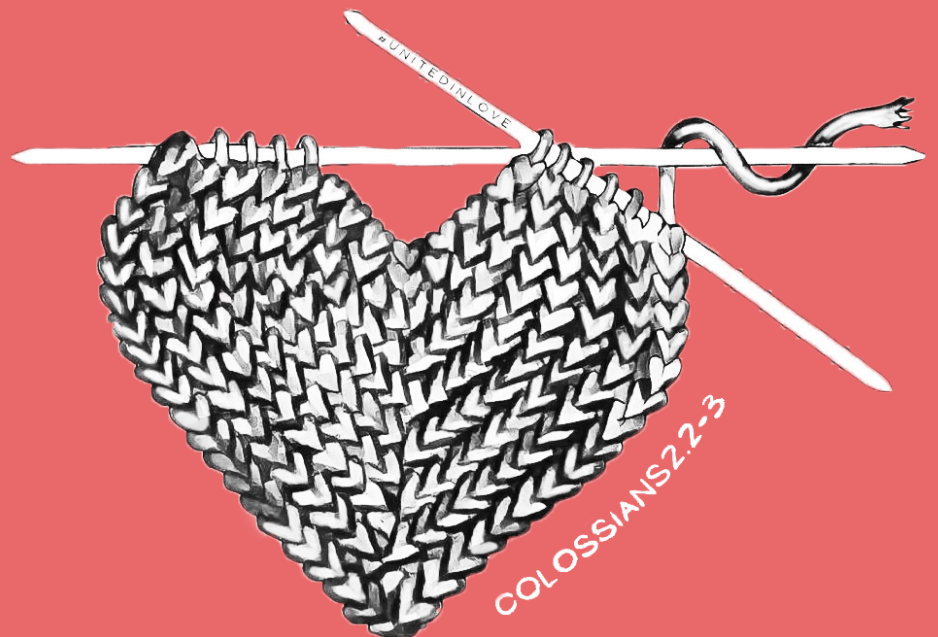


KNIT TOGETHER MARCH QUIET TIME SERIES



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/ 01 MARCH

**CREATING A TRANSFORMATIONAL
RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD**

Geraldine Fadrigon, West Professionals

“Teach me more about you, how you work and how you move, so that I can walk onward in your truth until everything within me brings honour to your name.”

– Psalm 86:11 TPT

devotional

I admire a lot of celebrities and famous people. I follow several of them on social media, watch their concerts / movies, listen to their podcasts, read books they recommend, visit places they've been to, and do the same things they like doing. It makes me feel like they are my real friends. The reality is, I am far from being close to any of them. They don't even know I exist.

Sometimes, my relationship with God can feel the same but unlike the celebrities I follow, God knows I exist. He formed my innermost being (Psalms 139:13) and He knew me before I was formed in my mother's womb (Jeremiah 1:5). Despite that, I can still feel distant from Him at times.

This year I desire to have a life-changing friendship with God, a transformational relationship with Him that is more than reading the Bible and attending church events. This prayer of King David (Psalms 86:11) speaks to my heart. I feel that having the desire to know God better can change everything within me.

Teach me more about you (Exodus 34:6-8) God's revelation of himself shows Moses—and us—his sovereignty, magnificence, and unfailing love for his people.

How you work and how you move (entire chapter of Isaiah 40) God is the Sovereign Lord, the one true, living God. He gives comfort to His people. He has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, he stretches out the heavens like a canopy, he calls each star by name, his understanding no one can fathom.

So that I can walk onward in your truth (John 14:6) Jesus is the way and the truth, and the life. God is pleased to see his children walking in the truth by following the life of Jesus.

reflection questions

- When was the last time your life felt transformed by your relationship with God?
- How can you move beyond your usual quiet time with God to an all-day awareness and connection with him?

challenge

Spend consistent quiet times with God focusing on his character and the life of Jesus.

Be vulnerable in your prayers / conversations with God without holding back any feelings from him, just like you are talking to your best friend.

02 MARCH

FOR THE JOY OF THE LORD IS YOUR STRENGTH

I stumbled upon this scripture many years ago and I wondered what it meant to have this verse, "for the joy of the Lord is your strength." 2022 is my 30th year as a disciple and my relationship with God is important to me. I pray that today we'll learn to have a deep respect and awe for God and to learn that our joy and strength only comes from our relationship with Him.

Catherine DeGuzman, West Professionals

Nehemiah 8

devotional

A. Making time and preparing our hearts to seek God daily (Nehemiah 8:1)

The Israelites acted on their desire to know God by coming together as one. As Christians, the first step to have a deep relationship with God is turning up to make time with God daily and be prepared to hear Him. It doesn't matter where it is. What matters is we meet God daily.

B. Listen attentively to the Book of the Law (Nehemiah 8:3)

The Israelites listened to God as it was read aloud from daybreak till noon. Wow, what a heart! Listening to God attentively is key because it has the power to change our hearts. Jeremiah 29:13-14 says that when you seek God wholeheartedly you will find him. It is in our wholehearted effort that we can find God. Do you seek God's word wholeheartedly?

C. Worship the Lord (Nehemiah 8:5-6; John 4:23-24)

Do we stand in awe when we hear the scriptures? Is our spirit one with Christ? The Israelites stood as soon as Ezra opened the bible. I am amazed at how the Israelites respected God's Word and it challenges me to the core that I need to do the same. They bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. To kneel or lay face down before someone as an act of reverence. Biblical worship is acknowledging that God is the King and results in us living lives in light of that truth. Worship is a beautiful and powerful reality if we understand it from God's perspective.

John 4:23-24, "...when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

D. Examine the scriptures (Nehemiah 8:8 & 13; Romans 12:1-2, Acts 17:11)

Nehemiah 8:8 – Examining the scriptures is an essential part in knowing God and through this we can live out the scriptures by assessing what we have done and deciding to change from what we just heard.

Romans 12:2 – Renewing our minds daily from God's word is what transforms us. Our goal is to be transformed like Christ.

Nehemiah 8:13 – I am inspired by this scripture that the heads of all the families gathered around Ezra to give attention to the word of the Law. I think nowadays this is a call for single mums and for all Christians too. As an ambassador of Christ, we have to reflect God and be able to teach them through our example.

Acts 17:11 – the Bereans were more noble than the Thessalonians because of their personal integrity to God.

E. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength (Nehemiah 8:10 & 17)

The Israelites were grieving in this verse because they knew how far they were from God. But from God's perspective it is a joyful time because at last they see God. God's goal is for everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9) and our goal is to be transformed like Christ.

During the seven day Feast of Tabernacles, the people lived in booths made of branches. This practice was instituted as a reminder of their rescue from Egypt. God wanted them to remember that He would still protect and guide them if they obeyed him. The same promise is for us, God's protection and guidance is available to us when we obey. This is our strength: a repentant heart by hearing God's word. Let God's word change us to be like him and verse 17 says, And their joy was very great because they knew God.

reflection questions

- What is taking priority over making time for God?
- Do you have awe for God's word?
- How can you make a reminder for yourself like the feast of Tabernacles?

/ 03 MARCH

GOD'S POWER IS MADE PERFECT

Dori Siasat, West Marrieds

"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."

– 2 Corinthians 12:9

devotional

Maturity is not measured in the number of years we have followed Christ. What counts is our reliance on God when we are feeling weak. To not be carried away and overwhelmed by the situation, but to come back to the Father in prayer to sustain and give us strength.

A lot of times we question God when we are in the midst of trouble. we want to give up, we have lots of worries. But take note, everyday is a battle, a problem on its own, that its too heavy to carry. God's grace is sufficient for us. For we know Christ died for us. We can boast about our weaknesses rather than being emotional because God demonstrated His power to our weaknesses. The more we struggle, the more we feel weak means the more we will find strength and the more God's power may rest on us.

We are not perfect, and you'll never be in this life. We need God's grace to see that in every circumstance and everything around us God's grace is sufficient for every moment of every day. God simply wants us to surrender our inadequacy to him so that He can fill us with His strength.

reflection questions

- What weaknesses do I have that I can boast about to glorify God?
- Are there overwhelming situations in my life that I can take to God in prayer?

challenge

Memory verse:

"He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak."

– Isaiah 40:29

04 MARCH

SETTING CLEAR GOALS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Sarah Wong, South Marrieds

"Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win!"

– 1 Corinthians 9:24 NLT

devotional

2 Timothy 3:16-17 is a key verse when we study with others. We use it to tell our friends that the Bible is from God and is useful to teach and train us to do well in every aspect of our lives. This is not just a fundamental verse to introduce the Bible to our friends but also the reason we study the Bible daily – it helps us be more like Jesus (training in righteousness, v16).

As in any kind of training, there is an objective to it. In physical training (the aspect that we can relate to the most - hopefully) the aim is always about building on your strengths and overcoming your weaknesses so that you can be stronger, faster, slimmer etc. We can also get better by discovering our blind spots and realising our faults. All of these features apply to our spiritual journey also.

Peter reminds me in 2 Peter 1:1-11 that if we make every effort to grow these Godly characteristics, I will never stumble and will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of God (Hooray!). However, if I don't, I will become ineffective and unproductive in my knowledge of God and forget my salvation. As much as I have appreciated people pointing out my sins or inspiring me with their vision for me over the past 30 years, I believe I need to actively bear spiritual fruit to become more like Christ and less like my old self as the days go by. When I set goals for my spiritual character growth, those goals give me a clear direction, and my faith grows because I can see how God works in me, that I am a work in progress, and God will complete his masterpiece in his perfect timing.

reflection questions

- Is there one Godly characteristic mentioned at 2 Peter 1:5-7 or Galatians 5:22-23 that you want to work on this year?
- What is the specific area you want to grow this year? A specific goal for me with humility is like seeking input or advice before making up my mind. Google search SMART goals if you have not heard of how to make specific goals before.
- Share with your friends and bible discussion group, so they can pray for your goal and keep you accountable (public pledges are an effective nudge for behaviour change)

scriptures

2 Peter 1:1-11 (main)
1 Corinthians 9:24
Philippians 1:6
Galatians 5:22-26
2 Timothy 3:6-17

/ 05 MARCH

GENTLENESS

Lisa Balian, North Marrieds

“Come to me, all you who are tired and are carrying heavy loads. I will give you rest. Become my servants and learn from me. I am gentle and free of pride. You will find rest for your souls. Serving me is easy, and my load is light.”

– Matthew 11:28-30 NIRV

devotional

Gentleness was not an attribute I was raised with, nor a quality I ever aspired to embody. No-one who knows the amazing women in my family would describe any of them as gentle. We are loud, feisty, direct, ‘tell it like it is’ women. For the longest time, I did not comprehend that my style of communicating was often angry, rude and aggressive, and nor did I realise that in this way, I was damaging the very relationships I held dear. Gentleness is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Ephesians 4:2 calls us to be completely humble, gentle and patient with one another.

A misconception I had is that gentleness is weakness or passivity. True gentleness, I am learning, requires great strength and self-control. Gentleness comes from a state of humility. In the verse from Matthew 11, Jesus puts the two together “I am gentle and free from pride”. My lack of gentleness is so often caused by my prideful spirit, my self-righteousness, being easily angered or wanting revenge. For me, having a gentle spirit is very much tied into how surrendered I am to God. If I am worried and upset about many things (Luke 10:41), it is near impossible for me to have the “quiet and gentle spirit” that Peter says is of great worth in God’s sight (1 Peter 3:4). I love the verse where David says in Psalms 131: 2 “But I have calmed and quieted myself, I am like a weaned child with its mother”. Gentleness places our strength under God’s guidance. He can then use our words and actions for good in His kingdom.

reflection questions

- In what ways has God been gentle and tender with you?
- How do you feel being spoken to with gentleness / tenderness as opposed to being spoken to harshly or in anger?
- What are your barriers to showing gentleness in your interactions with others?

challenge

Memory verse:

“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

– Proverbs 15:1

06 MARCH

PERSEVERANCE

My name is Miriam Brownlee. I have been married to Chris Brownlee for 40 years and we have been members of the Sydney Church of Christ since 1994. We, like so many others over the years, have faced, and still do face, challenges be it the unexpected death of a child, cancer, kidney transplant, diabetes, and partial blindness to name a few. However, we have persevered and keep on persevering.

Miriam Brownlee, North Marrieds

the difference (ref: Tapestries of Life – Poems. 1993)

I got up early one morning and rushed right into the day;
I had so much to accomplish that I didn't have time to pray.
Problems just tumbled about me, And heavier came each task.
“Why doesn't God help me?” I wondered. He answered, “You didn't ask.”
I wanted to see joy and beauty,
but the day toiled on, gray and bleak;
I wondered why God didn't show me, He said, “But you didn't seek.”
I tried to come into God's presence; I used all my keys at the lock.
God gently and lovingly chided, “My child, you didn't knock.”
I woke up early this morning,
and paused before entering the day;
I had so much to accomplish that I had to take time to pray.
– Anonymous

devotional

Romans 5:3-5 – Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.

James 1:2-4 – Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

I think we all do strike those times when we feel alone and forget that we are not alone. Just talk to God! Even if it is just a phrase like “God give me strength!” I find that phrase calms me and I am able to cope.

Read Matthew 6:5-15. This passage explains Prayer, and also includes what is known as the Lord's Prayer, teaching us how to pray and what to be thankful for.

Do you sometimes forget to ask God for help or guidance? I know I do. But just knowing God has a plan is calming and supportive even if it is sometimes very difficult to understand
When we were baptised, we all made a promise to God that Jesus Christ is Lord of my Life.

reflection questions

- How do you think knowing God has given you more strength and perseverance?
- How can you build on that perseverance?

/ 07 MARCH

WHAT DO YOU HAVE?

Karen Tindall, South Marrieds

2 Kings 4 :1-7 & Mark 6:30-44

devotional

When the poor widow came to Elisha begging him to help her, the first thing that Elisha asked her was” what do you have in your house?” And in Mark 6:30-44 when the disciples came to Jesus asking him to send the 5000 away so that they could find something to eat, Jesus asked them “How many loaves do you have?”

This QT came from Steven Furtick’s book -Greater and I wanted to share it because it was definitely a turning point in my walk with God. I realised that I had stopped believing that God could use my life for greater things. For years I had been comparing myself to other women in the church, thinking that I should be able to do the same things that they were doing, serve in the same way that they were serving. I was focused on what I didn’t have, instead of what I did have.

I would think : If I was married again I could do _____. If I didn’t have to work full time I would be able to _____. If I had the energy that ____ has, I could do_____.

I realised I needed to give up my false expectations of myself and what I thought God was calling me to do. I needed to accept my limitations and focus on what God was actually calling me to do. When I started to embrace and accept my limitations and acknowledge my current situation and my season in life I started to find peace. I started to trust that God had me exactly where he needed me to be. That I had everything that I needed in order to do the work that God has planned for me to do right now.

The Widow’s response to Elisha was, I have nothing except a small jar of Olive oil. The disciples said “we only have 5 loaves of Bread and two fish”. Yet in both situations, God used the little that they did have to perform a miracle.

It made me realise that I need to stop focusing on what I don’t have. To trust God that he has given me everything that I need and be willing to use what I do have to serve God. I started praying that God would open my eyes to see how he wanted to use my life and prayed that he would give me a heart that was willing to say yes to what he is calling me to do.

reflection questions

- What are some of the false expectations you have about yourself?
- What do you have?
- How can you use what you have to serve God?

prayer

That God will open your eyes to see how he wants to use your life for greater things and pray that you will have the heart to say yes to what God is calling you to do.

08 MARCH

COUNTING THE COST

Clara Welsh, South Marrieds

Luke 14:28-33

devotional

This is a familiar verse to me. This is the scripture I studied when I counted the cost before I became a disciple. Like the scripture, to build a house or tower, I need to estimate the cost and see if I have enough money to do it. I like how the bible suggests that we should think before we make our decision to become a disciple. This is what Jesus said to the crowd who were following Him. If I were Him, this definitely isn't what I would choose to say if I wanted them to follow me. What he said could have discouraged many people from following him. Jesus gets straight to the point. He has no interest in pleasing people or popularity. However Jesus didn't just want many people to follow him. Many people who were following Jesus were attracted by the miracles that Jesus had performed. What he said would deter some people but at the same time will sort out quality followers. The cost here does not merely mean financial costs.

In verse 33 – “those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.” – Jesus is rephrasing what it means to follow him. The cost of following him is much more than what most people think, basically giving up everything.

What does this mean to me? This means to surrender my life completely to him. Jesus is a great example of total submission.

Philippians 2:6-8 – Surrendering my life to Jesus means to imitate how Jesus had lived: love God, and people around me, save the lost (reaching out), help the needy, serve the people, community, say no to evil temptation.

In my life as a disciple of more than 20 years, I have experienced many ups and downs, at times stumbled, and made many mistakes. When I was baptised 30 years ago, I wasn't quite ready to follow Jesus by giving up everything. Even after baptism, I still loved the world and pursuing my own dreams. And this caused lots of spiritual conflicts and hindered my spiritual growth. Consequently I gradually drifted away from relationship with God. I thought my life would be freer and easier if I were not a disciple. This was a complete lie that Satan kept on whispering into my ear. Instead of freedom, I felt emptiness and insecurity. Because I know the truth that there is God, judgement and life after death. I felt my life was like an unfinished house or the salt that lost its saltiness which is useless.

God allowed me a second chance to live as a disciple in year 2000. I wish I can say my life has been fantastic since then. I found life as a disciple isn't getting any easier. However, I don't regret my decision to follow him again. I believe God uses difficulties and challenges to refine and mould me into the likeness of Jesus. Hebrew 2:10 – As my salvation is according to God's plan, suffering through various life challenges is also God's plan to bring us to glory. Therefore I now have a different perspective of suffering as an opportunity to grow, and that helps me to have a joyful attitude about it.

reflection questions

- What will it take for you to make it to the end of your life as a disciple? Have you thought through that cost recently to make sure you are ready for trials ahead?
- What things are hard for you to give up for God? Is there anything in your life that you have taken back from him, even though you promised to give up everything when you were first baptised? Talk about those things with God, and apologise for going back on your promise. Then remember his mercy! And ask him for help to give them up again.

/ 09 MARCH

BAD HABITS

Belinda Bath, West Professionals

"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."

– Philippians 4:8

devotional

Galatians 5:16-17– Whether we want to admit it or not, we all have bad habits. Those things we do and say that we wish we didn't. Some habits are difficult to break and some are incredibly difficult to break. Whatever it is, we've probably either become comfortable with certain habits in our lives, or we think they're too difficult to overcome. Why is change so challenging? Paul tells us that we must "live by following the Spirit" because we want what is "against the Spirit." Basically, right and wrong are at war with each other inside us. So, when we try to do the right thing, there's literally a war going on to try to prevent us from doing just that. We could also say that self is at war with the Spirit

Self conforms to the world, but the Spirit renews the mind. Self gives into temptation, but the Spirit trusts God for a way out. Self gratifies fleshly desires, but better than normal walks by God's Spirit. Self gives in to worry, the Spirit prays for strength and guidance. Self allows evil to win, but the Spirit submits to God. Self ignores sin, but the Spirit repents and receives forgiveness. The bottom line about our bad habits is that if we focus on beating them, it may be hard to do just that. But, if we strive to make our lives healthy, many of the bad habits we've adopted will fall away. What we focus on is what will grow stronger in our lives.

Philippians 4:8 – Ryan Blair once said "If it is important, you will find a way. If it's not, you will find an excuse." Instead of making excuses about our poor diet or how we speak, let's fight to continually renew our minds by thinking about the things laid out in this verse. Our actions will change when our minds do so use scripture by memorising it and meditating on it.

1 John 4:12-14 – Something the spirit has been teaching me is not to talk to others about other people through . Even if it me seemed subtle or well-intentioned, God considers it gossip . Going to the person directly and speaking to them first is better. Things that may seem normal to our culture are not ok in the eyes of God because we are followers of Jesus. We need to follow God's word and the spirit. I love this scripture - how god said that no one has seen him but if we love one other then God lives in us in all areas of our life

reflection questions

- What are the bad habits that you continue to struggle with?
- Are there actions you do or words you say that are normal but not beneficial? If you aren't sure, ask God to reveal your heart so that you can live a life that is lead by the spirit, not self.

10 MARCH

WHAT MATTERS TO GOD

In 1993 I moved to Australia from New Zealand, with my Certificate of Fashion Design in my suitcase, I had ambitions to set the Fashion World on fire! I was met by Christians evangelising at Victoria Mall in Chatswood very soon after. I had been religious in the past, but had not been taught to apply the scriptures to my life and to live them out!

This scripture was very true in my case: "Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of the world and the despised things – the things that are not to nullify the things that are, so no one can boast"

– 1 Corinthians 1:26

Trish Blair, North Marrieds

"the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not."

– Romans 4:17

devotional

Soon after I was baptized an older sister invited me to stay over with her. It was a large Federation style house that she shared with several young women. My critical eye, noticed the dated and shabby old bathroom, the broken hairdryer they shared, the rundown state of the place. But these women were filled with joy, as they had read their bibles' and prayed together in the morning. She shared Romans 4:17 with me – which resonated with me deeply.

I would regularly turn that same critical eye on myself, but this verse gives me so much confidence. Before I was a disciple I placed a lot of importance on my appearance and superficial things, my clothes had to be cool. I read Vogue magazine religiously, plastered its pages around my bedroom at home. This verse explains that God sees in such a different way than how we see ourselves, to how society sees us. As women, we are under pressure to look a certain way, to be the right weight. To present in a certain way, the pressure is relentless, even worse today with social media.

This verse helps me to fight the thought that I am not good enough, I am not educated enough, I don't have a designer bag, the up to the minute style, the perfect home, nails, the list is endless. Shopping was such a habit, one that I still struggle with, ever searching for a hit of dopamine, leaving me with feelings of shame and guilt and needing to find places for stuff. It was a very evangelical time in the church, we were always out on the streets meeting people and the church was growing a lot. I was working full time sewing Academic Gowns, a terrible job, but the only one I could get, as all the entry level jobs wanted slim girls who could double as an in-house model, which wasn't me. I realised I needed to have my quiet times every day in order to cope with my work and this new life I had adopted, it was exhausting. This morning daily habit is what has helped me to remain a Christian. We need God's word in our minds to fight the devil's schemes.

Following God's plan truly works. In 1999 Mark Colantonio and I were married after dating in the church and we have two sons Alex and Noah who are also disciples. Staying faithful to God on a daily basis reaps so many rewards. Working on our character and our teachability is of more value than outward appearance and status, daily quiet times keep us soft hearted, striving to grow and humble.

reflection questions

- Do you have your quiet time every day?
- Do you have a core circle of women friends who share scriptures with you, and try to help you become more like Jesus? If not, what could you do to start that process?
- Are your friendships based on superficial things? If so, how can you change that?
- Do you find fault with others? Judging their appearance, odd manner or even singing voice? Or do you understand that we are all called to be God's children because God sees our hearts?
- Do you try to make yourself happy through shopping, rather than deeply connecting with others?
- Are you trying to impress and intimidate, or are you approachable?

/ 11 MARCH

BARRIERS TO WORSHIPING GOD

"You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in their distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat. For the breath of the ruthless is like a storm driving against a wall."

– Isaiah 25:4

Kayla Te-ariki Lemai, Teens

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."

– Proverbs 3:5-6

devotional

This scripture is a great reminder that I can't do things with my own strength or understanding but with God. I have a God who I can trust with all things and who is there for me but I need to trust in him with all my heart and submit myself to him. I can find myself always wanting to be in control of situations and doing things myself instead of going to God and giving things to him. This can become a barrier stopping me from worshiping God and doing things for him. I also have other barriers that stop me from worshiping God in my life like fear, idolatry and lack of trust.

Fear – My fear can withhold me from doing things for God. It can stop me from getting out of my comfort zone, evangelizing and building relationships in the church. I can focus on what others think of me, fearful that if I become vulnerable people may see how sinful I am and think badly of me, fearful of change and fearful of standing out. These all can stop me from going out there and proclaiming God's name and putting him before myself. My fear can stop God from using me in the kingdom. Isaiah 41:10 – This verse reassures me and encourages me as it calls me to not fear because God is with me. It reminds me that God will strengthen me and that he will help me. I need to put my trust in him and trust that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Idolatry – Often I can focus on work, school and having time for myself. I can put myself before God; I can get up late and choose my sleep over having a quiet time; I can spend more time thinking about school work or work or even spending more time watching anime and dramas than thinking about God and my quiet times. Being self focused can stop me from encouraging brothers and sisters or reaching out to friends or work mates. Matthew 6:33 – This verse reminds me that I shouldn't be seeking things for myself but seeking first God's kingdom and his righteousness. I should be putting the kingdom first and be encouraging brothers and sisters and building those relationships.

Lack of trust – In my life I struggle with putting God first and not trusting in God with all my heart with my spiritual life and in general. I can face hardship and try to fix them myself and can become drained and frustrated. With my family I can lack trust in God with being able to support my family and help us become more godly focused. Sometimes I can think of what I want instead of listening to God and trusting that he will provide and be there for my family. Proverbs 3:5-6, says that we need to trust in the Lord with all our heart and even promises us that if we submit to him he will make our paths straight. That means I mustn't rely on what I can do but turn to God.

When we push past these barriers we will see God work.

reflection questions

- What weaknesses do I have that I can boast about to glorify God?
- Are there overwhelming situations in my life that I can take to God in prayer?

12 MARCH

WHICH PERSPECTIVE WILL I CHOOSE TO FOCUS ON?

We are going to look at a prayer by David. David was going through a lot of challenges and assumed it meant that God had forgotten about him. He was very depressed & sad. He felt alone & distant from God. He decided to talk to God & express his heart. At first he was completely distraught & consumed by his problems, then he changed to rejoicing, trusting, and praising God. His perspective was drastically transformed during his prayer. In the midst of his overwhelming feelings, he learned how to persevere through his pain & trials by seeing God's goodness. He learnt that just by changing his perspective it changed everything.

Jessica Roland, Central Coast Marrieds

"How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? Look on me and answer, Lord my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death, and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall. But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the Lord's praise, for he has been good to me."

– Psalm 13:1-6

devotional

This prayer is raw. David is pouring his heart out and questioning God. I can imagine he was sobbing with tears too (like 'ugly crying' haha). I can totally relate to this. I've been in this place emotionally SO many times!! Can you relate to him? Maybe your situations haven't been as extreme or emotional. How about just feeling hopeless, asking 'why God?', discouraged, faithless, lacking trust in God's plans, fearful, depressed, anxious, self piteous, or insecure?

I love looking at David's heart because in scriptures, God referred to him as 'a man after my own heart' (Reference: 1 Samuel 13:14 & Acts 13:22). I want to follow David's example so I can be 'a woman after God's own heart'.

So how did David's prayer transition from discouragement & despair to a place of trust, joy & encouragement?

He was depressed & questioning God, BUT he still fought to see God's love and goodness. He remembered how amazing it is to have salvation. He decided that if nothing else was good in his life, it was awesome to have a relationship with God. If nothing else went well in life, then at least he got to know the Creator of the whole Universe!!! That was enough for him and he praised God for it. He knew God promised unfailing love, so He held onto God's promises. Instead of focusing on his problems, David CHOSE to be grateful and thankful.

What do YOU focus on when you have challenges?

For numerous years I've had a long list of chronic health issues & felt so badly that I've been convinced that I'm dying. (I'm not just being dramatic. This is literally what I've thought). At the same time, I've also had different emotional, behavioural, and health issues with my 3 young daughters. Many times I have felt completely hopeless and angry with God, that this is not what I want for my life. I have questioned God & been so discouraged He hasn't taken these things away. I love this scripture because it teaches me how to be surrendered, grateful, & not focus on my challenges. It has completely changed my perspective. No matter what my trials are, God's love is still constant & I have so much to be grateful for! My heart will rejoice because of my salvation. I now write in a gratitude journal every day (for over a year now) to help me stay focused on God's goodness & many blessings. No matter what life's circumstances, we have a choice of what we will focus on.

Sisters, we all have problems. They are real, they can be difficult & often discouraging, BUT, we have a greater hope & love in God. Let's choose to focus on God & His goodness in our lives.

/ 13 MARCH

IMPERFECT AND LOVED

Tash Brown, South Professionals Ministry

"When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God."

– Romans 5:6-11 NLT

devotional

The last two years have been a process of God revealing my heart, layer by layer – like Shrek, or an onion. COVID, as I am sure it has for many, has stripped back the way I was so used to living and enjoying life. My identity was shaken, and I was confronted by how tightly I held onto an idea of 'who I should be' rather than 'who God tells me I am'. It is exhausting living under the self-applied pressure of perfectionism and expectations, rather than living in the freedom of God's truth. I still have a long way to go but would like to share a little of what I've learnt so far.

reflection questions

- What does it mean to be an 'especially good' or 'upright' person? Is this where I can get my value from?
- What might prevent me from trusting that I have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ?
- What are some truths in this passage? E.g. the truth – we are utterly helpless and sinful without God, the truth – our value and worth were settled on the cross when Jesus died for us (even at our worst!) and the truth – through Christ we can be friends of God
- What are some things you can do to help you hold onto these truths? Can you think of some scriptures which encourage these practicals?

14 MARCH

COURAGE THROUGH COVID

You-Jung Oh, North Professionals

“Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

– John 15:4-5

devotional

We need to lean on so many things to live in this society, but the Bible teaches us how to live in this world well. We made our decision to follow the Bible but there are times we are not able to follow it all because we are very weak.

For example, since the start of the COVID outbreak, there has been a lot of fear and worry, and we are not seeing each other as freely and regularly as we used to. Because of this, the depth of some of our relationships have decreased a lot, and some are afraid to even meet up with each other. Hebrews 10:25 says “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

I have also had a hard time because of COVID. Although I didn’t get COVID, because of other disciples’ becoming positive, many people were afraid of me and avoided me and they would treat me like someone with a serious illness. Because of this I am more afraid of people than COVID. I was thinking to myself, if I really got COVID, how would people treat me? I would avoid meeting with people and thought of excuses to not attend gatherings. As these times continued, my mind slowed down, and I often chose to stay home rather than try to put my effort into meeting with other disciples. One day we were going evangelising but I wanted to avoid going out, using any excuse, and I saw more of my own unbelief. James 2:26 says that “faith without deeds is dead”, but my faith was on its way to death. The day of evangelising came, my heart was still very heavy but I made my decision and went out to evangelise. I had a lot of thoughts on the way. However, when I arrived, I was grateful to share God’s words, and I also received a lot of encouragement and joy from my brothers and sisters.

I realised again that I couldn’t live my life alone, because seeing other disciples gave me encouragement and more strength. I would like to invite more people and try to know them more and find lost sheep through this time.

reflection questions

- What situations or thoughts can make you think that you are not attached to the vine?
- What is the next step for you to stick firmly to the vine?

/ 15 MARCH

LEAVING EVERYTHING BEHIND

Celine Park, North Teens

Luke 9:57-62

devotional

(v57) A stranger approaches Jesus and expresses his eagerness to follow Him and be a disciple.

(v58) Jesus warns him about the cost of following Him. Even wild beasts like foxes and birds have shelters where they find comfort and security. However, Jesus, the Son of Man, does not have any stability – no home, no money, He is not able to meet what we consider basic needs.

(v59) Jesus tells another man to follow Him, as if to demonstrate to the stranger the common excuses people have that hinder them from following God immediately.

(v60) Jesus is not saying this out of lack of compassion. It's not because he underestimated the sorrow and devastation caused from the father's death. In John 11:33-35, when He is informed about Lazarus' death, it is written that Jesus was "deeply moved in spirit and troubled" and wept, even though He knew He was going to be brought back to life. Jesus really cares about people. However, Jesus' eyes were so fixed on saving lives and turning people to God. Jesus, with the power of God, is able to conquer death - so death was not an excuse for hesitating to follow God.

(v61) Likewise, another person gives reasons why they cannot follow God right away. They resemble seeds on the rocky soil and those that fell among the thorns (Matthew 13:20-22).

(v62) If you look away while ploughing the land, you may steer off in unintended directions. Similarly, if you do not have your eyes fully fixed on Jesus, it is difficult to carry out God's work. As disciples, it is important for us to do God's work and not look back.

Two examples where people take the leap of faith to leave everything behind and follow God: Matthew 4:18-22 and Genesis 24:50-61.

reflection questions

- The excuses people give can often sound reasonable. However, why does Jesus challenge them to follow Him right away, despite their excuses?
- Jesus was pointing out the issue with their mindset of trying to do something before committing themselves to Jesus. What are some things that we are trying to get done 'before we fully devote ourselves to Jesus'?
- What are things we haven't let go of or things that are distracting us from fixing our eyes on God?
- In what ways can I follow God and be fit for service in the Kingdom of God?

challenge

Memory verse:

"Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

– Matthew 16:24

practicals

- Repenting of things that I have been distracted by
- Serving in the church
- Taking an action of faith today

16 MARCH

THE LORD IS NEAR...

This last year and a half have been hard on our family... My husband suffered a major cardiac arrest where his heart stopped and needed CPR to bring him back - all right in front of our 3 children. My stress levels were through the roof with trying to meet my husband's needs during his recovery, attempting to support 3 children through their distress and sadness along with my own struggles of shock and worry. I longed for God so much, for him to be closer to me than I thought he was and not so far away in Heaven. The Lord is near. I held on so tightly to God's word.

Jody Jensen, South Marrieds

"Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

– Philippians 4:5-7

devotional

The Bible says that 'The Lord is near.' We can feel the closeness of God and have a deep intimate relationship with him.

Have you ever sat down next to someone you don't know? Been to a place where you are the new person? Felt lonely in a room full of people? Being physically close to someone does not always mean we are close to someone. Being physically distant from someone does not mean we are far away from them either. For the Lord to be near us, he doesn't need to be 'near' us physically.

It says in verse 7: 'And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.'

It is hard to believe that God is near us. To really live this out. We don't need God to take away the trouble in our lives or heal our loved ones to have peace from God. We don't need to see him with our own eyes or touch him in the flesh. Or even see signs that he is near. We just need to pray to God about our worries, doubts and sorrows and give him our requests. His promise is to give us His peace. A peace we don't understand. A peace that can only come from God. A peace that protects our minds and our hearts from negative thoughts, from believing he is not there for us, and the feeling that he is not near. The Lord is near.

During my husband's health scare and recovery, I began to feel so close to God after looking at focusing on this verse. Sometimes I would sit in silence and just be with God, and know he was near. He was by my side, with me every step of the way.

reflection questions

- When going through tough times, what are some of the things you can do to remind yourself that God is near?
- When you are feeling that God is far away, how could you overcome these feelings?
- In your day to day life, how can you be sure that God will give you the peace you long for?

scriptures

Psalm 145:18-20
Zephaniah 3:17
James 4:8

/ 17 MARCH

LESS OF ME, MORE OF HIM

Today, we will be looking at this very well-known but often arduous and overlooked idea of 'more of him and less of me'. In a society that constantly advocates loving ourselves first and foremost and above all else and total self-gratification, I have found this to be a real struggle. And so, I decided to study out the response of the one person we can count on to personify humility and absolute surrender, even though they had EVERY right to and all the power in the world to seek glory for themselves – Jesus.

Diva Dobhal, Campus Ministry

Matthew 26

devotional

This had to have been one of the hardest moments of Jesus' life on earth. The last supper. Knowing that Judas was about to betray Him. Knowing that His closest friends would desert Him in His time of need. Needing to pray because He was overwhelmed with emotion. Coming back to His disciples sleeping because they couldn't stay awake. And the beginning of His journey to the cross with countless false accusations.

When I read this passage, I stand in awe of Jesus' response every step of the way. Not responding with emotion but with the truth and demonstrating peace and tranquillity despite being sorrowful and troubled to the point of death (vs 37 & 38). He had every right to feel anxious and fearful and be distressed and feel wronged by those who were going to disown Him. But instead, He acted in accordance to God's will, took his burdens to God and prayed for not his own but God's will to be done (vs 39 & 42).

Reading this passage helped me reflect on who is at the front of these areas of my life and who I draw strength from – God or myself?

In evangelism; reminding myself it is God speaking through me and leading me to people

In determining plans for my future; it is God who knows what is best and the desires of my heart

In my relationships; God is love and Jesus came to serve, not to be served – is that how I treat people?

With my joy; unrelated to feelings or emotions but it comes from God (Psalms 16:11)

With my career and education; am I glorifying God by working hard and being diligent?

With thanksgiving; do I praise God in every good thing and accredit all success to him?

When I feel wronged; trusting in God who judges justly and being at peace and not retaliating or holding grudges.

reflection questions

- Do others see Christ's humility and absolute surrender depicted through me?
- Do I make everything about me? What would it look like for me personally to have more of Christ and less of me? Is there something I can fast on and deny myself of, to recalibrate and draw from God's strength and to rely on scriptures instead?
- Is my reaction to people when I'm hurt based on God's word and the Holy spirit within me or is it my emotion and my pride? Do I pray for God's will to be done in ALL situations, especially the painful ones and do I keep praying till I am completely surrendered?
- Do I try to seek man's approval? Do I desire to be lifted-up by mere humans rather than God?

challenge

Memory scripture:

"In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!"

– Philippians 2:5-8

scriptures

Luke 9:23-24

1 Peter 5:6

John 3: 30

1 John 4:16

1 Peter 2:21, 23

Psalms 139:23-24

18 MARCH

COMPLETE SURRENDER

Today the focus will be on complete surrender before God, especially in the tough times. This is something that I've been so moved to work on this year as it's something I greatly struggled with last year. 2021 came with its own unique adventure, most of which were out of my control such as lockdown, cancelled events and online university. I realised throughout these challenges, my natural and sinful inclination of self reliance kicks in and I can so easily turn to things that I can tangibly trust in such as myself, friends, family, etc. However, we're commanded in Proverbs 3: 5 - 6 not to trust in these things but rather in God, and he emphasises that I do this with ALL OF MY heart. and to SUBMIT. This is such a high calling and the character who I think exemplifies this calling is Joseph (the dreamer).

Gabrielle Hamilton, Campus Ministry

Genesis 37, 39, 41: 9-12, 28-40

devotional

When reading through Joseph's journey, I can't help but to admire his character, because if I was in his situation, I would have found it incredibly difficult to trust God throughout it all. Life doesn't guarantee straight paths to God's ultimate plan, and the challenge is to maintain faith (defined in Hebrews 11:1) and Joseph's journey was no exception. Absolutely EVERYTHING went wrong for him; he was sold into slavery by his own brothers, literally ran away from temptation, became wrongly imprisoned and helped a fellow prisoner who couldn't even remember him. This was such an unfair storm in life to be going through! But how Joseph responded was with complete and unwavering faith, surrender and confidence in God's promises which is easier said than done.

Covid found unique ways to change my life drastically and mess up the initial plan I had for the past two years for the ministry, work, university etc. It became so easy to do what I saw fit or ask God to make the path towards the end clear so that having faith could be easier. But this is not the surrender that we're called to have; there were so many times that Joseph could've simply decided to give up, as no end seemed to be in sight, yet he had a faith that allowed him to let go of his own understanding and views. Joseph just let God prevail and Genesis 39:2-3 says God was with Joseph. God sometimes allows us to be placed into hard or difficult situations that stretch us in order to be refined to trust in Him whilst he's right there. When we look at the big picture, God worked in the background in Joseph's story but the promise only came to fruition after 13 long years, 2 of which were in prison (Genesis 41:1). How would you have responded if you had waited this long for a promise?

I can't help but consider how anticlimactic Joseph's story would have been if he had reacted the way I do when God puts me in long tough situations – he would not have been in the position of power that allowed him to help his family move to Egypt and be a part of God's great plan for His people. I find that my inability to let God work is because I can be so consumed with my feelings, thoughts, and uncertainty. Rather than focusing on God's greater picture like Joseph did, which lead to comfort and true joy, I rely on myself and become caught in crippling doubt and worry, because I know that I can't do anything to fix the situation. However, I've found that having an eternal perspective, constantly praying to let go of uncertainty and surrender and having God's promises on my heart through memorising scriptures has been so helpful to emulate Joseph's trust of God especially when no end is in sight. Life promises that we WILL go through crazy twists and new storms with an uncertain duration, days or years but the challenge of our faith is how we respond throughout. Whether we choose the path of self reliance or emulate Joseph's absolute trust in God. The path of trust is hard but we can see the true rewards through Joseph's life.

Memory scriptures that have helped me:

Hebrews 11:1 and 2 Corinthians 5:7

reflection questions

- What would your natural reaction have been in Joseph's circumstance?
- When faced with situations where fear or self reliance can so easily prevail, where do you turn?
- In what area of your life is God calling you to surrender to His greater plan?
- What are the ways that you can equip yourselves for the storms that will come in life?

/ 19 MARCH

FIXING OUR EYES ON JESUS

Aithne Morgan, Campus Ministry

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

– Hebrews 12:1-3

devotional

During my time as a disciple I've heard and read this scripture many times, and it's always something I need to hear as I can often stop focusing and fixing my eyes on Jesus and God.

Upon reflection I felt that recently I've definitely become hindered by things in my life such as burdens and sin which has stopped me from effectively running the race that, as the scripture says, God has marked out for me. I've realised that I haven't been fixing my eyes on Jesus. Instead I've been fixing them on my circumstances and have started running towards other things like excelling in uni, my job and chasing to live some amazing, fun life that I see other people living.

Every time I read this scripture it really helps give me perspective. I'm reminded of how Jesus endured the cross and He did this because of the joy set before Him; the joy of getting to be with God in heaven and making that possible for me too. Because Jesus did this I too get to look forward to this joy of getting to be with God, and I too can share this joy with others.

This scripture challenges me to persevere in my walk with God and trust in Him just as Jesus did. And it really reminds me to run towards God instead of other things in my life. For myself, this year I really want to focus on having an eternal perspective, rather than just focusing on my life here and now on earth. I want to be looking to God everyday and not losing sight of Him, even if things get hard. And it's so cool that I can run this race with so many amazing sisters so that we can help each other along the way.

reflection questions

- Why is our relationship / journey with God regarded as a race in this scripture and what type of race do you think it is?
- What has been hindering you / what sin has been holding you back lately? What has been stopping you from effectively running the race?
- What was the joy that was set before Jesus which helped Him endure the cross? And what is the joy set before us that we can look forward to?
- How can we fix our eyes on Jesus?
- How does considering the persecution that Jesus faced help us to not grow weary?

20 MARCH

PRAISING GOD IN ALL SEASONS

Ayesha Salier, Campus Ministry

Psalm 98

devotional

For me last year was a hard one. Through the lockdown I felt as though I was missing God's blessings that had brought me so much joy while we were meeting together, things such as devos and church services, being bold and sharing my faith with strangers, and even just having people over for dinners. Having restrictions on the things I found deep happiness in I had to really start searching for joy I could hold on to through all COVID's ups and downs.

My flatmate got me a reflection journal for my 18th birthday, and in it there is a little column labelled "happy moments". In a time when I found it hard to find joy in anything, I pushed myself to put entries in this book.

These are some of my favourite "happy moments" from lockdown. They aren't happy moments because they were relief from what I was going through, or because they helped me see the bigger picture, but rather just because they were the times I was reminded Jesus is Lord of the little things, as well as the big.

"my coffee was spot on today"

"the tiramisu Harper made"

"My scrunchie"

"I spilt my drink on the carpet but it didn't stain"

These tiny little blessings help me remember just how much God gives us to worship Him for, our salvation should bring praise no matter where our lives are. For my heart to sing and make music to God comes naturally when I'm reflecting on the big and small things He's done in my life.

So I love this Psalm because it makes me think about people dancing before God, being praise-filled about all the good things He has done for them.

reflection questions

- When was the last time you stopped and praised God for a little thing in your life?
- How can you change your attitude to reflect this psalmist's?

challenge

Memory scripture:

"But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me."

– Philippians 2:17-18

practicals

As you go through your day today find a tiny blessing you can praise God for.

/ 21 MARCH

ANXIETIES AND INSECURITIES

Mengxi Yang, Campus Ministry

Romans 5:1-5

devotional

After reading this passage I was reflecting on how joyful we should be in knowing we are in God's Kingdom, but how often this can be missing in our lives. I realized that a major reason why myself and others lack joy in the Kingdom of God is because of insecurities and the anxieties of life.

People have many insecurities in their lives in relation to their wealth, looks, popularity, abilities, family background and so on. In society today, this is so apparent with social media. People admire and idolize celebrities and their lifestyle, pursuing the perfect body and the perfect house. We can be so quick to compare ourselves with those around them and often strive to have superiority over others. All in all, this breeds insecurity and anxiety as we strive to conform to society and people around us rather than in God.

For me, I have many insecurities because of my desire to prove myself to others and because of the high standard I have created for myself based on my past experiences. These fears and insecurities have driven me to look to short-sighted achievements and ways to boost my pride, which in turn causes me to have less gratitude and joy towards God and the life He has blessed me with.

This scripture however directly tells us why we need to rejoice in all circumstances of life no matter what. It teaches us that we rejoice in our sufferings for developing endurance, for forming noble characters and for growing in our relationship with God and filling our lives with God's love above all else. The greatest gift and joy in life is knowing God and remaining in His love rather than pursuing all these other things that produce insecurity and anxiety. Ultimately, all good things come from God even the difficult times in our lives, that God will so we always have a reason to rejoice in God.

reflection questions

- What are some insecurities and anxieties in your life that are stopping you from rejoicing in God?
- Would those around you describe you as a joyful person?
- What is your attitude towards suffering? Do you view it as an opportunity to grow closer to God?

challenge

Memory scripture:
Philippians 4:4-9

practicals

- Share with others about the ways God has worked in your life recently
- Spend quality time with God in prayer and praise Him
- Have a gratitude list. To list everyday things to be grateful for

22 MARCH

COURAGE ON ANOTHER LEVEL

Linda Prakash, Central Coast Marrieds

Revelation 6, Hebrews 11

devotional

A lot can be said about courage. We often do not know that we have it until we need it. Courage for a Christian is very important. Almost all the stories in the Bible that we admire and remember took courage. The ones that move our hearts and our actions involve courage on monumental levels. Sometimes as Christians we casually read these stories and can become disconnected because we already know how the story ends. David kills the giant, Daniel isn't eaten by the lions, the three guys in the fire don't burn. Knowing how the story ends has a disadvantage. We almost forget about the courage and process involved before the victory. Sometimes putting ourselves in the story and seeing how we would respond can reveal a lot.

My desire for more courage was inspired by my readings in the book of Revelation 6 and Hebrews 11. In trying to understand one of the most baffling books in the Bible I stumbled upon a passage in Revelation 6:9-11 that took my interest. It seemed like those who went before us (the Davids' and Marys' of the Bible) were also waiting for the true Christians of today to complete their journey in Christ and come out victorious; and not just waiting but longing as if their joy and promise is not complete without us. The earlier Christians seemed to have an understanding of this eternal standing with GOD. Their hearts were fixated on the resurrection:

“Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection.”

– Hebrews 11:35

I'm sure I read this chapter before but somehow I skipped over this part. I never noticed these earlier Christians literally asked to stay in prison for righteous crimes in order to gain a better resurrection. In v37 it says, “...they were stoned and sawed in two.” Seriously? Who has the courage to undergo even the thought of that! And the implications that it would involve. Obviously, the opening line to Christianity is not going to be, “Come follow Jesus so you can be sawed in two” because who would sign up for that? But many did sign up for just that. Once this thought sank in I began wondering how one finds the courage to face trials that are on another level. It came down to two things. Faith and love.

The entire chapter of Hebrews 11 speaks primarily of faith. To be able to face such events one needs to have an abundant amount of faith in Jesus, His words and the resurrection. I believe that faith combined with love produces courage. I think of my children. I would never in my right mind touch a spider; however, if I saw one crawling on my child I would grab it with my own hands and toss it aside. There are various other examples, but the idea is that when love is deep enough we will do anything and that in and of itself is courage. I'm sure David when he went up against Goliath wasn't thinking... “I need to be courageous right now” while shaking in his sandals. I'm sure he was consumed with indignation that the GOD He loved was being slandered and dishonoured by an uncircumcised Philistine. See his courage steamed from his great love of GOD. We can assume this because his brothers had faith in GOD as well. They knew who He was, and what He could do but they lacked the love. So perhaps that is why David was called a man after GOD's own heart; because he didn't just have faith in GOD... He loved GOD.

If we remove courage fueled by genuine faith in the resurrection and love of GOD, then we will become an organisation of good people. People never inconvenienced, never imprisoned for righteous crimes, never persecuted, just good people having a form of godliness but denying its power. On the other hand if we take our faith and our love to another level so will our courage. And we will become a people worthy of longing for.

/ 23 MARCH

TRUSTING UNTRUSTWORTHY PEOPLE

Soon after I became a disciple as a teenager, my older sister and younger brother also became disciples in the Toronto church. I remember how fun it was to go to church together, united in our love for God and His church. We were always pretty close as siblings but this new focus on His word added depth and joy to our bond.

Unfortunately within 2 years of getting baptized, tragedy struck. My sister Jufiyah developed an acute form of leukemia (blood cancer) and passed away mere months after the diagnosis. Although questions about why God would allow such a loss - especially at a time when we were excitedly united in Him - challenged my faith....the greater challenge came from grappling with why my sister felt alone and deserted by our church community during the last days of her life. She often commented that she wished more people would call or come around to visit. Despite being ill, she wanted to be included and needed.

After her death, I struggled with feelings of anger, betrayal and distrust with church members. I remember telling someone that I only came to church because I loved God and that I hated the people at church. Even then I knew I was expressing a theological contradiction (1 John 4:20) but I just could not understand how God could ask me to love and (especially) trust such an untrustworthy lot.

Sanj Horadagoda, North Marrieds

devotional

As I begged God on how to move forward from the difficult, lonely and cold place I found myself in, over the course of years, He faithfully highlighted two important things ;

1. God trusts me even though I'm untrustworthy. Just like the rich man who walked by poor Lazarus every day without meeting his needs (Luke 16:19-31), God opened my eyes to how I often passed by needs in my family, church, work and wider community / world. For example, when others became sick in the church community, I did not always make the time to go see them. And yet, God chose to give me His love and trust by putting Jesus on the cross. As I realised how much I needed His grace, it made it so much easier to extend that grace and forgive others.

2. God wants me to trust Him above all else, not people/church or things or ideals. Jesus himself did not entrust himself to people because He knew the hearts of people (John 2:24). I was not to love and serve and be in community with His people because any of us were good (Psalm 118:8-9)...only because He is good!! (Mark 10:18)...what a relief and freedom I felt. Engaging with people was possible and wonderful again because I was giving my heart to others but trusting God first. Knowing that God is working everything out (Romans 8:28), makes the inevitable situations when people fail me or I fail them, while still painful and difficult, times of growth and bonding.

reflection questions

- Are there areas in your life where you are putting your trust in other things or people or ideas instead of God first? What are the results? How can you change the focus of your trust back to God?
- Think about / write about whether there are any hurts and / or hang-ups from past interactions with others in the church that make you hesitate to give your heart to them or others? Meditate on the memory scripture and ask God how your heart can heal and you can love them as he commands.

challenge

Memory scripture:

"Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen."

– 1 John 4:20

24 MARCH

FIRST OR LAST

Emily Nicholson, South Marrieds

"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."

– 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

devotional

This has always been, hands down, one of my favourite passages in the Bible. There's something in each of us that loves to win – to create a great presentation at work, to master a fantastic new recipe, to win a tennis match or a hockey game, to see our child grow in new ways – it's so satisfying. When I was in high school, I was the one who was usually picked last to be on a team when we were playing a game – dodgeball, volleyball, soccer – I wasn't sporty by nature. It was always so humiliating to be one of the last 2-3 people to be "picked". I felt very insecure about sport, and it showed!

Here's the great thing: God loves the team that wins. He loves the team that loses. He loves the team that grows in their capability! God is never about "first" and "last". Paul shares in this passage that the greatest race we run is only ever against our own capability, our own potential, and really striving to be our best for God! When I think about the story of Cain and Abel, it's clear that though God was happier with Abel's offering that day, he still loved the two brothers equally: "Why is your face downcast? 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?: (Genesis 4:6-7).

In this passage, Paul is asking us to stretch ourselves – to run the race and to finish well. That's the key – it isn't about "getting there first", it's all about making sure we finish the race: running at our own pace, with the gifts God gives us, to glorify Him. And the truth is, God loves us so much that he always wants us to choose us first to be on His team!

reflection questions

- How are you doing in your own "race"? What areas of "strict training" could help you with the endurance marathon that is the Christian life?
- What do you think a "crown that will last forever" means? Reflect on this. What kind of a crown does God want to give us? What kind of crown does the world give?
- Who else do you know and love who may be faltering in their race? How could you do one thing today to help them?

challenge

Memory scripture:

"...let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."

– Hebrews 12:1

/ 25 MARCH

IMITATING RAHAB'S FAITH

Hyun-soon Kim, Central Coast Marrieds

“By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.”

– Hebrews 11:31

devotional

There are so many heroes of the faith, however Rahab has always been an inspiring biblical figure for me. Rahab was a prostitute and a Gentile. As you know, prostitution was a lowly job which was frowned upon and not well regarded. However she believed in the miracles and promises God made for the Israelites so she decided to help hide the scouting soldiers. So God saved Rahab's family, out of the many families in Jericho. Later Rahab got married to Salmon and gave birth to Boaz, who all Christians respect, and became great grandmother to King David and became a part of the family tree of Jesus.

Firstly I'm very touched by Rahab's godly parenting to Boaz, which is reflected through his qualities. I have always been challenged by Rahab. Secondly only Rahab believed in God's word out of all the people in Jericho. This brought her glory from God by becoming the root to Jesus Christ. This reminded me that even in this world, only those who actually believe in and follow God's word will be recognised by God as righteous. Lastly I thought about the perspective of God, watching us. Rahab, who was a prostitute, did not have anything to brag about nor anything that would have improved her life drastically. However her faith changed her life.

Believing in God will change lives and even status. Through God's kindness, we are also given the glory of being accepted as God's children. It doesn't matter what job or history you have, if you repent and hold on to faith, God will accept us as his child. This is the miracle and grace of God.

To respond to his love, we should love him today, tomorrow and I want to become a person with firm and strong faith.

reflection questions

- Rahab was known for her faith in God. Am I known for my faith? If not, what am I known for?
- What is something faithful I can do for / with God today?

26 MARCH

COMPETENCE FROM GOD

Cassie Kwok, Teen Leader

"Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. Such confidence we have through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."

– 2 Corinthians 3:1-6

devotional

With going through different life stages, e.g. being a university student to working full time or changing ministries, these changes often feel overwhelming, uncertain and scary for me. In these seasons of transition in my life, there are endless situations where I find myself having to make decisions. I am honestly the worst decision maker (I struggle to even decide what to get when I go out to eat!). And so, I've realised that my decisions tend to be made based on what others would approve of or out of fear or people pleasing. But none of these reasons are pleasing to God! This insecurity and fear really has held me back from digging deeper into the Bible and what God has to say, stopping me from building deeper convictions and robbing me of the confidence in the Holy Spirit and God's Word!! I'm definitely still working on this area in my life and I have a long way to go and this scripture has helped me so much while growing in this area.

reflection questions

- What does it mean to be "a letter from Christ.. written with the Spirit of the Living God on tablets of human hearts"?
- What might stop me from being confident, in that my confidence comes from God? And how does this show in my life?
- What does this scripture say we are competent in because of God?
- What truths are in this scripture about our identity in God?
- What's something you can do today to live out being "competent as ministers of a new covenant?"

/ 27 MARCH

HONOURING GOD

Tina Board , West Marrieds

My heart is not proud, Lord, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me. But I have calmed and quieted myself, I am like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child I am content.

– Psalm 131:1-2

devotional

John 17:22-23

I am challenged by this scripture as it conveys God and Jesus' will and purpose for unity. It reminds me that unity whether in a family setting, or most importantly church, honours God who loves us all equally. In this, God has set the perfect example for me.

Acts 17:27-28

I ask myself:

Do I continue to seek God daily?

Do I continue daily to reach out to God?

Do I truly find out what his will is for me?

If I am his offspring, do I have God's qualities? For example, do I have love for others, what is my honesty gauged by, how is my commitment, compassion, kindness and forgiveness?

I believe I have not been this way lately, I am distracted by many things, I am concerned about what is best for me. In my commitment as a disciple what am I willing to sacrifice for my bible talk and church?

As I search the scriptures I am reminded of God's unity and how important bringing glory to God is paramount. Does my example demonstrate this?

Spending time with disciples in the Suva church has humbled me as they have not met physically for a very long time as a church and yet they have worked hard to keep the unity. They are full of joy, and continually give of their time to one another. As I have been speaking to them they have expressed how it can be tough and yet they continue to persevere. A lesson for me is wherever God's glory is honoured, then unity grows and I will be in sync with God in how I live my life.

28 MARCH

THE BEAUTY OF LOVE BEING A CHOICE

Recently I've been struggling a lot with my emotions. Facing the pressure of a new job, the separation from my long-distance boyfriend, the loss of a family member, the disconnection through lock down, facing my childhood hurt – it feels never ending. I can be so overwhelmed with my emotions, that I can let them lead me as I struggle to work through them. Some days I just wish God would sort through my emotions and force me to act in faith every time. I convince myself that my emotions are in the way of me following God. But I've realised, that's not what God wants, he doesn't want an absent follower, he wants to be loved and true love comes as a choice.

Monique Jordaan, Teen Leader

1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

devotional

He chose you (v4) and he chooses to love you, through the pain, at the cost of His son, giving his whole heart so you might know Him. (Additional – Hosea 2:16,19,23). God isn't forced to love you. With true love there is always a choice and it's in that choice that makes love so beautiful. It is through that love you labour for God. Love is the motivator - not fear, not hurt, not religiosity. But labour in love is still labour – so will you choose love above all else?

God wants you to choose Him like he chose you. He desires your heart, not your checklist, which is why he never forces you (Hosea 6:6, Isaiah 29:13). It's when I remember this that it becomes easy to choose God above my emotions.

Verse 6 says they welcomed the message during suffering. Emotions don't stop me from being able to choose love. It's when I forget I'm chosen and loved that the choice seems unclear. It's when I put my hope in anything but God (v2). What do you put your hope in?

God gave us so much in order to be able to choose Him – his word, his Spirit, his heart, his Son, his comfort, his protection and guidance, his people. What has God done or put in your life to help you choose Him with love? Do you forget?

Once we choose God, we impact those around us. A simple choice to love God today can impact a soul forever. Will He be able to say of you, "She chose me today"? – grateful he gives us new opportunities everyday to hold onto Him (Psalm 119:112). We can decide to choose him today and always, just like He chose us at the cross.

reflection questions

- How will I choose to love God today?
- How will I choose to love God's people today?
- How can I go after trusting God continues to choose me?

/ 29 MARCH

SEEN AND LOVED

Exactly one year ago, I was studying about love in the gospels, so I looked up all the times that the Greek word for God's love, agape, was used. When I got to this verse, what stuck out to me was the fact that Jesus loved this man after looking upon him. In the Greek, from the interlinear translation, verse 21a directly says: "And Jesus having looked upon him loved him."

In Greek, the word for "looking at" is: emblepó - to look at, to consider / I look into (upon); metaphorically: I consider; I see clearly. HELPS provides some extra context: emblépo (from en, "engaged in" and blepo, "look") – properly, stare (look) at with a "locked-in gaze"; look at in a sustained, concentrated way, i.e., with special "interest, love or concern".

Honestly, just reading the definition of the word for "looking at" in Greek brings tears to my eyes as I imagine the immense care, kindness, & compassion Jesus had as He gazed upon this man. I looked at the verse in a couple of other translations, and they also reflect this idea more clearly:

NAS: "Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said..."

KJV: "Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said..."

It was in gazing at him fixedly, considering him and his heart with this locked in gaze and special interest, love, or concern that Jesus chose to love him. Jesus is love, and He is therefore loving at all times, but He still chose to pause and really consider this man, to concentrate on him and in doing so felt love for him. Jesus loved/wished well to / took pleasure in / likely even longed for him and his heart to be truly right with God. This made me wonder: Am I taking the time to look at others with this gaze of Christ and love them?

Christina Namato, West Professionals

Mark 10:17-22

devotional

All too often, I'm not. With my husband, I can get caught up in the day to day to-dos, and focus on tasks rather than connection. When other sisters come to me for advice or support, sometimes I can focus on finding the right scripture to help them with what they're sharing, and while this is important, it is also important to first take the time to pause and deeply listen, to sit together and consider them and their hearts. When reaching out, am I taking the time to try and meaningfully connect with people and understand where they are coming from, or do I focus on getting the invite to an event or a Bible study out and move onto the next person?

I want to have the deep, quiet stillness that comes with taking the time to gaze upon others, to look upon Jesus, and to bask in the fact that Jesus looks at me this way too.

Truths

- Love takes the time to behold / gaze upon others to see them clearly in order to truly love them.
- In seeing others clearly and loving them, we can speak the truth to them in love and call them higher, just like Jesus did with this man.
- Just because someone walks away from us and the truth does not necessarily mean we haven't been loving. Jesus loved this man deeply, but when he told him what he needed to hear, he went away sad. Loving isn't about making people happy. It is about telling them the truth, in love, so they can be with Jesus eternally.

reflection questions

- Pray for God to give you Jesus' eyes to see others.
- Ask yourself: Am I taking the time to look at others with this gaze of Christ and love them?
- Take time to look upon others. It's a gift to them and to you.
- If you love someone, you need to tell them the truth about Christ's standard even when it's tough.
- Take the time to behold and be beheld by Christ.

challenge

Memory scripture:

"And Jesus having looked upon him loved him."

– Mark 10:21a

30 MARCH

RELYING ON GOD FOR STRENGTH

Camille Calagos, North Professionals

"but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

– Isaiah 40:31

devotional

This scripture both convicted and guided me in dealing with what I went through in the past few months. I had to be reminded that I need to stop, seek God and ask for renewal of strength.

Living in Sydney and being a disciple can be quite challenging and exhausting most of the time. Sydney, as Australia's most populated city is always busy, bustling and there is always something happening. The past few months have been reasonably difficult for me - managing my time between being a disciple and an employee. As a disciple, I am committed to the body and to fellowship which means that I need to attend devotionals, bible talks, midweeks, church services and bible studies. Meanwhile at work, I needed to devote longer working hours as at that time, we did not have enough resources to meet our global deadline. I remembered feeling exhausted, stressed, and anxious during this time. There were even times that I would miss devotionals or fellowship activities because I just did not have enough strength and energy after working longer hours. While going through this, I started questioning myself - why do I feel tired and helpless?

Then I encountered this scripture and realized that I was feeling tired and helpless because I just relied on my own strength and did not intentionally ask for God's help. I had to accept the fact that I cannot do everything on my own and I needed help. If I keep doing this, I can easily fall and stumble which would impact my physical, mental and specifically, my spiritual well being. This scripture taught me that I need to rely on God's strength and that only he can sustain me. Most of the time, I can turn to other things first and forget that I have a God who is just waiting for me to call on him. This scripture is an assurance that God is our unending source of strength and if we keep on seeking him – he will renew our strength and we are empowered to do more for his kingdom.

reflection questions

- What are the things or activities that can easily exhaust or stress you out?
- In relation to the above, how do you cope with exhaustion or stress?
- What does it mean for you to "hope in the Lord" and what does it look like in your life?

challenge

Memory scripture:

"I can do all this through him who gives me strength."

– Philippians 4:13

/ 31 MARCH

LISTENING FOR GOD'S WHISPER

Back in 1990, I had become a disciple in the Campus Ministry of the London Church of Christ, less than 5 years later I left God. Fast forward 25 years, I was now living in Sydney, and late one night after listening to a lesson on Joshua from old sermons on the Sydney Church of Christ website, I heard this small, quiet voice just say “you need to do something, it’s now or never”

I really believe that this was my last chance as my heart had become so hardened by living a sinful life, I felt dead inside spiritually. So, I sent a short message on the ‘Contact Us’ part of the website, thinking, OK, I’ve put it out there now, I will have to do something eventually not expecting to get a response almost instantly inviting me to church. So, the next Sunday I turned up and started studying the Bible again; I was restored the following month, June 2019.

I had always thought God would have to do something big, frightening and dramatic to help me come back to Him, but it turned out to be a gentle whisper.

Sharon Foster, South Professionals

The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper."

– 1 Kings 19:11-12

devotional

Elijah flees and seeks God on Mount Horeb, this is where Moses saw the burning bush and where God gave Moses the Law. Important things seem to happen on mountains in the Bible. When I think of mountains, I think of their majesty and the beauty of His creation. They're also "closer" to the heavens and usually away from other people, so no distractions, and a place where you can be still and connect with God.

My mind is busy from the moment I wake, thinking about all the things I have to do, accomplish that day, including my quiet times with God, another thing on the checklist of my life – read my Bible – tick, pray – tick, right, now the next thing on my list.

Recently though, I've been learning about the need to dedicate time to just being still, meditating and contemplating God's word, listening to what His Spirit wants to teach me. This is challenging for me, my mind is all over the place, I'm task orientated and get caught up in the "doing" instead of just "being" with God, making space for God to speak to me.

Wind, Earthquake, Fire – these are often referred to as "Acts of God" in our world and yes, God is the Creator, all powerful and has used these forces of nature throughout the Bible to demonstrate His power. I can often view God through the prism of significant others in my life and so expect Him to punish me or "strike me down"; something dramatic, big, bad, that I deserve because of my sin, my failures each day to live up to my performance based Christianity. Like Elijah, when I have been despondent, feeling hopeless, it is God's gentleness, kindness, patience that I've experienced instead. (Romans 2:4)

We live in a world where we expect and want everything instantly – answers, money, pleasure, success but as disciples, the Bible teaches us about waiting on God, persevering, continuing to seek Him even when we think He is silent, realising His "silence" doesn't mean inactivity (Romans 12:2). I'm an impatient person who loves being in control, God's timing is often not my timing, but while I wait on Him, continue to go to Him, He is teaching me more about who He is and teaching me more about trusting Him, especially when I don't get the answers I want.

reflection questions

- How can the busyness of my life or my mind keep me from hearing the whisper of God?
- What things have I been avoiding or putting off amongst the chaos and chatter of life?
- Make time this week to sit quietly and listen for God's voice

BONUS

TWO FAITHFUL PEOPLE

Zoe Scott, South Marrieds Ministry

The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance but the LORD looks at the heart.

– 1 Samuel 16:7b

devotional

Read Mark 12. If you can, read the whole chapter. Otherwise read verses 28-34 and 41-44.

The background: Jesus has made many enemies in his 3 years of preaching and teaching, healing and driving out demons. The religious leaders are suspicious of him and threatened by his popularity. The Roman authorities are worried he could stir up rebellion in a very volatile province of the mighty Roman Empire.

Important Jewish leaders and teachers try to trick Jesus with questions but he questions them in return. And then he outsmarts them all.

The Lawyer

Along comes a Jewish lawyer in verse 28. Read verses 28-34....

- Does Jesus hit back with a question of his own?
- What answer does Jesus give?
- How amazing to know what Jesus understands as the most important commandments of all!
- Why do you think Jesus and the Lawyer could really share their understanding of the Scriptures with one another? Were they competing or were they learning from each other?
- And then Jesus compliments the Lawyer in v34. Would you want Jesus to say that to you?

The Poor Widow

Now read verses 41-44. Do you think the widow knew Jesus was watching? Why do you think she was giving money to God? Why do you give money to God? Why did Jesus tell the disciples that the widow gave more to God than the wealthy people did? Who was the widow relying on for her food for the next day?

Jesus saw her faith in her actions, just like he saw the Lawyer's faith in his understanding of God's word.

Why I chose this passage: I am reading through Mark and Jesus is so misunderstood by everyone. People plot against Jesus and try to trick him as his life draws to its climax.

And yet, here are two people who understand God's heart. The lawyer shows his faith by his words. The widow trusts her actions. Jesus sees their faith and I know he sees my life and my faith too. I felt loved by God when I read these accounts.

patience that I've experienced instead. (Romans 2:4)

We live in a world where we expect and want everything instantly – answers, money, pleasure, success but as disciples, the Bible teaches us about waiting on God, persevering, continuing to seek Him even when we think He is silent, realising His “silence” doesn't mean inactivity (Romans 12:2). I'm an impatient person who loves being in control, God's timing is often not my timing, but while I wait on Him, continue to go to Him, He is teaching me more about who He is and teaching me more about trusting Him, especially when I don't get the answers I want.