

JESUS SAID WHAT?!

KEYS to LIFE

SLEUTELS tot LEVEN

Jesus

Preface

Jesus Said WHAT?!

It is not easy to follow the Lord Jesus.

He said things that sometimes seem to us to be impossible or undoable. Should you mutilate yourself (“If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off”) or love your enemies (“I tell you: love your enemies”) or never find fault (“Do not judge”)?

But behind all these statements of Jesus there are the most wonderful keys to life. Not only do they make life possible, but are secrets that create the way for us to a meaningful life and good relationships.

This booklet is a manual to help believers in our thoughts about Christianity and consistent following of Jesus. It is greatly exciting.

Victor Kuligin’s book *Ten Things I Wish Jesus Never Said* inspired 24 ministers of different churches to get together, to think about these truths, and to write this series you are holding in your hands.

Our prayer is that the church of Jesus Christ will awaken to again approach some of the more difficult things that Jesus said with a sense of earnestness, and to apply them in their lives.

May you, when you read the daily devotionals and during the group conversations, be touched by the wonderful Spirit of Jesus; may new roads open up to you in your faith.

May Jesus be glorified by what is happening here.

– Ds. Gerrie Doyer

Jesus said WHAT?!!!



Eish! I wish I never heard that...

Sunday 21 July
(Launch Sunday)

Week 1: The Key of Being Poor in Spirit.
Blessed are the poor in spirit...

Sunday 28 July

Week 2: The Key of Commitment.
No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.

Sunday 4 August

Week 3: The Key of Living a Pure Life.
If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off...

Sunday 11 August

Week 4: The Key of Denying Oneself.
If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Sunday 18 August

Week 5: The Key of Suffering for Jesus.
Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me...

Sunday 25 August

Week 6: The Key of Loving Your Enemy.
I tell you: Love your enemies...

Sunday 1 September

Week 7: The Key of Being Able to Forgive.
If you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

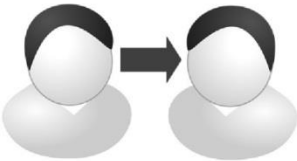
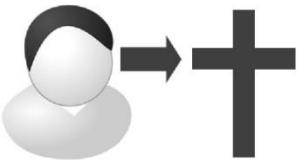
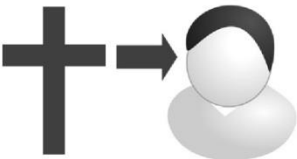
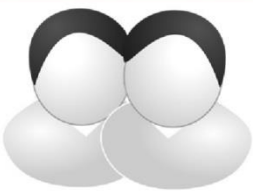


Sunday 8 September

Week 8: The Key of Having a Positive Spirit.
Do not judge...

Sunday 15 September

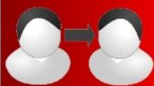
Week 9: The Key of True Religion.
Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven...

keys when you see this, the group should:

	Welcome	Hear how everyone one is doing by answering the questions.
	Worship	Time to praise God and lift up his Name.
	Word	Watch the DVD. Determine as group what God is saying to you.
	Work	It is now time to pray for and to bless each other for the coming week.
	Bible	Time to read the word. Pray together that God will open the Word.
	Questions	We get to know the Word better by discussing questions.

Week 1

The Key of Being Poor in Spirit



The world says: Be daring, be strong, full of self-confidence.

Jesus says: Live in humble dependence on God.

- What is the most beautiful thing anyone has ever done for you? What did you experience?
- Sometimes it is difficult to apply things that Jesus said. Tell the group which one you find to be especially difficult to do. Why?



Sing a song that tells about your dependence on God. Show the same dependence in a prayer to God.



Watch the DVD.



Now read Luke 9:23-25 and Matthew 5:3

Luk 9:23-25 NIV Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?”

Mat 5:3 NIV “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

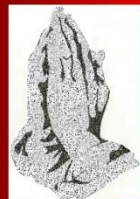


1. What do you think it means to be poor in spirit? Or as the CEV describes it: *“those people who depend only on him”*.
2. Tell about an incident which required you to be totally dependent on God.

3. Isaiah 66:2b says: “*This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.*”
What does this verse say about how our relationship with God should be?
4. What do these Scripture passages tell us are the characteristics that God is looking for?

- Practical application: Ask God how you can bless someone before next Sunday. Then do it!
- Write down a prayer here to answer the Lord on what He has told you during this session.

One of the most obvious ways for us to show our dependence and humility is to **kneel**. Now kneel as a group before the Lord and declare your dependence on Him in prayer.



MONDAY

Week 1: The Key of Being Poor in Spirit

Daily Reading
Ephesians 3:13-21

Crushed to release God's flavour

Isaiah 66:2b... but this is the man to whom I will look and have regard: he who is humble and of a broken or wounded spirit and who trembles at My word and reveres My commands. (The Amplified Bible)

God is looking for people who are repentant and humble with reverential fear.

‘Contrite’, means to break or bruise; to rub or wear. Hence, broken-hearted for sin; deeply affected with grief and sorrow for having offended God; humble; penitent; as a contrite sinner.

Isaiah 53:5 But He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was on Him; and with His stripes we ourselves are healed.

When we experience the amazing love of Jesus for us, we choose to become empty of self and available to be filled with all the fullness of God. (Eph 3:19) Those are the people that God is looking for - people who are poor in spirit, who have made Jesus the Lord of their lives. Many are happy to accept the wonderful freedom of salvation, but not many are prepared to walk the road of humility and obedience that God is looking for. Surrender is the key. Ask God to show you if anything is standing in the way of your total surrender to Him, then release these things to Him and allow Him to be Lord of your life. Now, for an exciting journey with the One who knows you better than you know yourself and loves you much more than you can comprehend.

Prayer: Dear Lord, I love you and want to serve You with all my heart. Please show me when I am putting myself back on the throne of my life and help me to surrender myself totally to You. Let my life be a fragrant offering to You.

Your weakness

2 Co 12:9-10 (NIV) But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

When we're faced with a problem we tend to focus on the problem and spend our time trying to find ways we can deal with it with our human, earthly resources. We become pre-occupied and weighed down by the thing while, often desperately, seeking a solution. Sometimes we may even blame God for not coming through for us, 'even though we prayed!' Meanwhile we allowed ourselves to become so anxious that all we were doing was asking God to 'rubber stamp' our plan to deal with the issue.

Instead of relying on our own strength (resources) we need to learn to release our life issues to the Almighty God and rely on His wisdom and strength to find the right solution. That means that we have to learn to surrender our own will to His will and plan. Only when we remove the stumbling block of self are we fully available to be used by the Lord so that He gets the glory, not us. So, I am strong when fully reliant on God but weak when depending only on my own resources.

Prayer: Dear Lord, please help me to put you first in all that I do so that, instead of relying only on my own abilities, I would constantly commit myself to your plan and hear and obey your voice. Amen.

Those looked down on

We really dislike it when we feel that someone is looking down on us. Yet like the Pharisee in this story we often find ourselves looking down on people who are different to us or in a different class financially. Like the Pharisee we can justify why we think we are better than the other person. What does the Bible say about us thinking we are better than others?

Firstly the Bible says that if you think that you are better than someone else you are deceived. *“For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself (Gal 6:3).* It goes on to say that we must first look at ourselves, first taking the log out of our own eyes before we try and take the splinter out of the other person’s eye. In fact the Word says we must prefer our brothers and sisters above ourselves. In other words put them and their needs above our own.

Secondly, the motive behind looking down on somebody is simply pride. This pride lifts us up above that person. Pride is something God hates. In fact it was because of pride that Satan thought that he was better than his fellow angels and that he could elevate himself to God’s status. This caused his downfall. The message in the Parable about the Pharisee and the Tax collector is very clearly put out when Jesus says *“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”* Look at how the Message translation puts it, *“If you walk around with your nose in the air, you’re going to end up flat on your face, but if you’re content to be simply yourself, you will become more than yourself.”*

Let’s not walk around with our noses in the air and humble ourselves putting others first and above ourselves.

Prayer: *Lord forgive me for being proud and thinking that I am better than others. I want to have a humble attitude toward others, loving them with your love. Amen*

Right Attitude

Luke 14:8,9,11 When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place. It could happen that someone more important than you has been invited, and your host, who invited both of you, would have to come and say to you, 'Let him have this place.' Then you would be embarrassed and have to sit in the lowest place. For those who make themselves great will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be made great."(Good News)

Kingdom minded, in a world that believes in “survival of the fittest”. Are we any different in the church? How do we feel when we arrive at church to find someone else sitting in ‘our’ seat? Peter and James also wanted to be honoured, saying to Jesus “*Grant to us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left hand, in Your glory.*”(Mark10:37)

Comparison is a tell-tale sign of “wrong attitude”. As soon as we find ourselves comparing ourselves with others there should be a flashing red warning light! Maybe one problem is that we don’t honour each other enough. We are more likely to criticize than to give honour to others, making others feel vulnerable and looking for affirmation. Where do we get affirmation from? People will disappoint us at some time or another, but if we allow Jesus to be our source of encouragement and trust Him with our deepest needs, He will never let us down. He will never compare us to someone else because He made us according to a unique pattern for a unique purpose – so why do we have to be better than anyone else? We just have to be who He created us to be and encourage others to do the same.

Prayer: Loving Father, please forgive me for the times that I have exalted myself. Please help me to encourage much more, criticize much less and look to You to meet all my needs. Amen

Not more highly than you ought

Rom 12:3 NIV For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

This scripture speaks of humility. The writer begins by acknowledging that if it weren't for God's grace he would not be able to address his readers on this issue.

Isn't it interesting how we so easily compare ourselves with others? We might feel inferior to someone who is more highly qualified or a really good salesman or we might stick our chests out because we are a better parent or drive a better car than someone else, for example. Attitudes of inferiority or superiority have the same root, pride. The Bible warns that, "*Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.*" (Proverbs 16:18).

Romans 12:3 warns against pridefully comparing ourselves with others. Rather, we should consider ourselves realistically in comparison with our view of Almighty God. The greater our faith in God the more we realise just how far we fall short of His image in which He created us. If we consider ourselves 'better' than others we are daring to suggest that God made a mistake with them and if we allow ourselves to feel inferior we're suggesting that God made a mistake with us. God is perfect. He does not make mistakes and He created all people in His image!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for creating me in your image. Please help me to be humble and to see others and myself as you see us. Amen.

SATURDAY

Week 1: The Key of Being Poor in Spirit

Daily Reading
Philippians 2 : 5 – 11
James 4: 10

Humble yourself

“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.” Jas 4:10 (ESV)

Humility is a concept that we struggle to apply in today’s way of life. In fact the media and the standards that are applied today are in absolute contrast to Humility. Life has become about “I, me, myself and no one else. The question most frequently asked is “what do I get out of it?”. If I don’t benefit from it, I don’t do or participate in it. The Bible says, *“Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind (Romans 12: 2).*

Jesus demonstrated humility in a wonderful way. The Son of God who is God and who was involved in Creation (*..all things were made through Him. John 1:3*), who was the object of worship in heaven humbles Himself and becomes a seed in the womb of one He created. He became just like us so that He could experience life in the same way that we do. He was tempted in every way as we are, but yet was without sin. *“He made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”(Php 2:7-8)*

James tells us that we must humble ourselves. It is our responsibility, not God’s. Jesus said that he is the vine and we are the branches. The vine’s branches are totally dependent on the stem of the vine to flourish, grow and bear fruit. Humbling ourselves means that we take on a position of reliance on Jesus, realizing that “without Him we can do nothing”. It is when we humble ourselves to the Lordship of Christ; seeking His kingdom first, that everything we need for life is added to us.

Prayer: *Today Lord I make the decision to humble myself and submit myself to your Lordship and your will. Amen.*

Week 2

The Key of Commitment



The world says: Don't commit yourself to anything. Live free!

Jesus says: Be absolutely committed to Me and my mission

- Tell each other about someone you know who had to make big sacrifices to achieve a personal goal. (Perhaps an example from your own life or from a movie based on a true story?)
- What does it mean when you say: *"I am committed to achieving or doing something"*?



Now there is a wonderful opportunity to praise and worship God. Let someone say a prayer of praise before and after the songs.



Watch the DVD and comment on it. What touched you?



Romans 12:11 "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord."

Exodus 20:4-5 "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God..."

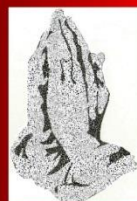


1. What in this passage touched you or what is the Lord speaking to you about?
2. Complete the sentence: "How can Jesus expect me not to be lacking in zeal while I..."
3. How important is it to the Lord that we live a life committed to Him? Does He see it as a case of "all or nothing"?
4. What things cause believers to be lacking in their zeal for God?

5. Consider the word “*zealous*”. What does it say to us about the origin and sustainability of your commitment.
6. What blessings result from living a life devoted to the Lord?
7. Compare Romans 12:11 with Revelation 3:15-16. What happened with the Laodiceans and what does that say to us?
8. What have you learned and decided today? Write it down here in a prayer.

How can one approach someone who has lost their zeal or passion?

Also look at our congregation’s prayer needs and other personal needs in the group.



Jesus' Commitment

John 19:30 "When he had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished.' With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."

"Hearing the Good News is the beginning; the rest of your life is your response to it." William Countryman

"There are only two things we should do with the Gospel: believe it and live it." Susanna Wesley

This passage spells out Jesus' commitment to us. He did not cower away when his life was threatened. He carried out the Father's instructions to the end. Jesus' commitment cost Him his life. Jesus left heaven and came and lived on earth in the likeness of a slave so that we could be set free. As a human being, He hungered, was cold and became tired, but that did not stop Him from persevering to the end. He did it for you, and the question now is: How strong is your commitment to Jesus? Because Jesus was determined and obedient to convince man of the Father's love, He demands total surrender and commitment to Himself.

You are precious and that is why God paid dearly with his blood to unite you with Himself. Choose again today to pledge your all to Him to the end. Jesus, all for Jesus!

Prayer: Jesus, thank you for your commitment to save me. Holy Spirit, give me the same attitude to follow in Jesus' footsteps. Amen

Sell Everything

Luke 18:22 “When Jesus heard this, he said to him, ‘You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.’”

“If you can’t go all the way, then why even start?” Joe Namath

In this passage, Jesus tests the rich man’s determination to put God first in his life. The man appears to be a believer: “I have kept the commandments since I was a boy,” he says. Jesus knows that, but He also knows that the man loves his possessions more than God.

It is not a sin to be rich, and Jesus Himself said that it is not impossible for rich people to go to heaven because God’s grace is sufficient for all people. You are important and valuable to Jesus, not your possessions. Therefore your security must be in God, not in your possessions.

Think about your priorities in life. What do you spend most of your time, attention and money on, and where does your relationship with God fit in? Do you, your wallet and everything you own, belong to God? Serve the Lord fully with what you own.

Prayer: Lord, here I am and everything I have. Use me as your instrument to show your love to the world. Amen

All I am belongs to You

Matthew 22:37 “Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ”

*“It is only by perseverance that the snail made it to the ark in time.”
Charles Haddon Spurgeon*

In Exodus 20:5 we read that the Lord is a jealous God who demands undivided faithfulness to Him. We cannot serve God with divided attention. Every part of our being should long after God; every part of our humanity should be committed to God – our will, feelings and thoughts.

- Will – my decisions belong to God. I will seek the Lord’s will in everything because my will is subjected to God’s will for my life.
- Feelings – there where no one can see, in the deepest part of your humanity; that too should belong to God.
- Thoughts – my thoughts should deliberately be focused on God and his will.

Prayer: Father, I confess that I do not serve You with my whole being. Today I choose again to love You with my will, feelings and thoughts.

Loyalty

Ruth 1:16-17 NIV But Ruth replied, ‘Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.’

“Life has its dark times, when there is no other option but to keep on and to hold on to God. No, more than that: To allow Him to hold on to you.”
William Barclay

Ruth is an example to us of a loyal person. She had to pay a high price and make sacrifices to go with Naomi because she regarded Naomi’s well-being as more important than her own needs. These days, loyalty is not valued highly. My needs and that which benefits me are often what determine the choices I make. God demands that we choose his will above our will. Our loyalty to God does not depend on what I receive from Him, but on my willingness to give up things to follow Him.

Prayer: Father, help me to keep serving You whole-heartedly and to choose your will above my own will this day.

Hot or cold?

Revelation 3:15-16 “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”

“We may be free to choose, but we are not free to choose the consequences of our choices.” Selwyn Hughes

The day when we accepted the Lord as our Saviour, we were boiling hot and blazing for Him. Often, with time, our zeal for the Lord cools down. That is unacceptable to God. To help you to stay passionate for the Lord, you have to do some basic things:

- Spend time in His word.
- Pray regularly.
- Deliberately witness about God’s miracles and goodness in your life.
- Be actively involved in the community of believers.

A coal that lies far from the others in a fire quickly loses its heat. To constantly stay “hot” will require that you make sacrifices. The reward for staying “hot” is the conviction that you will see the Kingdom of God.

Prayer: Father, make me so “hot” that I will ignite other “lukewarm” children of yours again.

Hardships for the sake of Christ

2 Corinthians 11:24-25 "Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea."

"If you build your life on your principles, a big percentage of your choices have been made in advance." James Russell Lowell

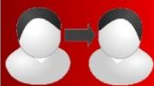
Paul experienced all these hardships, but that did not diminish his zeal and love for the Lord. The possibility that he might have been killed did not cause him to shy away from his calling to take the Gospel to the heathen nations. Every hardship only made him more determined to complete his task. In the same way there are many Christians who have lost their lives and who are still persecuted for the sake of the Gospel. May they and Paul inspire you today to persevere in your relationship with God.

Use every opportunity to witness and do not fear the possible consequences of your testimony and choices. Thank God every day for the privilege of being able to live and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus in freedom.

Prayer: Lord, strengthen my inner person to be able to witness with boldness and to always remember that You paid dearly for my salvation.

Week 3

The Key of Living a Pure Life



The world says: Try every sin, just don't get caught

Jesus says: Make a radical break with the sin in your heart.

"I have a confession to make: I like sin. As surely as Eve saw the forbidden fruit and found it 'pleasing to the eye,' I too find a certain pleasure in sin. At times I wonder what it would be like to be unable to sin, to be in that heavenly state where I not only no longer want to sin, but could not do so. I admit, a state such as that seems strange to me. I'm not entirely sure I want it.

What a horrible confession to make, but what I am admitting is my comfort with sin. Certainly, all sin at its foundational level is active rebellion against God, but I do not always sin because I am angry with God and want to shake my fist at him. Fact is, I have rarely sinned in that way. Rather, I do sinful things because I like them. They are pleasurable. They are enjoyable. They seem natural to me."

Victor Kuligin starts a chapter in his book with this confession. Discuss with each other the things in this paragraph that struck you.

Deliberate with one another about the holiness of God and the sinlessness of Jesus. Do you think that it was possible for Jesus to sin, and how was it that He did not commit sin?



Sing a song as a group. When we sing together, let us look away from ourselves and put our focus on God. Worship Him for who He is.



Watch the DVD.



Read Matthew 5:27-30

"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

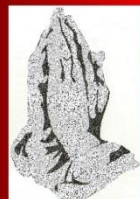
If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

Read Matthew 5:27-30 again

Here Jesus uses a metaphor, and that is to gouge out your eye, or to cut off your hand. The metaphor says: Don't treat sin lightly; make radical decisions to root it out of your life and to protect yourself against it.

1. *"Sin creeps into the lives of Christians; if you open the door widely, sin will storm in, and its purpose is to steal and destroy."* Be blatantly honest with each other and discuss the statement above.
 2. You have to treat sin in a radical and violent way. Draw the line at the start; if not, you are going to stumble. To see how close you can get to sin is a recipe for failure. What can we as Christians do, what can you and I do, to radically cut out sin and root it out of our lives? Do you have examples of this from your own life?
 3. The result of sin is: *"It produces the bitter fruit of a ruined life."* Around which areas of your life do walls need to be erected so that you can be protected as a child of God? Tell each other how you have built walls to protect yourself.
 4. In Romans 12:9 Paul says: "Abhor/hate what is evil" (hate sin). What does this say to us?
 5. A positive, drastic decision against sin bears much fruit in one's life. The world says: *"Look and lust because you are only human"*, but Jesus says: *"Gouge out your eye if it is polluting you"* – that is true life. Now tell each other about when you have made such drastic decisions against sin and about the life you have experienced as a result.
- How can Christians support and help each other in this regard?
 - What decision am I willing to make for my own life today as a result of this radical statement of Jesus? Am I willing to share it and to ask my group to hold me accountable for my decision?

Opportunity for prayer:



MONDAY

Week 3: The Key of Living a Pure Life

Daily Reading

Psalm 52

2 Sam 11:1-12, 25

Avoid being in the wrong place

2 Sa 11:2 NIV One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful...

Meditate on the passages and consider how sin has no respect even for those who love God very much. Think about what David could have done differently. How would you have handled his situation and what do you have in place to protect you against the attacks of sin?

After you have spent some time with these Scripture passages, proceed to read the meditation below:

Someone once said the following about this incident in David's life: "*He was at the wrong place at the wrong time, and then he made wrong decisions.*" Radical decisions against sin require you and me to always be aware of the time we have at hand, of where we are, of the decisions we make. Stephen Covey wrote in his book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* that between the stimulus and response there always is a period of time where you have the chance to make a decision. David had this too, and he made the wrong decision.

The thing we should note from David's story is that if you and I submit to sin even in the slightest way, there are also deadly and destructive consequences on those around us. Sin never takes place in isolation. You and I may think that we do it on our own until it is revealed. Then we see the destructive effect it has on other people. David's child died, and afterwards, the sword never departed from his family again. That is sin at its best! Many times, there is forgiveness and restitution, but the results can linger in our lives for many years to come. Wounds are healed, but the scars remain.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, today I want to ask that I will immediately listen when Holy Spirit warns me against being in the wrong place at the wrong time where I can make wrong decisions. Amen

Deal decisively with deception

Gen 3:1 NIV Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

Eve simply moved too close to the edge of the precipice. Then the precipice swallowed her – and her husband with her.

Her first mistake was that she had listened to the devil's whole story. She should not have given him the chance to even open his mouth. If he manages to get a foot in the door, it does not take long before he has moved in and taken over your life.

The devil is very cunning. It is not difficult for him to talk a weak person into doing something. And if someone is under the influence of the devil's sly words, it leads to the next step: You look at things around you from the wrong perspective.

Eve looked at the fruit (that God forbade them to eat) and she saw a delicious and attractive fruit that was good to eat.

What should she have seen? A great God that stood above everything and who had given them a fair commandment. If God is not in the picture, one only sees half the picture. The devil clouded her eyes so much that she only saw the part that would destroy her. She did not see the love and faithfulness of her Father.

Prayer: Lord, help me to be quick to raise a standard against the seductive words of Satan. Amen.

Flee from immorality

Gen 39:6-8 NIV Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he refused...

If first get quiet and then meditate on this: Joseph was a human being just like us who was tempted just as we are. He remained standing – to the end. Talk to the Holy Spirit about Joseph and ask what principles He wants you to embrace. After you have spent some time with this passage of Scripture, proceed with the meditation below:

What helped Joseph remain standing when he was alone in a strange world with no support or friends was the background and upbringing with which he arrived in Egypt. His foundation was good and strong. Never underestimate the value of the upbringing that you give your children – the godly values that you demonstrate to them. Keep on imparting them and persevere. Our foundation is one of the only things that will keep us upright in times of temptation.

Joseph was also someone who had his borders in place (in contrast to a man like Samson). He knew where to draw the line with Potiphar's wife – he knew when it was time to flee. Joseph had established borders and his decisions entrenched them. It is no use if you and I have the most wonderful borders in place, but do not apply them. Even in prison Joseph was not prepared to sink to the level of the other prisoners, but rose above the others thanks to the decisions he had made and the borders he had established for himself. Remember, Christians with strong values may initially be judged and laughed at, but in the long run they will be rewarded and will reap dividends. See it in the life of Joseph. Make the right decisions, live within the borders God demands of you, and He will notice it and lift you up.

Prayer: *My Father, thank you for the heroes of the faith in the Bible who were and are such wonderful role models to me. Make me and mould me so that I can also be a role model to others in the times we live in. Amen.*

Secrets of success

Dan 1:8 NIV But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way...

After you have finished reading, meditate on the type of life that Daniel lived. He is one of the characters in the Bible about whom nothing negative is said. What was his secret? After you have spent some time reflecting on the passage of Scripture, continue with the meditation below:

We like to read Daniel, especially the well-known stories, because he is a role model to us. But he only did what God had asked him to do. Remember: he was not a spiritual “superman”. Who among us would be prepared to make the decisions he made and then to still pray three times a day? But that was exactly the reason for Daniel’s success. The more we make the right decisions, the more we by choosing right withstand the devil and temptation, the more we succeed.

Furthermore, Daniel made friends with the right people. He did not stand alone, and that is an essential factor in our journey. Good Christian friends are a tremendous help in this life, and we should therefore pursue accountable relationships with a godly group. It is likely that Daniel and his three friends encouraged and prayed for each other continually. Don’t underestimate the value of Christian friends.

The Word and prayer are linked, and while he prayed three times per day, he no doubt, also spent time in the Word. In this regard, read his prayer in chapter 9:1-3 which contains another secret of Daniel’s success. Spend enough time in the Word and prayer and you it will strengthen you, nourish you, renew your mind and supplement your armour so that you can remain standing. Daniel is a beautiful example of someone who did not make even the slightest compromises with sin, but only did the normal things God required of him.

Prayer: *Father, remind me that I must stay aware of making the right decisions every moment of the day, and that I should not start a day without spending time in the Word and talking to you. Amen.*

In your anger do not sin

Num 20:10-11 NIV ..Moses said to them, "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?" Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff...

Most of us have a problem with our temper from time to time. If resentment starts influencing your actions and you allow it to control and drive you, then you will end up doing something you are very sorry about later on.

This was the case with Moses. He became irritated with the people who regularly resisted God. He rebuked them and in his anger he did what the Lord had NOT commanded him to do: he struck the rock instead of speaking to the rock.

God nevertheless, made water come out of the rock as He had promised but, punished Moses severely: Moses would not lead the people into the Promised Land.

In the heat of the moment, Moses did not restrain his bad temper but simply allowed his anger to control him. He did not cautiously handle the pull of his own temperament.

Don't become a slave of your own resentment. It clouds your good judgment causing you to act impulsively in disobedience. It resists God's will and gives priority to your own will.

Prayer: Lord, help me to establish measures in my life to prevent my temperament from ever controlling me. Amen.

Do not love the world

Gen 13:12 NIV Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom.

Abram and his nephew Lot shared the same land. Because they owned large flocks and herds a quarrel arose about pasture and they decided to separate. Abram graciously allowed Lot to choose the area where he wished to live. Lot chose the fertile Jordan valley, but the problem was that it was very close to the sinful city of Sodom. We read elsewhere that Lot frequently sat and chatted at the city gates of Sodom.

Because of his decision Lot came dangerously close to destruction, too close in fact – it later cost him his wife’s life.

Lot’s wrong and reckless decision led to him and his family moving into the sinful city of Sodom at some stage. There they probably lived in luxury.

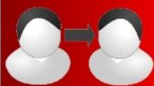
It took an angel of the Lord to lead them out of there whilst God was destroying the city with fire and brimstone.

The attachment of Lot’s wife to her life of luxury caused her to look back rather than pursuing to completion the way of escape that the angel had shown them.

Prayer: *Lord, teach me to remain cautious and to keep safe distances. Don’t let me be reckless with regard to sin. Amen.*

Week 4

The Key of Denying Oneself



The world says: You are number one. Just live for yourself and your own interests.

Jesus says: Crucify your selfishness. Come and follow Me.

Last week, we spoke about the *power of sin* and *radical amputation*. What have you seen and experienced in this regard this past week?

What do we mean when we talk about our priorities? Let us name some important ones in our lives.



The more we learn about Jesus, the more our respect and regard for Him grow. Let us put this experience into praise and worship, songs and prayers to honour Him.



Watch the DVD and talk about anything in the presentation that struck you.



Now read Luke 14:25-33, if possible, from different translations.

Luk 14:25-33 NIV Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’

“Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”

Have a nice discussion about the following questions:

1. What struck you in the reading of this passage? Where did the Lord speak to you? Or which word, sentence or image caught your attention?
2. What in verses 26, 27 and 33 is shocking? How should we interpret that?
3. Why do you think Jesus told the two stories in verses 28-32?
4. If you have to draw different circles around your life – what will come first, second, third and so on in terms of importance in your life?
5. Is it real? In other words, do we only say that those are our priorities, or do we live them every day? What is the difference between saying something and actually living it, and how can we recognise the difference?
6. Why do we not always live according to our priorities? Why is it sometimes difficult to do?
7. What can we do to live according to the right priorities in our lives? How does this passage (and our series) help us to do that?
8. How do other people know that you are a follower of Jesus?
9. When is it easy to follow Jesus? When is it difficult?
10. How can we help each other when it is difficult to follow Jesus?

PRAYER LIST:

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Be a loser!

Php 2:3-4 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

Have you noticed at a fair that people tend to like the pond fishing games more than the ball throwing games? Nobody wants to be a loser; we all want to be winners. That's why it is much safer to play the fishing with the magnet on the end game. You are sure to be a winner! Get a fish and claim your prize (however small and inexpensive it might be). Most of us go through life like we are playing the pond fishing game. We are constantly fishing for compliments and affirmation. "Is this ok?" "Was that all right?" "Am I ok?" The way we ask the questions actually forces our respondents to say: "Yes, off course you are ok." In essence we are all very selfish.

Our text today shows us that as Christians we shouldn't play the pond fishing game. Selfishness is not part of who we are supposed to be. It states very clearly that we should not do anything out of selfish ambition. Selfish ambition is blind to other people. It only thinks about oneself and one's own needs. Selfish ambition only sees the worth in other people insofar as you can gain something from them. Vain conceit makes you think that you are better than others, superior and more important than they are. You constantly compare yourself to others and think that you are always right. Worst of all, you do not keep it to yourself, but blubber it out for all to hear. Those controlled by vain conceit hardly ever admit that they have made a mistake and when they do it was not their fault. Martin Luther puts it well: "God created the earth out of NOTHING and as long as we are NOTHING, He can do SOMETHING with us." Are you willing to be NOTHING? Are you willing to focus on more than just yourself?

Prayer: Dear Lord, save me from myself. Forgive me when I focus only on myself and help me to see the needs of others. Please change my attitude through your Spirit. Amen

Check the temperature!

John 13:5, 15 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. ...

¹⁵I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

What is your least favourite chore around the house? We all have chores that we do not like. In the time of Jesus there was a chore that nobody liked. It was so bad that they reserved this chore for the lowest and least among them. From walking on dusty dirt roads with only sandals on, peoples' feet became very sweaty and dirty. And the greatest gesture of hospitality one could offer your guests when they arrived at your home was to wash their feet. Well you wouldn't wash their feet, your heathen slave would. Jesus knelt before his disciples and washed their feet. He then orders them to do the same to one another. This is what true love is. It is a self-sacrificial love. It is a love that gives without expecting anything in return. When you wash someone's feet you always need to check the temperature of the water:

- Don't wash with **boiling water**. If you are upset or mad because of something that happened in the past, don't do it with a grudge in your heart.
- Don't wash with **ice water**. Do not wash someone's feet with an attitude of I am right and I'm-holier-than-thou or I'm better than you are.
- Don't wash **without** any water. Do not dry-clean someone's feet with a bit of your own will.

There is only one way to do it. The temperature must be **just right!** Jesus demonstrated it to us. The right temperature is when we wash out of LOVE for one another. What is the temperature of your water?

Prayer: Dear Lord, make me a servant. Check my temperature and change it if you need to. Amen

Live to die? OR Die to live?

John 12:24-25 Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

The law of wheat determines that there must be death before life is possible. A grain of wheat needs to fall into the ground – die – change shape completely before any fruit can be produced. If the farmer keeps the grain of wheat in a bag behind the barn, it will never yield a crop. This is also true of the life of Jesus. Only He could yield a crop of millions of children of God by sacrificing His own life. He needed to die to bring in the harvest.

But this is also true of us. Many people think that faith does not ask much of them. All you need to do is believe that Jesus died for your sins and sometimes abstain from certain sins. Usually the list of things from which they abstain is not too long. Jesus challenges this way of thinking. To follow Jesus has serious implications for your life. There is no room for half measures when it comes to following Jesus. You need either, to commit to following Him completely and re-evaluate your priorities, or to not follow him at all. Even those things that are most dear to you need to take a place in the back of the line. To follow Jesus comes at a price. Fortunately the price comes with a promise. Whatever you sacrifice to love Jesus above all and serve Him, will most certainly yield the desired harvest.

Have you come to a point in your faith journey where you feel stuck and cannot move forward? Maybe it is because your grain is hoarded in the barn. To grow spiritually we need to die to ourselves and allow God to transform our lives to bear fruit for Him.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, You have showed us the way. May I die to myself in order to live with you! Amen*

THURSDAY

Week 4: The Key of Denying Oneself

Daily Reading

Rom 6:6-11

Die with Him and rise with Him!

Rom 6:8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

An unborn baby goes through exactly the same experiences that his mother goes through. If she gets into a car, he gets in with her, he moves when she moves, he stops when she stops. And if she would die in an accident, he would die with her.

Something of this is also true for us as Christians. Because we are in Christ we were crucified with Him on the cross. This is awesome and wonderful! This means that something of us has died: the terrible predilection to sin, our severe selfishness, the power of our sinful nature, the urge to hate or keep a grudge against someone, or to be greedy... Unfortunately we don't always live from that revelation and understanding. We allow our sinful nature to play yo-yo with us and to lure us back into our old lives.

Even more wonderful than dying with Christ, is that we were raised with Him from the dead. When Jesus broke the power of death and got up on that Easter Sunday morning from the grave, we stood up with Him. Now the person of Jesus lives inside of us: pure, honest, and steadfast against sin, loving...

Awesome! Live like that today!

Prayer: Dear Lord, I am so sorry that I do not live out or experience the fullness of blessing in my identity in you. I am often so weak and susceptible to the luring power of sin. I rise up with You today into a new life: strong, Spirit-filled and loving. Let the person of Jesus become clearer in every aspect of my life. Amen.

FRIDAY

Week 4: The Key of Denying Oneself

Daily Reading
1 Cor 10:31-11:1

Follow me... I follow Jesus!

1 Cor 11:1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

There was a dad who often would walk from his house to the bar. Time after time he came home drunk. There was no family life, until one night when he saw his four year old son at the counter of the bar next to him. Quite surprised and embarrassed he asked: "How did you find me here?" The little boy answered: "I just followed your footprints in the snow."

Regardless of whether you like it or not people, especially your children, are watching you. They start to absorb who you are and your values. They even absorb the way you live. How does that make you feel? Are you satisfied or do you feel embarrassed about it?

Paul tells the believers in Corinth that they must do everything to the glory of God. He does not want them to offend others, but to value the needs and interests of others as more important than their own. He thinks of a practical example to give them and realises that this is how he desires to live. Why? Because he learnt it from Jesus!

Follow me, as I follow Christ. This is the essence of what this week is all about. Your life must be a living demonstration of the fact that you have crucified yourself and that you gave up your own interests to follow Jesus.

Live this to the full!

Prayer: Precious Jesus, what an awesome privilege to walk in your footsteps. I know I fall drastically short, but I truly desire it. This is why I crucify myself anew today and I ask that you will fill me with your Spirit so that I will display Your image more clearly. Amen

Follow like a child...

Ephesians 5:1-2 Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

A man and his son went to church one Sunday morning. The boy was about three years old and walking behind his dad with his little book clenched underneath his arm the exact same way that his dad was holding his Bible. He was giving long, heavy steps, just like his dad. It was so evident that he wanted to be like his dad.

Paul uses the same argument in this scripture when he says that we are God's children and that He loves us very much. It is normal for children to copy their parents, especially when they know how much their mom and dad loves them.

And we as children of God; how much more shouldn't there be an urgency and desire in us to live like our Father and to become like Him? What is the essence of the Christ-life? *"Live in love as Christ also loved us..."* - live in the love of Jesus. Someone with this quality of love has an unselfish attitude and is willing to offer up anything for others.

Is there quality in your Christianity? Do people around you experience you as someone who portrays the image of Jesus? Do you carry the essential quality of someone that walks in the footsteps of Jesus – love?

Prayer: Loving Lord, I want to portray your image brightly and with clarity. I want to walk in your footsteps. I want to become more like You. Help me, Lord. Give me a heart like Yours and put the words of Jesus in my mouth today. Teach me to love like Jesus. Amen

KEYS to LIFE SLEUTELS tot LEWES Jesus Celebration

We are joining
hands as
children of God
to care
for orphans
in Mpumalanga.

F R I D A Y

13 SEPTEMBER 2013

FUNDRAISING BANQUET

for Tebelo Childcare Village

Lydenburg 18:30 for 19:00

Speaker: Michelle Harding
(Unashamedly Ethical)

Dress: Formal

R2500 per person
or book a table

Adel: 082 553 5939
Fred: 082 805 0924
fjwilson@telkomsa.net

**WE NEED
YOU!**

S A T U R D A Y

14 SEPTEMBER 2013

TURN2GOD

12:00 to 16:00

Longtom Pass, Lydenburg
(map on the facebook page)

Speaker: Rev. Elza Meyer
Louis Brittz & Band

Bring chairs &
picnic baskets

Itickets: R30 pp
www.iticket.co.za

call centre:
086 1000291



Tebelo

Turn2God via the **Tebelo Village** programme is well on the way
to establish a childcare village in Mpumalanga (Lydenburg).
It will accommodate **960 orphans**, in **160 homes**, providing 370 jobs.
To succeed, this initiative will need the help and skills of **MANY** willing
people in our province.

www.facebook.com/Turn2GodLydenburg,
Turn2God Mpumalanga, Acc no 9282991707, ABSA 632005

Week 5

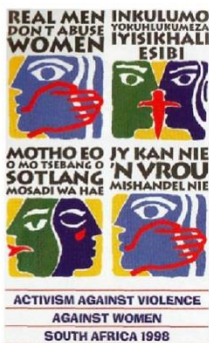
The Key of Suffering for Jesus



The world says: Follow the way of least resistance.

Jesus says: You are going to suffer if you want to follow Me!

- How are you? Let all the group members say how things are with their family/children/grandchildren/health/work (where applicable).



Ice breaker:

In 2011, the SA Post Office released a postcard to support “*Activism against Violence against Women*”.

The Minister for Women, Children and People with Disabilities (that means the minister for everyone except for men) Lulu Xingwana referred to the Oscar Pistorius events and told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC): “*Young Afrikaner men are brought up in the Calvinist religion believing that they own a woman, they own a child, they own everything and therefore they can take that life because they own it.*”

We definitely cannot deny that there are women in so-called “*Christian homes*” that suffer under their “*Christian*” husbands. Discuss this against the background of “*martyrdom for Jesus’ sake*” (not more than 10 minutes).



See how many songs about Jesus you can sing. Try to recognise the song writer’s view of Jesus.



Watch the DVD introduction and talk a bit about what it says to you. (The events on the DVD are fictional.) How would you have handled the situation?



Now read 1 Peter 2:19-25

1Pe 2:19-25 NIV For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

1. Say what in this passage struck you most.
2. In Peter's time, persecution and slavery made it difficult to be obedient to the authorities. Which circumstances make it difficult for us today?
3. How can the example of Jesus help us to cope with adversity (that you cannot change)?
4. What should people do whose legal rights are violated by bad government? Accept the suffering? Insist on justice? Confront the authorities?

If there is time left, talk about the following.

The persecution we face today:

How do we react to opposition we as Christians experience? When friends reject us, when people are uncomfortable in our presence because we do not laugh at the same jokes they do, or go to the same sort of entertainment they like, do the same things they do? When they talk in a degrading way about us and turn us into caricatures? When they ignore us or think that we are weird? Persecute us with the tongue? Ignore us for a job opportunity?

Are we prepared to sacrifice ourselves for Christ in the sense that we give up the right to assert ourselves and to give it over into God's hands? Are we prepared to keep vengeance out of our hearts and to give it over to God? Are we prepared to identify with Christ and to stand for what is right (Romans 12:19)?

Talk about how you will practically apply the following prayer:

"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference."

PRAYER LIST:



MONDAY

Week 5: The Key of Suffering for Jesus

Daily Reading

Matt 5:11

Blessed Are You

*Matt 5:11: "**Blessed are you** when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for **My sake.**"*

Don't take it too personal, they hate God not you! Are you willing to give 'self' up for Christ in the sense that you deny self the right to vindication, and leave it to God? The word blessed in Greek is **makarios** which means: *Supremely blessed; by extension fortunate, well off: - blessed, happy.*

Prayer: Father, I am willing to give self-up for You and deny self the right to vindication against those that say all kinds of evil against me falsely. I realize it's really You they hate and I ask that you would work in their lives and bring them to salvation in Jesus name I pray amen.

TUESDAY

Week 5: The Key of Suffering for Jesus

Daily Reading

John 16:33

Be of good cheer

Joh 16:33: These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

The harsh truth is that we live in a world disconnected from God, and we will run into trouble whether from our own choice or not. Jesus said trouble surrounds us on all sides. However, so does the love of God and His divine grace and because of this truth we can rejoice and take heart! We sometimes try and go around the challenges in life, but God has given us the ability to go through and to come out on the other side victorious! Have you settled this in your heart?

Prayer: Father, thank you for the peace that floods my heart at just the thought of You. Even when trouble surrounds me and I lift my eyes and voice up in prayer your peace that passes understanding keeps my heart anchored to the rock of Christ Jesus my Lord; there You hide me in Your hand close to Your heart. Amen

You shall be witnesses

Act 1:8: But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. (The Greek word for witness is “Martures” or our word “Martyr”).

The Apostles were all but one, killed for their faith. Even today there are countries where Christians are not tolerated and even executed for their faith in Christ. What is your attitude toward the opposition you face as a Christian? When friends reject you, when people are uncomfortable in your company because you won't laugh at the same off-colour jokes, or go to the same entertainment they enjoy, or speak in the same way, do the same things they do? When they speak in a derogatory way about you, and misrepresent you? When they ignore you, or think you're weird? Persecute you with their tongues? When you are passed over in a job opportunity? Even doing the right thing can get you killed. Does your life testify of Christ?

Prayer: Father, sometimes I feel rejected, ignored, and some think I'm weird because I will not join in their off-colour jokes and ways. So I come to You for help. Help me not to be judgmental or condemning of them. But yet not to allow the enemy to have his way through them; give me the words to say in each situation that will bring and shine Your light to dispel the darkness. Thank You for the witness of Your Holy Spirit in me. Have Your way Lord Jesus. Amen

THURSDAY

Week 5: The Key of Suffering for Jesus

Daily Reading

John 17:16-18

You represent the person of Christ

Joh 17:16-18: They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in Your Truth; Your Word is Truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.

As a Christian you belong to God's Kingdom. You've been taken out of the devil's kingdom and put into the Kingdom of God and as such you are an Ambassador of God's Kingdom, an Ambassador of Christ; you represent the person of Christ. You have a mission, as Jesus was sent by God He has sent you and He gives you the power, ability to do what He's sent you to do. Are you willing? (Read 2 Cor 5:17 for the message Jesus wants you to give)

Prayer: Father, thank You for taking me out of the kingdom of darkness and putting me into Your kingdom. It's an honour to be an ambassador of Christ and I take it seriously to represent You on this earth Father. 'As You sent Jesus so You are sending me' seems like an impossible task to me, but I thank You for the Holy Spirit and His enabling me to do this. Be glorified I pray in Jesus name. Amen

Identify with Christ

Luk 21:16-17: You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake.

Note that it is Jesus in you who is the reason for and the target of persecution. When we share in Jesus' sufferings (Rom 8:17; hatred, exclusion, insults and rejection) we become heirs who will also share in His glory. Unfortunately many Christians today, operate under the assumption that persecution is a part of the Church's past. The truth is that there are members of the Body of Christ that currently face severe persecution and restrictions as a result of their faith in Jesus Christ. Every day of every year and on every continent men and women face persecution because of their belief in Jesus Christ. Are you willing to exclude vengeance from your heart, and leave it to God to answer for you? Are you willing to identify with Christ and stand for what is right?

Prayer: Father, in South Africa I don't face the kind of persecution that many of my brothers and sisters in Christ face in North Africa, Middle East and Asia. Help me to be unswerving in my faith and stand strong for You. I count it an honour to be called names and to be rejected because I follow You. I pray for my brothers and sisters being persecuted, that their faith will not fail, that their testimony will speak volumes and would be like the voice of God in the ears of their persecutors and turn them to You, in Jesus name. Amen.

SATURDAY

Week 5: The Key of Suffering for Jesus

Daily Reading

James 1:2

See beyond the trial you're in

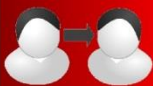
Jas 1:2: My brothers count it all joy when you fall into various trials...

We are surrounded by trouble, temptations, sin and evil. Don't allow the devil to draw you away from God or to get you to lose your focus as a Christian. Philosophy may instruct us to be calm in times of trouble; but Christianity teaches us to be joyful, to rejoice, because this proceeds from love and not fury, or anger in God. Consider, think about it, see beyond the trial you're in; see God at work on your side for His glory and your good. So be joyful!

Prayer: Father, I stand steadfast determined to be joyful in every circumstance, giving praise to You. For I know that what the devil has determined to destroy me or bring me down, You will turn around for Your glory and my good. I will not be moved by what I see, but by Your Word and Your Spirit. Let it be. Amen.

Week 6

The Key of Loving Your Enemy



The world says: Hate everyone who opposes you.

Jesus says: Love everyone, even those whom you do not like!

Ice breaker:

In 2011, the SA Post Office released a stamp issue that depicted



various types of vegetables that can be planted in a home garden. On the miniature sheet, there are also handwritten instructions on how to plant a garden. Of

course not all of us have the same love for all types of vegetables! But we do need all types of vegetables for a balanced diet. In the same way, we need all “types” of people to be able to live in a balanced and mature way.

Indicate the vegetables you do and do not like. Say why that is.



- Let someone read Psalm 103 out loud as a prayer.
- Sing a song about God’s love.



Watch the DVD.



Now read Matthew 5:43-48

Mat 5:43-48 NIV “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Let someone read the same passage again from the New Living Translation or any other translation.

1. What did the reading of this passage make you think about?

2. What must someone do to become your enemy?

- a _____
- b _____
- c _____
- d _____
- e _____

What does list tell you?

3. What does the Bible mean in verse 45?

4. Why is it difficult for you to bless your enemy, to pray for him/her, and to do good to him/her?

5. Why is it important to God that we should love our enemy?

Make a decision as a group about how you will practically apply the principle of love for the enemy in terms of blessing, praying and doing good to them.

- Identify people in the community who are hated and pray for them.

PRAYER LIST:

Now enjoy the interaction of spending time together with a cup of tea or coffee.



MONDAY

Week 6: The Key of Loving Your Enemy

Daily Reading

Matt 5:43

This is personal, “love your enemy”

Mat 5:43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'

This is not about good and evil, right or wrong, it's about love. Love doesn't change; it's the same love for your neighbour as for your enemy. The love remains the same, enemy or neighbour, friend, good or bad makes no difference. Which is easier for you; to love your neighbour or to hate your enemy?

Prayer: Father, I was Your enemy once, You didn't hate me, You loved me. Thank You that this same love with which You loved me is now in me, so I can love my enemy because of this love of God that is in me. Help me not to see the hate of my enemy but to see Your love for me and do the same to them as You did to me, in Jesus name I pray. Amen

TUESDAY

Week 6: The Key of Loving Your Enemy

Daily Reading

Matt 5:44

But Jesus says

Mat 5:44: but I say to you, Love your enemies; bless those cursing you, do well to those hating you; and pray for those abusing and persecuting you

Jesus brought them back to God's Law, His standard of righteousness. Then he raised the bar; by saying, BUT I say to you. Man's way is to hate your enemy, God's way is to Love your enemy. It's what God expects of us as His disciples. The Old Testament Commandments (10 Commandments) were written on tablets of stone, hard unmoveable. But now He has written them on our hearts, soft and merciful. (See Heb 10:16) Is there someone that persecutes you? Start to pray for them, each day it's the first step in loving them.

Prayer: Father, I pray for (put their name here.....) that You will shine in their heart the light of the glorious gospel, turn them from darkness to the light of Jesus Christ. I pray against all the plans and purposes of the devil to steal, kill and destroy from their lives and call those plans confused and brought to nothing. I pray that only Your plans and purpose for their lives will succeed and prosper. Amen

Imitate your heavenly Father

Mat 5:45: ..so that you may become sons of your Father in Heaven. Because He causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and unjust.

We show that we are God's sons because we do what He does. And this is how God does it. (John 3:16)
For **God so** loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

There's a small word in this scripture, "SO"; it says to us "This is how God did it", He sent His Son even when we were His enemies, we hated Him we crucified Him. That word, "SO" changes everything, it gives God's love for the world action, makes it work, it demonstrates His love in a way that cannot be denied.

Prayer: Father, Your love changed everything in my life. Before I was born You loved me, even though You knew what I would do and what I still will do, it did not change Your love for me. Help me to SO love like You SO loved me, to do good to those that don't know You, those that don't deserve mercy to be merciful to them as You are to me. I want to imitate You Father, so people will see the good works and glorify You Father and my Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

THURSDAY

Week 6: The Key of Loving Your Enemy

Daily Reading

Luke 23:34

Jesus our example

Luk 23:34: And Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. And dividing His garments, they cast a lot.

This wasn't a one off prayer; the imperfect tense suggests He repeated this throughout this ordeal. Jesus set us the example to Love our enemy. This is a personal enemy, someone that hates you. To love them in your own strength is impossible to do BUT as Christians we are not alone in this we have the Holy Spirit to help us, to strengthen us and enable us to love in this way. To pray for your enemy is the first step in loving them. What stops you from praying for your enemy?

Prayer: Father, if I was there on that day when they crucified Your Son; I would have also been shouting with the crowd, "Crucify him, Crucify him". Thank You for Your forgiveness, I also forgive those that have wronged me, hated me, persecuted me and abused me in any way. As Jesus forgave me I will forgive others. Amen

FRIDAY

Week 6: The Key of Loving Your Enemy

Daily Reading

Matt 5:48

Learn the rule first

Mat 5:48: Therefore, you be perfect even as your Father in Heaven is perfect.

There are lots of excuses we could use and scenarios we could think of to not love our enemy BUT Jesus doesn't give us any options He just says it, "Love those that hate you". Let's not look for exceptions but **first learn the rule of Loving our enemy** and take each case as it comes along in the light of the Word of God. When we've learned the RULE of loving our enemy we will know how to apply it in every situation.

Loving your enemy sets the follower of Jesus apart from others.

Prayer: Father, to be perfect like You are is for me an impossible task, but I realize I'm not who I used to be because You have come into my life. I am without excuse, no matter what others do to me. As I learn to walk in Your ways I am able to do what You've called me to do. In Jesus name and by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit I am able to be perfect as You are Father. Amen

It starts on the inside

Heb 12:2 ..looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Also Heb 12:1-3)

Loving your enemy is a work that starts on the inside and can only be achieved by the grace of God. Loving your enemy sets the follower of Jesus apart from all others; it means we surrender our personal rights. Our focus should be on Jesus more than on ourselves; He is working in us by His Holy Spirit and His Word, He is the Author and the finisher of our faith.

Prayer: Father, since the day I gave my life to You, You have been working in me changing me from the inside out. My efforts to change myself I must admit have been useless. I've tried to love my enemy, those that hate me or have done me wrong because I am Christian and I've failed miserably. So I surrender to You Lord Jesus, have Your way in my life, lead and guide me into Your truth. My desire is to be more like You in every way, be glorified in me and through me. Amen

Week 7

The Key of Being Able to Forgive

The world says: Be bitter toward people who make your life bitter.

Jesus says: Be gracious to those who have hurt you



Watch the DVD.



- Allow people to respond to the DVD clip and then ask the following questions...
- Does the principle of “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” really work? Motivate your answer.
- When was the last time you got really angry and what triggered it?
- What did you do with that anger?



Read Matthew 6:14-15

Mat 6:14-15 NIV For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

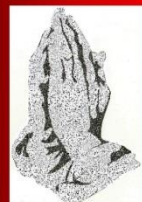


1. How could Jesus' teaching have helped the women in the video clip you just watched?
2. Is forgiveness optional? What does this Scripture say to you about the importance of forgiveness?

3. God is revealed in Scripture as a forgiving God. What do you think of Jesus' statement that the Father's forgiveness is linked to our being willing to forgive? Is Jesus teaching that the Father's forgiveness is conditional? If not, what is He teaching?
 4. Why did Jesus say these words? What does He want you and me to do?
- As God's sons and daughters in this world, we need to display His character of grace and forgiveness. Think of anyone out there who makes you angry or who may have hurt or harmed you and pray that God will show you how best to express forgiveness towards them.

Closing prayers: Pray for any needs in the group, your congregation or your city/town.

Close by singing songs of worship to celebrate your forgiveness.



MONDAY

Week 7: The Key of Being Able to Forgive

Daily Reading

Matt 18:15-20

Forgive! – God is with you

Mat 18:20 For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.

In Mathew 18 verse 21 to 45, Jesus tells a story that would easily have us say: “That is impossible!”

To forgive will always be something that we do not find easy to do; this is due to our self-centred nature. We continue to focus on what someone has done or said to us and the pain it has caused us. Like the official in the story, we forget about the exemption we received. We force others to correct their mistake or we try to cause them the same amount of harm. Reconciliation is God’s work. This is clear from Pauls’ explanation in 2 Corinthians 5 verses 14 to 21. God takes initiative to ensure reconciliation and he works toward maintaining the reconciliation. Because of this, we are no more than ambassadors to whom the responsibility of the ministry of reconciliation has been entrusted, and where two or more gather in his name, there He will be.

Therefore, it is important, on the first day of a week where we will focus on forgiveness and reconciliation, to make God’s promise to us our own and take it with us on our journey. If your brother or sister has wronged you, visit him or her, take another brother or sister with you and even talk to your congregation. Yes, do everything you can to fix the relationship. Most importantly, go to your brother in the name of the Lord our God! Do not merely go to him as John, Peter, Sarah or Ann, but go as a new person who has left the old version of him/herself behind and who is serious about having the attitude Jesus revealed to us. Visit your brother or sister while wearing Jesus’ garment of reconciliation. Remember what Jesus promised time after time: “I am with you”. If we know and remember this, we enter a world where nothing is impossible.”

Prayer: Lord, today I realise that I can’t take one step without You by my side. From now on I only want to act in Your Name. If I stray from this path, Lord, protect me as a mother would her children. Bring me back to you.

Limitless forgiveness

Mat 18:22 "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

Yet again, it is the talkative Peter, the disciple we can truly identify with, having his say. The Rabbis taught the Jews to forgive those who had wronged them as many as three times. Peter has a suggestion that should impress Jesus! Should we not rather forgive those who have wronged us, as many as seven times? To this, Jesus answers: “”. Do you also try doing sums when it comes to forgiveness? Jesus teaches us that maths and forgiveness are worlds apart.

Once again, Jesus explains this with a story: A king decided to go over his officials' books. He discovers that one of his officials owes him millions. The official begged for another chance and promised to correct his mistake. The king felt sorry for him and cleared his debt. However, the official seemed not to understand the grace he was shown, since as soon as he leaves the king's quarters, he starts with a new calculation. A co-official, who owes him a small amount of money, can surely pay back this small amount? The co-official begs for understanding, but the first official refuses to clear his debt.

When the king heard about this, he was furious and withdrew the exemption of the official's debt. He handed the official over to be tortured until all of his debt was paid.

Like the official, we won't be able to forgive others if we continue doing forgiveness calculations and don't understand the incalculable extent of our exemption. If we understand this (Also read 2 Cor 5: 14 -21), should we not stop calculating what others owe us?

Limitless forgiveness- our task on earth!

Prayer: Lord, teach me to forgive like You do. Help me to live in a way that allows others to see more of You in me.

Forgiveness... 'pay it forward'

My ability to 'pay forward' the forgiveness I was shown, is tested when I am willing to... Turn the other cheek when I am slapped, hand over my coat as well if someone wants to sue me for my shirt, walk the extra mile, to give to someone who asks something of me, be friendly with someone who is rude to me and to love someone I do not like.

It is a lot harder to forgive someone who you don't want to forgive than to forgive someone you can't forgive. *To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.*” CS Lewis

In Mathew 5 verse 38 to 48, Jesus explains how to live a lifestyle of forgiveness in everyday society. Jesus challenges us to forgive or “pay it forward” in situations where people disrespect you and treat you as a doormat

To hit someone on the right cheek ^{vs39b}, meant that you hit him with the inside of your right hand. To slap someone across the face in this way has always been a way of showing your contempt of the person. Jesus asks you how you will react if someone disrespects you for who you are. My instinct is usually to hit back, this is the 'eye for an eye' reaction that Jesus talks about. We react like this because we feel that our dignity is at stake. Jesus tells us that it is rather our understanding of forgiveness at stake. If a Christian is being humiliated, the question is not how long he will endure the beating or whether he will start to hit back after the second slap. No! To turn the other cheek actually says: “Treat me like an equal and not like the scum you meant that slap for.”

Jesus uses the other three examples to ask us about our ability to forgive when our will to forgive is under pressure. How do you forgive when

someone wants to sue you to take your shirt ^{vs40}? Jesus wants to know what your forgiveness will look like when someone wants to exploit your humiliation. The example of someone forcing you to carry his belongings for one kilometer⁴¹, refers to any Jew's worst nightmare...to become a Roman pack donkey. Judea and Galilee were ruled by the Romans and the soldiers had a rule that allowed them to use the locals to carry their belongings for a 1000 yards. By this example Jesus asks us about our ability to forgive the bullies in our society. The last example- to give to those who ask something of you⁴² –is not about how you will help your friends or someone who has already done something for you. With this example Jesus wants to ask you about your ability to forgive the beggar at your door who has a different excuse every day.

Jesus doesn't tell us how and when we should forgive the characters in these examples. Jesus seems to say that you should, when you are in the situation, be able to pay forward the forgiveness you were shown so that other people can experience the unconditional love of God you have experienced. "The practice of forgiveness is our most important contribution to the healing of the world." Marianne Williamson Only those who have received true forgiveness, can forgive others." Martin Lloyd-Jones In the words of Neale Donald Walsch, *'life is not "for getting", but "for giving" and in order to do that you need to be forgiving to others – especially those who did not give you what you thought you were going to get'.*

Prayer: *Lord, give me the desire to forgive because I know that I'm forgiven and the grace to forget the injustice committed against me and never to fret about it again.*

The Consequences of Un-forgiveness

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. (Mat 6:14-15 NIV)

Jesus taught us to pray “*forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us*”. He felt it necessary to expand on this further and to explain the consequences of un-forgiveness. A very serious one is that we effectively cut ourselves off from the grace of God. If we won’t forgive, then the forgiveness of God can’t get through to us. That’s a perilous predicament to be in!

When we’re unwilling to forgive we place ourselves in a self-imposed prison. In the parable of the unmerciful servant, the master was enraged at the servant who had been forgiven so much and yet was unwilling to forgive and “*turned him over to the jailers to be tortured...*” (Mat 18:34) To harbour un-forgiveness in your heart is torture to say the least. It will impact on your emotional well-being and may even adversely affect your physical health. As someone said, “*bitterness is the poison you drink in the hope it will kill your enemy*”.

Bitterness is contagious, it can contaminate others too – sometimes whole families are infected! Spend some time in silent reflection and ask the Holy Spirit to show you if you are harbouring un-forgiveness in your heart against anyone. Don’t remain imprisoned – release forgiveness to your offender and get freed.

Prayer: *Dear Father, God of grace and forgiveness, thank you so much for fully and freely forgiving me. Thank you that though my sins were as scarlet, yet you have washed me as white as snow. I pray that the grace of forgiveness may overflow from my life toward others also. I now choose to fully and freely forgive my offenders and to set them free. In Jesus’ name!*

Forgiveness in Broken Relationships

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. (Mat 18:21-22 NIV)

Forgiveness is not about keeping scores. Don't even keep tally as forgiveness is supposed to be limitless. It's interesting that the word "give" is in the centre of the English word "forgiveness". We could say that *"forgiveness is a gift that you give to someone who does not deserve it"*. Forgiveness starts when we make a tough but transforming choice, but it does not end there...

That first choice must issue forth in a lifestyle of forgiveness. Yes, you may have forgiven your ex, but how will you react the next time he reneges on his maintenance payment? Or how about that boss you forgave... How will you react the next time she rubs you up the wrong way? The fact is there are some people we can't simply forgive and forget – they're in our face and we are going to have to deal with their hurtful behaviour as often as it rears its ugly head!

So, the bad news is you are going to have to choose to forgive today, tomorrow and the next – seventy times seven. But the good news is that you will be free and that hurt in your heart will be healed and will no longer dominate your days or disturb your nights. Who is that person that hurts you so often? Choose to forgive him/her fully and freely, but also commit yourself to living out a lifestyle of forgiveness.

Prayer: Jesus, you asked the Father to forgive even those who nailed you to the cross. Take out the poison of anger and bitterness from my heart and give me your heart of forgiveness. Give me the grace to make the tough choice to forgive and the perseverance to follow through and live a lifestyle of forgiveness. Amen!

To forgive myself

Matt 18:35 NIV “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

Every one says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive ... And then, to mention the subject at all is to be greeted with howls of anger. ^{CS Lewis 1898 – 1963}

This is exactly what Jesus and Peter’s discussion in Matthew 18 was about. When Peter wanted to know till when and where one has to forgive someone, Jesus answered him clearly that forgiveness is not about how much or how many times. To explain what he meant Jesus told the parable of the man who’s great debt was forgiven, but who couldn’t forgive a small debt of another. That is as absurd as to expect that God must forgive me, but I don’t have to forgive anyone around me, including myself.

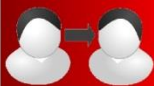
When you look closer at the parable, you realise that a “gap” in the parable occurs, which could explain why we struggle so much with forgiveness. The first person in the parable, upon hearing that all his debt is written off, never shows joy or thankfulness. He does not truly experience forgiveness. This is why, although he knows that it is very unlikely to happen, he begs for “*patience....to pay back everything.*” ^{verse 26}. Because he didn’t accept the forgiveness that he was shown, he could not pay it forward ^{vers 28vv}. Forgiveness is not about, paying back my debt, it is about whether I can pay forward the grace that I was, underservingly shown.

The conclusion in verse 35 wants to teach us that forgiveness involves a change of heart that cannot be calculated on a *quid pro quo* basis. Oprah Winfrey once said: “*true (self)forgiveness is to forget that you can ever change the past, about that you can merely say ‘thank you for the experience’ and move on*”. With the example in Matthew 18, Jesus asks us *how we, who have already been forgiven, live amongst those who still have to be forgiven? Already having received forgiveness, is not about whether I sin or not, but about whether I get along with people who still have to be forgiven.* I can only do this if I have experienced forgiveness. Someone once said... to forgive is to release a prisoner and then realise that the prisoner was really you.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the fact that forgiveness can heal people, those who have already been forgiven and those who must still be forgiven.

Week 8

The Key of Having a Positive Spirit



The world says: Be blunt and direct about other people's faults – gossip about them.

Jesus says: Do not judge other people!

- What is there that you are unrealistically crazy about? (To the extent that others are just amazed that you can spend so much time and money on that.)
- Give the group members the opportunity to comment about the picture below, especially in relation to the effective witness of the church.



Tell each other what the Lord has been saying to you lately. Then sing songs to glorify the Lord. Ask the Lord in prayer to speak to us clearly today.



Watch the DVD. What did the DVD make you think about?



Read John 8:1-11

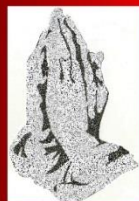
Joh 8:1-11 NIV But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” “No one, sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

1. Which words and phrases strike you? What is the Lord laying on your heart?
2. The Pharisees made some big mistakes in this situation. Do you see what they were?
3. One of them could easily have said: "What we are doing is only to follow the high standards that the Word gives us" (v. 4 & 5). How did Jesus react?
4. Jesus chooses *grace*. Does that mean that He lowers God's standards?
5. What is the difference between to *judge* (1 Cor. 5:12 & 13) and to *condemn*?
6. Why do you think we sometimes enjoy it so much to be critical and gossip about others?
7. What happens to you if you continually critical and find fault with everything and everyone? First discuss this, and then also read Mat. 7:1 & 2.
8. Where do you often hear negative, critical conversations? How should we as children of God handle conversations like that?
9. "*Serious about standards and soft towards people.*" What is your opinion of this statement?

Write down a prayer here to answer God on what He has taught you from his Word in this group today.

Share phone numbers (2x2) and phone each other this week to remind one another not to live in a critical way.

Now also pray for all the other needs in your congregation and community.



MONDAY

Week 8: The Key of Having a Positive Spirit

Daily Reading

Matt 7:1-2

Do not judge!

Mat 7:1-2 NIV Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Sometimes it seems as if Jesus makes unreasonable claims. He has a knack of saying what we would rather not hear! He says we must bring an end to certain things we may actually enjoy! And he demands that we be willing to yield what we see as our rights and privileges. Further, he asks for absolute, unquestioning obedience from us. And as if that were not enough, he asks us not to retaliate against those who harm us; rather, he demands that we love them! The last vestige of retribution we would like to hang onto is our ability to judge others, but even this means of defence, or attack, is taken from us.

Criticising and being judgemental about others is unfortunately a favourite pastime of many Christians. Perhaps you know of such a person or perhaps you, on occasion, have revealed a critical spirit... a person is too thin because they must have a secret illness, a person is not dressed 'properly' for church, if the preacher preaches a long sermon then he is merely long-winded and if the sermon is short then he is unprepared. A critical spirit puts other people down and quickly degenerates into mere gossip!

Jesus said, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged." (Matt. 7:1)

How do people experience you – as judgmental with a critical spirit? Or do you try to see value in others despite their faults?

Prayer: Lord, please free me from a critical spirit and judgemental attitudes. Please forgive me for the times when, though my words and actions, I put others down. Teach me to be kind and understanding like our Saviour Jesus. Help me not to judge.

TUESDAY

Week 8: The Key of Having a Positive Spirit

Daily Reading

1 Peter 4:17-18

Rom 2:1-3

Judgment begins with us

1Pe 4:17 NIV For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

We have a tendency to put others down so that we can feel better about ourselves when we criticise and belittle them. Jesus had some stern words for people who have a critical spirit, who always find fault and who are quick to highlight the failings and shortcomings of others.

He teaches us to begin with ourselves – to first recognise the plank in our own eye rather than the splinter in someone else's. It just so happens that often the things which irritate us and which we criticise in others, are the very things that we struggle with in our own lives. The child who is just like me is usually the child with whom I have the most conflict.

Paul says in Rom. 2:1, "You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things."

It is apparent that honest self-evaluation is needed. Let's make an effort to judge ourselves before we judge others. Whenever we examine ourselves we will be more tolerant and understanding of the faults of others.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to be honest with myself, to begin with myself before I make judgements about others. Thank you that you have compassion for me and have paid for my sins and shortcomings with your own life.

WEDNESDAY

Week 8: The Key of Having a Positive Spirit

Daily Reading

John 13:34-35

Christians mustn't condemn each other

Joh 13:34-35 NIV "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Jesus sharply challenged the Pharisees (religious leaders) about their critical spirit. It is an unhappy reality that the place where people are hurt the most is often in the church. It is a sad fact that many Christians just cannot get on with one another. Thousands of churches have been torn apart because fellow believers have not been able to work together. It has become standard practice for some to gossip about fellow believers, to belittle them and present them in a bad light. When the world looks at these churches it gets the impression that Christians are people who are forever embroiled in some sort of quarrelling and upset. Church history records the fundamental disagreements between the Roman Catholic Church and the Greek Orthodox Church, to the extent that, when these two churches came together in Jerusalem to attempt to reconcile their positions regarding the traditional places of Jesus' birth and crucifixion, Muslim soldiers had to separate them to prevent violent clashes from taking place.

This is why Jesus said that people will know we are his disciples if we love another (John 13:35). In the high priestly prayer in John 17, Jesus prayed for unity amongst his followers. There cannot be love where there is division and a pervasive spirit of criticism. Our churches will never be strong in faith and witness when believers, instead of contending for the gospel, contend with each other!

Prayer: Lord, through the power of your Holy Spirit, work in our hearts so that we may genuinely love one another, so that all people can see that we are your disciples. Free us from self-centredness and foolish conceit and unite us with all believers so that we contend together in unity for the sake of the Good News.

Judged with the same measure

Mat 7:2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

This statement of Jesus sounds harsh to us... “In the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the same measure you use, it will be measured to you. These really are words we wish Jesus had never said! But whether we want to hear or not, the message is clear. If we are hyper-critical of others then God will judge us in the same way. If we are prone to find fault with the smallest of things then God will deal with us in a similar way. Jesus wants us to understand that every time we make critical value judgements about others then we are lining ourselves up for judgement also.

We must not judge others because we ourselves may have a more serious problem. Jesus said that we easily see the splinter in another’s eye but ignore the plank in our own (Matt. 7:3-5)! It is easy for us to pick out the faults in others but we are lenient with ourselves, especially if it is a similar type of fault. We therefore must deal with the plank in our eye which distorts our judgement before we have a right to make any judgment about anyone else.

Prayer: Lord, please protect me from being hyper-critical. Teach me rather to see what causes division between you and me and, in your Name, to remove it. Make me a clear channel of your love, so that I can be a blessing not a bother to others.

FRIDAY

Week 8: The Key of Having a Positive Spirit

Daily Reading

Jas 4:11-12

Rom 12:19

Let God be the judge!

Jas 4:12 NIV There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbour?

It is God's responsibility to judge, not ours. God is the only righteous Judge. God and God alone has perfect judgment because only He has perfect knowledge of all the facts. It is only God who understands the difficult circumstances of a person's life – that awkward person who we are so quick to denigrate and cast aside. Recently, a famous, para-olympian athlete has been in the headlines after the tragic death of his girlfriend. There has been a free-for-all outpouring of opinions, some greatly inaccurate, because the facts are not fully known.

Paul says clearly in Romans 12:19, *“Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath...”* James makes this comment (Jas. 4:12): *“There is only one lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you – who are you to judge your neighbour?”*

We do not have the right to sit in judgement over another. Paul asks why we think it is alright to look down on our brother and sister when we will all stand before the judgement seat of God (Romans 14:10).

Let us refrain from thoughtlessly and harshly commenting on issues if we do not really know all the facts. Let us rather leave the judging to God because he is the righteous Judge.

Prayer: Lord, place a guard over my mouth so that I am not so quick to speak out in judgment. Thank you Lord that I can rather lift people up to you in love, and leave the judging to your perfect wisdom and mercy.

Judgment vs. discernment

1Jn 4:1 NIV Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

There's a fine line between being judgmental and exercising discernment. Non-Christians and the world misinterpret the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:1 – that we must not judge – to their own advantage. Whenever Christians speak out against the evils in society then the unbelieving world is quick to quote these words of Jesus.

Must Christians fall silent and let the lies win the day? This is when it becomes necessary to exercise discernment. 1 John 4:1 states clearly that there are many false prophets in the world and that we as Christ-followers must carefully consider each one to discern whether they operate under the Holy Spirit. 1 John 4:6 calls us to discern between the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

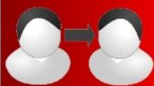
It is of cardinal importance for us to have a clear harmony between speech and attitudes and behaviour when we seek to discern between good and evil. This means that we speak the truth “in love”. There is a saying used in sport to “play the ball and not the man”. In other words, handle the issue, not the person, or “the problem is the problem”.

Christians must point out what is not of God. We are the conscience of society. But we must never speak with an attitude of superiority. We must be honestly willing to remove the plank from our eye before, as Jesus, said we can clearly see to discern between right and wrong.

Prayer: Lord, give me the wisdom to discern the fine line between condemnation and discernment. Help me to handle the truth in love. Give me the courage to face what is wrong in the right way. Protect me from any pride and any critical and condemnatory attitudes.

Week 9

The Key of True Religion



The world says: Follow whatever road you like; heaven does not really exist.

Jesus says: The road to heaven is narrow and only a few go in.

- Last week, we spoke about the words of Jesus that say that we should not condemn others. How did it feel to you to be gracious towards others in how you thought and spoke of them? Did you manage to see the beauty in people rather than their faults?
- We now talk about the Lord Jesus as our **Saviour** and **Shepherd**, but something that can make us quite scared is that He will also be the **JUDGE** that will JUDGE our faith in and obedience to Him. How do you feel about this? (*"He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one who God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."* Acts 10:42-43. Also read: John 12:48; 2 Timothy 4:1.)



Let us share with each other words or wisdom or songs about Jesus, who is precious to you. Everyone in the group can have the opportunity to share something special about Jesus with the others.



A DVD introduction that explains the text.



Scripture reading: James 2:14-26

Jas 2:14-26 NIV What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

Have a nice conversation about the following questions:

1. What is the Lord talking to you about from this passage? Tell the other group members what caught your attention.
2. One can only be saved by faith (Rom. 4:5 and Gal. 2:16). However, James says that the authenticity of that faith is proven by something specific. What is that? v. 14, 17 and 26.
3. Faith should be more than just words. How do v. 15-17 explain this truth?
4. How does this passage connect with Mat. 7:21-23?
5. The Lord Jesus is not only our Saviour; what is his other task according to Acts 10:42-43? Also read John 12:48 and 2 Tim. 4:1.
6. How important is obedience in true religion? Look at the following verses: John 3:36, Rom. 1:5 and Tit. 1:16.
7. What is an obedient life? Try to spell out the most important features to each other as a group.
8. What is unauthentic religious practice? How will you recognise it?
9. How dangerous is this false religion? What impact does it have on you yourself, the witness of the church, and the quality of Christianity?

Write down a prayer here to tell the Lord what you have learned today.

How can we help someone who used to serve the Lord but who has grown cold, to again walk the road of authenticity and obedience? Do you feel up to talking to someone like that?

Now pray for one another and also for the other needs that the Lord lays on your hearts.



MONDAY

Week 9: The Key of True Religion

Daily Reading

Ex 33:11

Listen to His voice

Exo 33:11 The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.

The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.

During the time of Moses which was approx. 1500 B.C. God spoke through certain individuals to His people. Moses had been chosen from birth, by God, and had an exceptionally close relationship with God. This was of vital importance to his momentous task of leading Israel out of slavery into the Promised Land.

God wishes to communicate with us just as closely and just as clearly. Once we've heard, we of course have the responsibility of obeying His word.

Pray for your leaders and Pastors that they will clearly hear the voice of God and follow His instructions. Amen

The fruit of obedience

Mat 7:22-23 NIV Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

A tree that does not bear fruit is useless. A great show can be very impressive, but to continually, day by day produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit is the great challenge.

The Bible talks about perseverance which is the trade-mark of the true believer. To produce quality takes time. God is patient with His children, as the potter takes time to produce beautiful vases, so God works in His people.

Reflect on what is involved in truly knowing Jesus. How will that shape my motives and how will that influence the fruit evident in my life?

Pray for a heart with the right motives, not self-interest but the interest of others. Amen.

A pure heart

Psa 51:10 NIV Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

The heart of man is by nature unclean. All of mans' efforts to purify self are unsuccessful. It is impossible for us to cleanse ourselves of a guilty conscience. To cleanse the human heart is something only God can do.

The first step to cleansing is to have faith in Jesus Christ. From there go on to being filled with God's Word and Holy Spirit through Scripture reading, confession (humility) and prayer. These powerful "means of grace" will purify our hearts.

Pray to God to cleanse and remove all "weeds" from your heart. Make this your most important desire. God will work in a wonderful way as you earnestly seek Him. Amen.

THURSDAY

Week 9: The Key of True Religion

Daily Reading

Jas 4:7

Resist temptation

Jas 4:7 NIV Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Temptation is something all of Gods' people face. It differs from person to person as we all have different strengths and weaknesses. Some folk are tempted more than others, but we can always be sure that we will not be tempted beyond our abilities to resist. (*See 1 Cor 10:13*)

We are not alone in this battle. We have a Mighty Saviour to whom we can flee for refuge at all times. Hebrews 2:18 teaches about Jesus saying, "*Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*"

Pray for strength to be able to resist during times of temptation. God will give you victory. Amen.

FRIDAY

Week 9: The Key of True Religion

Daily Reading

Gal 5:16

Choose life!

Gal 5:16 NIV So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

One of the greatest privileges we have as human beings is God's gift to us of a free will. We have the privilege of making our own choices and decisions. God has never, and never will force anyone to love and serve Him. Each and every person is allowed to make their own choices and thereby determine their destiny here on earth and in eternity.

Romans 8:13 warns us, “..if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live...” Let us choose to live by the Spirit rather than letting the sinful nature have its way!

Prayer: Holy Spirit, I need your help to be able to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, I want to “live by the Spirit”. Please fill me with your power and grant me the strength to resist the desires of the sinful nature. Amen.

SATURDAY

Week 9: The Key of True Religion

Daily Reading

Matt 4:20

Leave all to obey God's call!

Mat 4:20 NIV At once they left their nets and followed him.

To know God is to follow Him. A child of God will respond immediately to the Lord's call, leaving whatever they have been doing.

True children of God will not be ashamed to associate themselves with Jesus; in actual fact as God's child, one should make it clear to all that Jesus is your friend. Jesus said, in Matthew 10:32 *"Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven."* God is pleased with those who tell others about His goodness and love.

Pray that you will share Gods' love with humility and understanding, so that others may also experience His goodness.
