



MCG
Study Guide
The Atonement
March 21st – 27th



Prayer Requests from last MCG gathering...

Wednesday March 21st – Adoption

Reading Galatians 4:1 – 7

“...God sent his Son... that we might receive adoption to sonship.”

The image of adoption gives us a profound insight into what it is that God has done for us. Consider this story:

In August 2009, we got a rather amazing email from my wife's youngest brother, Jon. Six or seven years ago, when Jon and his wife, Lori, were working with a youth group in Nebraska, they met Amanda - a teenage girl the same age as their son, Wesley. Amanda came from a terribly abusive home and was eventually taken from her parents by the state. She has been part of Jon and Lori's family ever since.

After conferring with their two sons, Jon and Lori legally adopted Amanda. She is 22, and her name is now Amanda Foote. She will even get a new birth certificate! Now Jon and Lori have three legal heirs, and Amanda has two new brothers. She no longer has any legal claim upon her former parents, who disowned her - nor they upon her. The process was relatively simple.

They had thought of Amanda as their daughter for a long time, but I asked if anything felt different after that day at the courthouse. Jon said, "Absolutely! When it was official there was a huge change in Lori and me - sort of like when you see your newborn for the first time, and for Amanda, there was a change in her, too. Now she knew she belonged. She knew we were her parents."

The beauty of it all made me offer a word of thanks to the way-clearing of our Elder Brother Jesus, God's Beloved Son. God has given us a new name (his), a new legal standing (we are his responsibility and his heirs) and a new family (brothers and sisters in Christ, and God as our true Father). But God went even further. He gave us something that Jon and Lori can't give Amanda. God gave us his Holy Spirit. In some ways it's like God gives us his DNA. But even more than that, God implants in us his heart, his mind, his passion, his holiness—and people even look at us and say, "My, how you bear a striking resemblance to your Father!"

When Jesus adopted us, He broke from us every tie of our old way of life. We fully belong to God and we owe nothing to anyone who claims otherwise.

Meditation/Application

Are there times when your past comes back to “reclaim” you? Do you sometimes find yourself questioning if you have been truly set free from your past way of life? Bring these things to your Heavenly Father and embrace His assurance that you are truly, securely and forever His!

Reflecting on the reading:

The Greek word for “adoption to sonship” is a legal term referring to the full legal standing of an adopted male heir in Roman culture. Paul uses this term in reference to all Christians, male or female. What are the new “rights” we have as children of God that we did not have before we were adopted?

Prayer Points:

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- Pray for families you know who have adopted or foster children in your neighbourhood
- Pray for further insight into your adoption to sonship

Thursday March 22nd – Temptation

Reading Hebrews 2:14 – 18

“... he himself suffered when he was tempted.”

To be tempted is to suffer. There is a type of pain we must endure when we are tempted; one we will never avoid if we live our lives by the philosophy that says we should avoid pain at all costs and take the road of least resistance.

There is a mistaken notion that some believe, that when we suffer God has abandoned us, but that is simply not true.

Author Eugene Peterson writes:

Suffering is not evidence of God's absence, but of God's presence, and it is in our experience of being broken that God does his surest and most characteristic salvation work.

There is a way to accept, embrace and deal with suffering that results in a better life, not a worse one, and more of the experience of God, not less.

God is working out His salvation in our lives the way He always has, at the place of brokenness, at the cross of Jesus, and at the very place where we take up our cross.¹

Not all suffering is physical, and not all hardship is bad for you. Just as athletes choose the suffering that comes with training in order to obtain the physical benefits, so too, we should consider temptation the means by which we can grow stronger spiritually.

There was a time, prior to our receiving the power of God's Spirit, when we could not resist temptation and win. There was a time when it was

¹ Eugene H. Peterson, adapted from Foreword of Alan E. Nelson, *Embracing Brokenness: How God Refines Us Through Life's Disappointments* (NavPress, 2002)

inevitable that we would follow evil desires and selfish pursuits, but now that God has freed us from Satan's power, we can resist and we can win. Just as lifting ever increasingly heavier weights makes our muscles grow, so continuing to resist temptation - even enduring the suffering that such resistance brings - makes us stronger in our faith and stronger in exercising the power of God in our life.

Meditation/Application

Is there an area in your life where your resistance to sin is causing you to suffer? Where it is hard and painful to endure? Invite a friend who you can confide in, to pray for you.

Reflecting on the reading:

Today's reading talks about how people are "held in slavery by their fear of death." In what ways do we see people in slavery to their fear of death?

Prayer Points:

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- Pray for God to show you a person you can confide in
- MCG Celebration April 10th

Friday March 23rd – Disarming Powers

Reading Colossians 2:13 – 15

And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them..."

Even though Jesus has disarmed the powers and authorities that once held us captive, they can still influence our actions.

When farmer Bruce Grubb saw what he perceived to be a potential threat to the people and animals on his farm, he acted decisively. Only in hindsight did he realize his fears were unfounded.

Police in the area received a frantic call from Grubbs, explaining that there was a tiger on the loose on his property, which he noticed on his way to check on his pregnant cows. "I got the fright of my life," Grubbs said, adding later: "I was worried it was going to eat all my cows before police managed to shoot it."

Grubbs call prompted authorities to send armed officers, also checking in with a local wildlife agency to ensure there had been no recent tiger escapes. After a 45-minute standoff, officers realized that the life-size tiger was, in fact, stuffed. They later returned with the tiger in tow, to be used as a workplace mascot.

Besides enduring some teasing on social media, the farmer took the episode in stride. "I drove up to it with my truck, and that's when I knew it was a toy," said Grubbs. "I feel a bit silly for calling the police, but I thought it was a real emergency."

Police inspector George Gordiner gave a gracious final word: "Our ultimate aim is to protect the public and keep our officers safe when faced with uncertain situations. Until you know exactly what you are dealing with, every option has to be considered ... we appreciate that it was a false call made with genuine good intent."

Just like that stuffed tiger had no power or authority over the farmer, it still had tremendous influence. So too, can Spiritual forces seem more powerful and authoritative than they actually are.

Part of growing as a disciple of Jesus is to believe that these “powers” are no longer able to exercise their power over you. They may strut around and roar as if they are to be feared but the reality is they have been tamed by Jesus.

Meditation/Application

Is there some power that still holds influence over your life: guilt, shame, insecurity? Why not consider going to war against that defeated enemy and getting it off your back or out of your head? Consider reading a book from the church library that addresses your struggle and equip yourself with a better understanding of God’s word so you can fight!

Reflecting on the reading:

According to our reading, what things did God do for us when we were dead in our sins, so that we could be made alive with Christ? Can you think of other things?

Prayer Points:

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- Give thanks for the forgiveness you have experienced from others and Christ
- Pray for the shutins and people experiencing loneliness

Saturday March 24th – First Fruits

Reading 1 Corinthians 15:20 – 28

“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.”

One of the Jewish festivals that took place in the spring was called the Festival of First Fruits. The festival of First Fruits is recorded in Leviticus 23:9 – 11:

The LORD said to Moses, “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest. He is to wave the sheaf before the LORD so it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to wave it on the day after the Sabbath.

The first fruit celebration took place the day after the Sabbath that fell during the Passover celebration. In other words, on the Sunday of the Passover. The Jews would collect a sheaf of barley, which was the first crop to ripen, and it would be given to the high priest who would take it and wave it before the Lord, presenting it to Him. It was an act dedicating all of the harvest that was still to come so that the rest of the harvest would be acceptable to the Lord.

What happened on the Passover Sunday after Jesus was presented as the Passover lamb, whose body was the broken unleavened bread given to feed all who would take of it? He was raised up. Jesus raised from the dead and as God’s High Priest He presented Himself as a first fruit of humanity.

As we just read:

Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the

dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the first fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

Christ is the first fruit of resurrected humanity who was presented before the Father and guaranteed our being accepted by the Father when we are resurrected also. You see, if the first fruits are accepted, then the whole harvest is accepted and we who are in Christ are part of the harvest that, when we die, will be fully accepted by the Father.

Meditation/Application

If Jesus is the first fruit of resurrected humanity, that would mean that the resurrected body He has will be like the resurrected body we'll have. Consider what Jesus' resurrected body was like and allow yourself the thrill of anticipating this coming gift.

Reflecting on the reading:

This passage talks about Jesus' ultimate defeat of dominion, authority, power and death. We understand death, but what do you think is meant by dominion, authority, and power?

Prayer Points:

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- Tomorrow is Palm Sunday. Prepare your heart to gather with others as we celebrate the triumphal entry of Jesus. Maybe bring a story of victory with you.

Sunday March 25th – The Original Superman.

Reading Mark 11:1 – 11

Sermon Notes:

The Christus Victor Theory teaches that Jesus...

- defeated all the _____ that held power over us.
- frees us from Satan's _____ which we gave to him.
- frees us to participate in _____ the powers of evil.
- Overcame evil with _____ love.
- Gives us power to _____ Satan's power.

Meditation/Application

As you think about today's sermon what is one action point that you are taking away?

Prayer Points:

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- Give thanks for those who you have emulated or looked up to as a faith super hero. How might you thank them in a practical way today?
- Hear the stories that are shared in our gathering and pray accordingly.

Monday March 26th – Circumcision

Reading Colossians 2:9 – 12

“In Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands.”

Let’s be honest, the metaphor of circumcision is not one that many people in 21st century Canada talk about freely in church - or for that matter anywhere. Yet this ancient custom was established by God in the Old Testament as a sign and foreshadow of a profound spiritual truth that was to come.

Circumcision illustrates the cutting off of the sinful nature, what the Bible often refers to as “the flesh” or the “carnal nature” or “sinful nature”. It is an illustration of how God cut from us our sinful nature when we were buried with Christ. The image is that of our sinful nature being buried with Jesus as we identify with His death and when Christ is resurrected from the grave, and we with Him, our sin remains in the grave.

And yet why do we still sin?

In a sermon by Nancy Ortberg, she talks about the change that motherhood made in her life. She says:

I knew my life had been invaded by God in a way in which I would never be the same. With the birth of each of my children, there emerged from within me

Flesh

The word flesh has a metaphorical sense when it refers to our disposition to sin and to oppose or omit God in our lives. The flesh is characterized by works that include lusts and passions (Galatians 5:19-24; I John 2:16); it can enslave (Romans 7:25); and in it is nothing good (Romans 7:18). Based on this meaning of the word flesh, to be carnal means to be characterized by things that belong to the unsaved life (Ephesians 2:3).²

² So Great Salvation, Charles Ryrie, Victor Books, 1989, pp. 59-60

this person I had never met, a person whom I liked very much - this loving, caring, nurturing woman, and I watched her, amazed.

There was another transformation that occurred. Another person emerged who was not as attractive, who was frazzled and angry and impatient, and I was in amazement as I watched her. It was a sort of Jekyll and Hyde split - a creature that came out of me who was wonderful, and a creature that I didn't know.³

I once witnessed the beheading of a goat while I was in Nepal. One swift, sure, down thrust from the sword and the head of the goat was severed from its body. The problem was, the goat was trying to bleat, the mouth was opening, the tongue moving, the eyes rolling - the goat was acting out of habit even though it was dead!

The problem with our sinful nature is that while it may be dead, the habits that that nature trained us in, are stubbornly difficult to die. This is why Christian discipleship includes new habits of righteousness which help us to un-learn, and un-practise those sinful, circumscribed ways of living.

Meditation/Application

In Ephesians 4:28 Paul illustrates how righteous habits replace sinful habits when he writes, "Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need." The old habit – stealing - is to be replaced by a new one - doing something useful. Ask yourself what old habits you are still wresting with and then ask God what new habit might replace it.

³ Nancy Ortberg, in her sermon "The Jekyll and Hyde of Motherhood," PreachingToday.com

Reflecting on the reading:

In Verse 10 we read that “in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.” The word “fullness’ carries the meaning of being complete. What do you think this means practically, for us as Christians?

Prayer Points:

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- Thursday evening we will pray online together. Consider calling or going on your computer to www.freeconference.com and entering access code 8051842. It is a simple way to gather.
- Pray for those taking the membership and baptism classes at NBBC this season

Tuesday March 27th – First Born

Reading Colossians 1:15 – 19

“The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.”

What was Paul getting at when he calls Jesus “firstborn.”? Perhaps you’ve read the book *The New Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are*, by Dr. Kevin Leman (available in our church library). Leman, a psychologist, argues that our birth order, in part, determines our personality traits.

Perhaps you would agree to these observations:

As the leader of the pack, firstborns often tend to be: reliable, conscientious, structured, cautious, controlling, achievers.

The middle child often feels left out and a sense of, “Well, I’m not the oldest. I’m not the youngest. Who am I?” In general, middle children tend to possess the following characteristics: people-pleasers, somewhat rebellious, thrives on friendships, has large social circle, peacemaker.

Youngest children tend to be the most free-spirited due to their parents’ increasingly laissez-faire attitude towards parenting the second (or third, or fourth, or fifth...) time around. The baby of the family tends to be: fun-loving, uncomplicated, manipulative, outgoing, attention-seeker, self-centered.

I doubt Paul had this in mind, so what did he have in mind?

There are some who misunderstand the term “firstborn” to suggest that Jesus was the first created being. We may tend to think that firstborn means the first in time, the first in line which many others will join. If this were so, then Paul would be talking of Jesus as one who was created by God, prior to the rest of us. This of course is fallacy because, as God, Jesus was and is eternal. So why does Paul use this term?

The word is rich in meaning. In biblical times the word meant “first in rank” or “preeminent”. To be called “firstborn” was to be given a title of honour. This is why God calls Israel as a nation, His firstborn son.⁴ King David was actually the last-born son of Jesse, yet he was called “firstborn” because he was the preeminent son.⁵ Christ is preeminent because He is Creator.⁶

In Judaism the firstborn in a family held a place of honour and enjoyed a very special relationship with the father and would assume the right of inheritance.

Furthermore, we are told that he was firstborn over all creation not in all creation. In other words, among everything that exists He is preeminent over and above it all.

But among the Hebrews in the Old Testament period, the first of all the flocks and crops were offered in sacrifice. It was a representative offering indicating that all the flocks and crops were God’s. In a family, the firstborn male was offered for the priesthood.⁷

One who is honoured, preeminent, who holds a special relationship with the father. Heir of all the father owns. One who is to be a priest and a representative sacrifice. That’s a pretty rich meaning to one small word.

Preparing for your MCG

As you come for you MCG be prepared to share:

- **POTLUCK:** Be mindful about a story you might share regarding the importance of MCG regular group meeting together. (ie. What it means to you, or how the group has seen God work through them or in them)

⁴ See Exodus 4:22

⁵ See Psalm 89:27.

⁶ Geisler, Norman L. and Rhodes, Ron. *When Cultists Ask*. 1997.

⁷ Kauffman, Donald T. *The Dictionary of Religious Terms*.

- STUDY: Share from your time of Meditation/Application from each day study. What from chapter 5 of Daniel made an impression on you or what confused you.
- PRAYER WALK/ACTIVITY: be creative and intentional as you pray/work together.

Prayer Request:

Record the prayer requests that are shared at your MCG to inform your prayers this coming week.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Missional Community Group (MCG) Covenant

We desire to grow as followers of Jesus who represent Him and His Kingdom well in all of our life. We recognize that God's plan is for us to grow in and through relationships with other like-minded disciples. As those who identify as neighbourhood missionaries we enter into this covenant so that we might be transformed by God's grace and that together we might be transforming agents in our neighbourhood.

To this end, this year, we therefore covenant to:

- Meet regularly for weekly encouragement, accountability, and fellowship in our Missional Community Group and corporately with all of NBBC.
- Seek to grow in likeness to Jesus by engaging in NBBC MCG's shared practices.
- Nurture loving relationships within our Missional Community, accepting others as Christ has accepted us.
- Faithfully steward the resources that God has given us: time, abilities, resources and energy.
- Together discern where God is at work and join Him in His mission to bring the Kingdom of God to our neighbourhood.

In all that we covenant, we recognize that we are dependant upon the grace of God to enable us and so we joyfully enter this covenant in hope of what He might do in and through us.

Missional Community Group Shared Practices

1. Daily engage in reading Scripture and pray for God to bless NBBC in its missional calling.
2. Weekly purposely and intentionally bless another person.
3. Monthly practise table fellowship with someone in your Missional Community.
4. Respond to the Spirit's prompting as you sense Him leading and directing.
5. Share with others the stories of what God is doing in your life as opportunities arise.