Before long, we get tired out, irritable, self-centered, we may no longer be serving the Lord's ends but our own! This is the danger of not abiding in Christ.

Jesus urged His disciples to abide in Him, the source of all nutrients we the branches need. Staying with the vine ensures life. Only then, will the branches be able to bear fruit that lasts. Simple and basic thing each branch needs to continue doing – stay connected with the vine. Simple and basic thing we believers need to continue doing – keep and work on our relatedness and relationship with Jesus. Listen (feed and meditate on His word to order our lives by His word) and speak to Him (spend time in prayer).

Over to You

Repent from self-sufficiency. Rethink the DIY attitude. Are you connected to Christ? Acknowledge the Lord of our lives, and service/ministry and His supreme place in our lives anew.

Prayer

Dear Lord, forgive me my foolishness in thinking that I can achieve much on my own. Thank You that even my foolishness does not separate me from Your love for me. Help me to abide in You so that I may bear fruit You have chosen me so to do, fruit that will last.

Family Time/For Sunday

As you go for corporate worship tomorrow, remember Jesus' word, "Abide in me." Worship and serve him, abiding in Christ. During family time tomorrow, share with one another your experience of worshipping and serving by 'abiding in Christ' - is there a difference when you worship without 'abiding in Christ'?

Monday, February 25, 2008

John 16:1-33; Psalm 5

Jesus Sent Us a Counselor, the Holy Spirit

Yes, the Holy Spirit is our counselor, the one who walks alongside us! He also is our Advocate, the one who speaks on our behalf, even defend us. Have you forgotten Him? Jesus sent the counselor to us so that we can have someone as our advocate and counselor not just for a moment but for all times, in all situations, for all the days of our lives. The Holy Spirit will guide and remind us of Jesus' words and life; in this way, convicting and helping us to live as Christ would.

In your conversations today, in your board meetings, in your classrooms, in your negotiations with your clients, in your visitation to your church

members, in your office, in your home, in all places, the Holy Spirit is there to guide you in your thinking, saying and doing. Would you let the Holy Spirit be your guide, advocate and counselor? The Holy Spirit will prompt you and remind you. The Holy Spirit will convict you. He will give you the words to say.

The Holy Spirit has been given us – welcome Him and let Him be your guide, advocate and counselor in all you do today, tomorrow, day after tomorrow... He is here with you and for you! Let Him in!

Over to You

Listen to the Holy Spirit guiding you today.

Prayer

Spirit of the living God, let me walk with You.

Family Time

Welcome and acknowledge the Holy Spirit in your family. Encourage each member of the family to welcome the Holy Spirit afresh in their lives. Remind each other regularly to let the Holy Spirit guide you in all you do.

Tuesday, February 26, 2008

John 17:1-26; Psalm 17

Jesus Prays for You

We comfort those in trouble by promising our prayers for them. We are comforted when others tell us they will pray for us. Indeed we draw great encouragement from the assurance we are covered by the prayers of others in our times of need. Yet, we know as humans, our prayers have limits. We do not always know what is before or after – we are not all-wise. We are often at a lost for words as to what to pray for others. We have our limitations and sin to deal with. There is one who has power over all flesh. He is in the presence of God at all times, interceding for us. How do we know? His prayer for the

disciples in John 17 tells us of His caring and faithful intercession for His disciples, us. He knows perfectly well who we are and what we need.

While in this world, we face many troubles. When we take Jesus and all that He stands for seriously, we will face trouble but take courage in the truth that Christ prays for you and more. He is one who loves us. He is one who is totally able to protect us. He gives His life for us; He calls and empowers us to obey His words. He is the one who pleads for us in the presence of God daily. Such is our Intercessor – Jesus Christ.

Over to You

Knowing that Jesus intercedes for you, what is one matter in your life you would want Him to intercede for you, one which you find hard to tell others?

Prayer

Thank You Lord for Your intercessions for me, and for Your people. Much protection have I enjoyed. Much guidance have You given me though I have not asked them. Many wonderful things have You done for the sake of Your people without my knowing, all because of Your intercession. Thank You, Lord. Help me to live each day, remembering that You intercede for me.

Family Time

Share with one another some of the challenges or difficulties you are facing at work or at school or even home. Encourage one another with the assurance that more than prayers you could offer for one another, the Great Intercessor too intercedes for you.

Wednesday, February 27, 2008

Mark 14:32-52; John 18:2-12; Psalm 91

Jesus' Legacy

Jesus did not turn back against His betrayer. He did not resist His arrest. He knew what was coming for Him. He did not pack and run. He stayed and prayed. Lest we think that He was superhuman, we read He was greatly distressed and troubled. He asked Peter, James and John to pray for Him. He did not return evil for evil. He embraced the evil that had been plotted against Him. Knowing that His life was in the hands of His Father, He prayed, "not my will but yours be done." The Father's will and purpose comes before His personal wish. This is a legacy Jesus left for us, His disciples.

At this Lent, a time of fasting, abstinence and much prayer, we look to Jesus in Gethsemane again. We pause and stay with Him for a moment when He fell on the ground and prayed, "Abba Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt." Let Jesus' trust and surrender to His father's care and purpose inspire us to more greatly desire to do the Father's will in our lives. Let Jesus' abandonment of self to His Father inspire us to give up our preference for the greater good of others, the church and society we are part of.

Over to You

What is one sacrifice you could make today for those subordinate to you so that they may be better off? Or deny yourself of one thing you plan to buy for yourself so that you could help those who need the money you have saved.

Think of the person who has hurt you, whom you find difficult to forgive. Forgive him/her from your heart.

Prayer

Lord, You emptied yourself so that I may be full. You have made yourself poor so that I may be rich. You took on the suffering that was mine to bear so that I may be forgiven and healed. Give me grace that I too may give so that others may have more and be blessed.

Family Time

As a family, fast a meal today. Give the money saved from the meal. Identify the people of another race whom you could help as a family.

Thursday, February 28, 2008

Luke 22:54-71; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; Psalm 96

The Lord Reigns!

It was night when they arrested Jesus. Evil appeared to rule the hearts of people. Good sense and reasons diminishing, Jesus' trial was conducted in the night. Evil sent out fear to cow the hearts of those who tried to stand with Christ. Those in power abused their positions and authority for their personal gains with much boldness, unashamed. The evil-doers plotted together preferring lies to the truth. Those who stood up to them faced inhuman and unjust treatment. There are few in such times who would stand up for Christ, for the truth. Many indeed turned away from Him.

As we meditate on Luke 22 today and consider the world we live in, it is in much darkness. Our dailies inform us of the merciless killing of children,

heinous murders, corrupt leaders, materialism that generates more greed, repeated break of trust by those entrusted with public responsibilities, sexual immorality inside and out of the church, social practices that leads to the rotting of good norms and the list goes on. Evil seems to prevail. Many by their lifestyles tell - if we cannot beat them, join them. We look hard for those who would stand by what is true, just and good. It is easy to despair.

Christ faced evil head on, standing firm on what His Father sent Him to do. He triumphed over persisting and intimidating evil. The suffering Christ inspires us to face the persistent darkness of our time, standing firm on what God through Christ has called us to be – salt of the earth,

light unto the world. The night of evil seem long but the dawn of truth, justice and mercy will come. The Lord triumphs ultimately.

Over to You

In your workplace, what is one thing you could do in order to right the wrong? In your home, what is one thing you could do so as to make your home a beacon of hope and light? In your own life, what is the thing you could do to undo the intimidating power of evil?

Prayer

Lord, You stood up to the evil and overcome it. Be my strength and grant me grace to stand up to mine so that Your name may be glorified.

Family Time

Talk about what you, as a family could do to enhance a peaceful and harmonious neighborhood in your home. Pray for your neighborhood to be one that stands united to make it one that upholds good moral values and living norms.

Friday, February 29, 2008

John 18:25-27; Luke 22:56-62; Psalm 100

‘Who do you say that I am?’

Know that the Lord Himself is God

It is He who made us and not we ourselves.

In the movie Bruce Almighty, God (Morgan Freeman) gave Jim Carey to be God for a day since he thought he could do a better job than God in managing the world. And so being a man who was so totally full of himself, he began managing the world most of the time using the power bestowed on him for his own gains. It is no surprise how through a series of events, he landed himself in a mess and totally overwhelmed by the needs of the world that he returned to God and let God be God.

I wonder how often we are in touch with our true human nature in desiring to be god ourselves. Perhaps that is why

there was so much hostility and reservations then to believe that Jesus Christ came as a Messiah. Did the disciple Peter at that hour know truly who the Lord Jesus Christ was? I wonder if we know how rebellious our hearts really are. Maybe if we begin to recognize who we really are, what we are capable of doing, both for good or evil, then perhaps we will understand the depth of His grace and love for a messed up soul that required His salvation. Maybe then we will understand His death and His resurrection to save a soul like yours and mine.

Over to You

Place yourself in the place of the disciple, Peter. Consider what would be running through your mind and heart as you respond to the people around you. What did you feel as you hear the rooster crow and when you remember the words of the Lord Jesus Christ? When you saw the eyes of the Lord Jesus Christ, how did you feel? What was on your mind? What would Jesus say to you now? Who would you say He is now?

Prayer

Lord, may I learn to know the truth of my own heart and increasingly know that it is to You that I give my heart to, my Creator, my Master and my God.

Family Time

Watch the movie 'Bruce Almighty' as a family and discuss how each of you could have 'played God' in your own life and what were the consequences.

Saturday, March 1, 2008

Matthew 27:1-2; John 18:28; John 1:1-13; Psalm 89:13-15

Who do you say that I am?

You are the Light of Men

In Him was life and the life was the Light of men.

He was in the world and the world did not know Him

He came to His own...and His own did not receive Him

One of the saddest scenes of this passage is to see the blindness of the chief priest and elders. They longed for the coming of the Messiah while subjecting themselves to the laws of purity. But when the Messiah was among them, they saw not the light that could bring them out of darkness. They have become so acquainted with darkness they could not comprehend light even when light was among them.

I wonder if we understand the true meaning of life that comes from the enlightenment of the Light of Christ that made us children of God, truly free and loved. Christ may have been

physically bound on earth by those He came to save. But ironically, those who do not recognize His light that gives life, those who bind Him are themselves painfully bound in their own hearts and soul.

May we recognize the light of the Lord Jesus Christ and walk in His love and truth for His truth shall set us free!

Over to You

Consider John the apostle's words: 'He was in the world and the world was made through Him and the world did not know Him. He came to His own and those who were His own did not receive Him.' As you invite Christ, the Light of all humanity to illumine your heart, how much of Him do you recognize in the world around you and in the world in you? What do you see?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, illumine my heart. Enlighten me. May I see You and the work of Your hands in the world and in my own heart and life.

Family Time

Have a family time of worship by lighting a scented candle, sing 'Shine Jesus Shine' and 'This Little Light of Mine' and pray as family.

For Sunday

Look beyond the wrong music notes of the musicians and the bad grammar of the preacher and ask, "God, what are You trying to speak to my heart today?"

Monday, March 3, 2008

Matthew 27:3-10; Psalm 94

Who do you say that I am?

You are the Defender of the Righteous

You are a God of Vengeance

The Lord knows the thoughts of men

And they are mere breath

In a society where there is much pressure, where the values are so counter-culture to what following Christ is about, we are often confronted with tough choices. What governs our choices? What informs our decisions and directions? Who sees what we do? Who are we accountable to? Is who we are in public who we are in private?

There are consequences to all choices we take and make. Judas was one of the Twelve. His betrayal of his Master eventually led him to a place of turmoil and guilt and the very people whom he schemed with turned out to betray him at a

time when he needed them. Such is the world that turns against Christ, one that confronts the evil of one's hearts which leads eventually to death. Evil begets evil. Unless one recognizes that the Savior comes to save the soul, one has no hope of life.

Perhaps we need to remind each other that the Lord knows our thoughts, and that we are but mere breath. He breathed into us life and that makes Him our creator and us His creatures. He knows all that is within creation – both good and evil. And He will defend the righteous and the evil He shall destroy! This life is not all

there is. May that give us hope
in times of pain and courage in

times of suffering within an
imperfect world we live in.

Over to You

Consider yourself as one of the crowd who was following the disciples around and happened to stumble upon the scene of Judas. What runs through your mind when you hear Judas' conversation with the priests? To what extent do you feel for him and why? To what extent are you repelled by him and why? Imagine if Judas came to you instead of the priests, what would you say to him? If Christ was with you and Judas, what would Jesus say to him now?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, teach me to remain steadfast and to return to You in repentance each time I fall, and find forgiveness in You.

Family Time

Share with one another how you might have betrayed Jesus in your workplace, school, or family. Pray for one another.

Tuesday, March 4, 2008

John 18:29-38; Luke 23:2-5; Proverbs 28:5

Who do you say that I am?

You are Christ, the King

‘What accusations do you bring against this Man?’ John Stott came to Christ at a time when this portion of the scripture was preached when he became aware that he like the rest of the crowds must come to his own decision of what he would say about Christ. Pilate himself although under tremendous pressure from various sectors came to his own conclusion despite the pressure and he found no guilt in the Lord Jesus Christ. We may have been born into a Christian family and

had inherited the knowledge and culture of being a Christian yet we would come to a place to ask ourselves what would be our own conclusion. Making this faith journey our very own is the challenge that confronts each one of us who desires to take this journey of faith with our Lord Jesus Christ seriously. If we have already made that choice, life often brings with it pains and trials. And hence, we may need to reexamine this question so we know whom we believe and why.

Over to You

Consider yourself as one of the crowd and you hear Pilate asking 'What accusation do you bring against this Man?' What would you say about Jesus? Who is He to you?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I do not always understand all things that I see but teach me to seek You so I may understand all things when the eyes of my heart are enlightened at this station of my life in You and with You.

Family Time

Imagine that the Lord Jesus Christ, the King is seated with you and your family in your living hall. Take turns to bring something to Him as your gift. Write on a piece of paper what you would most like to say to Him, the King of Kings. Read out what you wrote.

Wednesday, March 5, 2008

Luke 23:6-12; Psalm 99

Who do you say that I am?

You are a Holy and Just God

The strength of the King loves justice

Holy is the Lord our God

Jesus remained perfectly quiet when He was accused by the priests and questioned by Herod. He was mocked with contempt and was harshly treated, yet He remained silent in the midst of all such chaos. Two enemies became friends with one common and tragic intent – to make a mockery out of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross, according to Paul in the book of Philippians. His incarnation within humanity revealed also that He has not ceased to be God.

And to that end, all who knew who He was then and now would know that He is Holy and that He is to be worshipped and exalted.

Yet, those who do not know Him seek to ridicule Him with insults and mockery. I wonder often how we live our lives and how aware we are that He is a holy and a just God. Do we live our lives as those who know Him and hence would worship Him with our words and deeds? Or is it possible we live our lives as if we do not know Him and hence our lives make a mockery of Him?

Over to You

When you watch Jesus remaining silent, how do you feel towards Him? Are there some things that you would like to say to Him? What about the priest and Herod? If you were given an opportunity to speak on Jesus' behalf, what would you say to them? Again, who would you say Jesus is? How much of your life speaks of your worship to Him?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, teach me to simply worship You because You are holy and just. Teach me to live my life that speaks of who You are so that others will see You.

Family Time

Think of a time in your life that God did not answer your prayer. He remained quiet and did not perform what you had asked of Him. What do you do? Share with each other what that means to you. Pray for each other.

Thursday, March 6, 2008

Luke 23:13-16; Psalm 142

Who do you say that I am?

'I found no guilt in this man.'

'Therefore I will punish Him and release Him.'

'You knew my path in the way where I walk'

You are my deliverer

Staying true to the voice of truth and the truth of ourselves is not always easy. George MacDonald once said that anxiety is a creative directive that tells us that we have been relentlessly untrue to ourselves. Being congruent followers of Christ, it means that we pay attention to the true voice of the Master so that we can follow Him through our actions, deeds and life. Pilate eventually ended up crucifying Christ when he began flirting with wanting to be

allies with the Jews and sacrificing the truth of his own heart, that Christ was innocent. In a fallen world we shuffle between following Him and following the voice of others. May we remember in those times of anxiety and incongruence and that when our spirit is overwhelmed within us that He is our refuge and deliverer. May we remember that He is our portion in the land of the living as the Psalmist echoes.

Over to You

Imagine you are Pilate and Jesus is brought to you. You found no wrong in Him. What is running through your mind when you hear the pressures of the charges against Jesus? What does it mean to hear and follow the voice that speaks of Christ's innocence? What does it mean to hear the voice and follow the people's charges against Him? To what extent do you believe in your heart the truth of Christ and yet follow the ways of the world?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, teach me to recognize Your voice of love and truth in my life and follow that all the way eternally and faithfully. May I steer clear from that which calls me away from You.

Family Time

Practice the spiritual discipline of silence. Spend 15 minutes sitting with each other in the room in complete silence. (Do not do anything). Process what the silence means to you and how that affects your mind and your heart as well as your physical. Consider the voices and sounds that you heard. Share how does silence help or do not help in your hearing your own voice of your heart and the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Friday, March 7, 2008

Matthew 27:15-23; Luke 23:17-23; Proverbs 1:23-31

Who do you say that I am?

You pour out the Spirit

You make known Your words

The reality of the pressures and the voice of people, culture and society can be so deafening. Yet in the midst of all that loudness, the gentle whisper of the Holy Spirit of God can be distinctly recognized and heard. The question is can we hear Him and follow what He desires of us. "Crucify Him!" was the loud relentless scream of the crowd. Yet in all that chaos, the Holy Spirit whispered into the heart of Pilate and hence he found no guilt in Christ. The same Spirit of God prompted Pilate's wife in her dream about the righteousness of Christ. But because of the voices of the

crowd prevailed, Pilate gave in to the crowd.

Hence I wonder if we realized that in giving in to the crowd we have inevitably refused Christ's call, paid no attention to His stretched out hand, neglected His counsel and declined His reproof. What tragedy to our own lives when the voice of the One who saves us, loves us and gives Himself for us sometimes is the one whom we turned our backs from. May we recognize and respond to His call, receive His stretched out hand, accept His counsel and embrace His reproof in the midst of chaos and life so that we might be saved and restored!

Over to You

What has the Spirit of God spoken to you about this week? Has He made His words known to you? Have you heard Him call you? Have you paid attention to His stretched out hand? In what ways have you given in to the crowd this day? In what ways have you heard Him and paid attention to Him?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, teach me to be attentive to the promptings of Your Holy Spirit so that I might hear Your call, see Your out-stretched hand and receive Your counsel for living this day.

Family Time

Share with each other a time where God has led you through His word, His people or a circumstance. How can you use this experience to help someone in your family?

Saturday, March 8, 2008

John 19:1-15; Psalm 68:20-32

Who do you say that I am?

You are the Son of God

You are the King

There will come a time that our loyalty will be demanded of us. Who is our king? Whom shall we serve? When the rubber meets the road who do we give our allegiance to? Voice of the Martyrs documents all the persecuted church in different parts of Asia where living the life of faith is practically a daily choice between life and death! Countless stories have been shared of how when death was staring in the eyes of these Christians, many have remained true and faithful and unashamed of their allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Most of us in other parts of the world may never need to make such choices but yet the

subtle choices we are confronted in our lives will require the same strength and depth of allegiance. A choice between Christ and your loved ones, between Christ and your job, between Christ and your possessions and securities, between Christ and your position and between Christ and you! For we need to remember that all that we have are from Him, including the very breath we breathe, hence the reminder to Pilate from Christ, 'You would have no authority over me, unless it has been given to you from above.'

May we know that all that we have and are come from the King of Kings who holds all things together! Indeed all things!

Over to You

What competes with your allegiance to Christ? What do these things (or people) mean to you and what does yielding to Christ over them mean to you?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, teach me to align my loyalty and allegiance to You and You alone and not let anything come between us.

Family Time

Family Drawing Time: Prepare a piece of paper and have each family member randomly draw an event or an example of their choice that will show your family's loyalty and allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ.

For Sunday

What would be one way during worship service to personally express your allegiance to Christ in a way meaningful to you.

Monday, March 10, 2008

Matthew 27:24-26; Psalm 95

Who do you say that I am?

He is the Rock of our Salvation

He is our Rest

Today, if you would hear His voice

Do not harden your hearts

After an intense pow-wow with the crowd, Pilate finally relented and punished Jesus and released Barabbas to appease them. One wonders what went through the mind and heart of Pilate as he washed his hands declaring that he was innocent of the blood of Christ before handing Him over to them to be crucified. We can only imagine that he wanted to be free from guilt in his heart despite what he said with his mouth and did with his hands. And the truth is only Christ can free us from that guilt of sin and not any person's feeble attempts to declare oneself free. He alone is the Rock of our

Salvation. And upon this Rock we enter into His rest.

May we know the meaning of salvation this Lent season as we consider the sinfulness of our lives and what Christ had to suffer in the hands of men that led to His intended death. His was an act of love that allowed you and me to be freed from the guilt of sin. His was an act that redeemed and reconciled us into a loving relationship with the God of heaven and earth. May this knowledge cause us to kneel before our maker and worship Him with all our soul and heart and strength and enter into His rest.

Over to You

What does your salvation mean to you? What have you been saved from? What would life have been for you if you had not known the saving grace of Christ? What does His death mean to you?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, may You increase my understanding and appreciation of the meaning of Your death and life this Lent season.

Family Time

Share with one another how you came to the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. What is your salvation story? What is most significant to you having known Christ? Think of someone you know who is not a Christian and pray for these persons as a family.

Tuesday, March 11, 2008

Matthew 27:27-32; Psalm 22

Who do say that I am?

He is the Ruler of the Nations

He is our Deliverer

The anguish of David's psalm perhaps gives us a glimpse into the life of Christ in His last leg of the journey of walking towards the cross. The pain and turmoil of one being mocked, spat on, ridiculed, insulted and beaten only goes to show the extent of the love of one who was willing to take all that in order to accomplish the will of His Father. Christ, a perfect man, experienced the fullness of pain and suffering because He looked upon the hope of having the nation and the people redeemed.

The painful journey to the cross was not a short one. Christ gave us an example of staying on the course. I wonder how we view our own journey in this

broken world that may most certainly be filled with suffering, pain, disappointments and fears. Yet the Father's provision surprises us through Simon of Cyrene as he carries the cross for Christ. For Scripture to mention his name means that in the course of salvation and the toughest part of Christ's journey, he became Christ's cross bearer, a role that may have grown with him as he journeyed with Christ all the way till the end. What impact that must have been on this seemingly insignificant character. No one who would come so close to Christ on His most poignant journey towards death can leave untouched. No one!

Over to You

What has your own journey been like? How does Christ example move you further to persevere in light of pain and suffering? If you were Simon of Cyrene, how do you think you would feel as you carried the cross for Christ and witnessed the journey all the way till His death? What do you think Christ would have felt having Simon carry the cross for Him?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for showing me the way of love and life. Thank You for going all the way despite the humiliation and suffering just so that I can live. Teach me to love and live.

Family Time

Think of someone in your neighborhood, church, school or workplace who may need the extra help in their journey of life. How can you help him or her? Share with your family and end with a time of prayer.

Wednesday, March 12, 2008

Mark 15:20-21; Luke 23:26-32; Isaiah 53:6-7

An Obedient Lamb

A lamb does not fight but quietly is led to the slaughter. A sheep does not fight but is silent before her shearers. Christ was abused, oppressed, afflicted, spat upon, mocked to the point He had not sufficient strength to carry the cross. He could have called 10,000 angels but He kept quiet.

What an irony that He came to His own and His own did not recognize Him. Emmanuel (God with us) was with them and yet they have gone their own way.

But the greatest of all ironies is the kind of frightening and almost irrational things we do when God is with us. The darkest levels that human hearts

can descend into when times are good and when God is near, is baffling.

Irrational and cruel as it may be, the path that Christ took was in total obedience to God. It was the obedience of a lamb who will not fight what is apparently human injustice and irrationality. He was the Christ who was totally submitted to the will of the Father and willing to go through the pain of obedience where there is no season too long or distance too far to walk in humble submission to the Father's design.

Over to You

When life does not make sense even when we know God is in total control; when it seems that we are going through a season of “the Lord gives and the Lord takes away”, are we still able to come to Him in trust and allow Him to fulfill His intricate work in our lives, shaping us into men and women after His own heart. Who do you say that Christ is? If He is the Son of God, the obedient lamb, will you follow like an obedient lamb?

Prayer

Lord, I do not understand the happenings in my life but help me to be willing to submit to Your work in my life that I may more fully reflect who I am following – Christ, the obedient lamb. Help me to cease striving and to start trusting and resting in Your will alone.

Family Time

As a family, expresses your commitment to follow Christ in humble obedience through song. Choose one of the following suggested songs/hymns to use or others as is suitable:

Short Chorus: I have Decided to Follow Jesus (*unknown*)

Hymn: Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing (*Robert Robinson*)

Contemporary: Blessed Be the Name of the Lord (*Matt Redman/Tree63*)

Let a parent end the time in prayer for the family.

Thursday, March 13, 2008

Matthew 27:33-37; John 19:17-27; Isaiah 53:1-3

From Humiliation to God

The picture we often have of Christ is someone who is very clean, proper, well groomed, and nice looking. Some of our so called portraits of Him even show him to be blue-eyed. Some have even gone to the extent of portraying Him in His crucifixion with minimal body wounds and blood that is nowhere near what we see in Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*.

Scripture depicts the suffering Saviour to be crucified as one who was so hideous with no beauty or majesty that would attract us to Him, unlike the way we so often romanticize about the cross and crucifixion. There

on the cross hung the One who came from God in total humiliation – Deity subjected to the lowest human torture of that time.

But that was the way to the fulfillment of God's saving love and strategic work of redemption.

Christ, who though equal with God, did not count equality a thing to be grasped but emptied Himself, taking on the form of a servant, and as a human, went through humiliation in an obedience that went to the point of death on the cross. (see Philippians 2:5-8)

Over to You

It is easy to respond to Christ in obedience in peace times. It is also easy to give Him our best when it is congenial to do so. But what if the obedience that God wants requires us to give up some of our rights? What if it means losing some part of our lives? What if the path of obedience passes through some form of human humiliation? Maybe friends would laugh at our supposed “fanaticism”; maybe we might be the butt of others’ jokes. Would we still obey and find at the end that God’s love and will is perfect, acceptable, and good? Who do you say that Christ is? If He is the Son of God who was willing to go through humiliation in obedience to God, will you follow Him?

Prayer

Lord, teach me to die to myself so that the worst of humiliation for your sake would pale in comparison to the richness and abundance of experiencing Your love in the process of walking the road of total obedience to You.

Family Time

Draw a big picture of the cross on a piece of Mahjong paper. On separate small slips of paper or Post-It note, have each family member write one item they want to trust God to die to. Stick those slips to the pictured cross. Do this for as many items as desired and end by praying for each other.

Friday, March 14, 2008

Matthew 27:38-44; Luke 23:35-43; Isaiah 53:4

True to the End

Everything seemed to be stacked against Christ.

He knew and foretold about His death. He struggled in the Garden of Gethsemane with the prospects of having to suffer inhuman pain and death. He was hardly given an opportunity to defend Himself before His human judges. He could have renounced His claim to be the Son of God at his terrible chastisement but He did not and was not given the opportunity. While hanging on the cross, He even rejected the drink offered to help numb His pain.

True to the end, He offered Himself as the sacrificial lamb – the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world!

Even in His dying moments, He offered hope to the thief hanging beside Him. In the face of ridicule, He remained true to His character and mission – to be a live example of God’s infinite love, more than any human being can grasp and understand.

Christ remained true to the end in that path of obedience to God. The valley of the shadow of death did not deter Him from going to the end in order that God’s light can shine in this dark world.

Over to You

How easy it is for us to give up in the face of darkness in our relationships and life. Our head knows what is the right thing to do but our hearts often push us to respond in negative ways. Even when His hands hold our hands to lead us out of darkness, it is like a long journey in a night that never seem to end and our hearts lose hope of ever seeing the light of day. Christ persevered to the end. Who is Christ to you? If you have not come to the point of shedding blood, how should you respond to life's darkness as you allow Him to lead you – the One who was true to the end?

Prayer

Lord, help me to rest in Your security and allow You to carry me when the darkness of life just seems too much to bear. Help me to be true to the end so that Your hand can work freely and fully in my heart.

Family Time

As a family, share what are some things happening in your family that you want to trust God to carry the family through in order that God's name be glorified and that your family be full of joy. Pray as a family for the things shared.

Saturday, March 15, 2008

Matthew 27:45-56; Luke 23:44-49; Isaiah 53:8

It is Finished!

What a journey – from heaven to earth to be born of a virgin, Mary; to be illegally tried by religious leaders; to suffer under Pontius Pilate; to be spat upon, mocked and ridiculed; and then to be crucified!

It was a terrible human pain of suffering and rejection by people who were considered His own – betrayed by one of His own disciple; abandoned by His own disciples in His arrest; renounced being known by His inner circle disciple; rejected by the people He created.

But the greater pain of it all was what seemed like an abandonment by the Heavenly Father. The sin of the world was so dark and evil that as Christ took it on Himself, it alienated Him from His holy Father in

heaven. The seeming impossibility of the isolation of the Son from the Father actually took place and He cried out that pain of isolation and loneliness hanging on the cross – “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

But that was it. The work was done – “It is finished!” The sin of the whole world was atoned for by the obedience of Christ.

Over to You

“But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8) Who is Christ to you? If He completed the work on the cross of Calvary so that His blood can cover all ills, how will you respond to Him and to others?

Prayer

Lord, I open my heart and ask You to fully apply in it the finished work of Christ on the cross that I may experience the reality of Your forgiveness overflowing in my life.

Family Time

Spend some time sharing and reflecting on what the work of Christ on the cross means to your family and how that should affect relationships. Then, spend time as a family in prayer together to thank God for His forgiveness.

For Sunday

The people who welcomed Him with shouts of Hosanna were those who 5 days later shouted “Crucify Him!” Spend time imagining the feelings of betrayal and rejection that Christ went through from His triumphal entry into Jerusalem to His death on the cross with this double-tongued and double-hearted people. Where is your own heart in relation to Christ and to others?

Monday, March 17, 2008

John 19:31-37; Isaiah 53:5

Dying and Healing

The crucifixion of Christ was a historical event. His death is well recorded and attested to. The fact that water and blood flowed out from His pierced side is medical confirmation of the separation of fluids in the blood at death.

Why did Christ have to die? Couldn't God have just forgiven us without having to give His only precious Son to death on a humiliating cross? Couldn't He just save us without a costly process – the life of His Son?

No... for if God did any of those without the work of Calvary, then it would reflect a God who pampers and closes a blind eye to sin, a God who doesn't care about holiness and justice together, a God who

would be double-hearted by saying sin has its consequences and another time just waiving the consequences.

Christ had to die because of all the sins of humanity from the beginning of time to the end of the world. He took on Himself the consequences of all our sin - "For the wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23)

Why? So that by His dying, humanity may find life and healing for the darkness and sin that originates in our hearts.

Over to You

While humanity was still in sin, God took the initiative to express His love by personally paying the price for sin by Christ's death on the cross. The result – today we live in the freedom of God's love and our sin forgiven. Have you personally embraced God's gift of life through the death of Christ in your heart? Who do you think Christ is? If in His death, He brings about life and healing, how should you respond to Him?

Prayer

Lord, bring the restless wanderings of my heart home to Your love and life secured for me through the finished work of Calvary.

Family Time

Select a baptized member of the family to share how he/she came to personally embrace God's gift of life and what Christ's death means for him/her. Let him/her also share what being baptized means personally. End your family time with a time of thanksgiving to God.

Tuesday, March 18, 2008

Mark 15:42-47; John 19:38-42; Matthew 27:62-66; Isaiah 53:9

A Moment of Darkness

Christ died. He was buried. But prophecy and hindsight tells us that the death of Christ was not the end of the unfolding of God's great plan of salvation.

But at the point of death, all seems to be lost. His disciples thought all is gone. His enemies thought that is the end and wanted to make sure there is no counterfeit claim that He is still alive – secure the tomb!

But death is only a momentary darkness. In living, He loved us. In dying, He saved us. In being buried, He carried

our sins far away... really buried and gone.

In that moment of darkness where Christ is to be buried in a borrowed tomb, the secret disciples come out while the 12 are hiding. The 12 probably did not know what to do. The secret disciples did the only thing they knew traditionally to do.

But Christ is not in hiding and He is doing the unexpected and the mysterious. God is still sovereign and in control. His plan and purpose will be fulfilled not by human will.

Over to You

Is there darkness in your life right now that God wants to deal with? Is He removing about everything important in your life from you? If He is the Christ, how are you responding to Him in this situation? Are you hiding in your darkness? Are you attempting to deal with it the way you know best based on your human competencies? Who is Christ to you? If He cannot be held by death for more than a moment, how should you respond to the darkness that seems to have a grip on your life?

Prayer

Lord, teach me to look beyond the rain clouds and see the sun still shining. Teach me to be able to see the bread and fish in what often looks like a stone.

Family Time

Let each family member share something in their personal lives that seem like a persistent darkness. Have either parent say a word of encouragement and hope as a response to each sharing. For more activity, use cut out 50 sen sized black paper. Give one of those to either parent when one shares a persistent darkness. Then when the parent respond with a word of encouragement and hope, the parent should tear and destroy that black piece of paper. Pray for one another to end this time.

Wednesday, March 19, 2008

Matthew 28:1-8; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-10; Isaiah 53:10-11

What Do You See?

Death could not hold Christ in the tomb. O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory? (see 1 Corinthians 15:55)

Early on the third day, God raised Christ from the dead. The act was so spectacular that the soldiers guarding the tomb were terrified beyond life, the women were bewildered, and the disciples couldn't believe it.

But the most interesting part of the story is probably found in the Gospel of John (20:5-8). What exactly did the disciples see when they hurried to the tomb to have a look for themselves? The NIV uses 3 words – “looked” (v5), “saw” (v6), and “saw” (v8).

In the Greek original, 3 different words are used.

The first means “to observe or view the facts.” The second means “to view intently, or wonder.” The third means “to perceive and gain understanding.”

The disciple who reached the tomb first only observed the facts of the strips of linen. Then Peter wondered about what he saw – why was the cloth folded and separated from the linen. Then the former looked and understood, thus believing.

Over to You

We see the events in our lives. We see the broken relationships. We see the seeming darkness surrounding us. Do we wonder and do we understand what actually is happening and how the hand of God might be working in your life? Who is Christ to you? If He is the One who has conquered death and the grave, who holds your life in His hands, what do you then understand of the things and relationships that surround you?

Prayer

Lord, open my eyes and my heart that I may behold and understand the mystery of Your holy love in action in my life and relationships.

Family Time

Share some things that individual members find difficult to understand and have questions about God. Do not attempt to answer those questions at this point but as a family, go to God in prayer asking God to help each one to be able to see beyond mere facts to understanding and belief.

Thursday, March 20, 2008

Matthew 28:9-15; John 20:11-18; Psalm 49:1-13

Send the Point Home

The tomb was the context of the burial. It was the symbol of death, a journey of no return. It represented pain and tears and hopes dashed. There were political overtones and conspiracy to subvert and hide truth.

But God was sovereign in raising Christ from the dead that He should live on and not see decay!

His is a story of life and hope, truth and freedom. But He did not choose to herald it in a house of worship or where the context of life normally exists and is expected.

The message of His resurrection and life was

expressed and proclaimed right in the seat of death, darkness, and hopelessness – the tomb! What a place to send the point home that Jesus Christ is Lord of all! What a place to give hope to the confused and the desperate. What a place to defy the powers of human and demonic authority.

In the very centre of hopelessness and helplessness, God introduces light and the resurrected life of Jesus Christ. Right there is the declaration of a special relationship... no longer merely master-disciple but brothers (*and sisters*).

Over to You

As you go through Maundy Thursday commemorating the Last Supper and Jesus' washing of His disciples' feet, remember that Jesus was setting the stage for God's great act of love and the initiation of us into a special relationship with Him. Who is Christ to you? Is He merely Master or a Servant and a Brother to you as well?

Prayer

Lord, You have injected Your life and hope into the dying of my heart. I thank You that Christ has become my brother to journey with me out of darkness into His wonderful light.

Family Time

Talk about what it is/was like to be a brother or sister in a human family. How would that be similar or different to that of Christ being our brother? Have a brother (son or father) close in prayer.

Friday, March 21, 2008

Luke 24:13-46; John 20:19-21:14; Psalm 90

Missing the Signs

The greatest event had taken place – the resurrection of Christ. But there are those that just did not understand. They were missing the signs.

We have the example of the 2 that walked the Emmaus road oblivious to the fact that it was the risen Christ that was speaking to their hearts. They felt their hearts warmed but only recognized Christ at the end.

Then there is the example of Thomas who was cautious in his belief in spite of all that he had seen in Christ's life and miracles. He was the one that Jesus addressed "I am the way and the

truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Somehow, he missed many signs and in the end, only wanted one more sign and Christ gave him to see the nail scars and His pierced side.

Then the disciples returned to fishing and Jesus appeared the third time to them. After 2 signs and they still needed a third! Even in the third, they were still afraid to affirm His resurrection.

God gives His signs in our lives. He has never left us.

Over to You

Are there moments in your difficult journey that you felt heart-warming moments? Are there moments of pain (CS Lewis says that God shouts in our pain)? “As long as you feel an ache in your spirit, you know there is healthy life there. God is near – the discomfort is His way of telling you that your relationship needs special care.” (Bill Bright) And what greater sign do you need today than to commemorate Christ dying on the cross for you to show that God cares for you and loves you beyond all measure? Who is Christ to you?

Prayer

Lord, what do I see here on this day? As I watch the Lamb of God hanging on Calvary, show me in my heart what You are saying to me.

Family Time

Let a parent attempt to tell the story of God’s love expressed to us from creation to Calvary. Think of as many stories as is possible within the time your family has set aside for this part. End the time with thanksgiving to God as a family.

Saturday, March 22, 2008

Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:14-20; Luke 24:46-53; John 21:15-19; Psalm 145

A New Initiation

By then, Christ has appeared to more than 500 believers – first hand witnesses. But just before He ascended, He gave what is popularly known as the Great Commission which perhaps in our day may sound something like this – Go and build spiritual movements everywhere so that everyone knows someone who truly follows Jesus Christ.

That is an initiation into a story far greater than any of the disciples can ever imagine – God’s story!

Then there is that personal encounter between Christ and Peter. In response to every answer that Peter gave, Christ

initiated him into roles to “feed my lambs”, “take care of my sheep”, and “feed my sheep”.

In embracing the sufferings of Christ, we embrace Christ for life. In embracing His death, we embrace God’s forgiveness and cleansing. But in embracing His resurrection, we embrace a new life and a new initiation into God’s story which is greater than our own stories or the stories of any person, institution, or church.

Over to You

Who is Christ to you? Who and what have you embraced for your life and all that you are? God wants to initiate you into something greater through Christ's resurrection. Are you ready and willing to ride the wave of His personal visit in your heart this weekend?

Prayer

Lord, take my life and use it for the glory of the resurrection that in the world that I am in, Your name may be glorified and that my joy may be full.

Family Time

Set aside a meal this weekend as a family to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. During the meal, speak to one another what the resurrection means to each other personally. End the meal with a time of praise.

For Sunday

As you commemorate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, reflect on who He is. Through this Lent season, how much have you come to know your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who came to give His life for you and all. Affirm and confess with your mouth to Him in prayer and praise as a respond to the question – “Who do you say that I (Christ) am?”

Contributors

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