

40 Days *ENGAGE*
People with JESUS

LOVE Jesus.

LEARN Jesus.

LIVE Jesus.

Daily Devotions

For personal use only

Introduction

At the heart of the Christian faith is Jesus Christ. When we call ourselves Christians, we are saying that we are a people who believe in and follow Christ.

If we know little about the life of Jesus – His teachings, works, values and views – we will not be able to follow Him with clarity of mind and conviction in spirit.

We can take small steps to grow in our understanding of Jesus Christ by reading the Bible. The Bible is no ordinary book. It contains stories and messages from God that reveal who God is – His character, thoughts, and awesome plan for mankind. Therefore, Christians today call the Bible the Word of God.

This compilation of devotions is based on the Gospel of Mark provides a glimpse into the life of Jesus while He was on earth more than 2000 years ago.

Each devotion focuses on a passage in Mark. It contains a simple explanation of God's Word, a reflection based on the passage and application points. Please read the Bible passage before moving onto the daily devotion.

Jesus has given us His life. Let's faithfully live ours in Him.

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. (Colossians 2:6-7)

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael Groom". The signature is written in black ink and has a horizontal line underneath it.

Pastor Mike Groom

Day 1: ENCOUNTERING JESUS

Mark 1:1-20 *The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, ² as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way”³ “a voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”⁴ And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. ⁶ John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And this was his message: “After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.⁸ I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”⁹ At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, Whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” ¹² At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, ¹³ and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him. ¹⁴ After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵ “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” ¹⁶ As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” ¹⁸ At once they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹ When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. ²⁰ Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.*

Remember the last time you waited eagerly for something to happen? Perhaps it’s the release of the latest mobile phone, or your favourite pop star’s concert, or the birth of your first child.

At the beginning of the book of Mark, people were buzzing with excitement too. Jesus Christ, the Saviour foretold by ancient prophets, was finally coming! His arrival would change history for ever because He was not just a man but the beloved Son of God (v10-11).

Pause and chew on this amazing truth – God, the supreme and limitless Creator of heaven and earth, took on the finite flesh of a man. Jesus slept, ate, breathed, moved, and hurt like you and me. This transformation is as drastic as a man shrinking to look and live like an ant. Jesus was 100% man, but He is 100% God as well. His ministry (*what we do for God out of our faith in Him*) was unique, powerful and mind-blowing.

People prepared for an encounter with the Saviour by turning away from their sins (*thoughts, words and actions that fail to meet God’s perfect standards*) and living a new life in Jesus (v5).

Everywhere Jesus went, He drew people to Him. At Jesus’ call, Simon, Andrew, James and John immediately dropped everything they were doing to follow Him

(v14-20). There must be something wonderfully special about Jesus that made them abandon all that they had to pursue Jesus. Their lives would never be the same again.

You may have already invited Jesus into your life and are wondering what is ahead. You may have many questions and doubts. That's okay! We're all on the journey of knowing Jesus more.

Life with Jesus is fulfilling, with plenty of unexpected discoveries. You can look forward to encounters with Jesus that will stun you, shake you and shape you to become more like Him. Jesus calls us to let go of our old mindsets, habits, and values to model our new lives after Him.

- *Are you ready to know this Jesus more?*
 - *Are there concerns or fears that are holding you back?*
 - *Pray to God about them.*
 - *Pray that God may show you how wonderful Jesus is as you read the Gospel of Mark.*
-

Day 2: WHO DO YOU THINK JESUS IS?

Mark 1:21-45 They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. ²² The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. ²³ Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, ²⁴ "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are - the Holy One of God!" ²⁵ "Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" ²⁶ The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. ²⁷ The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching - and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him." ²⁸ News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee. ²⁹ As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. ³⁰ Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. ³¹ So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them. ³² That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. ³³ The whole town gathered at the door, ³⁴ and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was. ³⁵ Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. ³⁶ Simon and his companions went to look for him, ³⁷ and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!" ³⁸ Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else - to the nearby villages - so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." ³⁹ So he travelled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons. ⁴⁰ A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." ⁴¹ Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" ⁴² Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. ⁴³ Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: ⁴⁴ "See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded

for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.”⁴⁵ Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

Most of us probably have individuals in our lives whom we call the “all-rounders”. These people are good at everything – academics, sports, cooking, singing, you name it. They seem to excel at whatever they are doing. We may wonder, “How can someone so capable and smart exist?”

Jesus is the ultimate all-rounder. He taught with such authority that it awed His audience (v21-22). He chased evil spirits out of people with ease (v22-28, 34).

He healed many people at such a rate that it would put the best doctors to shame (v32-34). Jesus impressed and surprised people so much that they couldn’t help but think, “How can this guy be a mere man?”

Clearly, Jesus was not your average guy next door. No ordinary man could so freely exercise authority over every kind of sickness and evil spirit as Jesus had done.

Jesus is more than a miracle worker too. His understanding of God and the Scriptures amazed His listeners. Even the evil spirits recognised His divine nature – they called Him the “*Holy One of God*” (v24).

Jesus’ unique identity could not be hidden. People who heard of His great works ran to Him for help. They sat down at His feet to hear His teachings about God. Jesus looked like any normal guy, but His works were anything but ordinary.

The great impact of Jesus’ three-year ministry on earth has continued more than 2000 years later to this day. Christianity is the largest religious group in the world with an estimated 2.4 billion believers. That’s nearly a third of the entire world’s population!

The Bible, containing God’s revelations about Jesus, is the best selling and most widely distributed book of all time. The lasting influence of what Jesus has done testifies to the uniqueness and authenticity of His ministry.

- *Who do you think Jesus is?*
- *Is He a miracle worker, a wise man, a good moral teacher or more?*
- *If you’ve taken the step to be a follower of Christ, what do you think about Him?*

Day 3: JESUS AND SINNERS

Mark 2:3-6 *Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them.*

⁴ *Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on.*

⁵ *When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”*

⁶ *Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves,*

All of us have a past. We may have been selfish and hurt others along the way. We may have done things we are not proud of. We may regret some terrible wrongs.

We may have secrets so deep and dark that we wonder and even fear how people would react if they knew what we were hiding. Would they still accept and love us?

For some of us, our past is a chokehold making us breathless with insecurity and anxiety. Let us come to Jesus. He demonstrates God's love for us who have sinned against God in one way or another. His mercy destroys the stranglehold of sin over us.

During His time on earth, Jesus ate with tax collectors, who were widely despised because of their profession. There were also "sinners" at the dinner table, who were shunned by society (v15-16). Jesus reached out to them and offered forgiveness.

Jesus' ministry is about bringing forgiveness, healing and restoration to people.

Does this mean that Jesus doesn't care whether we sin or not? Absolutely not! In fact, He cares greatly about sin's impact on us. He taught passionately against sin (*Mark 9:42-49*) and commanded His followers to be devoted to the Holy God (*Mark 12:28-33*).

Near the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus would also give His life to cleanse us of our sins. By dying on the cross, He sacrificed His life to take away our sins. He provided a way for us to live freely from the control of sin.

When we come face to face with our sins, we may feel overwhelmed by guilt. We may be hurt by harsh judgment from others. But Jesus graciously reaches out to us with forgiveness of our sins. He wants us to recognise our sins and realise our need for forgiveness.

Pray and ask God to forgive you of your sins. Repent of your sins today.

Repentance means to turn away from your wrongdoings and to walk towards a right life with God. Make repentance a regular activity in your life so that you never forget how you are always in need of God's mercy.

- *After you have repented, stop dwelling on your past. Jesus has forgiven you.*
- *Move on with a deep gratitude to God and a joyful determination to do what's right in His eyes!*

Day 4: ARE YOU A SPECTATOR OR A DISCIPLE?

Mark 3:7-19 *Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed. ⁸ When they heard about all he was doing, many people came to him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon. ⁹ Because of the crowd he told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him, to keep the people from crowding him. ¹⁰ For he had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him. ¹¹ Whenever the impure spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." ¹² But he gave them strict orders not to tell others about him. ¹³ Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. ¹⁴ He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to*

preach ¹⁵ and to have authority to drive out demons. ¹⁶ These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter), ¹⁷ James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means “sons of thunder”), ¹⁸ Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot ¹⁹ and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

What do Olympic champ Michael Phelps, celebrity Kim Kardashian and business heavyweight Jack Welch have in common?

They all love the book *The Purpose Driven Life* written by preacher Rick Warren. The book has sold tens of millions of copies to date.

People around the world are looking for a purpose greater than themselves. To Christ-followers, Jesus has given the greatest purpose of all – to be his disciples who will make more disciples.

During Jesus’ ministry on earth, there were many people who were part of the crowd. They came to Jesus because they needed His help, or they might come to hear Jesus’ wise teachings. They came, heard, received and went on with their lives. In other words, they were spectators who watched from afar but did not get involved. They never really experienced what it meant to follow Jesus.

However, there were some who became Jesus’ disciples. The disciples shared in Jesus’ life and ministry. They knew Jesus intimately as they lived, ate and travelled with Him. They were taught and often corrected by Him. They followed Jesus everywhere and played important roles in Jesus’ mission on earth.

Jesus wants every Christian to be His disciple, to follow Him and to fulfil God’s will on earth. Because we are created by God for God, nothing will satisfy us more than to live for Him. We are not made for ourselves or other people, but for Jesus. There is no greater purpose than to know Jesus and to obey Him.

Today, we can decide to be a disciple by learning humbly from Jesus and actively applying what we learn. We learn from Jesus by reading the Bible, listening to others teach from it, and watching others live by it. We model our lives after Jesus’ by putting godly values and principles into practice. We will see our lives changed as we live for a greater purpose – God’s purpose.

- *As someone who professes faith in Jesus Christ, do you think you are a spectator or a disciple?*
- *Which one do you want to be?*
- *Why?*

Day 5: **ONE DAY THEY WILL UNDERSTAND**

Mark 3:20-35 Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. ²¹ When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, “He is out of his mind.” ²² And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, “He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he

is driving out demons.”²³ So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables: “How can Satan drive out Satan?²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.²⁵ If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.²⁶ And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come.²⁷ In fact, no one can enter a strong man’s house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man’s house.²⁸ Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter,²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.”³⁰ He said this because they were saying, “He has an impure spirit.”³¹ Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him.³² A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, “Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.”³³ “Who are my mother and my brothers?” he asked.³⁴ Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers!³⁵ Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”

You have just come to know Jesus and you’re excited to share about His goodness with a friend or family member. After hearing you politely for about 20 seconds, they interrupt you and say, “Sorry I’m not interested.” Your mum and dad advise, “It’s okay to believe in a religion but don’t get obsessed with it.” Your friends poke fun at your faith, “How can you believe in something as dumb as the Bible? Are you ‘holier’ than us now?”

If any of that happened to you before, know that Jesus had it worse.

When He was surrounded by the crowd at His home, His family thought He was crazy and tried to restrain Him (v20-21). More insulting than being called a lunatic, Jesus was also accused of being a lackey of Satan, the devil.

The scribes, who were teachers of the Law, claimed that Jesus could cast out demons because He was possessed by the prince of demons (v22)! This was such a severe accusation that Jesus strongly told them off for blaspheming (*saying disrespectful things against*) the Holy Spirit (v28-30).

When we follow Christ, people may misunderstand us. They could doubt our enthusiasm or be wary and sceptical of the changes that they see in us. We may experience misunderstandings and tension in our relationships as a result.

When misunderstood and falsely accused, Jesus remained steadfast in His mission. He defended His ministry with reason (v23-27). To Jesus, those who did God’s will were His true family (v31-35).

It’s natural to feel rejected, hurt and torn between following Christ and pleasing our loved ones. Sometimes the tension may be overwhelming, but we can always find encouragement from God and fellow believers.

Take heart also that God will give us the wisdom and strength to deal with opposition. He will empower you to bring about positive changes in your life so that others can see how good Jesus is.

One day those who object to your faith will understand your love for God and even come to know Jesus through your life.

- Do you face obstacles and opposition because of your faith?
 - Ask God to help you love those who misunderstand you, and pray that they too will one day know Jesus.
-

Day 6: HOW'S YOUR HEART?

Mark 4:1-20 Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. ² He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: ³ "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times." ⁹ Then Jesus said, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear." ¹⁰ When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. ¹¹ He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables¹² so that, "they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!" ¹³ Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? ¹⁴ The farmer sows the word. ¹⁵ Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. ¹⁶ Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. ¹⁷ But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. ¹⁸ Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; ¹⁹ but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. ²⁰ Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop - some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown."

The heart is one of the primary organs in the body. It is responsible for pumping blood to the head right down to the toes. It ensures the proper circulation of essential nutrients such as oxygen throughout the body.

Without the heart, we cannot function effectively. One reason you can read this now is because your heart is sending oxygen-rich blood to your brain.

Just as the heart is important to our physical wellbeing, our heart condition towards God's teachings is crucial to our spiritual health. *Mark 4:1-8* is a parable about a farmer sowing seeds on different kinds of ground. The seed represents the Word of God (*v14*), and the grounds represent the different heart conditions of the listeners.

The first three grounds – the path, rocky places and thorns – are unsuitable for the growth of the seed. Characteristics of people with such heart conditions include a shallow understanding of the Word, failure to persevere in times of trouble and persecution, and distraction by worries, wealth and other pleasures.

Though they receive God's Word, they are not able to flourish in the faith.

Finally, we have seed that falls on good soil. The seed grows and produces a crop (v8). Only those who hear, accept and commit to the Word will have a rooted and fruitful faith (v20).

Jesus shared this parable so that His listeners could reflect on their heart conditions towards the Word and things of God. We may listen to teachings from the Bible during weekend services. We may go online to hear sermons by powerful preachers.

Yet all these won't matter if we don't approach the Word of God with the right attitude. Our heart conditions determine how His Word will grow and produce fruit in our lives.

- *Today, is your heart rejecting God's Word or responding to it with faith?*
 - *Know that Jesus loves you and desires for you to turn to Him.*
 - *How do we turn our hearts into fertile soil for God's Word to grow and flourish?*
-

Day 7: **DON'T BLOCK THE LIGHT**

Mark 4:21-34 He said to them, "Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don't you put it on its stand?"²² For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open.²³ If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear."²⁴ "Consider carefully what you hear," he continued. "With the measure you use, it will be measured to you - and even more.²⁵ Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them."²⁶ He also said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground.²⁷ Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how.²⁸ All by itself the soil produces grain - first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head.²⁹ As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come."³⁰ Again he said, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it?"³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth.³² Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade."³³ With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand.³⁴ He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.

Night falls, and the house is in darkness. If you were the owner of the house and have a lamp, would you hide it under the bed or bowl? Probably not, as that would dim the light and defeat the purpose of having a light source.

Would you put the lamp on a lampstand? Held up high, the lamp would easily light up the whole house. Surely any owner would place the lamp where it can shine the brightest without hindrance!

God is eager to shine His light into the world of darkness too. He has generously revealed His heart, thoughts and instructions to anyone who needs His light. The lamp (v21-23) represents God's life-giving message which He has freely made

known to us. He does not hide His revelation. Rather, He has put His truth out there, making it easily available to those who want to know it.

Some of us may think that God only discloses important stuff to those who are “super Christians”. But God has already made His truth known through the Bible to everyone.

We do not know everything about God. He is way too awesome and powerful for us to completely comprehend! But what He has revealed to us through the Bible, about His character and plan for humankind, is enough for us.

The question then is, how are we responding to the message that God has revealed? Are we giving God’s Word the respect it deserves? If the message is really from God, then it demands our obedience. If the revelation is truly from God, then it is the absolute truth that we ought to live by.

The two parables in verses 26-34 reveal how the supernatural growth of the Kingdom of God occurs because of God’s power and man’s effort. God desires for us to respond to Him in the right way, to join Him in His work.

- *Is there anything that hinders you from approaching God’s Word with the right attitude?*
 - *How can you deal with it so that it doesn’t block the light of God in your life?*
-

Day 8: JESUS’ POWER, OUR RESPONSE

Mark 4:35-6:6a *That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.”³⁶ Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him.³⁷ A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.³⁸ Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”³⁹ He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.⁴⁰ He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”⁴¹ They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!” They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes.² When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him.³ This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain.⁴ For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him.⁵ Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.⁶ When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him.⁷ He shouted at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God’s name don’t torture me!”⁸ For Jesus had said to him, “Come out of this man, you impure spirit!”⁹ Then Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” “My name is Legion,” he replied, “for we are many.”¹⁰ And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.¹¹ A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside.¹² The demons begged Jesus, “Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them.”¹³ He gave them permission, and the impure spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the*

lake and were drowned. ¹⁴ Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. ¹⁵ When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. ¹⁶ Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man - and told about the pigs as well. ¹⁷ Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region. ¹⁸ As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. ¹⁹ Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." ²⁰ So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed. ²¹ When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. ²² Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. ²³ He pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live."²⁴ So Jesus went with him. A large crowd followed and pressed around him. ²⁵ And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. ²⁶ She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. ²⁷ When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸ because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." ²⁹ Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. ³⁰ At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" ³¹ "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?'" ³² But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. ³³ Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. ³⁴ He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."³⁵ While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher anymore?" ³⁶ Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, "Don't be afraid; just believe." ³⁷ He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. ³⁸ When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. ³⁹ He went in and said to them, "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep." ⁴⁰ But they laughed at him. After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha koum!" (which means "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). ⁴² Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. ⁴³ He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Mark 6:1-6a Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples.² When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. "Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing?" ³ Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. ⁴ Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home." ⁵ He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. ⁶ He was amazed at their lack of faith...

What might Jesus have accomplished if He hadn't departed from the earth?

Perhaps He could have advised presidents and prime ministers, united North Korea and South Korea, settled border disputes and stopped terrorists. He could have gone to the hospitals and healed the sick. The list goes on. If we had seen these acts of Jesus, what would our response be?

In *Mark 4:35-6:6a*, Jesus demonstrated His power on different occasions. He calmed the storm, restored a demon-possessed man, healed a woman and raised the dead.

All of these demonstrations are supernatural, spectacular and stunning. Yet what is more interesting is the different responses of the people towards Jesus when they saw His works.

Responses ranged from fear to faith. In one incident, a bleeding woman was desperate for healing. By faith, she reached out for Jesus' clothes, believing that she would be healed just by touching His garments (*5:25-34*).

Jesus honoured her faith and freed her from her suffering (*5:34*). By contrast, in *6:1-6a*, Jesus did not demonstrate His power among the people in his hometown because of their lack of faith.

From the various responses, we learn that faith doesn't come naturally to us just because we witness a miracle or wonder of Jesus. It's an intentional decision on our part to trust in Jesus after what we've seen.

Faith is also not a feel-good feeling or a sense of confidence based on our circumstances. It is the determination to believe in the big God who is always in control, whatever the challenge we're facing.

Faith is not rooted in spiritual experiences. These experiences may open our eyes to more of Jesus' mighty deeds, but they do not make us believe. Faith stems from a decision to follow Jesus, who has revealed Himself to be our powerful God and gracious Saviour.

- *What is a spiritual experience you're seeking, or a prayer you want answered?*
 - *If Jesus seems silent or gives you a different answer from what you desire, will you still trust Him? Why?*
-

Day 9: WHO JESUS SENDS, HE EMPOWERS

Mark 6:6b-13 Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. ⁷ Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits. ⁸ These were his instructions: "Take nothing for the journey except a staff - no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. ⁹ Wear sandals but not an extra shirt. ¹⁰ Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. ¹¹ And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them." ¹² They went out and preached that people should repent. ¹³ They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

Imagine, one day, the most powerful person in Apple now calls you to his office. He shares with you all the latest iPhone and MacBook products, even those that are yet to be released to the market. Thereafter, he gives you a task – to manage his company on his behalf! How would you feel?

Perhaps you would embrace the task with enthusiasm, especially if you're a geek or Apple fan. Or you may hesitate and ask, "Can I really do it? What if the company collapses under my watch?"

When Jesus told His disciples that they were going to do what He had been doing – preaching, healing and casting out demons – they might have had different reactions.

Some might have gleefully grabbed at the opportunity to participate in the work of God. Others might have struggled with doubt because they weren't sure they could accomplish the task.

In any case, Jesus gave His disciples the power and authority to complete the mission. Power is the ability to do something, and authority is the right to exercise that power.

The disciples obeyed Jesus and out they went, preaching repentance, healing people and expelling demons (v12-13). Jesus specifically instructed the disciples to leave behind their essentials because what He had given them was more than enough to accomplish the mission (v8).

When Jesus sends us to do His work today, He gives us both power AND authority!

As Jesus' disciples, we are empowered to do the good works He has called us to do. These include sharing the Good News with our friends and families, applying godly values at the workplace or school, and volunteering at the church.

- *Life as Jesus' disciple is exciting and meaningful! How do you feel knowing that?*
- *Jesus will give you power and authority when He sends you on a mission.*
- *The disciples trusted and obeyed Jesus that even without their essentials, how does this change the way you see serving Jesus?*

Day 10: WHO OR WHAT DO YOU FOLLOW?

Mark 6:14-30 King Herod heard about this, for Jesus' name had become well known. Some were saying, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him." ¹⁵ Others said, "He is Elijah." And still others claimed, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago." ¹⁶ But when Herod heard this, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!" ¹⁷ For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom he had married. ¹⁸ For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." ¹⁹ So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, ²⁰ because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John,

he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him. ²¹ Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. ²² When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests. The king said to the girl, "Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you." ²³ And he promised her with an oath, "Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom." ²⁴ She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" "The head of John the Baptist," she answered. ²⁵ At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: "I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter." ²⁶ The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. ²⁷ So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, ²⁸ and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. ²⁹ On hearing of this, John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb. ³⁰ The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught.

Everyone is following someone or something. Some follow in the footsteps of people they admire. Some follow fashion brands. Some follow certain philosophies of life. Some follow social media influencers.

Who or what we follow will eventually show in our actions and speech. We dress and speak like the influencers we follow. We make decisions based on the philosophy of life we subscribe to. How about you?

From the actions and decisions of John the Baptist, it is obvious that He was a follower of God. He was a prophet sent by God to urge people to repent and seek forgiveness for their sins (*Mark 1:4*). John even baptised Jesus in water (*Mark 1:9*).

John's life is a clear example of how following God can sometimes lead to a tragic end. John was jailed and killed by King Herod for speaking out against the latter's sin of taking his brother's wife for himself.

One significant characteristic of a follower of God is the bold decision to live by God's truth. John chose to stand by the inconvenient truth that King Herod was committing a sin, though it would cost him his life.

Today, Jesus calls us to be representatives of His truth. Living in a world where lies and avoidance of truth may be easier alternatives, it takes courage and trust to follow Jesus and persist in His truth.

The Internet and social media are flooding us with many "truths" about how to live our lives. We live in constant danger of being swayed by worldly values.

We are taught to do whatever we want, and that what we feel is right must be right. We are also fed with the falsehood that the wealthier we are, the happier we'll be. The more lies the world throws our way, the more we need to understand and stand firm on God's truth.

- *Who or what do you follow?*
 - *Are you aware of the values you hold onto, whether they are of God's or not?*
 - *How can you train yourself to be a representative of Jesus' truth?*
-

Day 11: PROBLEMS OF THE HARDENED HEART

Mark 6:31-56 Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." ³² So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. ³³ But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. ³⁴ When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things. ³⁵ By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. "This is a remote place," they said, "and it's already very late. ³⁶ Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." ³⁷ But he answered, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "That would take more than half a year's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?" ³⁸ "How many loaves do you have?" he asked. "Go and see." When they found out, they said, "Five - and two fish." ³⁹ Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. ⁴¹ Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. ⁴² They all ate and were satisfied, ⁴³ and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. ⁴⁴ The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

Jesus Walks on the Water ⁴⁵ Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. ⁴⁶ After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray. ⁴⁷ Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. ⁴⁸ He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, ⁴⁹ but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, ⁵⁰ because they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." ⁵¹ Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, ⁵² for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened. ⁵³ When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. ⁵⁴ As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. ⁵⁵ They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶ And wherever he went - into villages, towns or countryside - they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

Those of us who play the guitar would notice that after some time, the fingers we use to play the instrument would become rough. If we do not do anything about them, the regular friction between our fingers and the guitar strings would create a layer of hardened skin.

Seeing or hearing about Jesus' signs and wonders is like strumming a guitar. Our hearts may come into contact with the miracles that demonstrate Jesus' power. But because we do not do anything about what we see or hear, our hearts may become hardened after some time.

The disciples were in a similar situation. Though they had seen Jesus' miracles, they did not understand the significance of these signs and wonders. They did

not exercise faith. In one instance, the disciples were struggling to row their boat against the strong wind (v45-48). When they finally saw Jesus miraculously walking on water, they weren't happy to see Him at all. Instead they were frightened because they thought He was a ghost (v49-50)!

Some of us may be confused by the disciples' reaction. Earlier on, didn't they witness Jesus feed five thousand people with five loaves and two fish (v31-44)? It was clear that Jesus had power over nature. Why would they find it strange then that Jesus could take a stroll on the lake? Shouldn't they be relieved that Jesus was there to help them?

The Bible gives the answer – the disciples were terrified because they had hardened hearts (v52). They did not understand what the miracles had demonstrated about Jesus' authority over nature. They did not look beyond the signs and wonders to know the God who performed them. Their hardened hearts limited their expectation of what Jesus, the Son of God, could do. They failed to see Jesus' divinity.

Signs and wonders are supposed to point us back to Jesus Christ, to show us how special and powerful He is. They are a gateway for us to exercise our faith in the power of Christ. But when our hearts are hardened, we miss out on the opportunities to know Christ and act in faith.

It is important to look beyond the signs and wonders to reflect on who Jesus is and respond to Him with faith.

- *Think of miracles performed by Jesus that you have read or heard about.*
- *What do they say about Jesus – who He is and what He can do?*
- *In light of that knowledge, how can you step out in faith today?*

Day 12: THE SINS FROM WITHIN

Mark 7:1-23 *The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus² and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed.³ (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders.⁴ When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.)⁵ So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, “Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?”⁶ He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: “‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.⁷ They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.’⁸ You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.”⁹ And he continued, “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!¹⁰ For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and mother,’ and, ‘Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.’¹¹ But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God) -¹² then you no longer let them do anything for their father or*

mother.¹³ Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.”¹⁴ Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand this.”¹⁵ Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them.”¹⁶⁻¹⁷ After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable.¹⁸ “Are you so dull?” he asked. “Don’t you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them?¹⁹ For it doesn’t go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body.” (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.)²⁰ He went on: “What comes out of a person is what defiles them.²¹ For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come - sexual immorality, theft, murder,²² adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.²³ All these evils come from inside and defile a person.”

What would you do if you see dirty water flowing out of your tap? Most of us would call the plumber to find out the cause and solve the issue as soon as possible.

Perhaps the inner lining of the tap is rusty, or the water pipe is covered in unwanted chemicals and bacteria. In any case, the water has become undrinkable and unusable because of a problem that happened on the inside.

Sin works like that too. It contaminates our hearts before it pollutes our thoughts, words and actions (*Luke 6:45*). If we do not deal with the sins in our lives, the infection of our hearts will worsen. Everything else that we think, do and say will be stained with sin.

Jesus taught that evil starts from the heart, which leads to wicked behaviours such as sexual immorality, greed, pride and hatred (*v20-23*).

Yet not all agreed with Him. The Jewish authorities insisted that as long as they fulfilled their man-made traditions, they would be considered ‘clean’ and good people (*v1-4*). Jesus rebuked them for relying on human rules and regulations to justify themselves. By doing so, they had separated themselves from God (*v6-13*).

Even Christians can fall into this trap of depending on human efforts to make ourselves right with God and appear good. We may rely on our attendance at services and Life Group sessions to demonstrate that we are growing in the faith.

We may participate in meaningful causes to show others that we are living purposefully. We may even want to please our parents, friends and colleagues just to prove that we are loving people.

These outward actions are not wrong in themselves. But they do not take away our sins and make us right with God.

Only Jesus can free us from sin’s control and make us righteous before God (*2 Corinthians 5:21*). He died on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins, making it possible for us to not just be sinless but holy.

Today, with the Holy Spirit’s empowerment, we have the strength to reject sinful desires and embrace the righteous life that God has in store for us (*Romans 8:9-14*).

- *Now take some time to look deeper within your life. What are some thoughts, emotions, words and actions that come from sins in your heart?*

- Go to Jesus for forgiveness.
 - Pray and ask God to help you change from the inside out.
-

Day 13: **BREAKING BARRIERS**

Mark 7:24-8:21 Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. ²⁵ In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. ²⁶ The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷ “First let the children eat all they want,” he told her, “for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.” ²⁸ “Lord,” she replied, “even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” ²⁹ Then he told her, “For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.” ³⁰ She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone. ³¹ Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. ³² There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him. ³³ After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man’s ears. Then he spit and touched the man’s tongue. ³⁴ He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, “Ephphatha!” (which means “Be opened!”). ³⁵ At this, the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly. ³⁶ Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. ³⁷ People were overwhelmed with amazement. “He has done everything well,” they said. “He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”

Mark 8:1-21 During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, ² “I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. ³ If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance.” ⁴ His disciples answered, “But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?” ⁵ “How many loaves do you have?” Jesus asked. “Seven,” they replied. ⁶ He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. When he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people, and they did so. ⁷ They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them. ⁸ The people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ⁹ About four thousand were present. After he had sent them away, ¹⁰ he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha. ¹¹ The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven. ¹² He sighed deeply and said, “Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it.” ¹³ Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side. ¹⁴ The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat. ¹⁵ “Be careful,” Jesus warned them. “Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.” ¹⁶ They discussed this with one another and said, “It is because we have no bread.” ¹⁷ Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: “Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? ¹⁸ Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don’t you remember? ¹⁹ When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of

pieces did you pick up?” “Twelve,” they replied.²⁰ “And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?” They answered, “Seven.”²¹ He said to them, “Do you still not understand?”

In Singapore, foreign workers and domestic helpers often gather at public places during weekends. If a Singaporean joins them, he or she would stand out among the crowd right away!

When Jesus, a Jew, entered a Gentile (*non-Jew*) region and interacted with the people there, He stuck out like a sore thumb too. It is highly unusual for a Jew to hang out with Gentiles, because Jews traditionally thought of Gentiles as ‘unclean’ and of lower status than them.

Clearly, Jesus did not follow the norm. He did a few unthinkable things in the eyes of people at that time. He went into the house of a Gentile to help the people there and meet their needs. He cast a demon out of a Gentile girl, healed a deaf Gentile, and fed a crowd of four thousand.

From this, we know that Jesus’ heart is not just for people of a single culture but for the whole world. His desire is for Jews and Gentiles alike to know the powerful and loving God. In Christ, all are equal, regardless of their culture, background, gender or occupation (*Colossians 3:11*).

He destroys the hatred and prejudices we have against individuals of another culture, gender or socioeconomic status. He makes peace and builds bridges among people.

Today, most of us in Singapore are Gentiles. As God’s people, we have the privilege and responsibility to live out Christ’s barrier-breaking, peace-making love. The passage below tells us how:

*Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. (*Colossians 3:12-15*)*

- *Are you harbouring hatred towards someone?*
- *Would you let go of your animosity and forgive them?*
- *Do you have prejudices against people of other cultures or socioeconomic backgrounds?*
- *How can you change your thoughts, speech or actions towards them?*

Day 14: **HELP US SEE**

Mark 8:22-33 *They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him.²³ He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man’s eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, “Do you see*

anything?"²⁴ He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around."²⁵ Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.²⁶ Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't even go into the village."²⁷ Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"²⁸ They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."²⁹ "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."³⁰ Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.³¹ He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

Signs and wonders abound in Jesus' ministry. The people He touched were healed immediately. But not this blind man at Bethsaida. The first time Jesus touched him, he could only see partially. Jesus had to touch him again before he fully restored his sight.

It's not that Jesus did not love this man as much as He loved others. Nor was Jesus having a bad day at ministry. Rather, the Bible is using the blind man to depict the spiritual state of the disciples. They had only partial insight into who Jesus really was. It would take some time before they could clearly see that Jesus is indeed the Son of God.

Though Peter once proclaimed that Jesus is the Saviour (*Messiah*), he couldn't accept that Jesus would have to suffer a terrible death (v31-32). Peter was blinded by his limited perception of the Messiah; he too only had partial insight into Jesus' identity. He was unable to understand God's plans for mankind.

Similarly, we may not be able to see clearly what God is doing in our lives. Some of us may see it as God's blessing that our lives are productive, smooth-sailing and carefree. By contrast, we find it hard to imagine that God can bless us through the troubles that we face, such as a financial difficulty or a tough time at work or in school.

Because our sight is blurred, we begin to doubt and question God's authority and character in times of trouble. Yet He could be using these very situations to test our faith and strengthen us to press on for Him:

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

- *Even when you're puzzled, will you choose to trust that God knows and desires what's best for you?*
- *Will you allow God to work in your life according to His wisdom, not yours?*
- *It's easier said than done. But it's possible when we grow in our understanding of Jesus and learn more about His character and deeds through the Bible.*

- *Pray that God may help you to see things from His perspective.*
-

Day 15: **LOSE AND FIND**

Mark 8:34-38 *Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷ Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”*

Think of something you really, really want. Is it the latest gadget, an exciting job opportunity, or a relationship with that great guy or girl?

Now ask yourself this: would you be willing to give it up in order to follow Christ? Why?

According to Jesus, if we want to be His disciples, we are to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him (v34). We make ourselves smaller and enlarge Christ. We say no to our self-centred ways and yes to what Christ commands. We place more importance on Christ’s interests and desires than our own.

Jim Elliot was an American missionary. His love for Christ and people motivated him to bring the Gospel to the Huaorani tribe in Ecuador. Tragically, he and his teammates were killed by the very people they wanted to reach out to.

Jim Elliot remains an inspiration to Christians today. He once said, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.” His words echoed one great paradox of the Christian faith – whoever is willing to lose his or her life for Jesus and for the Gospel will find it (v35).

To Jim Elliot, giving his life for Christ and the Gospel was the best thing he could ever do. He might have lost his physical life, but he gained the eternal life that Christ has promised to those who follow Him wholeheartedly.

There is no better way to live than to devote ourselves fully to the Gospel. How can we live for the Gospel today? How should the Gospel influence the way we treat our family, classmates, colleagues or our church? How can we tell others about the Gospel?

Living for Christ and the Gospel may bring about hardships and heartaches. But just as we share in Christ’s sufferings now, we will participate in His glory in the future. At the end of the day, we know that *Jesus is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6)*. Knowing this truth, we can be assured that all that we go through for Christ will be worth it.

- *What hinders you from following Christ wholeheartedly?*

- How can you overcome the obstacles and develop a single-minded love for Christ and the Gospel?
-

Day 16: FAITH COMES FROM UNDERSTANDING

Mark 9:2-29 After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. ³ His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵ Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” ⁶ (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) ⁷ Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!” ⁸ Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. ⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. ¹⁰ They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what “rising from the dead” meant. ¹¹ And they asked him, “Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?” ¹² Jesus replied, “To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected? ¹³ But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him.” ¹⁴ When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. ¹⁵ As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him. ¹⁶ “What are you arguing with them about?” he asked. ¹⁷ A man in the crowd answered, “Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. ¹⁸ Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.” ¹⁹ “You unbelieving generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.” ²⁰ So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. ²¹ Jesus asked the boy’s father, “How long has he been like this?” “From childhood,” he answered. ²² “It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.” ²³ “‘If you can’?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for one who believes.” ²⁴ Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” ²⁵ When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. “You deaf and mute spirit,” he said, “I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.” ²⁶ The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, “He’s dead.” ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up. ²⁸ After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?” ²⁹ He replied, “This kind can come out only by prayer.”

“I need to see it before I can believe it.” This is a common statement that many make when they are asked to trust in a person, idea or concept. Their experience determines their faith.

Sounds like a fool proof way to make sure that we don’t just blindly believe in something?

Perhaps. But our senses are limited. We may misinterpret the signals we are receiving. Places like the Trick Eye Museum use the fact that our brains can “deceive” us to see things that aren’t real to create optical illusion paintings and installations.

Led by Jesus up a high mountain, Peter, James and John probably thought that their eyes were playing tricks on them too. They witnessed Jesus, dazzling white in His glory, talking to Elijah and Moses, prophets who supposedly lived and died ages ago in Israel.

No wonder the disciples were afraid and at a loss for what to say and do (v3-6). Then a thundering voice from a cloud commanded them to do what Jesus said and suddenly, they were alone with Jesus again (v7-8). Nothing made sense!

Doubts could have emerged: “What just happened? What does Jesus mean when he says that he will rise from the dead (v9-10)?”

The confusion continued. Back at the bottom of the mountain, a desperate father was seeking help to heal his possessed child (v17-18). Jesus’ disciples could not drive the spirit out because they lacked faith (v19). They failed to rely on God to do His ministry (v28-29). Though they should have experienced Jesus’ miracles by now, they still could not understand the nature of His work.

Today, this is a struggle that many believers have – just like how the disciples recognised that Jesus is special, we may say that Jesus is the Son of God. Yet we do not understand what it really means. Faced with uncertain life circumstances, our faith wavers as we try to make sense of God’s ways. As a result, we are not able to trust Him fully in various areas of life.

We can take heart that our struggles of faith are not out of the norm; the disciples too had their moments. They learnt from their mistakes, but held onto Jesus, following Him. Eventually they became the apostles of the early church. Faith is more than what we say or feel about Jesus. Faith is based on knowing who Jesus is and choosing to live in a way that honours Him as God. In other words, faith is a decision based on understanding.

- *Let’s be honest with God about our lack of faith, if that’s our condition today.*
- *Ask God to help us overcome our unbelief by guiding us to not just experience, but understand who Jesus is.*

Day 17: A DIFFERENT KIND OF SUCCESS

Mark 9:30-50 *They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, ³¹ because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.” ³² But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it. ³³ They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the road?” ³⁴ But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. ³⁵ Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “Anyone who*

wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.”³⁶ He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them,³⁷ “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”³⁸ “Teacher,” said John, “we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.”³⁹ “Do not stop him,” Jesus said. “For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me,⁴⁰ for whoever is not against us is for us.⁴¹ Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward.⁴² “If anyone causes one of these little ones - those who believe in me - to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea.⁴³ If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out.⁴⁴⁻⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell.⁴⁶⁻⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell,⁴⁸ where “the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched.”⁴⁹ Everyone will be salted with fire.⁵⁰ “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other.”

How would you define success? Is it getting straight A's at school or scoring a spot on the national team? Or does it lie in possessing the 5C's – car, cash, credit card, condominium, and country club membership?

In a society that prioritises results, many pursue achievements that rank them above others. In this game of survival of the fittest, being the best in academics, sport and our careers is everything. Many define success as being stronger, smarter and richer than the rest.

Similarly, Jesus' disciples were looking to beat one another in the game of “who's the best” (v34). They desired the recognition that came with the title of Jesus' greatest disciple. Jesus grabbed the opportunity to teach them God's definition of success.

Instead of acting like they were better than others, or looking down on those they thought were unimportant (v36-37), disciples of Jesus should serve everyone else (v35). They should humble themselves and place others' needs above their own.

They should be willing to forsake their comforts and rights in order to lift others up. Jesus is the ultimate example of humble service – He, who is the King of kings, has served the world by giving up His life to save us from our sins (v31). He put aside His divine and royal status to live and die like a servant on earth (*Philippians 2:6-8*).

But that's not the end of Jesus! God the Father has raised Jesus up from the dead and has given Him authority over every man and living creature (*Philippians 2:9-11*). From Jesus' life, we see that success in God's eyes is not 5C's but 1S – servanthood out of obedience to God.

Living the life of a servant may seem like a daunting task. Yet we can have confidence that God will help us.

Through the Holy Spirit, He gives us the power to serve with spiritual gifts (*1 Corinthians 12:4-11*).

Through the Word, He teaches us the attitudes we ought to have when we serve (*Ephesians 4:25-32; Colossians 3:12-17*). We can serve with gratitude because of God's love in our lives. We can take the 'last place' of a servant with joy because God has promised us a great and glorious eternity with Him.

- *How do you define success?*
 - *Is your perspective influenced by worldly values or godly principles?*
 - *How can you be a great servant today?*
-

Day 18: MARKS OF A TRUE DISCIPLE

Mark 10:1-31 *Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them.*
² *Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"* ³ *"What did Moses command you?" he replied.* ⁴ *They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away."* ⁵ *"It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied.* ⁶ *"But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.'* ⁷ *'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife,* ⁸ *and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh.* ⁹ *Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."* ¹⁰ *When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this.* ¹¹ *He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her.* ¹² *And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."* ¹³ *People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them.* ¹⁴ *When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.* ¹⁵ *Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."* ¹⁶ *And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.* ¹⁷ *As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"* ¹⁸ *"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good - except God alone.* ¹⁹ *You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.'"* ²⁰ *"Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."* ²¹ *Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."* ²² *At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.* ²³ *Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"* ²⁴ *The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."* ²⁶ *The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?"* ²⁷ *Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."* ²⁸ *Then Peter spoke up, "We have left everything to follow you!"*

²⁹ *“Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel ³⁰ will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields - along with persecutions - and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”*

What makes a true disciple? Do we have to be perfect in all that we say and do? Are we supposed to serve others till we drop, not giving a care for ourselves? Through interactions with three different groups of people, Jesus reveals what it takes to be a true disciple.

A true disciple seeks God’s will.

The Pharisees were the A+ scholars of their day. They could easily recite Scripture by heart, and knew just about every religious ritual there was. Intending to trap Jesus, they asked Him a question regarding the Jewish law and divorce. Instead of focusing on divorce, Jesus directed the Pharisees back to God’s original intention for marriage (v6-9).

A disciple yearns to discover and do God’s will. He or she wants to know and follow God’s unchanging intentions for how we ought to live our everyday lives.

A true disciple has childlike faith.

People were swarming Jesus, wanting Him to bless their children. The disciples decided that their Lord had no time for pesky, insignificant children, so they tried to keep the children away.

Perhaps they expected Jesus to be grateful to them now that He had more room to breathe. Instead, Jesus told his disciples off. He called the children back and blessed them. He used them as an example to teach the importance of having childlike faith.

Disciples should approach God with complete trust and humility like a child, rather than with doubt and pride (v14-15).

A true disciple is wholeheartedly devoted to Jesus.

In spite of following rules all his life, the rich young man lacked one key feature of a disciple – wholehearted devotion. He had done all the right things, yet he was unwilling to let go of his wealth. He wanted eternal life, yet he didn’t value the kingdom of God enough to forgo his riches on earth (v21-22).

It’s not that Jesus wants His disciples to be poor. Instead, Jesus is challenging us to follow Him wholeheartedly.

- *Out of these three characteristics, which one do you want to grow in?*
 - *Identify the steps you need to implement to grow as a disciple.*
-

Day 19: IS JESUS YOUR LORD?

Mark 10:32-52 *They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him.³³ “We are going up to Jerusalem,” he said, “and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles,³⁴ who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.”³⁵ Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”³⁶ “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked.³⁷ They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”³⁸ “You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said. “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”³⁹ “We can,” they answered. Jesus said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with,⁴⁰ but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.”⁴¹ When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John.⁴² Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”⁴⁶ Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means “son of Timaheus”), was sitting by the roadside begging.⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”⁴⁸ Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”⁴⁹ Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” So they called to the blind man, “Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.”⁵⁰ Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.⁵¹ “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him. The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see.”⁵² “Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.*

If you’re a fan of superhero movies, you would notice that the good guys share these traits:

1. They have a special skill or talent.
2. They are regarded with honour.
3. They have a mission to save the world.

Jesus might very well be the superhero of biblical times. People were awestruck by His great wisdom and unusual boldness in the face of opposition. They were stunned by His supernatural works. It’s no wonder that his disciples James and John desired to claim the prestige of being His top followers (v35-37).

Little did they know that before they could bask in Jesus’ glory, they would have to suffer pain and humiliation like He would as He served others (v42-45).

Today, Jesus calls us to follow in His footsteps of selfless service. Some of us may gamely take on Jesus’ invitation. Others may hesitate. Perhaps it’s because we gladly receive Jesus as our Saviour but we are not ready to call Him our Lord.

Calling Jesus our Lord means that we will do whatever He says, whatever the cost. We hesitate to follow Jesus because we may not be ready to pay the price of discipleship.

Like the beggar Bartimaeus, we were spiritually blind and poor. Out of His mercy, Jesus has healed us and given us spiritual sight to recognise Him as our Saviour and Lord. In response, will we be like Bartimaeus who willingly gave up all that he had to follow Jesus (v50-52)?

Bartimaeus didn't have much to offer to Jesus. He was a blind beggar who owned nothing but a cloak to his name. The crowd expected Jesus to ignore him – surely there were people and matters far more worthy of His attention. But Jesus stopped for Bartimaeus. Overwhelmed with gratitude, Bartimaeus threw his possessions aside and ran to Jesus. That day, Bartimaeus chose to live for Jesus.

- *You were once spiritually blind but now you see.*
 - *The world may not think that you're important but Jesus does.*
 - *You may think that you do not have much to give to Jesus, but He calls you anyway. Will you follow the Lord.*
-

Day 20: RETURN OF THE KING

Mark 11:1-11 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, ² saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'" ⁴ *They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, ⁵ some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" ⁶ They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. ⁷ When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. ⁸ Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. ⁹ Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" ¹⁰ "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" "Hosanna in the highest heaven!" ¹¹ Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.*

One of the top grossing, most critically acclaimed trilogies in Hollywood history is J.R.R Tolkien's Lord of the Rings. In Tolkien's fantastic universe of humans, hobbits, elves, wizards, dwarves and monsters, a great evil threatens to cover the world in darkness and make every living being its slave. Chaos is the order of the day. Fear rules the hearts of most. Hope is faint.

Yet amid the darkness, there are flickers of light in the love, unity and courage of a few heroic characters. One of them is Aragon, who is destined to be king. The trilogy ends with his long-awaited return to the throne and triumphant deliverance of his people.

In the real world today, we are also waiting for the return of King Jesus.

Mark 11:1-11 tells of Jesus entering Jerusalem to the cheers of the crowd. His arrival on a donkey fulfilled a 500-year-old prophecy about the King of Jerusalem (*Zechariah 9:9*). This was a big deal for the Israelites, who had been looking forward to a King to save them from foreign oppression and restore Israel's former glory.

After years of waiting and suffering under oppression, the Israelites were finally able to declare the arrival of their King, openly singing songs of praise and glory unto Him. What a celebration it was!

One day, Jesus will return to earth in all His glory (*1 Thessalonians 4:16-17*). He will save and reward those who are faithful to Him (*Revelation 22:12*) and reject those who disobey the Gospel (*1 Peter 4:17-18*).

This is a comforting truth for believers of all ages and all over the world. Today, many Christians are persecuted for the sake of Christ and the Gospel. Persecution can come in the form of physical torture/death, economic pressure, or social marginalisation.

According to Christianity Today, a Christian online magazine, more than 200 million Christians face high to extreme persecution. In secular nations, and even in nations that call themselves "Christian", our values and way of life may receive rejection and ridicule.

If you are suffering for your faith today, you're not alone. Take heart that many believers are going through it too.

- *Hold onto Jesus, knowing that your suffering has a purpose.*
- *We who put our trust in Jesus will enjoy eternal life with Him when He returns with victory and salvation!*

Day 21: **TOUGH LOVE**

Mark 11:12-33 The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. ¹³ Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. ¹⁴ Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it. ¹⁵ On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, ¹⁶ and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. ¹⁷ And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" ¹⁸ The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching. ¹⁹ When evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city. ²⁰ In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. ²¹ Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!" ²² "Have faith in God," Jesus answered. ²³ "Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not

doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. ²⁴ Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. ²⁵ And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.” ²⁶⁻²⁷ They arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. ²⁸ “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you authority to do this?” ²⁹ Jesus replied, “I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ³⁰ John’s baptism - was it from heaven, or of human origin? Tell me!” ³¹ They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’” ³² But if we say, ‘Of human origin’ ...” (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.) ³³ So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.” Jesus said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”

Mark 12:1-12 Jesus then began to speak to them in parables: “A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. ² At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. ³ But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ⁴ Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. ⁵ He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed. ⁶ “He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’” ⁷ “But the tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’” ⁸ So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. ⁹ “What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. ¹⁰ Haven’t you read this passage of Scripture: “‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; ¹¹ the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”” ¹² Then the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.

Think back to the time when a teacher or instructor corrected you. Their remarks probably stung. Their rebukes could have been harsh. They might even have ended up on your “Most Hated” list. But more likely than not, they were concerned about the mistakes you were making and wanted you to learn to do what was right.

Similarly, because He cares, Jesus warned and scolded the Jewish chief priests, scribes and elders for their faithlessness towards God. Though they claimed to worship God, their religious system had failed to make known God’s salvation to the nations (11:15-17).

Though they had the Scriptures (God’s revelation), they refused to accept that God had sent Jesus to save the world. Instead, they plotted to get rid of Him (12:1-12).

Jesus’ harsh rebuke towards the Jewish religious authorities reflected His frustration with their stubborn hearts.

He was disappointed at their lack of faith in Him (Luke 13:34, Matthew 23:37). He even delivered a scathing criticism of their hypocrisy, spiritual blindness and acts of violence against God’s servants (Matthew 23:1-36).

Jesus didn't have anger management issues. So when He was upset, it was for a really good reason. Jesus takes faithlessness very seriously. He knows the danger of rejecting God's revelation. He can see through people's false humility and empty religion. He does not want us to sink into faithlessness.

Instead, He wants us to be faithful. Faithfulness is believing in God's revelation about who Jesus is. It is trusting in God and forgiving those who hurt us (11:22-25).

- *Let's pause for a while and reflect. Are there areas in your life where God has shown you what He wants you to do, yet you're unwilling to act on it?*
 - *How can you turn from faithlessness to faithfulness?*
 - *As you reflect on the passage, write a prayer to God to help you apply what His Word says.*
-

Day 22: RE-ADJUSTING OUR WORLDVIEW

Mark 12:13-37 *Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words. ¹⁴ They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not? ¹⁵ Should we pay or shouldn't we?" But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. "Why are you trying to trap me?" he asked. "Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." ¹⁶ They brought the coin, and he asked them, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied. ¹⁷ Then Jesus said to them, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." And they were amazed at him. ¹⁸ Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. ¹⁹ "Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. ²⁰ Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. ²¹ The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. ²² In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. ²³ At the resurrection^[b] whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?" ²⁴ Jesus replied, "Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? ²⁵ When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. ²⁶ Now about the dead rising—have you not read in the Book of Moses, in the account of the burning bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? ²⁷ He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!" ²⁸ One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" ²⁹ "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' ³¹ The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." ³² "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. ³³ To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." ³⁴ When Jesus saw that*

he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions. Whose Son Is the Messiah? ³⁵ While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, “Why do the teachers of the law say that the Messiah is the son of David? ³⁶ David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared: “‘The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.’” ³⁷ David himself calls him ‘Lord.’ How then can he be his son? The large crowd listened to him with delight.

Going for an interview can be a nerve-wracking experience. You are scrutinised for what you wear, how you carry yourself, and where you studied and worked previously. And then there are those difficult questions that cut into you and drag out your inner thoughts and insecurities. Feeling dissected and vulnerable, you struggle to answer more questions.

During his ministry on earth, Jesus had to answer difficult questions several times. He wisely handled them, some of which came from people who tried to trap and discredit Him.

In *Mark 12:13-37*, Jesus was questioned by three different groups of people in three areas:

1. His allegiance to God (*v13-17*)
2. His understanding of the faith with regards to the resurrection (*v18-27*)
3. His approach to God’s Law (*v28-34*)

Jesus’ answers were so wise and thought-provoking that His listeners gasped with wonder (*v17*). Besides being corrected in their wrong understanding (*v27*), they gained a deeper insight into God’s truth (*v32-33*). Jesus was so good at answering difficult questions that no one dared to challenge Him again (*v34*).

Jesus was able to silence His critics and guide people to the truth because of His solid, biblical worldview. Our worldview is how we see and understand ourselves and the world. Amid the lies that the media and Internet are throwing at us, it is of utmost importance to build our worldview on the truth that God has revealed in the Bible.

Our worldview has a direct impact on our priorities, decisions and actions in life. It enables us to navigate challenging situations where we have to make tricky ethical choices or tough decisions.

One day, people may bombard us with tough questions about our faith. They may do so with sincere intentions to find out more about Jesus, or they may be asking out of ill intentions to discourage us and ruin our reputation. We need to be ready to handle all kinds of questions about our faith with gentleness and respect (*1 Peter 3:15*).

Aligning your worldview to the Bible’s starts with small steps.

- What questions would you ask them to find out more about the Christian worldview?
-

Day 23: **EMPTY NO MORE**

Mark 12:38-44 *As he taught, Jesus said, “Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces,³⁹ and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets.⁴⁰ They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely.”⁴¹ 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.⁴² But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.⁴³ Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others.⁴⁴ They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything - all she had to live on.”*

For many people, life is like a giant masquerade ball. They pretend to have joy from seeking pleasures. They fake smiles of satisfaction from their achievements. Yet when they are alone and take off their masks, they feel empty.

God sees beyond our external appearance, achievements and acquisitions to our hearts. He knows our secret thoughts and deepest longings. He understands the depth of our emptiness.

In *Mark 12:38-44*, Jesus looked through the external acts of people and zeroed in on their inner intentions and attitudes. Here we see two contrasting sets of characters.

The scribes (*teachers of the Law*) were dressed in flowing robes and uttered long prayers (*v38-40*). They looked good, spoke well, and enjoyed high status among the people. They loved receiving honour from others while exploiting poor and helpless widows. Their goal was to gain greater prominence for themselves. The scribes might have fooled their fellow men, but not Jesus. The Son of God saw through their empty religion and pointed out their hypocrisy.

In contrast to the arrogant scribes was the poor widow (*v41-44*). She was probably dressed shabbily and was unknown to most people. She could only afford to give two pitiful copper coins as an offering, while the rich around her poured in huge sums of money. Perhaps they were sneering at her for her lack.

But Jesus was moved by this widow. He praised her sincere faith for she had given to God all that she had (*v44*). The two small copper coins could very well have been her entire earnings for that day. By offering them she would have barely enough left to survive. Jesus declared that she had contributed more than others (*v43*). He was so impressed by the poor widow, that He used her as an example of faithfulness.

God is not looking for empty religion – superficial Christian behaviour centred around selfish desires and devoid of sincere love. Rather, He is looking for true and sincere faith. He wants a solid faith that is based on His revelations and consistently displayed in everything that we do and say.

- *What steps can you take to grow your faith in truth and sincerity?*
-

Day 24: ARE YOU PREPARED FOR THE END?

Mark 13 As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!”² “Do you see all these great buildings?” replied Jesus. “Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”³ As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately,⁴ “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?”⁵ Jesus said to them: “Watch out that no one deceives you.⁶ Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many.⁷ When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.⁸ Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.⁹ “You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them.¹⁰ And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.¹¹ Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.¹² “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death.¹³ Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.¹⁴ “When you see ‘the abomination that causes desolation’ standing where it does not belong - let the reader understand - then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.¹⁵ Let no one on the housetop go down or enter the house to take anything out.¹⁶ Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak.¹⁷ How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers!¹⁸ Pray that this will not take place in winter,¹⁹ because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now - and never to be equaled again.²⁰ “If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them.²¹ At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or, ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it.²² For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.²³ So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.²⁴ “But in those days, following that distress, “‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; ²⁵ the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’²⁶ “At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.²⁷ And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.²⁸ “Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near.²⁹ Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it^[d] is near, right at the door.³⁰ Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.³² “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.³³ Be on guard! Be alert^[e]! You do not know when that time will come.³⁴ It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.³⁵ “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back - whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn.³⁶ If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping.³⁷ What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”

The National Geographic Channel runs a series called “Doomsday Preppers”. It features people who go to extreme lengths to get ready for the end of the world. Think underground weapons arsenals for fear of zombies, or large medicine stashes in anticipation of an outbreak.

The word “doomsday” sounds like something terrible will happen as the age that we live in comes to an end. In some sense, it’s true. There will be widespread persecution of Christians as Satan fiercely attacks the Church (v9-13). A man of lawlessness will brazenly call himself God (2 *Thessalonians* 2:4). Evil beings, with fake signs and wonders, will deceive those who reject God and choose wickedness (2 *Thessalonians* 2:9-12). Distress, fear and chaos will be the order of the day (v14-22).

But evil won’t have the last say. Jesus will return in His glory to save His followers (1 *Thessalonians* 4:16-17) and punish those who reject God’s truth and mistreat God’s people (1 *Peter* 4:17-18).

While we may not store weapons or hoard medicine, we need to prepare for Jesus’ arrival. Because we won’t know the exact time He will come, we need to be watchful and ready to receive Him (v32-36).

One important way we prepare for Jesus’ return in the future is by living a life of holiness in the present (1 *Thessalonians* 4:3-8). Being holy means to be set apart for God, to offer ourselves for God’s purposes. Holy living includes honouring God with our desires and behaviours (*Colossians* 3:1-10); loving people around us (*Colossians* 3:12-14); and studying or working diligently for God (*Colossians* 3:23-25).

Sounds difficult? It is. But if we submit to the Holy Spirit, it’s possible. We find the power for holy living through the Holy Spirit, who promises to lead us into a fruitful life (*Galatians* 5:22-26). We don’t rely on rules and regulations to keep ourselves in check. Instead we depend on the Holy Spirit to lead us to honour God with our lives.

- *Do you want to grow in holy living, but feel helpless to do so?*
- *Speak to more mature Christians around you. Ask them how you can experience and obey the Holy Spirit.*

Day 25: LOVE AT ALL COSTS

Mark 14:1-11 *Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. ² “But not during the festival,” they said, “or the people may riot.” ³ While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. ⁴ Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume? ⁵ It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor.” And they rebuked her harshly. ⁶ “Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ⁷ The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. ⁸ She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare*

for my burial. ⁹ Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her. ” ¹⁰ Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. ¹¹ They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

We often hear the phrase, “Diamonds are a girl’s best friend.” It’s an advertising line targeted at men who will buy the expensive gemstones for their girlfriends or wives. Love is a powerful incentive to loosen the purse strings, and advertisers know it.

Some of us are very willing to spend a bomb on people we love. Think of parents who shower their children with toys, or the smitten husband who splurges on flowers and jewellery for his wife. Giving gifts is a natural way to communicate love and appreciation.

In *Mark 14*, there is a woman who loves Jesus so much, she presents Him a gift of really expensive perfume (*it’s worth more than a year’s salary!*) By pouring the perfume on Him, she is expressing her adoration and thanksgiving to Him. Her extravagant gesture of love, however, draws criticism from those around her (v4-5).

Jesus jumps to her defence and openly praises her for her “beautiful” act of blessing Him and preparing for His burial (v6-9). What an honour it is to be affirmed by Jesus, the Son of God!

Put yourself in the woman’s shoes for a moment. Would you be willing to pay the price of loving Jesus? The cost may come in the form of resources, time and energy. We can love Jesus by giving generously to ministry, serving the church with our hearts and hands, and loving people by sharing the Gospel to them.

Sometimes these acts may attract criticism from our friends and families who do not know Jesus or understand why we want to give our lives to Him. They may even question our motives. However, a deep love for Jesus keeps us going.

- *What are some things you can do out of love for Jesus?*
- *When your love for Him attracts opposition or requires a great deal of sacrifice, what will motivate you to continue in the faith?*

Day 26: AN EVERLASTING COVENANT

Mark 14:2-26 “But not during the festival,” they said, “or the people may riot.” ³ While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. ⁴ Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume? ⁵ It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages^[a] and the money given to the poor.” And they rebuked her harshly. ⁶ “Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ⁷ The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. ⁸ She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. ⁹ Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.” ¹⁰ Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve,

went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. ¹¹ They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over. ¹² On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples asked him, "Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?" ¹³ So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. ¹⁴ Say to the owner of the house he enters, 'The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' ¹⁵ He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there." ¹⁶ The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover. ¹⁷ When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. ¹⁸ While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me - one who is eating with me." ¹⁹ They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, "Surely you don't mean me?" ²⁰ "It is one of the Twelve," he replied, "one who dips bread into the bowl with me. ²¹ The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born." ²² While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body." ²³ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. ²⁴ "This is my blood of the ^[c] covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them. ²⁵ "Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." ²⁶ When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

At a wedding, the bride and groom pledge their faithfulness to each other before God and witnesses. They promise to stay together "for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do us part". What a serious commitment that is! In God's eyes, the wedding vow is a covenant between a man and a woman that is binding for life and more intimate than any other relationship.

Christ has also made a marriage covenant with the Church. The Bible likens our relationship with Christ to that between a husband and wife (*Ephesians 5:25-27*) and encourages us to look forward to the day when we will have a glorious wedding with Christ (*Revelation 19:7*). This covenant that Christ has established with us is also known as the New Covenant.

The New Covenant is built on Jesus' blood. As Jesus observed His last Passover with His disciples, Jesus prophesied that His body would be broken and His blood spilled for many (*v22-24*). Traditionally, the Passover commemorated God's deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt.

Many years ago, when God punished the Egyptians with a plague that killed the firstborn son of every household, He spared the Israelites because their doors were marked by the blood of an unblemished lamb (*Exodus 12:1-14*). Just as the blood of the lamb marked the Israelites as God's people and ensured their deliverance, the untainted blood of Jesus seals us as God's beloved and secures our salvation.

The Passover has great significance for Christians today because Jesus has redefined it as a reminder of the new, everlasting covenant He has made with us. The covenant is a reliable assurance of His constant presence.

It is a rock-solid promise that we will receive the blessings and privileges as His chosen people if we continue to live according to His ways.

Every Christian experiences seasons of ups and downs in the journey of faith. In every season, remember Jesus' everlasting covenant with us. He wants us to have joy in Him, be comforted by His presence and draw strength from Him.

Another term for the Passover meal that we use more often today is the Holy Communion. The next time you take the Holy Communion during a service or Life Group meeting, pause and reflect on its meaning.

- *How does Jesus' covenant with the Church add courage to you in your faith journey?*
 - *Will you fulfil your part of the covenant today?*
-

Day 27: **OBEDIENCE AGAINST ALL ODDS**

Mark 14:27-52 *“You will all fall away,” Jesus told them, “for it is written: “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.”²⁸ But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”²⁹ Peter declared, “Even if all fall away, I will not.”³⁰ “Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “today - yes, tonight - before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.”³¹ But Peter insisted emphatically, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the others said the same.³² They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.”³³ He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled.³⁴ “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he said to them. “Stay here and keep watch.”³⁵ Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him.³⁶ “Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”³⁷ Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Simon,” he said to Peter, “are you asleep? Couldn't you keep watch for one hour?³⁸ Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”³⁹ Once more he went away and prayed the same thing.⁴⁰ When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.⁴¹ Returning the third time, he said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners.⁴² Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”⁴³ Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders.⁴⁴ Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.”⁴⁵ Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Rabbi!” and kissed him.⁴⁶ The men seized Jesus and arrested him.⁴⁷ Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.⁴⁸ “Am I leading a rebellion,” said Jesus, “that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? ⁴⁹ Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.”⁵⁰ Then everyone deserted him and fled.⁵¹ A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him,⁵² he fled naked, leaving his garment behind.*

If you had to give up a promotion at work because you refused to make unethical decisions, would you still choose to honour God at the workplace? If you had to score worse in a project because you refused to cheat, would you still stand firm on godly values? If people you love were to cut ties with you because of your faith, would you still follow Christ?

Choosing to obey God can cost us our achievements, resources and relationships. Understandably, we struggle with discomfort, disappointment and discouragement.

Jesus knows how that feels like. Facing impending death, He experienced the betrayal of a disciple (v43-46), immense sorrow (v33-34) and abandonment by His closest companions (v27, 50). He was in so much distress that He asked God if there was a way out of His suffering.

Yet Jesus chose to remain in God's will. He understood that complete obedience was necessary. He would not consider an easier alternative if it was not aligned to God's plan. He determined to obey God in tough and trying circumstances, even to the point of death.

Living our lives according to God's will, will bring challenges. No one is untouched by trouble and everyone goes through trials. But it is through adversities that we experience God's love and grow in endurance and character (*Romans 5:3-5*).

Obedying God requires more than just verbal declaration or even fierce determination. It requires faith. Trusting God, Jesus was calm and controlled when He faced opposition from the Jewish leaders and hostile crowd.

Faith is trusting God even when you are not certain what lies ahead (*Proverbs 3:5-6*). It is being confident that God will lead the way. It is persisting to obey God and doing His will.

Our faith in God is not a blind leap into the unknown. It is a trust that comes from knowing who Jesus is. Studying the Bible and spending time with Jesus in prayer gives us opportunities to understand Him.

- *What can you do to know Jesus more today?*
- *List some ways you can cultivate a heart that will follow Jesus in obedience.*

Day 28: **SURRENDERED NOT TO MEN, BUT TO GOD**

Mark 14:53-72 *They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, the elders and the teachers of the law came together. ⁵⁴ Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire. ⁵⁵ The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any. ⁵⁶ Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree. ⁵⁷ Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him: ⁵⁸ "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days will build another, not made with hands.'" ⁵⁹ Yet even then their testimony did not agree. ⁶⁰ Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Are you not going to*

answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?"⁶¹ But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?"⁶² "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."⁶³ The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked.⁶⁴ "You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" They all condemned him as worthy of death.⁶⁵ Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, "Prophecy!" And the guards took him and beat him.⁶⁶ While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by.⁶⁷ When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him. "You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus," she said.⁶⁸ But he denied it. "I don't know or understand what you're talking about," he said, and went out into the entry way.⁶⁹ When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, "This fellow is one of them."⁷⁰ Again he denied it. After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean."⁷¹ He began to call down curses, and he swore to them, "I don't know this man you're talking about."⁷² Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times." And he broke down and wept.

Mark 15:1-15 Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, made their plans. So they bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate.² "Are you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate. "You have said so," Jesus replied.³ The chief priests accused him of many things.⁴ So again Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of."⁵ But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.⁶ Now it was the custom at the festival to release a prisoner whom the people requested.⁷ A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising.⁸ The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.⁹ "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate,¹⁰ knowing it was out of self-interest that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him.¹¹ But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.¹² "What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them.¹³ "Crucify him!" they shouted.¹⁴ "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!"¹⁵ Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

Hardly anything is more surprising than an underdog beating a frontrunner in a competition. Rarely is a match more exciting than a losing team scoring a hat trick and claiming victory in the end.

Jesus, with his normal appearance and gentle spirit, looked like the underdog who was up against the powerful political and religious leaders of His day. As He stood before the Jewish leaders and Roman authorities on trial, many gave false testimonies in desperate attempts to pin a crime on Him.

Though no evidence of wrongdoing was found (14:55-56), Jesus was wrongly accused of blasphemy (14:64) and sentenced to death by crucifixion (15:15), a capital punishment that was highly cruel and humiliating. What a terrible injustice!

Was Jesus defeated by His opponents? Had He succumbed to their evil schemes? Absolutely not! The truth is that Jesus willingly endured suffering out of surrender to God the Father, not to men. Jesus chose to fulfil God's plan when He declared, "...*Yet not what I will, but what You will.*" (Mark 14:36b).

Unknown to those who wanted Him dead, Jesus' death was part of God's plan all along. He has scored the ultimate hat trick. He has turned the situation on its head. He has won!

Jesus' death is also our win, because by His wounds we are healed of our slavery to sin so that we can live righteously for Him (1 Peter 2:24). On the cross, Jesus completely defeated the true Enemy, Satan, and all other spiritual powers (Colossians 2:15).

By surrendering to God, Jesus has won. Surrendering is the attitude of giving in to God. Instead of insisting that we know it all, we entrust ourselves to the One who is truly in control. Instead of persisting in 'my way', we allow God to lead us in living life 'His way'.

- *What is one area in your life that God is calling you to give in to Him?*
 - *If you find yourself struggling, focus on God. Know that He has your best interests at heart and trust that He has a perfect plan for you. There is no one and nothing more trustworthy, loving and powerful than Him.*
 - *You're in great hands. Give in to Him today!*
-

Day 29: IF WORDS COULD KILL

Mark 15:16-32 *The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. ¹⁷ They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. ¹⁸ And they began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" ¹⁹ Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. ²⁰ And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him. The Crucifixion of Jesus ²¹ A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. ²² They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means "the place of the skull"). ²³ Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. ²⁴ And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get. ²⁵ It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. ²⁶ The written notice of the charge against him read: the king of the Jews. ²⁷ They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. ²⁸⁻²⁹ Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, ³⁰ come down from the cross and save yourself!" ³¹ In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! ³² Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.*

Were you ever wrongfully accused of something you did not do? Or humiliated by

family members, classmates or supervisors though you were innocent?
How did you feel? Do these experiences still haunt you today?

Jesus understands how it feels like to undergo verbal abuse. If words could kill, He might have died many times.

After His disciples deserted Him, Jesus was left alone to face the insults and ridicule of men. Soldiers mocked Him insolently (v16-20) and passers-by sneered at Him while He hung on the cross (v29-30). The Jewish religious leaders taunted Him for saving others but not Himself. Even the two robbers crucified alongside Him piled on insults (v31-32).

Jesus was disrespected and mocked by people from all levels of society, from the high and mighty Jewish leaders to the lowly and disgraced criminals. The verbal barbs hurled at Him did not diminish Jesus' resolution to go to the cross for mankind. He even forgave those who hurt Him.

Without a doubt, Jesus could have delivered Himself from the cruel humiliation. He is fully God! Yet for our sake, He chose to die on the cross. For our sake, He received degrading jokes and scathing sarcasm until He breathed His last. He loves us so much that He readily endured all of that.

Jesus' love is constant and unchanging, it does not wane and will not fade. With the same measure of love that brought Him to the cross, Jesus loves you as much today and forever.

- *What emotions or thoughts come to you when you know that Jesus loves you?*
- *In what way is He worthy of your adoration and trust?*
- *The next time you encounter verbal abuse, remember that Jesus understands what you are going through. He chooses to forgive and love those who hurt Him. Will you follow His example?*

Day 30: WHY DID JESUS HAVE TO DIE?

Mark 15:33-47 *At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.*

³⁴ *And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").* ³⁵ *When some of those standing near heard this, they said, "Listen, he's calling Elijah."* ³⁶ *Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink.*

"Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down," he said. ³⁷ *With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.* ³⁸ *The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.*

³⁹ *And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"* ⁴⁰ *Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome.* ⁴¹ *In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.* ⁴² *It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached,* ⁴³ *Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went*

boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. ⁴⁴ Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. ⁴⁵ When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. ⁴⁶ So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. ⁴⁷ Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid.

Hanging on the cross with the sins of all mankind upon Him, Jesus cried out to God. Spurned by the very people He came to save, He drew His last breath and died (v37).

Jesus was determined to save us from sin even though it would literally kill him. Why the need to go to such extreme measures? Why did Jesus have to die?

The answer is righteousness. God is holy and just – He cannot tolerate sin and rightfully punishes those who persist in it. When we sin, we deserve God's anger and are unworthy to have a relationship with Him. Yet out of mercy, God does not want to leave us like that. He wants to cleanse us of sin so that we can be with Him.

Sin is dirty. Just as a single ink blot mars a clean sheet of paper, so sin stains our life. Just as carelessly discarded waste chokes up a drain, so sin pollutes our relationship with God and obstructs our access to Him.

Sin is deadly. Many trivialize sin to a harmless wrongdoing or a joke. However, the Bible says clearly that the consequence of sin is death (*Romans 6:23*). Everyone has sinned (*Romans 3:23*) and thus everyone deserves to die. If that sounds terrible, it is. Sin is a death sentence that none of us can overturn.

Did Jesus do wrong? Not at all. He is completely innocent. However, Jesus loves us so much that He willingly bore the penalty of our sins (*Romans 5:8*). He went to the cross for you and me. He has served our death sentence for us.

God's justice demands a penalty for sin. God's mercy compels Him to send His Son to be the sacrifice that will pay for it once and for all (*Hebrews 10:12-14*). At the cross, God's justice and God's mercy meet.

Through Jesus, we can enjoy a relationship with God. Because of Jesus, God forgives our sins and blesses us with a purposeful life in Christ.

- ***How can you express your gratitude to Jesus for what He has done for you?***
-

Day 31: **THE STRUGGLE IS REAL**

Mark 16 *When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. ² Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb ³ and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" ⁴ But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. ⁵ As they entered*

the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. ⁶ “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’” ⁸ Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid. ⁹ When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. ¹⁰ She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping. ¹¹ When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it. ¹² Afterward Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country. ¹³ These returned and reported it to the rest; but they did not believe them either. ¹⁴ Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen. ¹⁵ He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. ¹⁶ Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. ¹⁷ And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; ¹⁸ they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.” ¹⁹ After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. ²⁰ Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.

If you have been through the demise of a beloved parent or grandparent, or experienced the tragedy of losing a child, you would know that the death of someone you love can bring great grief.

This was probably how the women who followed Jesus felt. They had experienced His power and kindness. They had heard His amazing teachings. They loved Him as their Teacher and Lord. They were crushed by His death.

Three days after Jesus’ crucifixion, the women went to His tomb to prepare His body for a dignified burial. To their shock, they met an empty tomb and a strange being who declared that Jesus was no longer dead. Jesus has risen and is alive!

You would think that the women would be relieved or happy to have Jesus back.

Instead, they ran away and kept quiet, for they were greatly puzzled and afraid (v8). They were not the only ones who struggled to believe that Jesus has risen. Even His disciples rejected the testimonies of those who had seen the resurrected Son of God (v14).

Today, Christians face the same struggle of faith. We may read from the Bible that Jesus is the Son of God. We may sing about Him during services. We may pray in Jesus’ name. We may even be serving Jesus in ministries.

But there will come times when we will struggle to believe. We may be tempted to pursue pleasures and wealth instead of Jesus. We may give in to opposition towards our faith. We may fear death when we are down with dreadful diseases. The struggle of faith is real and can come in many other forms.

When tempted, we may struggle to see the purpose of living for Jesus. When facing opposition, we may forget that Jesus has promised everlasting life to those who are faithful to Him till the end. When battling an illness, we may find it tough to trust that Jesus has already defeated death.

Since we will struggle, let's build our faith strong. Continue to deepen your relationship with Jesus by reading the Bible, listening to the counsel of more mature Christians, spending time with your church family and praying to God.

- ***How else can you prepare yourself for the struggle of faith?***

At the heart of the Christian faith is Christ. When we call ourselves Christians, we are saying that we are a people who believe in and follow Christ.

But how can we believe in and follow a Person we do not know much about? No matter how great the Person is, if we know little about His life – His teachings, works, values and views – we will not be able to follow Him with clarity of mind and conviction in spirit.

The Bible is not just any ordinary book. It contains stories and messages from God that reveal who God is – His character, thoughts and awesome plan for mankind.

Many thanks to Hope Church (Singapore) for permission to use this Daily Devotional
www.hopesingapore.org.sg



