

ENCOUNTER
TO
LOVE

— Journal Devotion Guide —

HOW TO USE THIS ENCOUNTER JOURNAL DEVOTION GUIDE

This guide follows the 2018 Encounter Journal (EJ) schedule and hopes to give you a bit more handles and prompts on how to read the Bible and journal your encounter with the Lord for you to grow in your relationship with the Father as you read the Word.

The guide will provide devotional reflections for *only* the Saturdays of 2018 from May to Dec by following the ROAD method:

- **Provide a passage to **R**EADE**
The passage to read is specific and shorter than the one in the EJ schedule. The purpose is to help you zoom in to the text to make the observations. But we encourage you to read the full scripture text for the day's reading.
- **Highlight or prompt you to **O**BSEERVE the scripture text**
Making observations include looking for repeated words or ideas. Looking at the who, what, where, when, why and how of the text. Making comparisons. Observing cause and effect/result. Making lists. These methods help you read God's word slowly in order to listen to what God is saying.
- **Suggest how you can **A**PPLY what you have learnt**
When you make observations, the next thing is to apply those truths in your life. That's where transformation takes place.
- **Propose some areas for you to **D**IALOGUE with God**
And finally, spend time listening and talking to your Heavenly Father who loves you; to draw close to Him and encounter Him.

We hope this will give you a bit more familiarity on how to use ROAD for the scripture passages for the other days of the week and will encourage you to continue to apply what you have learnt from this guide to the readings for the other days as well.

May you be blessed encountering God and His Word.

Saturday, 5 May 2018

Obedience, Obedience, Obedience to God!

Read: 1 Samuel 26:7-11; 1 Samuel 28:8-19

Observe:

The Philistines had gathered their armies to go to war against Israel. At this time, Saul was the king of Israel, and Samuel the prophet had died. However, in his predicament, Saul had not been able to get a response from God on what he should do as his enemies prevailed around him. Out of desperation, Samuel was called out of the dead through a medium by Saul, hoping to get some advice and help. It seemed that Saul did not get the kind of response he was hoping to get from God.

- Why do you think Saul was unable to get a response from God, and God pronounced judgment on him through Samuel? (1 Samuel 28:18)

We find David in an equally difficult predicament – hunted by and hiding from Saul, whom he served faithfully, but Saul wanted to kill him out of jealousy (1 Samuel 26). In contrast, we find David in full surrender and obedience to God (1 Samuel 26:10-11).

- Observe and note down David's attitude as he sought to obey God, even when he had the right (and it also seemed logical) to defend himself and kill Saul when he could.

Apply:

There may be times when we are faced with trials, frustration or decisions to make. We go to God to ask Him for an answer, and God seems to be silent. But God is not silent. He is always with us and directs us. We can find his answers in His Word. Sometimes it is whether we choose to submit in obedience (like David) or continue in our own ways (like Saul).

- Reflect on your attitude and mindset when it comes to being obedient to God's commands and word.
- Are there areas in your life that God is prompting you to submit in obedience to Him? What is holding you back? Are you willing to trust God?

Dialogue:

- Confess and ask the Lord for forgiveness in areas where you have been disobedient or have not surrendered to Him.
- Invite the Holy Spirit to fill you, so that you are empowered to do the will of God through His Spirit.
- Give thanks that God is always gracious and merciful, and desires for us to obey Him out of love for Him.

Saturday, 12 May 2018

Days of Our Lives – Be Reconciled

Read: 2 Samuel 14:12-21, 33

Observe:

Have you ever watched soap operas? Whether long-drawn drama series from Taiwan, USA, Korea or even from Singapore, soap operas all have one thing in common – dramatic family feuds. The Bible also records such family drama. In the context for today's reading, Absalom had fled the palace and his father's (King David) house because he murdered his brother for raping his sister and was in fear of punishment or revenge on his life. Nothing pains a father more than seeing discord among his own children for David mourned for his son (1 Sam 13:37) and longed for Absalom (1 Sam 13:39; 14:1). Joab, a nephew of David and a commander in his army sought a wise woman's help to use a subtle way to reunite David and Absalom.

Some observations to note:

- The wise woman from Tekoa delivered the message of reconciliation (2 Samuel 14:14), of God's heart and how He "devises ways to bring us back when we have been separated from him".
- Convinced, David reconciled with Absalom, despite a lapse of over 2 years.
- Absalom also played an intentional role in the reconciliation process by seeking presence with David (2 Samuel 14:33).

All of us must die eventually. Our lives are like water spilled out on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. But God does not just sweep life away; instead, He devises ways to bring us back when we have been separated from Him.

~ 2 Samuel 14:14, NLT ~

Apply:

Just as the wise woman from Tekoa said, the days of our lives are like water spilled on the ground and cannot be gathered again. It is fleeting and gone in a flash.

- Are there any grudges, discord or estrangement you have with a family member, colleague or friend? It pains God to see His children fighting against one another. Instead, choose to and take intentional steps to reconcile.

Another parallel we can draw from the reconciliation story between David and Absalom is our reconciliation between God and us. If we have been far from Him, God desires to bring us back, but we also need to play an intentional role in seeking Him and wanting to be reconciled to Him.

Dialogue:

- Thank God that just as He forgives us, we can forgive the one who has hurt us.
- Ask the Lord to put His love in us, so that we can be quick to reconcile with others.

Praise God for His ultimate act of reconciling us to Himself – for Jesus dying for our sins and taking our punishment on the cross.

Saturday, 19 May 2018

A Heart to Hear and Obey

Read: 1 Kings 3:3-14

Observe:

In the animated Disney movie of the *Hunchback of Notre Dame*, there was a scene where Esmeralda, the heroine in the movie was in a cathedral singing a prayer. The townspeople were also in the cathedral where some were asking for wealth, for fame, for glory to shine on their name, for love to possess and for God and his angels to bless them. But Esmeralda asked for nothing for herself but for God to bless and help the outcasts. If God says you could ask Him for anything, what would you ask for?

That was what God asked King Solomon one night. Solomon prayed and asked for a “discerning mind” (NET), a “heart that listens” (LEB), an “understanding heart” (NASB).

- Go to www.biblegateway.com and compare the various Bible translations for 1 Kings 3:9.

The Hebrew word used in verse 9 is “Shama.” It is a verb to mean “to hear.” But this same word is also used to mean “to obey.” Therefore, to hear God is also understood as to obey God.

- Observe and note down God’s response to Solomon’s request (v10-14)

Apply:

God is reaching out and speaking to us all the time. He speaks to us through His word, the Bible. He speaks to us through the Holy Spirit to our inner hearts. He speaks through Pastors and church leaders. He speaks through our parents, mentors, accountability partners and cell group leaders. Are we listening? More importantly, are we obeying?

Solomon asked for a heart to hear God. He recognised that he needed God’s direction and wisdom to make decisions to rule the nation and guide the people. The Lord rewarded him with peace, wealth and fame.

Is there an area that God has been speaking to you about and you find it hard to obey? Maybe He has been speaking to you about confessing a specific sin in your life, or to obey His commandment to love a specific individual, or to let go of your fears and seek first His kingdom, and just like Solomon, when you surrender and obey, He will provide for all other things to be added unto you.

Dialogue:

- Ask the Lord for a heart that is still to hear His word, and a spirit to obey Him. Trust the Lord, that He will provide for all your other needs.

Saturday, 26 May 2018

What Are You Passing Down?

Read: 1 Kings 14:21-31

Observe:

- Was Rehoboam a good or evil king in God's sight? Observe and note down the consequences of Rehoboam's ways.
- Did you notice something that was repeated in verses 21 and 31 about Rehoboam's family background that sandwiches the start and end of these narratives about Rehoboam's life?

Rehoboam, Solomon's son, did not worship the Lord and did evil in the sight of the Lord (v22). He worshipped foreign idols and also led the people of Judah in worshipping these foreign gods. Where do you think this influence was from? The writer of 1 Kings repeats in verse 21 and 31 that Rehoboam's mother's name was Naamah and she was an Ammonite; one of the many foreign women that king Solomon (Rehoboam's father) took either as wife or concubine. These foreign wives not only influenced Solomon to turn away from God, but also passed on their practices and idolatry to their sons which affected the nation and generations to follow with serious and negative consequences.

Apply:

Those around us can positively or negatively influence us. Likewise, we can also influence others either to draw near to God or turn away from Him. If you are a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, mentor or leader etc and are in a position of influence, what are you passing on to others? Faith or idolatry?

"But I bring my children to church, how can that be idolatry?" you might think. Idolatry comes in very subtle ways. "Why are you spending so much time in church? Concentrate on your studies for now." "I'm too tired to go for cell group, it's so inconvenient." "I don't like this pastor, his sermons are not very engaging." Our actions and words can model or convey to our children/wards either a love for God, or a love for success and achievement; trust or fear; love for others or love for self; humility or pride. What do you want to pass on to your children and future generations?

Dialogue:

- Ask the Lord to search your heart and reveal if there is any idol in your life. As the Holy Spirit reveals, confess that to the Lord and turn away from the idol.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to guard your actions, attitudes and words, so that just like Paul, you can say "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." (1 Corinthians 11:1, ESV)

Saturday, 2 June 2018

The Battle Belongs to the Lord

Read: 2 Kings 6:8-23

Observe:

Have you ever been in a situation where you felt surrounded by troubles or your enemies? Where based on what you see, it seems like there is no way out or no solution to the problem? A seemingly lost cause, pressed between a rock and a hard place, a hopeless situation. It would take a miracle! Well, Elisha and his servant would understand. "Been there, done that" they would say. Indeed, it took a miracle.

The King of Syria was after Elisha and surrounded the city where Elisha was. Horses, chariots and a great army; all after one man. It seemed like a hopeless situation to Elisha's servant because he saw the situation with his human eyes. But Elisha saw differently.

- What was Elisha's response to his servant? (v16-17)
- Observe how Elisha treated his enemies? What did he do with them? (v22-23)

Elisha did not kill his enemies but prepared a great feast and sent them back. Surely, he knew the risk of letting his enemies go as they might come back to try to attack and destroy him again. Yet Elisha showed mercy and grace to his enemies.

Apply:

We can find comfort in Elisha's words "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." The battle belongs to the Lord. Elisha's words are echoed by John in the New Testament where he wrote "Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). Your seeming "enemies" today could be colleagues or schoolmates playing politics, backstabbing you; an unreasonable and demanding boss; a family squabble; maybe even Christians in church who oppose you or your decisions.

Even though the situation looks discouraging and bleak in our eyes, we can be assured that God is at work in our lives for our good. Jesus also called us to love our enemies and not retaliate in ways where it would cause us to sin. Just like Elisha, will you show mercy and grace to your enemies? Because the battle belongs to the Lord.

Dialogue:

- Ask the Lord to protect you from the situation you are facing and from your enemies.
- Pray for the Lord's wisdom to show mercy and grace to them and how to respond in a manner where you do not sin.
- Thank and praise God that just as He fought for Elisha and protected him, He will do the same for us today, because His Spirit in us is greater than any threat or enemy in this world.

Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.

~ 2 Kings 6:16, ESV ~

Saturday, 9 June 2018

A Higher Call to Lowly Serve

Read: John 13:1-15

Observe:

Observe the sequence of events in these verses.

- During supper, the devil already put in Judas' heart to betray Jesus (v2).
- Jesus knew of this (v3).
- Jesus got up and washed His disciples' feet (v4-5)

Did you notice something significant and extraordinary? Read the passage again slowly. In the scene where Jesus showed the example of washing the disciples' feet, He was already aware that Judas would be the betrayer. Yet, Jesus carried out the act of washing Judas' feet in the same manner as He did for those who were loyal to him. In this example, Christ showed us the extent of how much we should serve in humility, even to those who may harbour evil against us.

Apply:

This narrative of Christ washing the disciples' feet is often used as a model on how leaders should be humble and serve. But what should strike us is that Christ also extended that attitude of servitude and humility to those that harboured evil against Him. In common leadership examples, it is normal to serve those who are part of our team. But Jesus has raised the bar to show us to extend love and service to even those who hate us and "are against us." In your workplace among colleagues, in school or even among family members, do you face individuals who do not see eye to eye with you or are at opposing ends of an issue? While it may not be easy, Christ has shown us that this is the example that He wants us to follow. If the King of kings and Lord of lords humbled Himself to serve His enemies, shouldn't we as His disciples do the same?

Dialogue:

- If you are going through a situation with someone who seems to be making things "difficult" or even opposing you, pray for him/her.
- Ask the Lord for wisdom in relating to this person and for humility to serve this person out of love for Him.

Saturday, 16 June 2018

Unity that Glorifies

Read: John 17:20-23

Observe:

John 17 is usually referred to as the High Priestly Prayer. Even before we were born and became believers, Jesus already prayed for us more than 2,000 years ago. Jesus prayed for unity, not just for His disciples, not just for those who put their faith in Him while He was on earth, but for all believers in the future (v20).

He asked the Father that all believers be in unity with each other and with Christ. The key word to observe here is in verse 21b, **so that** the world may believe that the Father sent Jesus. Jesus repeats this again in verse 23, that they (referring to all believers) may be perfected in unity **so that** the world may know that the Father sent Jesus.

From these verses, the purpose of unity is show the world who Jesus really is. The power of unity is to glorify the Father through Jesus.

Apply:

All around us in the world today disunity and discord threaten peace. There are discord and wars among nations. There is political disunity within a country. There is disunity among people of different races, social and economic status and religions. In contrast to this, unity that is driven by love is a miracle. Whenever the body of Christ is not in unity, we do not bring glory to God and instead become part of the world's ways. Unity that is driven by love is a miracle.

Is there a brother or sister in Christ you are in conflict with? Do you not see eye-to-eye on some of the decisions made by the pastors or leaders of the church? Are you complaining or speaking ill of other brothers or sisters in Christ? Do not let the devil divide and conquer us. Instead, "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:3). As Jesus' disciples, let us choose unity so that God is glorified.

Dialogue:

- If you have been hurt by a brother or sister in Christ, ask the Lord for a spirit of forgiveness and choose to forgive because God forgave us first.
- If you are in conflict or disagreement with a brother or sister in Christ, ask the Holy Spirit to give you the wisdom to make peace with him/her.
- Pray for the unity of the church, so that the world will know Jesus, and glorify God.

Saturday, 23 June 2018

Power Witnesses

Read: Acts 1:1-11

Observe:

Acts 1 captures the days and words of Jesus' before His ascension. For verse 8, take note of and list down the who (the people involved), the when (reference to time/event), the where (location), the what and the how.

Acts 1:8:

- Who: The disciples
- When: When His Holy Spirit comes upon them
- Where: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, remotest part of earth
- What: Be witnesses of Jesus
- How: With power from the Holy Spirit

After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples. He gave them many proofs of Him being alive (v3) and continued to teach and instruct them. Jesus' last words before His ascension to heaven were critical as He was entrusting to them their task from the time He ascended to heaven to the time He would return to earth again. The disciples had a compelling and powerful testimony for the world – eternal life through Jesus; and they made this their mission for the rest of their lives on earth.

Apply:

We are in the same period and have the same instructions as the disciples; the time after His ascension till the time He returns again. Jesus continues to instruct us today to be His witnesses. But we know that we do not do this alone. He has equipped and empowered us with His Holy Spirit just as He did for the early disciples. The disciples were faithful to their calling and commission. They took the gospel far and wide to many other nations. We are recipients of the faithfulness of other witnesses. Are you being faithful to Jesus' calling for you to be a witness for Him?

Dialogue:

- As believers, we have the power of the Holy Spirit to help us. Ask the Holy Spirit to take control and fill you; choose to surrender in obedience to His Spirit.
- Ask the Spirit to place names of people in your mind and heart. As He does so, pray for these individuals that their hearts will be open to God.
- Ask the Spirit to use you and empower you to share the gospel with people He will lead you to.

Saturday, 30 June 2018

God is Bigger Than Our Circumstances

Read: 2 Chronicles 14:1-15

Observe:

Asa restored the worship of God among the people of Judah. He feared the Lord more than than he feared men and was not afraid to do what was right.

- Observe and list down what the result of Asa's reforms was.

Judah experienced peace because they repented and returned to worship the Lord under the leadership of Asa, and the Lord was the one who gave them rest (v6).

- Note down the strength, that is, the number of fighting men Asa had as well as their weapons they had. Do the same for the Ethiopian army (v8-9).
- Read carefully Asa's prayer for deliverance (v11). What do you notice there?

The collective number of fighting men that Asa had was 580,000 bearing shields, spears and bows. This was miniscule compared to the Ethiopian army of a million men with 300 chariots. Asa recognized that God was able to help him when he was powerless and through God's intervention and deliverance, they defeated the enemies until they fell and could not fight anymore. Asa's army even took away large numbers of plunder like livestock which they carried back to Jerusalem (v15).

Apply:

When you are faced with challenging, insurmountable or seemingly hopeless situations, go to the Lord in prayer and trust that God will deliver. Because He will. At the end of the experience, you will take away more than what you expected – seeing God's hand at work, growing in faith and love, knowing Him more, seeing His faithfulness and more. Are you in such a situation right now? Won't you spend some time in dialogue with your Father?

Dialogue:

- If you have not been seeking the Lord, confess that to Him and tell Him that you want to return to worshipping Him; just like Asa did.
- Even though God already knows what you are going through, take time to tell Him your situation, frustrations, fear of the challenge you are facing.
- Now be still before the Lord, worship Him with a song or Psalm (see next page) and ask the Lord to give you faith to trust in His faithfulness to carry you through this time.

He Will Carry You

[Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zBCcBwnW1PU>]

There is no problem too big, God cannot solve it
There is no mountain too tall, He cannot move it
There is no storm too dark, God cannot calm it
There is no sorrow too deep, He cannot soothe it

If He carried the weight of the world upon His shoulders
I know my brother that He will carry you
If He carried the weight of the world upon His shoulders
I know my sister that He will carry you

He said, "Come unto me all who are weary, and I will give you rest."

Psalm 23

[Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pN4tPkX0MG0>]

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters.
He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil, for You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You have anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life,
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Saturday, 7 July 2018

Tender-Hearted to the Lord, Turning from Evil

Read: 2 Chronicles 34:1-8, 14, 18-28

Observe:

Read slowly and summarise Josiah's actions, the sequence of events that took place and God's message for the nation and for Josiah.

- Even in the early days of his reign, Josiah sought God and purged the land from idolatry (1-7).
- On the eighteenth year of his reign, he sent Shaphan and Joah to repair the house of the Lord (v8).
- There, they found the book of the law given to Moses (v14).
- Upon reading it, Josiah discovered how the people had been disobedient to the Lord, he grieved and sought the Lord in repentance for the nation (v19-21).
- Josiah sought Huldah the prophetess to inquire of the Lord (v22).
- God spoke of calamity to the land but spared Josiah (v23-28)
- God said that Josiah's heart was tender; he humbled himself, tore his clothes and wept before God (v27).

Apply:

The anger and wrath of God is real. He sees and detests rebellion and evil and He will take action against evil. As children of God, we should love what God loves and hate what God hates. Reflect on your response and attitude towards evil. It is easy to hate evil and sin in the world and in others. But what is your response and attitude towards sin in your life? Let us learn from Josiah to be tender-hearted, to be quick to humble ourselves and see the gravity of sin and turn away from it.

Dialogue:

- Praise the Lord for His holiness and acknowledge that we once were sinners but by grace through faith, we are made holy through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Isn't that something to be very thankful for?
- Ask the Holy Spirit to keep your heart tender towards the Lord and sensitive of sin in your life so that you can turn away from it and turn towards God.

Saturday, 14 July 2018

Facing an Immense Task with an Immense God

Read: Nehemiah 4:14; 6:15-19

Observe:

Why would noblemen and politicians be afraid of a group of returning prisoners of war building a city wall? Men in power as opposed to a group that was vulnerable. These noblemen and politicians conspired and plotted, threatened, negotiated, lied, spied and backstabbed, mocked and laughed at these returning exiles and their mission to rebuild the city wall.

It was an uphill task for Nehemiah to lead the Jews to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. A city without walls was vulnerable to enemy attacks. Yet, the wall was finished in 52 days. A remarkable feat for ordinary people who were constantly under the threat of attack.

Notice verse 16, “and when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem.” Why would the nations around a tiny group of returning exiles trying to rebuild their wall and their lives, be so afraid that they would lose their esteem? The second part of verse 16 tells it all - “for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.”

Apply:

Isn't it amazing? The mockers, scoffers and proud were silenced, fearful and brought low. God once again revealed His power and glory. In the eyes of man, the rebuilding of the city wall was an impossible task, an immense wall – figuratively as well as literally. The odds were stacked against the Jews. “It's a futile attempt, a failure to begin with,” the enemies shook their heads and laughed.

Are you facing an immense wall that it seems impossible to see a solution? Maybe a financial crisis that weighs you down; loss of job and no interviews in sight; a deep depression you cannot get out of; an illness that has gripped you; a family estrangement that hurts so much; loss of confidence and self-worth and you feel like crumbling. It is when we are faced with an immense wall, that we need to realise that we have an immense God. Remember the words of Nehemiah in 4:14, “...Do not be afraid of them; remember the Lord who is great and awesome,...”

Whatever battle you are facing, you are not alone. Remember your God and Lord who is great and awesome. He loves you and fights for you. He surrounds you and protects you. He comforts you and heals you. You may face an immense problem, but you have an immense God.

Dialogue:

- Whatever problem you are facing at the moment, cry out to the Lord just like Nehemiah and pour out your feelings to Him. It is ok to be vulnerable before God.
- Thank Him that His grace is sufficient for you, His strength is perfect, His wisdom is watching over you, His hand is holding you.
- Ask His Spirit to replace fear with His love and peace. Praise Him for He is great and awesome.

Saturday, 21 July 2018

Doing Good in the Face of Adversity

Read: Esther 10:1-3

Observe:

The Bible is not a stuffy boring book. It is full of historical records of wars, family drama, treachery, miracles, political plots and much more. If you have been following your daily EJ reading and today's reading of Esther chapters 8 to 10, you would know the background story to probably one of the greatest blindsides in history; one that saved an entire nation from being wiped out and turned the tables on the enemy. If you have not read these chapters, I encourage you to do so.

Ruth 10 tells us that Mordecai was truly a great man, not because he was ranked second to King Xerxes, but for what he did for the people, especially among the Jews. The verses suggest that Mordecai practised true religion mentioned in James 1:27, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." No wonder, his people – the Jews esteemed him because of the good he did for them.

From the earlier chapters of Esther, we saw how Mordecai had saved the king from an assassination plot, but he was forgotten. In fact, the Book of Esther tells us that he almost lost his life towards Haman. But God did not forget him and remembered how he saved the Jews from a massacre. In Chapter 10:1-3, Mordecai was held in high esteem by his many fellow Jews and his greatness was even written in the Persian chronicles.

Apply:

In times of adversity, we may be tempted to retaliate or even take revenge against our enemies who harm us. But we need to rest our faith in Him by living a pure life, doing good for the best interest of men. Or maybe you have been serving faithfully, working with integrity but you have not been recognised for it, have not received thanks for appreciation for it. God remembers us. And in His time, He will avenge for us and will promote us in His own glory.

Dialogue:

- Thank the Lord that He will never forget you. He sees you and knows your every need.
- Ask for the Lord's protection over you even in the face of adversity, that you will have the wisdom to know how to face your enemies without falling into sin yourself.
- Pray for the strength and grace of the Lord Jesus to carry you through this period and for His peace to dwell within you.

Saturday, 28 July 2018

My Hope is in My Redeemer

Read: Job 19:25-27

Observe:

In the earlier chapters of Job, we observe that Job had suffered greatly. He lost virtually all of his earthly possessions and was bereaved with the loss of all his children. His body was afflicted with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. His wife was not at all supportive, and even nagged Job to “curse God and die.” Adding to Job’s woes, his friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar were not much of a comfort. They accused him of doing something awful to be suffering in this manner.

- Observe and note down Job’s attitude towards God.

In all the adversity and suffering, we can observe in Job 19:25-27, Job was holding strong to his faith. He certainly knew that he was not without sin and in fact, he called God, “My Redeemer.” In fact, he was absolutely certain that someday he would stand in the presence of his Redeemer and see him with his own eyes. Job expressed confidence that ultimately God would vindicate him of all the accusations he received.

Apply:

Are you facing accusations, suffering, persecution? Do you see God as your Redeemer. He already has redeemed you through His son Jesus Christ. We can rest in this knowledge and hope. He is our greatest comfort and someday when we are in His presence, we will understand everything that is happening to us now.

Hold on in faith and hope. Hold on to Jesus, your Redeemer!

“As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth.”

~ Job 19:25, NAS ~

Dialogue:

Lord Jesus, I feel afflicted in every way, but I declare that I am not crushed; I am perplexed but I do not despair. I am persecuted but I know I am not forsaken. I feel as if I’m being struck down, unable to get up. But I know I am not destroyed. I know I can overcome this situation I am in, because of the greatness of Your power. I praise You, because You are my Redeemer!

Spend some time worshiping the Lord with the following song: *There is a Redeemer*. Let the words encourage you and lift you up to focus on Jesus and praise Him.

There is a Redeemer

[Listen here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CLpW_uK5GTc]

There is a Redeemer
Jesus, God's own Son
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah
Holy One

Jesus my Redeemer
Name above all names
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah
Oh, for sinners slain

Thank you, oh my Father
For giving us Your Son
And leaving Your Spirit
Till the work on earth is done

When I stand in glory
I will see His face
And there I'll serve my King forever
In that holy place

Thank you, oh my Father
For giving us Your Son
And leaving Your Spirit
Till the work on earth is done.

Saturday, 4 August 2018

Out of the Darkness

Read: Acts 26:15-18

Observe:

Have you ever been to a place so dark that you could not see what was in front of you? A darkness so deep that it even created an unnatural silence? Maybe it was a game you played and had to be blindfolded. Maybe it was a blackout you experienced or a holiday to a countryside without bright city lights, or a mission trip to a remote location with little or no electricity at night. A darkness that can give you a loss of a sense of direction and imbalance. Prolonged darkness numbs the eyes and leaves a feeling of emptiness, uncertainty and even fear.

In verse 18, Jesus revealed to Paul that those in the dominion of Satan are like in prolonged darkness with their eyes blind. But Jesus provides hope for those who are saved from darkness:

- Being in the dominion/ kingdom of God
- Receiving forgiveness of sins
- Receiving an inheritance
- Being sanctified/ made holy by faith

Apply:

We were once in that darkness, but now we receive light and life in Christ. Paul experienced this too and was so convicted of this truth that he went around “testifying both to small and great” (v22) about Jesus’ death and resurrection to give light and salvation to all in darkness. Paul shared the gospel with prison guards, kings, governors, captors and accusers and remained faithful as a witness and disciple of Christ.

Having experienced life in Christ, are we doing the same in being a faithful witness for Jesus? If the Holy Spirit gave boldness and power to Paul and the disciples to be a witness for Him, surely He will do the same for us. Let’s continue to be faithful messengers of God’s light to those still in darkness.

Dialogue:

- Thank the Lord that through faith in Jesus, you are no longer in Satan’s dominion but in God’s dominion and that you have received forgiveness, an inheritance and have been made holy.
- Ask the Spirit to give you boldness and obedience to be a witness for Jesus to others who are still in darkness.

Saturday, 11 August 2018

No Double Standards

Read: Romans 2:17-24

Observe:

In this passage, Paul questioned the Jews' behaviour and their application of double standards for themselves and the Gentiles respectively – the Jews were judgmental towards the Gentiles for wrongful behaviour even though they themselves were guilty of it too.

- Observe what Paul's accusations of the Jews were and the result of their double standards.

As a result, God's name and the peoples' view of God were tarnished. Paul's words were much harsher because God's name was blasphemed.

Apply:

Having experienced the grace of God, we must likewise extend the same grace to those who have yet to know of God's love and grace. Who are we to judge since we were once sinners? It is common to hear of examples where people were turned off because of some Christians' behaviour which drove them farther away from Jesus, rather than draw them nearer to Him.

- Have you judged someone else for their wrong behaviour or attitude? Why?
- Have you experienced God's grace and mercy in your life? Examine yourself if you have been applying double standards in your life.
- How can you be a means and channel of grace to others around you rather than a stumbling block?

Dialogue

Read through this prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi and think about the words. Ask the Holy Spirit to work in and through you to be a channel of grace, that through your life, others will draw near to God and praise Him.

Lord make me an instrument of your peace
Where there is hatred let me sow love
Where there is injury, pardon
Where there is doubt, faith
Where there is despair, hope
Where there is darkness, light
And where there is sadness, joy

O divine master grant that I may
Not so much seek to be consoled as to console
To be understood as to understand
To be loved as to love
For it is in giving that we receive
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned
And it's in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen.

Saturday, 18 August 2018

Sure or Not?

Read: Romans 8:31-39

Observe:

Have you ever been sure of anything? Can you be sure your financial investments will reap good returns? Can you be sure you will be in perfect health 5 or 10 years later? Can you be sure you can get or keep a good job? Can you be sure you will still be alive tomorrow? Is there anything sure in life? In this world, no; in God – a big YES!

In verses 31 to 35, Paul was firing away questions and answers of what God has done for us. As if to tell his readers, “what more evidence do you still need? Look what God has done, look at how much He has proven Himself to be trustworthy.” God gave His Son for us; He graciously gives us all things. God justifies us; He does not condemn us. Jesus continues to intercede for us. Yes! There is something Paul⁷ and you can be sure of. Can you see it in these verses?

Paul said, “For I am sure...” (v38). He’s sure that nothing can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Apply:

The devil is always ready to ask us, “Sure or not?” He mocks, taunts, threatens and casts doubts whenever we face trials, persecution, discouragement, or danger. He’s ever ready to plant the seed or a soft whisper, “Are you sure God loves you? If He loves you, why is this happening to you?” But we can say with certainty and a shout that “Yes! I am sure God loves me.” Because He says so. More than that, He has proven so. Just look at what Jesus did.

Dialogue:

Thank you Lord for Your unfailing love for me. In times of trial or discouragement, I keep my eyes on You Jesus, because neither death nor life, nor friends nor enemies, nor things happening today nor in the future, nor powers against me, nor whether I’m brought high or brought low, nor anything else in creation, can separate me from Your love for me. I am sure. In Jesus name I give thanks, Amen.

Saturday, 25 August 2018

From Young to Old

Read: Psalm 71

Observe:

Notice the various references to age – young and old – and what the Psalmist says with reference to that.

- He has put his hope and confidence in God since his youth (v5).
- God has sustained him since his birth (v6).
- God was already watching over him when he was in his mother's womb and the Psalmist praises God (v6).
- He trusts that God will not forsake nor cast him away in his old age when he is physically weak (v9).
- Since youth, God has taught him and he continues to seek God for sustenance (v17).
- Even when he grows old, he will testify of God to the younger generation (v18).

Apply:

How can we in a multigenerational church serve God and one another?

For children and youths, put your confidence in God, not your grades and achievements for these are temporary. Be like the Psalmist - seek God who will provide for all your needs and future, God who will direct and teach you in what is right and good.

For adults and seniors, trust the Lord, He will not forsake you in old age. This Psalmist has testified of God's goodness and faithfulness. One of your key ministry areas is to testify of God's goodness through your life and provide guidance to the next generation to direct them to experience God. In your words and actions, are you directing the youth to God or to the things of this world?

Live a life that seeks and shows others to encounter God to love.

Dialogue:

- Acknowledge God's hand over your life since the days of your youth.
- Praise Him for His faithful presence and guidance in your day to day decisions, that He will never leave you nor forsake you.
- Ask the Lord to help you be a testimony and bear witness of His goodness to future generations.

Saturday, 1 September 2018

A Testimony of Trust

Read: Psalm 91

Observe:

This is a wonderful Psalm outlining the character of God (v1-2), the care of God (v3-8), the protection of God (v9-13) and the love of God (v14-16). But one interesting thing to note about this Psalm – observe the pronouns. Read the Psalm slowly and follow the pronouns. Who is talking to whom?

- *Personal declaration:* The psalmist first makes a declaration of God to everyone (v1). He then makes a personal statement, “I will say... my refuge... my God... I trust” (v2). This is a statement of choice and of trust; the psalmist makes a declaration that he chooses to trust in the Lord.
- *Declaration to others:* The Psalmist then goes on to encourage others and testifies of God’s care and protection – “delivers you, cover you, your dwelling place, no evil will befall you, He will give you, guard you etc”(v3-13).
- *God’s declaration:* Finally, the Psalmist wrote as if God was speaking to confirm his faith – “Because he (Psalmist) has loved Me (God), I (God) will set him (Psalmist), I (God) will rescue him (Psalmist), I (God) will satisfy him (Psalmist)” (v14-16).

Apply:

Just like the Psalmist, have we chosen to trust the Lord in all things? Are we testifying of God’s care and protection?

We can sometimes be half-hearted or double-minded in our trust in the Lord. We might say we trust God or know we should trust Him, but our actions betray us when we take matters into our own hands or are overcome by worry or pursue the things of this world rather than the will of God.

In times of doubt, look at God’s declaration of love at the end of the Psalm. He is speaking to you too. The Lord has declared that He delivers you, He will secure you, He will answer you, He will be with you in trouble, He will rescue and honour you, He will satisfy you, He will save you. That is the declaration of a loving and faithful God. Declare these truths to yourself and the situation you are in right now.

Dialogue:

Use Psalm 91 as a guide to pray. Change all the pronouns to address yourself (the first-person pronoun: I, me) and change all references of God to the second-person pronoun (“You”) such that you are using the words of the psalmist to dialogue with God. Use this psalm to declare your trust in the Lord today.

Example: I dwell in the shelter of the Most High, I will abide in Your shadow Almighty God (v1)...For it is You who delivers me from the snare of the trapper (v3)...I will call upon You and You will answer me, You will be with me in trouble (v15).

Saturday, 8 September 2018

You Are Good, Yesterday, Today and Forever

Read: Psalm 116

Observe:

In your observation, list down all the character traits of God.

The Psalmist talks about his love for God, because of his experiences with God – when he cried out to God for mercy, when he faced death (v3, 8), when he was overcome by trouble and grief (v8). The Psalmist speaks of God's character. God is gracious and righteous (v5). He is compassionate (v5). He protects the weak (v6). He saves (v6). That is why the Psalmist can rest in the knowledge that God has been good to him and that he can depend on God.

Apply:

The Psalmist had personal experiences with God. That is why he was so familiar with God's character; that God would reach out to him when he called upon the Lord. We too should build our relationship with God and remember all the experiences we have with Him – how He delivered us from trials, how He blessed us and provided for us when we were in need, how He comforted us in grief, how He gave peace in trouble etc. Why not write down as part of your Encounter Journal your experiences with God, so that you can be reminded of His goodness, yesterday, today and forever.

Dialogue:

- Take some time to praise and thank God based on His character traits. For example, praise the Lord for He is gracious and compassionate.
- Thank Him for the many times you have experienced God's intervention in your life.

Saturday, 15 September 2018

This Is My God

Read: Psalm 145

Observe:

King David, the Psalmist had so many adjectives, verbs and descriptions of God. List down these adjectives and descriptions from this Psalm, eg, great, power, righteous, just, He fulfils, He satisfies etc. There is much more. As you read through the Psalm, list them down.

One word that is repeated consistently is the word "all." From verse 9 to 21:

- Good to all
- Supports all
- Just in all His actions
- Near to all who cry out to Him
- Endures through all generations
- Lifts up all
- Exhibits love in all He does

"All" shows completeness or completely, and the whole extent or quantity. God doesn't fall short of anything. Aren't these descriptions comforting and reassuring of who God is?

Apply:

Often when we come to God in prayer and worship, it is to petition and ask Him for things or favours. But seldom are we able to adore God and speak at length of His goodness, attributes, to praise and boast about how good a God He is. If we have a God with such wonderful attributes and character, shouldn't we be boasting of Him to others?

Despite trouble and threats around the world, I can have the assurance and peace that my God is faithful, He is in charge and in control. His perfect attributes and character contrasts so much to what we see in this sinful world and sinful actions. This is my God, and I should boast in Him alone.

Dialogue:

Lord Father, You are perfect and unchanging. You are my rock and shelter, in You I have no fear. In You I find my peace and salvation. I praise You for You are my good Father God. Let me not focus on the things of this world that may shake me, but I keep my eyes focused on You. In Jesus name. Amen.

Saturday, 22 September 2018

Words Have Power

Read: Proverbs 12:18; 13:3

Observe:

In both Proverbs 12 and 13, notice there are many contrasting outcomes described between good and evil, righteousness and wickedness, diligence and slothfulness and between truth and deceit. Also, make observations on the various verses with reference to the impact of our words. Our words have a direct impact to the hearers and they can either edify or hurt the other person. The damage can also be “life threatening” where they are akin to sword thrusts which can cause serious damage or kill. At the same time, how we guard our tongue and speak with prudence will also guard our lives as seen in Proverbs 13:3. Therefore, our words can have a far-reaching effect on the people around us and on ourselves.

Apply:

Knowing the effect that our words can have on the people around us, we should be mindful of what comes out of our mouths. Before we speak, we should examine the intent and ask ourselves – is it to hurt or shame the other? Is it spiteful or to prove I am correct? The outcome of these spoken words will not improve the situation and would also affect the relationship you have with others. One would also not know how much the other person would be hurt by your words, and if unresolved, it could affect him/her for life.

This is even more so to our own family members where we tend to be a lot less guarded with our words. We should carry the grace of Christ and bring healing, comfort and also encouragement to those around us with our words. Even in reproof of others, let us remember that we can do it in a way that edifies and not destroys.

Dialogue:

Lord, it is written in Proverbs 12:18 that the words of one who speaks rashly can pierce like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise bring healing. I acknowledge that there may be times when I have not guarded my words. I'm sorry for the thoughtless words spoken in anger, lies to deceive, flattering words for self-gain or gossip or words of contempt. Holy Spirit, help me to be wise by keeping my tongue in check, to be slow to speak and quick to listen, to use words to heal and not hurt. Fill me with your patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control. Amen.

Saturday, 29 September 2018

Match the Talk

Read: Galatians 1:6-10

Observe:

Paul's letters typically have a certain structure to it; usually he starts with a greeting and encouragement or praise before addressing specific issues to the Christians in a particular church or region.

For the letter to the Galatians, he gives a short greeting and launches straight into rebuke. It is a letter of correction. Some in the church are turning to a different "gospel", i.e. a different teaching or unorthodox doctrine. Paul corrects them, and explains his intent of preaching the gospel is not to gain the applause of man but of God.

Paul was living a life according to God's calling; he was not trying to please men or gain their approval with popular teaching.

Apply:

Whether we like it or not, know it or not, when we say that we are Christians, we "preach" the gospel to others who are observing the way we live our lives. The question is, are we "preaching" the gospel of Jesus Christ or a different gospel? Do our actions and words match what Jesus has taught us to obey or are we living a life that does not reflect Jesus' words and commands?

Dialogue:

- Ask the Lord Jesus to help you walk the talk and that your actions match your words so that your life can bring glory to God.

Saturday, 6 October 2018

There is No Greater Thing Than Knowing Jesus

Read: Ephesians 1:15-19

Observe:

What are the various things that Paul prayed for the Christians in Ephesus?

- Spirit of wisdom
- Revelation in the knowledge of God
- Heart enlightened to:
 - Know the hope of His calling
 - Know the riches of the glory of His inheritance
 - Know the surpassing greatness of His power to us who believe

But what do these really mean for us on a day to day basis?

Apply:

The purpose of wisdom and revelation is to know God better. When we read the Bible, we can pray to ask the Spirit to give us wisdom and revelation so that we can encounter God through His word. When we pray, we also ask the Spirit to give us wisdom to discern His voice and His revelation to pray according to His will.

Having that revelation opens our eyes to realise that despite trials, we have hope, we are called to Him. It opens our eyes to realize that despite whatever lack (physical, emotional, spiritual) we feel inside, the truth revealed is that we are rich in His inheritance. And that revelation opens our eyes to realise that we are not overcome by distress or problems or persecution or fear, but we have a great and powerful God who is for us.

Knowing God is not gaining knowledge about Him but having a personal relationship with Him to truly experience Him.

Dialogue:

I pray that You, God of my Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, will give to me a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of You. I pray that the eyes of my heart may be enlightened, so that I will know what is the hope of Your calling, what are the riches of the glory of Your inheritance in me, and what is the surpassing greatness of Your power toward me who believes, according to the working of Your vast strength. Amen.

Saturday, 13 October 2018

Team Jesus

Read: Philippians 1:27-30

Observe:

Have you ever played or watched a team sport? Maybe rugby, soccer, basketball or ultimate frisbee. In team sports, each person has a role to play (eg, forward, mid-field, defence); they support one another; they play according to the coach's strategy; they play their role to the best of their abilities and skills.

Paul was asking the Christians in Philippi to do the same – be a team. Conduct yourselves in a manner that rightly reflects the value of the gospel of Christ. How? Stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the sake of the gospel. In other words, be united!

Apply:

We show the value and worth of the gospel when we are united in love. After all, Christ said that “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). In Christ, we are one team, each person in the body of Christ has a role to play (different spiritual gifts), we play according to the coach's strategy (Jesus' commands), together in one spirit and mind for the sake of the gospel.

When we quarrel with fellow believers, when there is strife and disunity among us, we undermine the gospel of Jesus. There is no such thing as one-man Christianity or church. We're part of the body of Christ. Don not isolate yourself in church or simply come for service and disappear unnoticed. Be part of the team by building relationships with others within the church through a cell group or serve in a ministry area. Are you part of Team Jesus?

Dialogue:

- If you are not yet part of the community life in church, ask the Lord to lead you to an area to serve or to a CG you can connect with.
- If you are in a situation of disunity among fellow believers, ask the Lord for wisdom and humility to make peace with the other person, not for your sake nor the other person's but for Jesus because He instructs us as disciples to do so.

Saturday, 20 October 2018

Meekly Powerful, Powerfully Meek

Read: Isaiah 42:1-7

Observe:

Isaiah prophesied the ministry of God's chosen Servant – Jesus Christ. Observe what the Servant would experience as well as what He would do.

Isaiah described Jesus as one who was meek and would experience suffering, and yet He would not be defeated. In fact, Isaiah described a Servant who would bring justice to the nations, who has the Spirit of God, brings light to the nations, opens blind eyes and sets those in the prison of darkness free. He might be a meek and suffering Servant, but Jesus is also a Servant who brings hope to all.

Apply:

Can meekness and power go hand in hand? Yes, Jesus has given us that example through His ministry on earth. In meekness, Jesus surrendered to the will of the Father. In meekness, He gave His life for the world. In meekness, Jesus willingly suffered for us. Yet, Jesus also healed in power. In power, He brought light to those who were spiritually blind and in power Jesus broke the bondage of sin.

Jesus was never antagonistic, proud or abrasive towards others; even towards His enemies. It was His meekness and love that drew people to Him. Jesus also lived in power that glorified God.

As His disciples, are we taking a posture of meekness to serve others just like Jesus? But in the same vein, are we operating in the power of the Holy Spirit to point others to the hope they have in Jesus Christ?

Dialogue:

- Ask the Lord to give you the same Spirit of meekness as Jesus and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to serve others.

Saturday, 27 October 2018

Words!

Read: Jeremiah 1:12

Observe:

We hear words every day. Promises made by politicians and advertisements, claims made on product packaging, assurances and guarantees by people. How much of it is 100% certain?

Today's full reading is Jeremiah 1 and 2. Did you observe a sentence that is repeated a few times in these two chapters? The sentence is "The word of the Lord came to me saying,..." (1:2,4,11,13; 2:1). What is so significant about the word of the Lord? Because the Lord said, "for I am watching over My word to perform it" (1:12). What this means is that whatever God says, He will do. 100%. Every judgment He has pronounced, every prophesy given, every promised made – He will perform and it will come to pass.

Apply:

Do we take God's words seriously or do we pick and choose what we want to hear? Do we highlight His promises in our Bibles but glaze over the parts we do not like or do not agree with? As children of God, the Bible should not be optional reading. It contains the very words of God. As His children, we do not have to be afraid of His words, but rather, God's words are a light for our path (Psalm 119:105); His words equip us for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17); we are blessed when we obey His word (Luke 11:28), and so much more. Wouldn't you want to read His Word every day?

Dialogue:

- Thank the Lord that His Word is alive and active and that He has given us His Word through the Bible.
- Ask the Lord to give you a love and understanding of His Word as you read the Bible.

Saturday, 3 November 2018

Remember Who is the Potter and Who is the Clay

Read: Jeremiah 18:1-6

Observe:

Pottery is an art form that requires skill and creativity. If the clay is too dry, it would be hard and difficult to mould and form anything. If it is too wet, it crumbles easily and cannot form a shape or be sculpted. In pottery, there is also intentionality and purpose. Each piece is crafted for a purpose – a vase to hold flowers, a water jug, a pot for cooking etc. The potter decides what to do with each lump of clay and the clay is subject to the potter's hands, fashioned into what it is intended for.

God revealed to Jeremiah His plans and His thoughts using the analogy of a potter and clay. God said, "Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter does?" declares the Lord. 'Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel.'" (v7). God is the potter, Israel was the clay. God the potter, is the one in control to plan and execute His intention and purposes for the clay, Israel.

Yet the foolish 'clay' Israel said in verse 12, "It's hopeless! For we are going to follow our own plans, and each of us will act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart."

Apply:

Do we sometimes behave like "foolish clay"? In our stubbornness or lack of trust, we decide to follow our own plans, act according to our own will instead of allowing God to mould us and direct us. The clay doesn't give instructions or demands to the potter on what to do. Likewise, it is foolish for us to give God instructions, demands or plead with God what to do for our lives. God the Master Potter knows all, sees all, plans all and is in control of all things. More importantly, He is a good and loving Master Potter. If you are seeking a direction or decision for a certain area of your life, ask the Lord to lead you. If you are facing a trial or difficult situation, believe that you are in the hands of a loving God who is in control of your situation. If you are tired, discouraged or fearful, know that your life is in the hands of God; surely you are more valuable and loved by Him than clay.

Dialogue:

- If you have been trying to be in control of all the things around your life rather than trusting God, acknowledge that to God.
- Thank God for His purpose and plans for you.
- Ask the Lord to increase your faith that you will learn to surrender and allow Him to mould you according to His plans and ways which are best for you.

Saturday, 10 November 2018

Are You Listening?

Read: Jeremiah 37:1-3, 17

Observe:

Zedekiah was the last king of Judah before the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and took them all as captives and deported them to Babylon as exiles. Jerusalem was under siege by the Babylonians during this time and Zedekiah asked Jeremiah to pray for him and the people. Yet strangely, “neither he nor his servants nor the people of the land listened to the words of the Lord which He spoke through Jeremiah” (v2). Jeremiah’s response was not something that Zedekiah wanted to hear. Zedekiah went again to Jeremiah in secret (v17) and asked if there was a word from the Lord. Again, the words from the Lord were not what Zedekiah was hoping for. Zedekiah was neither filled with repentance nor a contrite heart to turn away from sin. He wanted to hear from God what his ears wanted to hear.

Zedekiah was praying but not listening. He was asking but not obeying. He was going to God, but not surrendering nor repenting.

Apply:

Have you ever said that you felt that God was far away? Or that you can’t hear His voice or His word? Have you ever prayed and asked the Lord for something but felt that He has been silent? Maybe God has already spoken, but you are not willing to listen, and like Zedekiah, you are waiting to hear what you want to hear and not what the Lord is truly saying to you. The Lord desires for us to know Him, to hear Him. He reveals Himself to us through creation, through the law and the prophets, through scripture and most of all through Jesus. We have no excuse to say that God has not revealed Himself to us.

The real question is, are you willing to listen to what He says and respond in obedience, or do you want to hear what you want to hear?

Dialogue:

- Ask the Lord for a contrite heart, that you will humble yourself before God to listen to Him.
- If He is revealing areas in your life that you need to repent or surrender to Him, ask the Holy Spirit to lead you to repentance and surrender.
- As the Lord reveals to you, respond to Him in faith, knowing that He is trustworthy and good.

Saturday, 17 November 2018

There is Always Hope

Read: Jeremiah 52:31-34

Observe:

Nations rise and nations fall. Jerusalem, once with the splendour and wealth of Solomon's temple now laid desolate, destroyed and denounced. Invoke your senses when you read the Bible. As you read Jeremiah 52, imagine the scene in your head – chaos, destruction, burning fires all around. Imagine the emotions the Jews would have felt – fear, hopelessness, vulnerability, shame. Imagine the sound and smell – the smell of smoke, screams and cries of the people, shouts from the enemies, clanging of the national and temple treasures taken away. Where were the hope and promises that God made to His people? How could the nation ever be restored?

Yet, amid all the gloom and doom that was recorded, the book of Jeremiah ends very significantly and purposefully. Jehoiachin, king of Judah was in the Babylonian's second wave of deportation, after which Zedekiah, his uncle, was placed as a vassal king. Jehoiachin was taken captive and imprisoned in Babylon. But when Evil-Merodach became king of Babylon, he showed kindness to Jehoiachin. He released Jehoiachin from prison, changed his clothes, allowed him to regularly eat at the king's table, gave him a throne and even provided regular allowance for his entire life! (v31-34).

Hope in the midst of darkness! The favour on Jehoiachin gave the exiles hope of God's promised restoration and blessing.

Apply:

Whatever difficulty you are going through, there is always hope. God does not leave us without help. He fulfils what He promises, He restores, He heals, He loves, He provides, He holds our tomorrows in His hands. You may be going through something difficult and it may even feel like the darkest days of your life. You may wonder, "How can I go on?" Just as God remembered and watched over Jehoiachin, God remembers and watches over you. Like the Psalmist, we can say, "Even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me" (Psalm 139:10).

Dialogue:

Pray Psalm 139:1-10 (NLT)

O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I'm far away. You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord. You go before me and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand! I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there, if I go down to the grave, you are there. If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me.

Saturday, 24 November 2018

Wisdom to be a Doer

Read: James 1:1-8, 22-26

Observe:

James first talks about faith (v2) then goes on to talk about asking for wisdom (v5) then goes back to talking about faith (v6-8). He continues to write on various topics and issues like trials and evil then about being doers of the word (v22) and bridling our tongue (v26). All these seem like random unrelated topics... but are they? How are faith, works, wisdom and the tongue related?

To be a person of faith is to also do what we believe. Our works show our faith. How can we be a doer of the word? Ask God for wisdom. The words that we say also reveal our faith as well as our works. After all, Jesus also said in Matthew 12:36-37 that we shall all give an account for every careless word we speak on the day of judgment. How then can we bridle our tongue? Ask God for wisdom.

Apply:

Has there been a time when you've been serving in ministry and you've complained about the work or about a leader or fellow Christian? Even as we serve, we need wisdom over our tongue. Maybe we have been bad-mouthing others as we serve, or taking glory and praise for areas that others think we've done or we have said words that hurt others in the course of ministry and service. How are we supporting the work of God and the church rather than working against? How can we learn to submit and yet speak up for the things we have conviction for without being harsh in our words? The solution is to ask the Lord for wisdom when we serve and minister (our works) and in what we say to others (our words).

Dialogue:

- If you have hurt someone in the course of service and ministry, confess that and believe that the Lord forgives. Ask the Lord for wisdom so that you can reconcile with the person.
- Thank the Lord that as James 1:5 says, when we ask, God gives wisdom to all generously and without reproach.
- Ask for the wisdom of the Lord in all that we do, so that our works and words will glorify Him, thus proving our faith and love for Him.

Saturday, 1 December 2018

Live Like It's the Last

Read: 1 Peter 4:2, 7-11

Observe:

If you knew you only had a week left to live, what would you do? This question is often posed to help one think about priorities and what's important to you. But if you knew you only had a week left before Jesus returns again, what would you do? This question should help us think about what God's priorities are instead of our own.

- In your observation of the text, make a list of Paul's instructions to Christians, knowing that "the end of all things is at hand" (v7).

We should live the rest of our earthly lives for God and stop living in sinful ways like the times before we knew Christ. Paul instructs Christians, and us to:

- Be alert, sober-minded and pray
- Continue to love people deeply and use our spiritual gifts to serve others
- Offer hospitality to one another
- Speak the very words of God
- Serve with the strength God provides

Apply:

God's will is for us to be in a faith community and that is why many instructions given cover the aspects of loving and serving each other. The passage also instructs us to share the gospel – speaking the very words of God. God knows it is not easy for us to love and serve each other but He will give us strength to do it if we obey and trust Him. Sometimes after serving for some time, it is natural to feel tired, discouraged and even feel like giving up. Thank God for this reminder that even in the last days, we should not stop drawing strength from Him to accomplish His will for us to love and serve others.

Dialogue:

- Ask the Lord for His Spirit to live each day in expectant hope and readiness for His return.
- Thank Him for that glorious day of His return that we will not be in dread, but in joy.
- Ask for courage, joy and faithfulness in speaking His words and serving others in the body of Christ, as well as those who have yet to accept Jesus.

Saturday, 8 December 2018

Live Life, Live Love

Read: 1 John 3:14-15

Observe:

How should we love our brothers and sisters in Christ? In this passage of 1 John 3, it instructs us to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If they are in need and we have the material possessions, we should show love and help them. We should love with actions and in truth and not love only with words and speech. In addition, we learn about His command: to believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ and love one another as He commanded us. And we know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. In other words, love is the distinct mark and outward expression of our faith in God.

Apply:

God is love, and we can love because He first loved us. God has commanded us to love our brothers and sisters in Christ. We can start loving them in practical ways to meet their physical and also spiritual needs. But first we need to get to know a brother/sister and establish a relationship before he/she will be comfortable to share his/her needs.

The cell group (CG) is a good platform where we can develop authentic relationships to start loving each other. When needs are shared, CG members are there to support, pray for them and help in any possible means. For example, we can contact a CG member and spend time talking, listening, praying with him if we sense that he/she is experiencing discouragement. We can visit members in hospital, help take care of children to let a couple go for a date if we sense that the relationship between the couple is strained due to lack of time together. Conducting follow-up sessions for a member who just recently became a Christian.

Let us love, not only in words, but also in action.

Dialogue:

Dear Father, I know that You desire to see Your children love each other in an unconditional way just as how Jesus laid down His life for us. Forgive me when I have been self-centred, focusing on loving myself and not paying sufficient attention or being sensitive to the needs of those around me. There are many who are in need of love and help, but let me not be overwhelmed. I pray for Your Holy Spirit's presence as I extend love and care to someone in my CG in the coming week. I pray You will provide me with the wisdom and ability to extend love.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, 15 December 2018

First Love First

Read: Revelation 2:2-5

Observe:

Christ commended the church in Ephesus for several things. They worked hard, they persevered. They did not tolerate wicked men and false teachers. Jesus commended them for not growing weary in service. In spite of these praises, Christ rebuked them for one thing – they had left their first love.

Paul had commended this church before in Ephesians 1:15-16, “For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.” Now more than 30 years later, John gave a message to the same church, most likely to the second generation of Christians in the church. They had lost their first love for God. What characterises ‘first love’? Boldness, devotion, eagerness to please, desire to hear the other’s voice, excitement in spending time together and adoration are some examples.

Apply:

Zealousness for correct doctrine and faithful service are good. But sometimes, we can work so hard in serving God, that we lose our love for Him; doing has preceded loving. Think about the characteristics of first love. Do you feel this way about your relationship with God? Or has it become ritualistic and mundane?

Christ’s message to the church in Ephesus continues in verse 5 to repent and do the deed they did at first. What were these deeds they did at first that would characterise first love for God? They were to continue their service not because it was right nor out of obligation or duty, but out of love for Christ.

Think about your own relationship with Christ. Are you coming to church out of habit, rushing in 15 minutes late, or are you eager to come early to prepare yourself to worship and adore the King? Are you serving because no one else wants to or someone asked you, or because there is a need? Or are you serving because you love Jesus and others? Heed Christ’s words, repent and return to the love you had for your Saviour.

Dialogue:

- Ask the Lord to rekindle your passion and first love for Him, that you will grow deeper in love with the Lord

Saturday, 22 December 2018

A Sure Victory

Read: Revelation 12:10-11

Observe:

The prophetic imagery in the book of Revelation may baffle some and terrify others. The sounding of the seventh trumpet (11:15-19) announces the events that would take place leading up to the second coming of Christ. Satan, depicted by the red dragon would cause intense persecution of Israel (represented by the woman with child; the child symbolising Christ).

Satan is identified as one who deceives the world (12:9) and the accuser of brethren (12:10) before God day and night. He is relentless in his lies to blind those in darkness and accusations against Christians. But victory is announced through the salvation and power of Christ. Satan is defeated by the blood of the Lamb. In addition, believers who were martyred also partake in this victory (12:11).

Apply:

Satan may be working hard by throwing accusations at us, trying to make us feel guilty and condemned, or casting lies that cause us to doubt God. But we can overcome him because of the blood of Jesus. Jesus' death on the cross not only gives us eternal life, but also gives us victory over temptation and trials. Do not be afraid, do not be discouraged. We already know the end result, who wins and who loses.

*“...Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God
and the authority of His Christ have come...”*

~ Revelation 12:10 ~

Dialogue:

- Praise the Lord for Christ's victory over Satan, and that by Jesus' blood we have that same victory.
- Praise the Lord that we no longer stand condemned or accused before God, but worship and dwell with the Lord forever.
- Ask for the same persevering faith as the saints who have gone before us to overcome temptation and persecution.

Saturday, 29 December 2018

All Things New

Read: Revelation 21:1-8

Observe:

Don't you just love happy endings? Whether in movies or in books, happy endings give a feeling of closure, finality, assurance and peace. These final chapters in the book of Revelation gives believers so much hope and assurance of what the future brings and awaits us. No more tears, no more death, no more pain, mourning, crying (v4). God will reign and dwell with His people (v3) and we will never be in want (v6).

Apply:

What we are experiencing now is but a speck of eternity and is only temporary. Hold on to this thought as an encouragement because God said, "Behold, I am making all things new" (v5), to the thirsty He will give water of life (v6), He is our God and we are His sons and daughters (v7). Now that's a happy ending!

Dialogue:

Take some time to worship the Lord with this song or any of your favourite hymn. This song, *Longing for the New Jerusalem*, is based on the bible reading for today. Praising and worshipping God is also dialoguing with Him. As you listen to the song:

- Praise Him for His majesty and reign.
- Thank Him for making all things new and giving us hope and inheritance.

Longing for the New Jerusalem

[Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DNIillH0r4Q>]

I'm looking for a city not made by human hands.

I'm longing for the garden where God once walked with man.

For eternity is written on my heart, I'm longing for the day when we will never be apart.

I looked and saw a city descending down from heaven.

Prepared just like a bride for the Son of Man.

There's a day of gladness written on His heart, He is longing for the day when we will never be apart.

Every tear will be wiped away, there'll be no sorrow, hurt, or pain.

There'll be no more night. All things will be made new, it will be a brand new day.

And in righteousness He'll reign and the Lamb will be the light.

Behold the tabernacle of God will be with men.

And He will be our God, and we will be His people.

And the bride she will marry the Lamb, but until that day I'm longing for the New Jerusalem.

I love the day of Your appearing, I want to hasten Your return.

The Spirit and the bride say, come for Your beloved ones.

