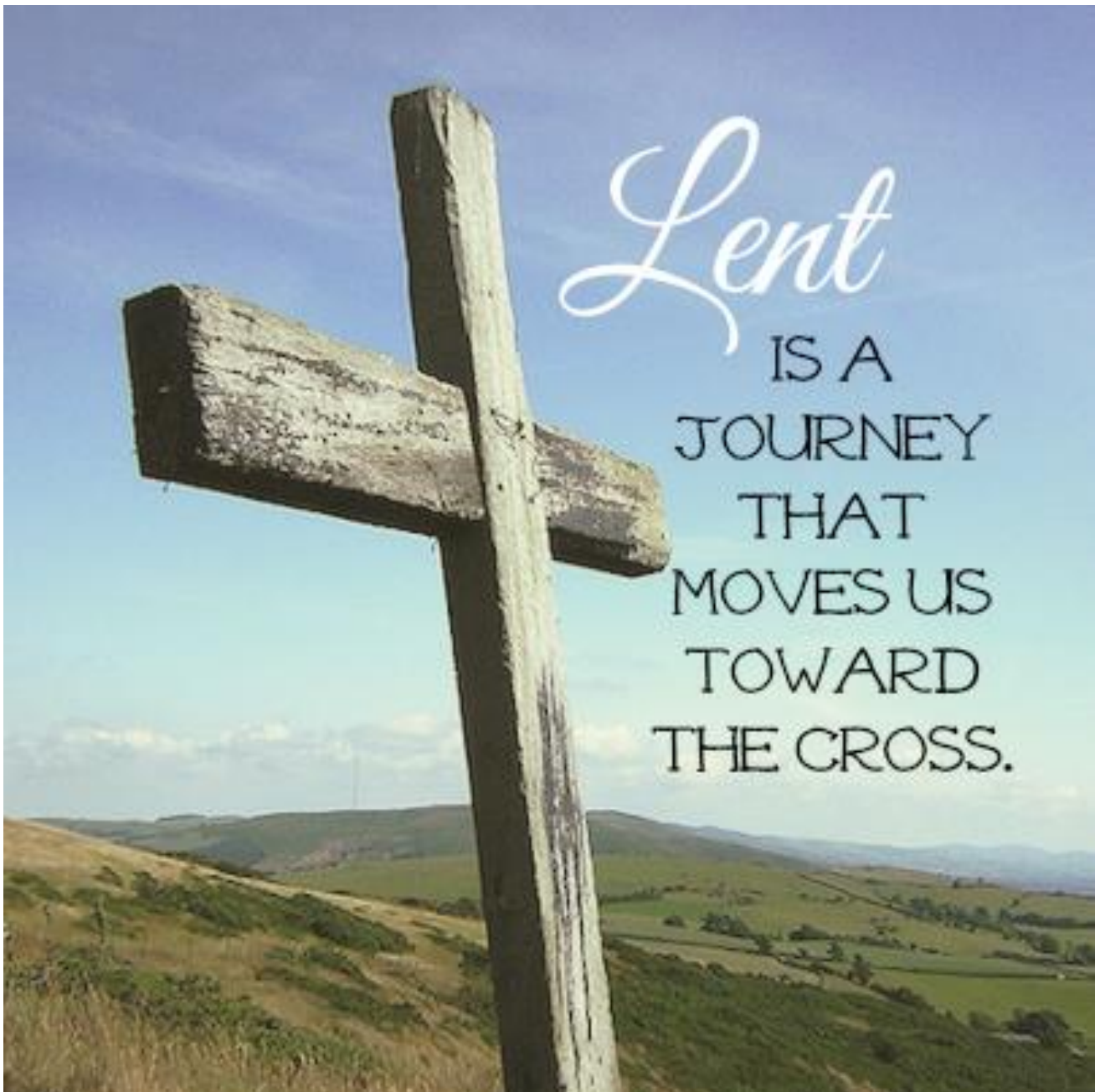




Perth Alliance Church English



# Daily Devotional

Lent 2019



# Lenten Daily Devotions 2019

## Purpose:

During this time of remembering Jesus' suffering and death on the cross for our salvation (Lent), we would like to encourage you to cultivate the spiritual discipline of daily devotions – to make time for self-reflection, listening to God's word, reconciling with God and people, for loving in action, praying unceasingly, meditating on Jesus' suffering, and understanding more deeply what it means to live sacrificially.

## Daily devotions together:

We have invited over 20 brothers and sisters from PACE to each write one or more daily devotional materials, which have been edited and compiled in this booklet.<sup>1</sup> Let's learn together as we remember Jesus' suffering and death for us. May we also be filled with hope as we look forward to His coming.

Rolf and Sylvia

March 2019

## Guide to devotional time

1. Quiet yourself down for 5 minutes.
2. Read and re-read the Scripture passage at least 2-3 times.
3. Meditate on the Scripture passage
4. Read "explanation" and "sharing of personal application"
5. Engage with the "Reflective Questions"
6. Pray in response and jot down notes from your meditation and reflection of the day.

All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version (NIV) 2011, unless otherwise indicated.

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<sup>1</sup> This was first done by Ps Kevin Leung in the Cantonese congregation of PACS, and we liked the idea so much we thought we should try it in the English congregation too! We are using essentially the same passages selected by Ps Kevin in 2018.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Psalm 139*

*Known by God*

*Rolf Van Wollingen*

**For the director of music. Of David. A psalm.**

<sup>1</sup> You have searched me, LORD,  
and you know me.  
<sup>2</sup> You know when I sit and when I rise;  
you perceive my thoughts from afar.  
<sup>3</sup> You discern my going out and my lying  
down;  
you are familiar with all my ways.  
<sup>4</sup> Before a word is on my tongue you,  
LORD, know it completely.  
<sup>5</sup> You hem me in behind and before,  
and you lay your hand upon me.  
<sup>6</sup> Such knowledge is too wonderful for  
me,  
too lofty for me to attain.  
<sup>7</sup> Where can I go from your Spirit?  
Where can I flee from your presence?  
<sup>8</sup> If I go up to the heavens, you are there;  
if I make my bed in the depths, you are  
there.  
<sup>9</sup> If I rise on the wings of the dawn,  
if I settle on the far side of the sea,  
<sup>10</sup> even there your hand will guide me,  
your right hand will hold me fast.  
<sup>11</sup> If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide  
me  
and the light become night around me,"  
<sup>12</sup> even the darkness will not be dark to  
you;  
the night will shine like the day,  
for darkness is as light to you.  
<sup>13</sup> For you created my inmost being;  
you knit me together in my mother's  
womb.

<sup>14</sup> I praise you because I am fearfully and  
wonderfully made;  
your works are wonderful,  
I know that full well.  
<sup>15</sup> My frame was not hidden from you  
when I was made in the secret place,  
when I was woven together in the depths  
of the earth.  
<sup>16</sup> Your eyes saw my unformed body;  
all the days ordained for me were written  
in your book  
before one of them came to be.  
<sup>17</sup> How precious to me are your thoughts,  
God!  
How vast is the sum of them!  
<sup>18</sup> Were I to count them,  
they would outnumber the grains of  
sand — when I awake, I am still with you.  
<sup>19</sup> If only you, God, would slay the  
wicked!  
Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty!  
<sup>20</sup> They speak of you with evil intent;  
your adversaries misuse your name.  
<sup>21</sup> Do I not hate those who hate you,  
Lord,  
and abhor those who are in rebellion  
against you?  
<sup>22</sup> I have nothing but hatred for them;  
I count them my enemies.  
<sup>23</sup> Search me, God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.  
<sup>24</sup> See if there is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.

*Explanation*

This psalm is a prayer in which David acknowledges the God is all-knowing, all-powerful and always present, especially in relation to himself, i.e. that God knows him inside out. There's nothing about him that God doesn't know, or that's hidden from God, because he was made by God, and God is always present with him. Therefore, David knows that ultimately he has nothing to fear, because his life is in God's hands.

*Sharing of personal application*

When I was 14 years old I suffered a mental illness that put me in a psychiatric hospital for three weeks. The doctors and psychiatrist didn't know what was wrong with me. One doctor wondered if I'd been taking some kind of drugs. Even after I was allowed to go home, I fell into a deep depression and it took me several of months to recover completely. Most of the time I was in hospital I was only half-conscious of what was happening around me and to me. However one episode sticks clearly in my mind, and I will never forget it. I was outside, and suddenly experienced a moment of clarity. I was aware, in that moment of lucidity, when I clearly knew where I was and who I was, that even my sanity – the ability to think one thought after another – was the gift of God. I knew then that I would get better, when and as God saw fit.

*Reflective question/s*

- To what extent am I aware that God knows me completely? That I'm known by God?
- What am I currently afraid of? Am I willing to trust that God has it in hand?

*My meditation notes*

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Psalm 51*

*Broken-hearted Repentance*

*Jason Wong*

**For the director of music. A psalm of David.**

**When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.**

<sup>1</sup> Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your unfailing love;  
according to your great compassion  
blot out my transgressions.  
<sup>2</sup> Wash away all my iniquity  
and cleanse me from my sin.  
<sup>3</sup> For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is always before me.  
<sup>4</sup> Against you, you only, have I sinned  
and done what is evil in your sight;  
so you are right in your verdict  
and justified when you judge.  
<sup>5</sup> Surely I was sinful at birth,  
sinful from the time my mother  
conceived me.  
<sup>6</sup> Yet you desired faithfulness even in the  
womb;  
you taught me wisdom in that secret  
place.  
<sup>7</sup> Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be  
clean;  
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.  
<sup>8</sup> Let me hear joy and gladness;  
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.  
<sup>9</sup> Hide your face from my sins  
and blot out all my iniquity.

<sup>10</sup> Create in me a pure heart, O God,  
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.  
<sup>11</sup> Do not cast me from your presence  
or take your Holy Spirit from me.  
<sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of your salvation  
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain  
me.

<sup>13</sup> Then I will teach transgressors your  
ways,  
so that sinners will turn back to you.  
<sup>14</sup> Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O  
God,  
you who are God my Savior,  
and my tongue will sing of your  
righteousness.  
<sup>15</sup> Open my lips, Lord,  
and my mouth will declare your praise.  
<sup>16</sup> You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would  
bring it;  
you do not take pleasure in burnt  
offerings.  
<sup>17</sup> My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart  
you, God, will not despise.  
<sup>18</sup> May it please you to prosper Zion,  
to build up the walls of Jerusalem.  
<sup>19</sup> Then you will delight in the sacrifices of  
the righteous,  
in burnt offerings offered whole;  
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

*Explanation*

This psalm is a powerful example of a prayer of repentance. It is how David responds when Nathan confronted him for killing Uriah so he could take Bathsheba as his wife (2 Sam. 12:1-13). In his prayer, David is deeply convicted of his sin, and he falls on God’s mercy and His character (unfailing love, great compassion, righteousness, and more) to ask for forgiveness. This is because David knows that above all he has sinned against God. But he also knows that only God can forgive, cleanse, restore, deliver; and only God can create a new heart and spirit in him to deal with his sin.

*Sharing of personal application*

As I reflected on this psalm, God convicted me of the fact that my sin does not break my heart. Unlike David, I become too comfortable with my sin, and I take for granted the forgiveness won for me in Jesus. But David’s heart was shattered, and his spirit broken, when he was confronted with his sin. I know in my head that my sins are no less offensive to God, so where is my broken-spirit? I realized that I’ve taken forgiveness too lightly, because I take my sin too lightly. Upon deeper reflection, I’m reminded that sin is a serious issue – in fact, it’s so serious that God chose to send his Son to become like me, and to be executed on a cross for me! Surely this demonstrates the seriousness of sin! And so, I once again ask God to deepen my hatred for sin, and grant me a heart-broken attitude when I do sin, so that I can experience Christ’s love more deeply as I am forgiven.

*Reflective question/s*

- Does sin break my heart and spirit like David’s? Why / why not?
- How might I appreciate God’s forgiveness, bought for me in Jesus, more deeply?

*My meditation notes*

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Psalm 23*

*I Lack Nothing*

*Wendy Fan*

**A psalm of David.**

<sup>1</sup> The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.

<sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures,

he leads me beside quiet waters,

<sup>3</sup> he refreshes my soul.

He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

<sup>4</sup> Even though I walk through the darkest valley,

I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;

<sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.  
You anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.

<sup>6</sup> Surely your goodness and love will follow me

all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

*Explanation*

Psalm 23 is a short hymn of David. The first four verses develop the image of a good shepherd who leads, refreshes, and guides his flock (collectively) and his sheep (individually) to peaceful places like green pastures and quiet waters. In this world there will be dark evil places, but there is no need to fear the evil one because God, the good shepherd, who cares for his sheep, is present and protects them from harm with his rod and staff and so they lack nothing.

The setting of the last two verses is in a house. It's not just any house, but the house of the LORD. Those who follow him will lack nothing, and instead have everything: a seat at his table and living in the LORD'S house forever.

*Sharing of personal application*

I once was lost, and God graciously herded me back to his loving embrace in 2014.



At the end of 2018, God led me to Sydney to start full-time studies at Sydney Missionary & Bible College (SMBC). Trusting in God has been brought to a “whole new level” in this transition as fears and worries settle in. It seems like I have nothing – no job, no income, no car, few friends in Sydney, etc.

Psalm 23 is filled with comfort and assurance of who God is in my life. It reminds me that I have everything (in Christ), I am whole, I lack nothing. Even when I really miss family in Perth and it feels like I am in the “darkest valley”, I do not fear for God is with me, and he comforts me, I lack nothing. Even when I only see large outflow of money from my bank account, I do not fear for God is with me and I lack nothing. Even when I can’t be of much help in a situation when I hear of friends passing away or battling illnesses, I do not fear for I know God is with them and I pray trusting in God.

I look forward to the day when we will dwell in the house of the LORD forever, but before that I am clear of that fact that there is the task of bringing more people with us to the house by the help of the Holy Spirit.

### **Reflective question/s**

List everything that God gives to you, and does for you, according to Psalm 23. Pray and give thanks to the Lord Jesus, (your Good Shepherd):

- How has He been leading you, refreshing your soul, and guiding you even through life’s hardest times?
- Thank God that you have everything in the Lord Jesus. Thank him for what he has done for you on the cross.

### *My meditation notes*

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Psalm 116*

*The LORD heard my cry*

*Johnny Cheung*

- <sup>1</sup> I love the LORD, for he heard my voice;  
he heard my cry for mercy.
- <sup>2</sup> Because he turned his ear to me,  
I will call on him as long as I live.
- <sup>3</sup> The cords of death entangled me,  
the anguish of the grave came over me;  
I was overcome by distress and sorrow.
- <sup>4</sup> Then I called on the name of the LORD:  
“LORD, save me!”
- <sup>5</sup> The LORD is gracious and righteous;  
our God is full of compassion.
- <sup>6</sup> The LORD protects the unwary;  
when I was brought low, he saved me.
- <sup>7</sup> Return to your rest, my soul,  
for the LORD has been good to you.
- <sup>8</sup> For you, LORD, have delivered me from  
death,  
my eyes from tears,  
my feet from stumbling,  
<sup>9</sup> that I may walk before the LORD  
in the land of the living.
- <sup>10</sup> I trusted in the LORD when I said,  
“I am greatly afflicted”;
- <sup>11</sup> in my alarm I said,  
“Everyone is a liar.”
- <sup>12</sup> What shall I return to the LORD  
for all his goodness to me?
- <sup>13</sup> I will lift up the cup of salvation  
and call on the name of the LORD.
- <sup>14</sup> I will fulfill my vows to the LORD  
in the presence of all his people.
- <sup>15</sup> Precious in the sight of the LORD  
is the death of his faithful servants.
- <sup>16</sup> Truly I am your servant, LORD;  
I serve you just as my mother did;  
you have freed me from my chains.
- <sup>17</sup> I will sacrifice a thank offering to you  
and call on the name of the LORD.
- <sup>18</sup> I will fulfill my vows to the LORD  
in the presence of all his people,  
<sup>19</sup> in the courts of the house of the LORD—  
in your midst, Jerusalem.
- Praise the LORD.

### *Explanation*

The psalmist begins this Psalm with the phrase "I love the LORD" expressing his gratitude to the LORD for what he has done. The psalmist recounts how the LORD heard his cry and has saved him from death, distress and sorrow. The psalmist joyfully praises the LORD and gives thanks for his grace and righteousness, for giving rest to his soul and deliverance from death. What then is the psalmist's response to

the LORD's many blessings? He determines to live for the LORD.

*Sharing of personal application*

I can recall one particularly stressful time in my life when crying out for God and his presence was particularly comforting. It was the night before I had to handle my first trial as Counsel. I had to defend a civil matter which, if unsuccessful on my part, would have severe consequences for my client. Compounding my stress was Vivian's visa status, which meant that she had to leave Perth the next day also. That night, as I was reviewing my trial bundle, all of a sudden I felt so helpless and unsure of what would happen, both with the trial and with Vivian. So, in my desperation, I just started praying to God. I remember praying for God to give me a sense of peace and comfort in what was to come the next day. Perhaps with a bit of humour on God's part, but definitely in his sovereignty and as a test of faith for me, he didn't answer my prayer immediately as the Court judgement was reserved for a few months and Vivian's visa status was also delayed for several months. However, both throughout the trial and as I saw Vivian off at the airport, I felt a real sense of peace and rest knowing that God is good. God truly is rest for my soul.

*Reflective question/s*

- Can you be confident calling out to God, knowing he will hear you?
- What aspect of God's character brings you joy? How? Why?

*My meditation notes*

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Luke 12:22-31

*Do not worry!*

Lilian Huang

<sup>22</sup> Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. <sup>23</sup> For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. <sup>24</sup> Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! <sup>25</sup> Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? <sup>26</sup> Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? <sup>27</sup> “Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. <sup>28</sup> If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! <sup>29</sup> And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. <sup>30</sup> For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. <sup>31</sup> But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

### *Explanation*

Earlier in chapter 12, Jesus was warning his disciples by asking them to be on guard against the yeast of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy (vv.1-12); and then he gave a parable of the rich fool (vv.13-21), which is a warning against greed. Jesus then went on to encourage the disciples to trust in God’s provision and do not worry about their life. We should not worry about what to eat or wear, because worry itself changes nothing (vv. 22-26). Unlike the pagans who don’t know God and chase after all the material things, the disciples who know God should trust that God loves and cares for them, and will provide for what they need (vv. 27-30). Jesus’ command is to seek God’s kingdom, and God will provide with all that we need (v. 31).

### *Sharing of personal application*

I have stopped working ever since our second son was born, and for a period of time the family depended on Jason’s sole income. When Jason started part-time study at

Bible College and changed to part-time work, I sometimes had anxiety and would ask: “Is there going to be enough money for us?” One of the temptations was when I looked at the social media seeing people posting photos of trying out fancy restaurants or holiday overseas, the envy in my heart would grow. God has been so gracious and gradually changed my heart as I practice obedience to His calling. We have lacked nothing, even when Jason started full-time study and reduced work hours even more. God has blessed us abundantly through His church, but also through people who haven’t known Him yet like my parents. This will be a life time lesson for me, to not set my heart on earthly things (v. 29), but to set my heart on seeking God’s kingdom (v. 31), as a response to God’s love and what Jesus has done for me on the cross.

*Reflective questions*

- What is stopping you from seeking God’s kingdom at the moment?
- What part of Jesus’ teaching in this passage can help you to not worry and to put your trust in God?

*My meditation notes*

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Luke 9:46-48 [The Message]*

*Famous*

*Ali Dench*

<sup>46</sup> They [the disciples] started arguing over which of them would be most famous. <sup>47</sup> When Jesus realized how much this mattered to them, he brought a child to his side. <sup>48</sup> “Whoever accepts this child as if the child were me, accepts me,” he said. “And whoever accepts me, accepts the One who sent me. You become great by accepting, not asserting. Your spirit, not your size, makes the difference.”

### *Explanation*

The events leading up to this conversation emphasise the glory of *Jesus*: after suffering on the cross (Luke 9:21-27), during the transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36), and in casting out a stubborn, unclean spirit (Luke 9:37-43). Hard on the heels of this panoramic picture of our Master’s splendour, we find the disciples looking inward and bickering over their *own* significance.

### *Sharing of personal application*

I’ve probably never said, “I’m greater than you,” but I sure have thought it! Almost every day I’m on campus amongst a bunch of PhD-holding colleagues, I find myself (a mere Master’s Degree recipient) trying to measure up. I often catch myself falling into the *performance* syndrome: evaluating myself by my earthly status and achievements. Sometimes it’s hard to grasp that Jesus has completely crushed this measuring rod and ushered in a gracious alternative. We’re only famous to the degree that we embrace him and his lifestyle.

*Reflective question/s*

- In what ways am I trying to be famous?
- How can I get my eyes back onto the glory of *Jesus*?

*My meditation notes*

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Luke 19:16-24*

*Future Proof Investments*

*Fred Goh*

<sup>16</sup> The first servant reported, 'Master, I invested your money and made ten times the original amount!' <sup>17</sup> "'Well done!' the king exclaimed. 'You are a good servant. You have been faithful with the little I entrusted to you, so you will be governor of ten cities as your reward.' <sup>18</sup> "The next servant reported, 'Master, I invested your money and made five times the original amount.' <sup>19</sup> "'Well done!' the king said. 'You will be governor over five cities.' <sup>20</sup> "But the third servant brought back only the original amount of money and said, 'Master, I hid your money and kept it safe. <sup>21</sup> I was afraid because you are a hard man to deal with, taking what isn't yours and harvesting crops you didn't plant.' <sup>22</sup> "'You wicked servant!' the king roared. 'Your own words condemn you. If you knew that I'm a hard man who takes what isn't mine and harvests crops I didn't plant, <sup>23</sup> why didn't you deposit my money in the bank? At least I could have gotten some interest on it.' <sup>24</sup> "Then, turning to the others standing nearby, the king ordered, 'Take the money from this servant, and give it to the one who has ten pounds.'

### *Explanation*

Jesus, having just met with Zacchaeus is now nearing Jerusalem – to meet his fate. The crowd are following Jesus expecting that He will reign as King and usher in God's kingdom. Jesus challenges the crowd's expectation of God's Kingdom with a parable about a returning king who has entrusted ten of his servants to deal with a large sum of money. Upon the king's return, several of the servants have produced a small return to which the king returns a generous reward – by giving them greater responsibilities. One servant, however, only returns the king's original amount. Instead of putting the king's money to work, he kept it in a safe place because he perceived the king as a hard task master. The master was unimpressed.

### *Sharing of personal application*

In 2017 I invested a minas worth of my wage into a rapidly growing tech company on the Australia Stock Exchange. At one point in time, the shares were valued 40%



more than what I had purchased them for. But in mid-2018 this came to an abrupt halt, and the company went into liquidation. All shareholders including myself were left holding an empty bag. Besides trying to understand what went wrong with my investment strategy, this financial setback got me to examine earnestly the motivations of my heart. Getting these motivations terribly wrong can have significant consequences. In the case of the final servant – his lazy actions were motivated (or demotivated) by how he perceived his master – a ruthless task master. In my case, what motivated my actions? Was it greed? Lack of trust in God’s provision? His kingdom work? Earlier in the chapter, Zacchaeus had just given up half his fortune for the poor. When he met Jesus, what motivated him? Fortunately for us, King Jesus isn’t a hard taskmaster. In fact, He is the most humble and generous man ever to walk this earth. He performed the hard task himself and met His fate on the cross. The currency He chooses for God’s kingdom isn’t dollars and cents, but love, peace and hope. This is a King I want to be ruled by. This is a King whose kingdom I want to serve and invest my God-given resources in.

*Reflective question/s*

- Reflect on the resources God has entrusted you with. How have or will you invest it for God’s Kingdom this year?
- Are you willing to risk these resources for a kingdom return? Or will you play it safe and be left holding nothing?

*My meditation notes*

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*James 3:1-12*

*Controlling the Tongue*

*Rina Fu*

<sup>1</sup> Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. <sup>2</sup> We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check. <sup>3</sup> When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. <sup>4</sup> Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. <sup>5</sup> Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. <sup>6</sup> The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. <sup>7</sup> All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, <sup>8</sup> but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. <sup>9</sup> With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. <sup>10</sup> Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. <sup>11</sup> Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? <sup>12</sup> My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

### *Explanation*

Although we are not all called to be teachers, all of us ought to pay closer attention to the use of our tongues. James, the brother of Christ, reminds us that the words we speak reflect the kind of person we are. It can do a lot of good as well as a lot of damage. Just as the rudder, which is a small mechanical part of a ship, has the ability to steer the direction of the entire vessel, our tongue is similarly powerful in its effect. We ought to examine how we use our tongues, e.g. how can we sing praises to God on Sunday morning, yet during the week, use the same tongue to curse or swear at another person created in God's image? Since the tongue is so difficult to control, whoever controls it perfectly gains control in all other areas of life too.

### *Sharing of personal application*

Anatomically, the tongue is neither the strongest nor largest muscle in the body. This body part, as James pointed out, is like a double-edged sword. I remember when I began my university teaching career in medical science, I realised that what I say really matters. It could make or break a struggling student. The words I spoke carried authority and information that students noted down. It made me uneasy and cautious about what I said in class, knowing that 80 ears were listening and trusting what I said. These reflections from the academic arena are also true in my personal life. The words I exchange with my parents, my husband, my children, friends, a passer-by, can build or tear down, they can delight or frustrate. Our Lord Jesus was the perfect master who wielded his tongue consistently for God's purpose. Jesus wielded his tongue as a sword against the devil and when debating with the Pharisees. He also used it to bless, teach and bring healing into people's lives. With Christ as my role model, I shall learn to control my tongue by His strength, to admonish, praise and steer my life and that of others towards the love of God.

### *Reflective question/s*

- Are there any particular relationships (with your work colleagues, school or uni friends, family members) where there inconsistency in the use of your tongue?
- How can you use your tongue to build others up more consistently?

### *My meditation notes*

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Matthew 5:43-48*

*Loving all*

*Chen Wei Por*

<sup>43</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ <sup>44</sup> But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. <sup>46</sup> If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? <sup>48</sup> Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

### *Explanation*

This passage continues a series of statements Jesus makes in his “Sermon on the mount” where he states, “You have heard that it was said . . . but I say to you”. In the earlier examples starting from Matthew 5:21, we see Jesus revolutionising the Pharisees interpretations of Old Testament teachings on areas such as murder, adultery, divorce, oaths and “an eye for an eye”. Here, Jesus gives a different and deeper meaning to his greatest commandment by redefining who it is we ought to love. The Pharisees had known the Levitical command given to Moses on loving neighbours (Lev 19:18), but they had conveniently added the line, “hate your enemies”, to justify their actions. They found it easier to choose their “neighbours”, deciding who they could love then treating anyone else however they liked. But Jesus points out that even the tax collectors and pagans, people they considered to be amongst the worst sinners, were able to love their neighbours. Instead Jesus calls us into a new model of loving; to love everyone we encounter no matter what good or evil they do or have done against us. This interpretation of this command is arguably the one most Christian thing that differentiates us from everyone else.

### *Sharing of personal application*

I remember a time at a previous church where there arose a very apparent division amongst the people in the church. While I, my family and some others valued and supported the pastor in his methods and teachings, a select group had an issue with

him and wanted him out. Families who had been serving and worshipping together for many years suddenly became “enemies” with each other, and I saw people who I had considered to be friends of our family going to extreme measures to vilify the pastor; seemingly bending rules and concocting deceitful plots, to convince everyone else that the only solution was to get him removed from the church. I couldn’t believe that this kind of behaviour could be coming from people within my own church.

To this day I still don’t understand what their issue was with the pastor and why they insisted he had to go, but the experience gave me some empathy towards Jesus’ words on the cross as he was beaten, mocked and scorned, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”, or at least in my case, I didn’t know why they were doing them. In spite of their actions, I chose to practice loving these “enemies” and praying for those who were persecuting those close to me. Because of the example of Jesus, this became my prayer and it was a forerunner to me being able to be gracious to them and forgive them.

*Reflective question/s*

- Is there someone in your life who is making or has made your life difficult? How can you overcome any feelings of anger or hurt towards them, and forgive and love them as Jesus commanded and showed us how?

*My meditation notes*

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Luke 5:12-21*

*Jesus Heals the sick*

*Vivian Hung*

<sup>12</sup> While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." <sup>13</sup> Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left him. <sup>14</sup> Then Jesus ordered him, "Don't tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." <sup>15</sup> Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. <sup>16</sup> But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

<sup>17</sup> One day Jesus was teaching, and Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there. They had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick. <sup>18</sup> Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. <sup>19</sup> When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. <sup>20</sup> When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." <sup>21</sup> The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

### *Explanation*

Back in those days, people with leprosy were outcasts and required to live on the margins of society to avoid contagion. Jesus showed compassion and acceptance by touching the leper (who was rejected by the society), healed and cleansed him.. When Jesus uses the words "Be clean", it's not just about healing the man physically, but also spiritually. The man with leprosy is an illustration of our sin, and our need to come to Jesus to be cleansed of our sins. In Jesus' miracle of healing the paralysed man, Jesus knew the paralysed man's needs (his sins needed to be forgiven *and* he

needed to be healed). Jesus wanted to show everyone that the Son of Man (referring to himself) has the power and authority to forgive sins, even though he knew the religious leaders were questioning his authority to forgive sins.

*Sharing of personal application*

I sometimes find it very difficult to understand or process God's love, patience and mercy towards me, even though I'm a sinner and don't just sin once, but many times. I sometimes question myself "Why does God still love me and help me through difficult times, when I don't always do the right thing in His eyes?" This passage reminds me that God is not just loving, but He accepts us as we are (just like the man with leprosy). I may be a bad Christian in some people's eyes; I may not be a perfect mother; I may be rejected or isolated by people, but God never judges me that way. Instead, He wants me to come closer to Him, confess my sins and weaknesses, and to receive His forgiveness. Just like the man with leprosy asked Jesus to heal and cleanse him physically and spiritually. May God continue to help me to identify and confess my sins, to remain faithful to Him, and to remember that He will never ignore/reject me as He is a loving and forgiving God.

*Reflective question/s*

- God is merciful, loving and patience to us. How do we, as His children, remain faithful and show our love for Him?

*My meditation notes*

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Luke 5:22-26*

*Healing of a Paralysed Man*

*Eva Mak*

<sup>22</sup> But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, He answered and said to them, “Why are you reasoning in your hearts? <sup>23</sup> Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise up and walk’? <sup>24</sup> But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins”—He said to the man who was paralyzed, “I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.” <sup>25</sup> Immediately he rose up before them, took up what he had been lying on, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. <sup>26</sup> And they were all amazed, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, “We have seen strange things today!”

### *Explanation*

One day, Jesus was teaching in a house, where Pharisees and scribes were also present. Suddenly, a paralysed man, helped by his friends, came in through the roof and landed in front of Jesus. Everyone knew that this person came for healing, but Jesus said “Man, your sins are forgiven you.” For those who witnessed this, it was clear that Jesus was doing something only God can do – forgiving sins; so the Pharisees and the scribes reasoned among themselves. Jesus asked them “Why are you reasoning in your hearts?” (v22) This word “reason” (translated from the Greek word “dialogizomai”) means reason, dispute, cast in the mind, deeply think, and consider. It seems that the Pharisees and the scribes are having a hard time understanding why and how Jesus forgave sins. They even said “Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (v21) Once the healing miracle took place, they were filled with fear by the “unbelievable” event that they witnessed. Jesus dealt with the paralysed man’s spiritual problem – his sins – when he came for healing of the body. At the same time, Jesus addressed the Pharisees’ spiritual problems when they failed to understand who he was.

### *Sharing of personal application*

When I first started my new job as a psychologist in a GP clinic, I was anxious and even reluctant to go to work. I prayed to God to take away these negative feelings, but



God answered by showing me His word “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:14-16) God’s answer seemed to be unrelated to what I asked for, but all my negative feelings were instantly gone. Indeed, He spoke this verse to me five times in three days, and six times in five days through different channels, including people’s sharing, songs, verse chosen to use at church, etc. Just as Jesus healed the paralysed man by dealing with his spiritual life as well as his presenting problem, God spoke to my spirit for spiritual and emotional healing. From that day onwards, I started working happily in the clinic with a sense of mission, bearing the identity of the light of the word. Spiritual life is not separated from our everyday life; instead, it is in every moment and every aspect of it.

*Reflective question/s*

- Can you think of an experience where Jesus healed your spirit and also dealt with your presenting problem?
- What area(s) of life can you identify that you need God’s spiritual intervention?

*My meditation notes*

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Ephesians 5:3-5*

*Being a follower of Jesus*

*Shih-Lon Fu*

<sup>3</sup> But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. <sup>4</sup> Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. <sup>5</sup> For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

### *Explanation*

Prior to this passage, Paul has reminded us that Jesus' death and resurrection has released us from our old selves and former lives which are corrupted by deceitful, sinful desires, and that we have been given a new self to be able to grow in righteousness and holiness. Paul then encourages us to live lives in accordance to this truth, and continues to outline examples of what our old self was, and what our new self should be. This section of Ephesians highlights that if a person has submitted to Jesus as their Lord and Savior, sexual immorality, impurity, greed, gossiping and foul language shouldn't be part of the way they live now.

### *Sharing of personal application*

Passages that talk about Christian living are always difficult and confronting for me personally, especially when it highlights sexual immorality. I have a longstanding battle when it comes to resisting pornography, in a world where its temptations can come at me from any direction when I least expect it.

At times I feel guilty that I haven't, by now, become completely victorious over these temptations. I think about the damage it could do to my relationships, especially to God, my wife and my daughter if I fail to resist. How can God want to hang out with someone like me, who continues to struggle, with no end in sight? Though this could be a moment for despair, I thank God that it is not because of my own actions that I am saved into a relationship with God but because of what Jesus has done for me on the Cross. I know from past experience that I cannot resist on my own, and I thank

God that He knew that –that He sent Jesus before me, and blessed me with a new heart and the Holy Spirit to give me the strength to resist the temptation of pornography. Even if I fail to resist and fall to temptation, I know that God still loves me and forgives me. This reassurance releases me from the burden of resisting temptation and actually gives me more desire and strength to resist. It makes me desire righteousness and holiness so that I may glorify God and thank him for his mercy and kindness to me.

*Reflective question/s*

- What longstanding sinful habits do you currently have, that you may be struggling to overcome in your own strength?
- How can Jesus and the Cross release you of its burdens and give you the strength and perseverance to change?

*My meditation notes*

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Mark 12:41-44*

*Give everything for a change*

*Shih Ching Fu*

<sup>41</sup> Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. <sup>42</sup> But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

<sup>43</sup> Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. <sup>44</sup> They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”

### *Explanation*

Here we find Jesus sitting down to observe the crowds as they give their offerings to God. Recall that Jesus has just come from the Temple courts, sharply warning people against the teachers of the law who “devour widows’ houses and for show make lengthy prayers”. As if to further indict these teachers for their superficial piety and failure to care for the poor, Jesus points out a real widow as she brings forward her offering. In contrast with the rich whom for mere outward appearances have given out of their surplus, this poor widow has given to God all that she has to live off. Jesus remarks that although by earthly standards she has given only a pittance, by spiritual standards she has given lavishly, and he praises her deep faith in God.

Here Jesus does not seem to reprove the rich for being rich but he does reveal that God sees the heart of the giver and thus commends the widow for her generosity and trust in God’s providence. As a poor widow, without the income of her husband, she must rely solely on the generosity of others to live and by faith she’s given so much that it shall certainly affect how she lives in the days to come.

Soon Jesus too will give, not a couple of coins or a rich treasure but rather his own life on the cross. He gives willingly in obedience to the Father so that those for whose sin he dies may instead live. Now alive in Christ we are called to follow and lay down everything we have before him; so much that it changes how we live.

*Sharing of personal application*

In the years before becoming a Christian I obsessed over how I appeared to the world. I worked hard to manufacture an outward persona that garnered praise and admiration from my peers. When I became a Christian, guess what? I was still obsessed with how people perceived me. That didn't change overnight but I did realise my foolishness in thinking that God couldn't see past my constructed facade. At first, realising that God transparently saw all my faults and failings was terrifying, my worst nightmare. But when I remember that it was because, and not in spite of my brokenness, that Jesus died on the cross for me, I'm freed from my need to deceive God and myself. I can acknowledge and give him my broken life, receive his forgiveness, and ask the Holy Spirit to start his work in making real changes rather than pursuing vanity.

*Reflective question/s*

- Is there something in your life that you pretend God doesn't see yet you know displeases him? What will happen if you bring that to him?
- What does knowing that Jesus, despite knowing your heart's rebellion, willingly died on the cross for your sin, reveal about your value to him?
- How might that aspect of your life look differently if you give it to God, submitting it to the lordship of Jesus, and asking the Holy Spirit to transform you?

*My meditation notes*

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Luke 19:28-40*

*Jesus greeted as King*

*Wan For Seow*

<sup>28</sup> After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.<sup>29</sup> As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, <sup>30</sup> “Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. <sup>31</sup> If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

<sup>32</sup> Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. <sup>33</sup> As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” <sup>34</sup> They replied, “The Lord needs it.”

<sup>35</sup> They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. <sup>36</sup> As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. <sup>37</sup> When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: <sup>38</sup> “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” <sup>39</sup> Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!” <sup>40</sup> “I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

### *Explanation*

The holy city of Jerusalem was crowded with pilgrims who had come for the annual Passover celebration. Jesus had spent many months traveling through the towns and villages of Palestine. He preached about the kingdom of God and healed the sick wherever He went. Now the time had come for Him to claim His title as the Messiah - the Savior that God had promised to the Jewish people. As they came near Jerusalem, Jesus told two of His disciples to go into a nearby village and bring a colt that would be waiting there. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the colt. Crowds of people spread their coats on the ground in front of Him. The people shouted and sang praises in loud voices. Only a king would be greeted this way (2 Kings 9:13), and the people wanted Jesus to be their king. However, most of the people did not understand what kind of king Jesus would be. They expected their Messiah to be a great political and military leader who would free them from the tyranny of the Roman

Empire. But the kingdom of God is not of this world.

*Sharing of personal application*

As I reflect on the scripture above, with Jesus as Lord and King entering my life, the question is, “What is the state of my life before Jesus? I carefully examine each group of people. Firstly, the Pharisees. They think they know it all because they were the teachers of Law and thought they had the power to judge others. I, too, have been prideful and judgmental of others. The scary thing is I wasn’t able to detect the problem because of pride. Secondly, the crowd of people with wrong expectations. Often, I find myself in this state where I expect God to give me something I want. I pray and sing praises to Him. But as I examine my heart and His will, I wrongfully expected Him to grant my wishes. Lastly, what about the disciples? How obedient were they when they went to get the colt? Did they have doubts? I experience such doubts and it was distressing, but joyful at the same time. It is hard because it involves faith, trust, submission without immediately seeing the results. In the end, I always have something to be thankful for to God.

*Reflective question/s*

- What is currently the state of your life before Jesus?
- How can Jesus help you recognize the “wrong” state of your life and change?

*My meditation notes*

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Luke 20:1-8*

*Jesus' Authority*

*Vania Ngu*

One day as Jesus was teaching the people in the temple courts and proclaiming the good news, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, together with the elders, came up to him. <sup>2</sup>“Tell us by what authority you are doing these things,” they said. “Who gave you this authority?” <sup>3</sup> He replied, “I will also ask you a question. Tell me: <sup>4</sup> John’s baptism—was it from heaven, or of human origin?” <sup>5</sup> They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘why didn’t you believe him?’ <sup>6</sup> But if we say, ‘Of human origin,’ all the people will stone us, because they are persuaded that John was a prophet.” <sup>7</sup> So they answered, “We don’t know where it was from.” <sup>8</sup> Jesus said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”

### *Explanation*

Jesus had been preaching in the temple about the good news and that the kingdom was near. Up until Luke 19, the religious leaders have been plotting to arrest and kill Jesus but had not been able to charge Jesus of any wrong doings. In Luke 19:45-48, Jesus drives out all the people selling and making money in the temple, yet He still continues to preach. This aggravated the situation and the religious leaders were even more determined to arrest Jesus. In Luke 20:1-8, in an attempt to catch Jesus out they ask Jesus ‘...by what authority are you doing these things?’. If Jesus were to say from God, they would have challenged Jesus and say how dare He put Himself on the same level as God. If Jesus said Himself, they would have questioned, ‘Who does He think He is?’ Both answers were blasphemous in their view. Instead Jesus turns the question back onto the religious leaders. John being one of their most prominent prophets declared Jesus was the Messiah. If they believed in John, they too should have believed Jesus to be the Son of God, with full authority.



*Sharing of personal application*

There were two applications that came to mind when reading through this passage. Firstly, Jesus continued to speak the truth and told others about the Good News despite such strong opposition. He wasn't afraid and drew all His strength and courage knowing God the Father's will for Him. In the same way, there is a lot of opposition against Christianity even in Australia, but if we trust in God's great plan of salvation for humanity we should find strength and courage in that to continue His works. Secondly, am I like the religious leaders who profess to believe in God, yet are too absorbed in my own life to accept everything God has to say? It's a good reminder for me that I can't pick and choose what I want to believe in and what's convenient for me, but to be humble and obedient when God is speaking to me, challenging me or convicting me of my sins.

*Reflective question/s*

- What is your motivation for telling others about Jesus and the Good News?
- What opposition do you face? Why do we give in to that opposition?
- Are there times when you choose to not listen to God? Why?

*My meditation notes*

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Luke 22:1-6

Judas Sells Out

Nonna Van Wollingen

Now the Festival of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching, <sup>2</sup> and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people. <sup>3</sup> Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve.<sup>4</sup> And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. <sup>5</sup> They were delighted and agreed to give him money. <sup>6</sup> He consented and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.

### *Explanation*

In Jesus' time, the Roman authorities expected the religious leaders to maintain order among the Jewish community. Throughout Jesus' ministry, the religious leaders, normally at odds with one another, became more and more afraid of the effect that Jesus' teaching was having on the population. Together they looked for a way to get rid of Jesus without causing a rebellion. The solution came to them: *Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus.* A perplexing turn of events. One of Jesus' own inner circle selling him out! Judas knew when, and where, Jesus would be away from the throngs of followers, hangers-on, people listening and waiting, for a Messiah to rescue them from Roman oppression. One wrong action by the authorities and mayhem would breakout in Jerusalem. Secret. Secluded. A quiet place to arrest this troublemaker of their peace is what they needed.

### *Sharing of personal application*

Jesus knew what his purpose on earth was. He knew that a time would come when he, himself, would be the sacrificial lamb – to provide atonement for the sins of the people. Jesus knew that his betrayer was amongst his disciples. Judas had a part to play to fulfill God's purposes. It was all part of God's Great Plan of Salvation – for you and me, and every person who lives, has lived and will live in this fallen world.

Betrayal. “Even the people who betray you are part of the plan; Jesus couldn’t get to the cross without Judas.” (Steven Furtick) Judas's betrayal must have been a great disappointment and terrible blow for Jesus. To have someone you have trusted, spent a great deal of time with, shared yourself with and loved, betray you. Imagine the breaking of trust, the dismissal of all that had passed before. This is a common experience in many relationships today. Brokenness of heart. Loss of a future. Of shattered dreams and hopes. Betrayal is horrible, hurtful and usually comes from those whom we love or trust. It is so very difficult to move on from the pain, the lies, the loss of face, the loss of being known as trustworthy. Forgiveness – slow, bit-by-bit restoration of trusting people closest to us – is the breakthrough towards being healed, being restored to a more whole person. God knows our future, our needs, our hopes. Betrayal is not above the loving work of the conquering Saviour, Jesus – God is supreme, and in authority over *all*. We can trust Him to see that our lives fulfill His purposes – for His glory.

*Do not let your hearts be troubled, trust in God, trust also in me. ~Jesus*

*Reflective question/s*

- Can you think of a situation where you were betrayed? What did you lose? How did God restore you?
- Have you ever betrayed someone? Is now a good time to ask for forgiveness (before God and/or the person)?

*My meditation notes*

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Luke 22:14-23

The true Passover Lamb

Janice Chua

<sup>14</sup> When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. <sup>15</sup> And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. <sup>16</sup> For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God." <sup>17</sup> After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. <sup>18</sup> For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." <sup>19</sup> And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." <sup>20</sup> In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. <sup>21</sup> But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. <sup>22</sup> The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed. But woe to that man who betrays him!" <sup>23</sup> They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this.

### *Explanation*

In order to understand this passage, we must understand the meaning and significance of the Passover to the Israelites. (Exodus 12) God had promised to rescue the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, but after nine painful plagues, the Egyptian king (Pharaoh) still refused to let the Israelites go. Moses told Pharaoh that the final plague would result in the death of all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, but his heart was still hardened and he would not let the Israelites go. In order to avoid the plague, the Israelites followed Moses' specific instructions. This involved the killing of a lamb without blemish, taking its blood and putting it on the doorpost of the house and eating its flesh roasted on fire. When God saw the blood, he would pass over their household and the firstborn in the household would be spared when the plague struck Egypt. The Passover was established as a memorial feast for the Israelites to remember how God used this plague to rescue them from Egypt.

It is with this in mind that Jesus initiates the Lord's Supper on the night of the Passover celebrations. He is telling his disciples that he is the better and greater Passover lamb. He is giving his body and pouring out his blood, so that we no longer

stand condemned before God, and those who trust in his death will also be free from the slavery of sin and death.

*Sharing of personal application*

As I ponder the significance of this passage, I cast my mind back to Exodus 12. I imagine that I'm one of the Israelite firstborn children, having heard the news that God is about to strike again, and this time, my life is at risk! In the days leading up to "the day", I am feeling nervous, reading over Moses' instructions time and time again, making sure everything is done correctly. I feel helpless and know there is nothing I can do, but trust that the lamb is sufficient to save my life. As the night draws near, I lay in bed listening to the crickets chirp, not knowing what's going to happen next. At midnight, I hear a loud wailing throughout the land of Egypt, but I am still alive! Praise God! Because of the sacrifice of the lamb, God had spared me!

In the same way, without Jesus' sacrifice I'm in the same position, helpless and condemned because of my sin and rejection of God. But Jesus, the ultimate Passover lamb, has sacrificed his life, died on the cross, so that my life is spared. There is nothing I can do, but trust in his death for me. Praise and thank God for Jesus, that he was willing to suffer and die in my place!

*Reflective question/s*

- What are you trusting in to save you, i.e. to give you the kind of life you desperately want to have?

*My meditation notes*

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Luke 22:31-34

Jesus prays for Peter

Jane Xu

“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” But he replied, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.”

Jesus answered, “I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.”

### *Explanation*

This is the last conversation Jesus has with Peter (also called Simon) at the Last Supper, before His crucifixion. A precious moment. Peter is on a “spiritual high.” He has been following Jesus for the last three years, learnt from His teachings, witnessed Him perform miracles, and literally walked on water! He feels ready to follow Jesus to prison and death, but has no idea that he is about to hit the ultimate “spiritual low.” On the other hand Jesus foresees all that is to come – Peter’s denials, His imminent arrest and crucifixion. While looking into the face of the one who is about to disown Him, Jesus warns and encourages Peter. He warns him of Satan’s intention to “sift” him, likened to the process used to separate wheat grains from debris; the Enemy wants to shake Peter's faith so that he may fall away from Jesus. Jesus also encourages Peter by letting him know that He prays for him and for his faith, reassuring him that he will turn back to be used to minister to others. In the rest of Luke, we see everything unfold the way Jesus foretold it, and that Jesus, despite knowing the next minute Peter is going to disown the Lord whom he swears to love, still chose to be obedient to the Father’s will in sacrificing Himself to save Peter and the rest of humanity alike.

### *Sharing of personal application*

It is humbling to know that even when I feel spiritually on fire like Peter, at any moment I could fall if it was not for the love and grace of Jesus. It is also sobering to be reminded that Satan is always prowling around looking for someone to devour.

However, it is so encouraging to know that Jesus fights for me. God is more powerful than Satan, and Jesus has won the ultimate victory on the cross. He knows every part of my journey, what's happened and what is to come – the good, the bad and the ugly. I will fall away from him at times, betray him at times, yet He still decided that I was worth dying for. He loves me and forgives me and it gets better, He prays for me! Lately I've been going through a spiritual dry patch, and I look back remembering previous days of intimacy with the Lord when I was feeling invincible like Peter, loathing myself for where I am now and letting fear and worldly things lead me astray. It is so encouraging to be reminded that all this time, Jesus has not given up on me. He has been praying for me, from even before I wandered off, that my faith may not fail. He loves me the same during my highs and lows, whether I'm doing great things for Him or nothing at all. In times of despair, we can take comfort knowing that Jesus prays for us, even though Satan makes every effort to destroy our faith. Jesus sustains our faith; He will never let Satan snatch us out of the Father's hand. In times of joy, it's a reminder to be alert and prayerful that Satan is real and active, and be persistently conscious of our need for God.

*Reflective question/s*

- How might Satan be “sifting” you, even now?
- Jesus knows all of your weaknesses and sins and chooses to love you and pray for you. How does this affect your faith and how you deal with sin?

*My meditation notes*

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Luke 22:39-46*

*Prayer of Dependence*

*Justine Feng*

<sup>39</sup> Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him.<sup>40</sup> On reaching the place, he said to them, “Pray that you will not fall into temptation.” <sup>41</sup> He withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, <sup>42</sup> “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” <sup>43</sup> An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him.<sup>44</sup> And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. <sup>45</sup> When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. <sup>46</sup> “Why are you sleeping?” he asked them. “Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.”

### *Explanation*

This passage takes place after Jesus has shared his last meal with his disciples. Jesus knew he was going to be betrayed by Judas, disowned by Peter, and crucified on the cross by humanity. In his final hours before the crucifixion, Jesus is in complete anguish and wishes for this punishment to be taken away from him. He prays earnestly to his Father, asking if there is another way – he prays if God is “willing”. Surely, God would have been willing to take away this punishment from His One and Only Son? But His love for sinful humanity is greater than His desire to spare His Son this pain, and therefore He allows Jesus to be crucified. Jesus willingly submits to his Father’s will.

Jesus knows all that is going to happen in the next few hours leading up to his crucifixion. He knows that he will be sentenced to suffer a humiliating death, and will be separated from his Father. Jesus prays and asks his disciples to pray also.



*Sharing of personal application*

Prayer is a powerful tool that I take for granted. More often than not, I am praying, saying the words, but not saying them in my heart. Prayer is an instrument that shows our dependence on God. I have experienced the feeling of hopelessness a few times in my life. When my parents were in life altering/threatening surgeries, there was literally nothing I could do but pray and depend on God. During the hours of surgery time, our family gathered together to pray earnestly for His will to be done, whatever that may be. This passage was a wakeup call to me, to pray more earnestly and show my reliance on God by praying more regularly. May God help me to be vulnerable and show my dependence on Him through a change in my prayer life, for the better.

*Reflective question/s*

- How is your prayer life? When you pray, do you really pray from your heart?
- Have you felt the Holy Spirit speak to you, and strengthen you, just as Jesus felt when he prayed earnestly?

*My meditation notes*

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Luke 22:47-53*

*Jesus Arrested*

*Steve Yu*

<sup>47</sup> While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, <sup>48</sup> but Jesus asked him, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?” <sup>49</sup> When Jesus’ followers saw what was going to happen, they said, “Lord, should we strike with our swords?” <sup>50</sup> And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear. <sup>51</sup> But Jesus answered, “No more of this!” And he touched the man’s ear and healed him. <sup>52</sup> Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, “Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? <sup>53</sup> Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour—when darkness reigns.”

### *Explanation*

This is on the night of “the last supper” – the Passover meal, when Jesus was betrayed by Judas, who sold Jesus out for a bag of silver. Jesus is fully aware of the situation, he knew that Judas’s kiss meant his arrest. But instead of turning Judas away, Jesus embraced him, by asking a simple question: “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?”

Jesus has always been the man who brings peace and healing to the people around him, even on the night of his arrest. His disciple strikes without Jesus’ consent and cuts off the ear of the servant of the high priest. Jesus stopped the violence at once, and healed the man who came to arrest him. Jesus heals even his enemy! In front of everyone who opposes him, (chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders) Jesus reaffirms that he is not here to start a rebellion, but to obey the Father’s will, and to reveal the darkness that was reigning in their hearts.

### *Sharing of personal application*

Many are the times where I’ve acted in self-righteous swiftness, thinking that I was doing God’s will, striking without even considering the possibility that this might not

be what Jesus wants, or if there is a better way to approach the situation at hand. As a result doing damage to the gospel work. Don't get me wrong, there are times when swift action is needed, and Jesus can use even the worst situation for his glory. But wouldn't it be nice if I could know his will just a little better? So I can act in ways that pleases the Lord Jesus?

At one time, we were all enemies of Jesus, wanting to get rid of him in our lives. Darkness reigned in our hearts. But just like the servant of the high priest, Jesus's healing work began way before we even rightfully recognized him. I often look back in my life and am always amazed at how Jesus looked after me even before I knew him. Even when I rejected him. There is not enough thanksgiving I could offer to measure the amazing love that Jesus poured on me in my life! But to follow him with everything that I have, and learn to let go of the places in my heart where darkness still reigns.

*Reflective question/s*

- Have I ever act in “self-righteous swiftness”, thinking that I was doing God’s will, but ended up doing damage to the gospel work? If so, how should I respond in a similar situation next time?
- Are there still parts in my life where darkness reigns? How can I let it go, and give it to Jesus to reign?

*My meditation notes*

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Luke 22:54-62*

*Peter Disowns Jesus*

*Jenny Fu*

<sup>54</sup> Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. <sup>55</sup> And when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. <sup>56</sup> A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him." <sup>57</sup> But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know him," he said. <sup>58</sup> A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." "Man, I am not!" Peter replied. <sup>59</sup> About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean." <sup>60</sup> Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. <sup>61</sup> The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." <sup>62</sup> And he went outside and wept bitterly.

### *Explanation*

During the Passover meal which Jesus shared with his disciples, Jesus foretold that Peter would deny Him three times before the rooster crows. After the Passover meal, Jesus and his disciples went to the Mount of Olives to pray. Jesus is arrested by a group of men, led by Judas, and then put on trial in the house of the high priest in the early hours of the morning. Peter warms himself by a fire as he watches from a distance. Three times he was recognized by different people as one of Jesus' followers. Yet he denies knowing Jesus each time. On the third occasion, the rooster crows. and it's then that Jesus looks at Peter through the crowd. Peter remembers Jesus' words from the Passover meal about his denial, and his heart is broken.

### *Sharing of personal application*

It feels almost easy to talk about Jesus when you're under the banner of "mission" or when people already know you're a Christian. But what about the times when you're just hanging out with friends or have just met someone new at an event? When someone I've met for the first time asks me what I like to do on my weekends, it's so

easy not to mention church because I'm afraid that they'll stereotype me. Like Peter, I'm afraid of being lumped together with Christ and judged.

Peter denies knowing Jesus over and over again. It's easy to sing things like "I offer my life" and "I surrender all" when things are going well in my life. But when it comes down to it, I often wonder if I really will offer my life or surrender all. Just as Peter was able to say those things during a meal with food and wine, but in the end wasn't able to follow through. I can see why Peter left the courtyard and wept bitterly after Jesus' prediction came true. A huge sense of guilt and shame comes over me when the Holy Spirit convicts me of these things. Jesus would certainly never deny me. In fact, he died on the cross for my sake and by doing so, has given the most precious thing to me, that is, eternal life and a relationship with him. If Jesus gave his life for me, I shouldn't be worried about how people see me.

### *Reflective question/s*

- When have you had the opportunity to talk to someone about Jesus but instead denied him?
- What can you do in the future when these opportunities arise to prevent yourself from denying Jesus?

### *My meditation notes*

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Luke 23:26-43 [The Message]*

*Do I deserve this?*

*Ali Dench*

As they led him off, they made Simon, a man from Cyrene who happened to be coming in from the countryside, carry the cross behind Jesus. A huge crowd of people followed, along with women weeping and carrying on. At one point Jesus turned to the women and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, don’t cry for me. Cry for yourselves and for your children. The time is coming when they’ll say, ‘Lucky the women who never conceived! Lucky the wombs that never gave birth! Lucky the breasts that never gave milk!’ Then they’ll start calling to the mountains, ‘Fall down on us!’ calling to the hills, ‘Cover us up!’ If people do these things to a live, green tree, can you imagine what they’ll do with deadwood?” Two others, both criminals, were taken along with him for execution. When they got to the place called Skull Hill, they crucified him, along with the criminals, one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them; they don’t know what they’re doing.” Dividing up his clothes, they threw dice for them. The people stood there staring at Jesus, and the ringleaders made faces, taunting, “He saved others. Let’s see him save himself! The Messiah of God--ha! The Chosen--ha! The soldiers also came up and poked fun at him, making a game of it. They toasted him with sour wine: “So you’re King of the Jews! Save yourself!” Printed over him was a sign: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. One of the criminals hanging alongside cursed him: “Some Messiah you are! Save yourself! Save us!” But the other one made him shut up: “Have you no fear of God? You’re getting the same as him. We deserve this, but not him--he did nothing to deserve this.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you enter your kingdom.” He said, “Don’t worry, I will. Today you will join me in paradise.”

### *Explanation*

After an exhausting, brutal few days, Jesus pours out every last ounce of life and love on the cross – to save a mostly ungrateful world. Simon probably thought. “I don’t deserve this!” The weeping women knew that Jesus didn’t deserve this. But the second criminal, hanging alongside Jesus, knew, “We deserve this...”

*Sharing of personal application*

Like Simon, who was pressed into hauling the cross of Jesus up Skull Hill, we often find ourselves getting what seems to be undeserved. Our flesh is quick to scream, “This isn’t fair! I deserve better!” Actually, we all deserve a whole lot *worse*, and Jesus urges the women to weep for *that* Day of Disaster and Judgement. It seems only the repentant criminal had a clear vision of his own unworthiness and the extravagant rescue work of Jesus.

*Reflective question/s*

- Do I sometimes feel as if God owes me something? That I deserve better than this?
- Do I understand how deep God’s grace towards me is, shown most fully on the cross? What difference should this make when I’m facing hardship?

*My meditation notes*

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Luke 23:44-49*

*Jesus' death on the cross*

*Simeon Ngu*

<sup>44</sup> It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, <sup>45</sup> for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. <sup>46</sup> Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

<sup>47</sup> The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man." <sup>48</sup> When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. <sup>49</sup> But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

### *Explanation*

This very moment is the climax of all human history and God's plan of salvation. To save and redeem us from sin and death, Jesus was sent by God the Father as the scapegoat to bear all the sins of humanity. Jesus received the full measure of God's wrath in our place, so that we would not have to. In doing so, the way to God was opened, and all of humanity is now able to be into the presence of God and have a relationship with Him. This is represented by the tearing of the temple curtain. It is significant, because the curtain was the barrier before the Most Holy Place where the Ark of the Covenant and God's presence resided. Only the high priest, after a lengthy cleansing ritual, could enter once a year for the atonement of the sins of Israel. As the name suggests, it is a holy place and people wrapped with sin were simply not worthy to be in the presence of God. Yet now through Jesus, our sins are no more. Through Jesus we *can* enter God's presence and we *can* have a relationship with the Father.

### *Sharing of personal application*

The main thing about this passage that always makes a deep impression on my heart is that our salvation must have been a matter of great importance to Jesus,



knowing exactly what he would have to go through yet still going through with it. The physical pain alone was already tremendous. Death by crucifixion was extremely slow and painful. Besides that, I believe the spiritual suffering was the most difficult for Jesus. Jesus was with the Father from the very beginning. They were in a relationship of perfect unity, intimacy and love that is beyond human comprehension. But to experience God's wrath is to be separated from Him. Jesus experienced hell and was separated from God while he was on the cross. Jesus knew that was what he needed to do, and still went through with it. Knowing the privilege that I've been given to have a relationship with God, and at such a price, is not something that can be taken lightly and is wonderful gift from God. This is extremely helpful when I battle with sin, and is a spur for evangelism. My life has been transformed by this truth; if only others *knew* this is how much God loves them. It's an honour to help people to know this truth.

### *Reflective question/s*

- It's easy to forget the significance of this passage after hearing it so many times. What attracted you most when you heard this gospel for the first time? Has that attraction increased, decreased or remained the same?
- If it has decreased, why is that? What are some ways you might reignite your attraction to Jesus?

### *My meditation notes*

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Luke 24:36-49*

*God's Plan Fulfilled*

*Rolf Van Wollingen*

<sup>36</sup> While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." <sup>37</sup> They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. <sup>38</sup> He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? <sup>39</sup> Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." <sup>40</sup> When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. <sup>41</sup> And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" <sup>42</sup> They gave him a piece of broiled fish, <sup>43</sup> and he took it and ate it in their presence. <sup>44</sup> He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." <sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. <sup>46</sup> He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup> I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

### *Explanation*

The eleven disciples are once again gathered together in Jerusalem, (John tells us in his Gospel, "the doors were locked for fear of the Jews" – John 20:19), when "Jesus himself stood among them." They'd heard rumours and reports of appearances of the risen Jesus to various people, but they themselves put little weight on these testimonies. Even when they saw Jesus with their own eyes, and he invited them to "Touch me and see," they still "did not believe it because of joy and amazement." Not until Jesus "opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures," did they begin to believe that what they were witnessing fulfilled everything that was "written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Furthermore, they began to understand the essential role they would play in God's Great Plan of

Salvation (GPS): as “witnesses of these things,” they must go and preach “repentance for the forgiveness of sins ...in Jesus’ name to all nations.” But first they must be empowered by the Holy Spirit, in order to fulfil the Great Commission.

*Sharing of personal application*

Like the eleven disciples, it’s essential that each one of us meet the risen Lord Jesus for ourselves, and have our minds opened to understand the Scriptures, in order to believe and see our own place in God’s GPS. This first happened for me towards the end of the mental illness I referred to above (see first devotional on Psalm 139). This illness recurred three years in a row, though less severe each time. On the third occasion, towards the end of my convalescence, my mind was becoming clearer and I was meditating on the crucifixion of Jesus, trying to imagine what it must have felt like for him. It was in that moment that Jesus revealed himself to me, (I saw him with the eyes of my heart), and he assured me, “I did this for you because I love you.” i.e. he died on the cross for my sins, and rose again to give me his life, because he loved me. It was a life-transforming moment; I’ve loved reading the Scriptures ever since.

*Reflective question/s*

- When did you first begin to see the personal significance of what Jesus did on the cross for you? How did you come to this understanding?
- What part are you meant to play in the fulfilment of God’s GPS – his Great Plan of Salvation? Are you pursuing it in the power of the Holy Spirit?

*My meditation notes*

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