



MCG

Study Guide

The Gospel According to Mark

Chapters 1 - 4

October 10 – November 6

Introduction to Mark

The book of Mark was written by John Mark who we read about accompanying Paul and Barnabas in Acts 12:25. In I Peter 5:13 we find that he was a dear friend of the apostle Peter. In fact, it is believed that Mark got much of his information from the apostle Peter since there are details in it that only Peter would have known.

It is written in the 60s A.D. when the Roman persecution of the Christians was taking place. It is clear that Mark's audience is not Jewish but likely Roman as he uses very few Old Testament quotes, he explains Jewish words and customs to the readers, and uses many Latin terms, which would have been the native tongue of Rome.

The book talks a lot about suffering and serving, and was meant to encourage the believers in Rome to remain faithful in the face of persecution.

A very simplistic way of dividing the book would be:

- 1 – 13 Jesus, the servant - His work.
- 14 – 16 Jesus, the servant, His death.

If we were to try and describe Mark from his writing we get the sense of an excited, hyper school boy. Mark's Gospel hardly has any of Jesus's discourses and teaching, but it is full of telling what Jesus did. It is a very action-oriented book, and as Mark writes, you can't help but sense the energy, as on almost every page he uses the word "immediately". Of the 16 chapters, 12 of them start with the word "And". Mark's Gospel is full of words which are emphatic in their tone. People are always amazed or astonished, and he is constantly adding small details to help emphasize and illustrate what happened. For instance when he tells of the women going to the tomb he writes:

- Very early on the first day of the week, *just after sunrise*, they were on their way to the tomb.
- But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, *which was very large*, had been rolled away.

Have you ever heard an excited child tell a story and they can barely find the words to keep up with their enthusiasm? “I went to the store for my mom to buy some milk, 2% not homo ‘cause we don’t like that. And she gave me some money, not a lot of money but a little more than it cost, and told me I could get candy too and I decided to put on my new running shoes because they make me go so fast and I ran all the way to the store...” This reminds me of Mark’s energy and enthusiasm.

The challenge that Mark throws down to his readers is one which had them wrestle with Jesus’ identity..... who was Jesus? What conclusion do you come to? What do His actions tell us about who He is? All through the book of Mark you will notice that the identity of Jesus is being discussed and debated. Mark challenges the readers to account for Jesus’ authority over sickness, over the demonic, over the hearts of people, over nature and to come to a conclusion of His identity.

Over the next seven weeks we’ll be studying The Gospel according to Mark. We will take a break over Advent and Christmas and then come back to finish our study of this delightful Gospel in the New Year.

Prayer Request:

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

- _____
- _____
- _____
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Wednesday October 10th – Confession

(By NBBC's Blair Clark)

Reading Mark 1:1 – 13

"...all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins..."

It is a longstanding truism that confession is good for the soul. King David affirms this in Psalms 32 and 51. After finally confessing his sinful relationship with Bathsheba, he states how the heaviness of his guilt was lifted, and joy in the Lord was restored to him.

Today however, confession has become a much-debated subject. At the heart of confession is an admission of guilt. Some of the recent high-profile confessions would be Lance Armstrong's confession on the Oprah Winfrey show. He admitted that after years of emphatic denial, he did in fact use performance enhancing drugs to win his seven Tour de France victories (he was unceremoniously stripped of those titles following his confession). There was Tiger Woods tearful, televised 14-minute confession in 2010 that he had repeatedly cheated on his wife. Then there was actor Hugh Grant's confession to Jay Leno on the Tonight Show in 1995 that he had solicited prostitutes in Los Angeles and been arrested for it.

In each of these instances, there was acknowledgment of guilt, but each of these highly public confessions was followed by public humiliation, ostracism, and lots of debate over the sincerity of the confession. Among the fans of each celebrity, there were some who extended forgiveness, but many more who didn't. For most detached observers, though, these confessions just led to a heightened sense of skepticism and distrust

In stark contrast to King David is President Donald Trump, whose public response to the accusations and evidence of his affairs with Stormy Daniels and Playmate Karen McDougal is to deny, deny, deny. This is what he has advised others to do as well when they have been accused of wrong behaviour. The temptation to deny is certainly not unique to

people of influence – most two-year-olds have tried it when confronted with something that they have done that they were told not to do.

The confession that God demands of us is different. While it requires admission of guilt, its sincerity is always known to God, because He knows our hearts and our thoughts. We cannot manipulate or fool God. The test of our sincerity, both for God and for those around us who may be aware of our sin and our confession, is found in our repentance, the change in our behaviour. When confession and repentance are genuine, they are followed by forgiveness and cleansing, as so eloquently expressed by King David in Psalm 51. While the primary object of our confession is God, at times Scripture also commends confession to one another as beneficial (James 5:16), in that it can develop humility and provide accountability that will help us to avoid that sin in the future. True confession is both humbling and liberating and is definitely good for one's soul.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Take some time to examine your own heart. Is there anything in your life you need to confess and repent of before God?

Why do you think we find it so hard to confess our sins?

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Matthew 12:1-21
- Acts 17:1-15

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalms 27
- Exodus 10-12

Questions about your reading? Jot them down here to discuss with our MCG:

Prayer Points:

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

- There is a memorial today for Rosie Gill, please pray for the family as they celebrate her life.
- Pray for those who are feeling the loss of a loved one.

Thursday October 11th – Repentance

(By NBBC's Veronika Bankuti)

Reading Mark 1:14 – 20

“Repent and believe the good news!”

John the Baptist came to prepare the way for Christ. What does this mean?

Before a royal visit, long months are spent in preparation; making sure the roads are smooth, the streets are swept, cleaned and decorated. Members of the extensive security detail are trained, practised and put in place, the buildings are sanded down, the red carpet is laid out and a welcoming committee lined up, consisting of the Governor General, Prime minister, the Premier, the Mayor - leaders of the country and city.

Jesus, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords was ushering in a different Kingdom, which needed a very different kind of preparation; the hearts of the people needed to be made ready. This is not a job for city crews and police chiefs and it cannot be done legislatively. This preparation can only be done by the people themselves. “Confess your sins and repent”. Two short, simple words - two incredibly tough assignments.

Human nature in its fallen state, is extremely skilled at turning a blind eye to those parts in us we do not wish to see or be seen. As long as we do not look in the mirror we can pretend not to know about our unruly hair or the spinach between our teeth. We are called to confession and repentance - in that order. To fulfill this assignment, we need to intentionally think about our attitudes, actions, and behaviour. First, we need to first line up those things that we know are wrong and confess them to God... but confession is only the first step. It is like the Ten Commandments - it sheds the light of God on our shortcomings.

After we do the hard work of confessing, we now need to make a decision about those sins; are we willing to forsake them and turn from them? Are we willing to repent? Repentance literally means turning

away and changing direction. It is a radical step. We have to stop walking north and begin to walk south.

One good way to find out if we repented of a sin is to keep score of how often we confess the same thing. If our confession is the same every week, it is a pretty reliable indicator that we have not repented. At this point we do another very clever thing; we rationalize. We find a way to justify our failure to repent, and come up with very good arguments to prove that what we repeatedly confess, but continue to do, is not really that bad. God is not fooled! His justice is perfect. No one escapes God's justice on a technicality.

Jesus brought the Kingdom of God near. He invites us to enter and sends John the Baptist to tell us how to do it. Repent and believe. Acknowledge your sins by confessing them and show your repentance by walking away from them, by changing direction. The road you are now walking on is inside the Kingdom. Are you on the right road?

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Is there an area in your life of which you need to repent? Repentance often requires planning. If there are areas of repentance that you need to make in your life, don't simply say the words "I repent" make a plan of how things will change.

If someone were to repent of prayerlessness, what kind of planning would need to be made?

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Matthew 12:22-37
- Acts 17:16-34

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 28
- Exodus 13-15

Questions about your reading? Jot them down here to discuss with our MCG:

Prayer Points:

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

- ESL classes run on Thursday mornings in the Fireside Room. Pray for those who are meeting the needs of the students and the students themselves as they learn.

Friday October 12th – Spiritual Authority

(By NBBC's student intern Ben Froese)

Reading Mark1:21 – 28

A new teaching – and with authority.

All of us have heard advice and guidance from others. Some of the time we may have responded with openness and gratitude. Other times we may have responded by saying (or at least thinking of saying) something like, “Who are you to tell me that?”

Our openness to receiving advice or guidance from another person often depends on who that person is. We wonder about questions like “Does this person really know what they’re talking about?” and “Does this person really have my best interests at heart?”

In verse 22 of this passage we read that “the people were amazed at [Jesus’] teaching, because he taught them as one with authority, not as the teachers of the law.” Unlike the rabbis of Jesus’ day, Jesus taught with a clear sense of personal authority, and he taught in this way because he was and is “the Holy One of God” (v. 24) and, as we discover in other passages of Scripture, Jesus is *God himself*. He’s not just another teacher.

Jesus’ authority is far superior to any other person or “authority” who has ever walked on this earth. Of course there are many other people from whom we can learn a lot, and many sources of great information. As a student who has written a lot of papers in the past few years, I personally have had to learn what sources are appropriate and which ones aren’t. If an article is written by an expert on the particular topic I’m studying, then that source could be especially helpful, but when it comes to the ultimate questions about God, spirituality, and morality, Jesus Christ should be our go-to source.

Who is Jesus to tell us how to live our lives? He is the One with all authority. He’s the one who created us, who knows how life works best,

and who is Lord over all. Not only this, but we know he also has our best interests at heart, as we see his love for us displayed on the cross.

C.S. Lewis wrote, “A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a liar, a lunatic... or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse... but let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”¹

So as we read the words of Jesus, let’s keep in mind that when Jesus speaks, the one speaking is the one with all authority. Let’s be open to what he wants to speak into our personal lives.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Are there certain commands of Jesus that you find particularly difficult to follow? Why do you think this is so?

Knowing that Jesus has all authority may make us feel intimidated or uneasy as we read his words. How might it change our perspective when we remind ourselves that he is also the One who loved us to the point of death?

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Matthew 12:38-50

Acts 18:1-17

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 29

Exodus 16-18

Questions about your reading? Jot them down here to discuss with our MCG:

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (HarperCollins, 2001 [originally published 1952]), p. 52.

Prayer Points:

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

- Chill Out Group meets today, a group for kids struggling with anxiety. Pray for the young ones in our communities who are already facing a life where they struggle to find peace.

Saturday October 13th – Healing

Reading Mark 1:29 – 34

“So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her...”

When I read these stories of Jesus healing, I can't help but be in awe at how easy he makes it look, how nonchalant He is. This is not my experience of life. Jesus is calm, I'm often frantic. Jesus is certain, I'm often doubtful. Jesus always sees healing, I seldom do.

Healing is one of the things we have been commanded to do but are totally dependent upon God to perform. We cannot lean upon our education. There are no apps to heal. We are not necessarily more successful if we gather a large group to help and support us. Healing reveals our true poverty of spirit and our desperate need of God.

With the history of the church, evidence of miraculous signs and healing have existed like a rivulet cutting through a forest. Consider this report from Irenaeus (140 - 203) during the patristic era: “For some do certainly and truly drive out devils, so that those who have thus been cleansed from evil spirits frequently join themselves to the Church. Others have foreknowledge of things to come: they see visions, and utter prophetic expressions. Others still, heal the sick by laying their hands upon them, and they are made whole. Yea, moreover, as I have said, the dead even have been raised up, and remained among us for many years.”

Other examples could be produced from the Medieval Era (600 - 1500), the Reformation and Modern Era (1500 - 1900) as well as the 20th and 21st centuries. Yet, healing remains to be the exception.

Joni Eareckson Tada, paralyzed from the neck down in a swimming accident at age 18, wrote about her experiences in a best-selling book. Afterward, she received many calls and letters telling her that God had both the power and the desire to heal her. She became convinced of it and, in a little oak chapel near her home, several elders and ordained

ministers anointed her head with oil and offered fervent, believing prayers for her healing. She fully expected God to heal her.

“A week went by,” she later wrote, “then another, then another. My body still hadn’t gotten the message that I was healed. Fingers and toes still didn’t respond to the mental command...”

“You can imagine the questions that began popping into my mind. Is there some sin in my life? Had we done things right? Did I have enough faith?”

Joni spent the next six years searching the Bible for answers about divine healing, finally coming to this conclusion:

“God certainly can, and sometimes does, heal people in a miraculous way today, but the Bible does not teach that He will always heal those who come to Him in faith. He sovereignly reserves the right to heal or not to heal as He sees fit.”

Joni continues, “From time to time God, in His mercy, may grant us healing from disease as a gracious glimpse, a ‘sneak preview’ of what is to come. It is my opinion that He sometimes does, but, in view of the fact that the Kingdom has not yet come in its fullness, we are not to automatically expect it.”²

Meditation/Application/Reflection

If God doesn’t always heal, should we continue to pray for healing? Why or why not?

Have you ever witnessed or been part of a healing?

² Joni Eareckson and Steve Estes, *A Step Further* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 123 – 133.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Matthew 13:1-23

Acts 18:18-28

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalms 30

Exodus 19-20

Questions about your reading? Jot them down here to discuss with our MCG:

Prayer Points:

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

- Bright Corner takes place this morning. Let's pray for those who are struggling to make ends meet. Let's also pray for the group of servants who are faithful to meet these needs.
- Pray for those are needing physical healing.

Sunday October 14th – The Gospel According to Mark: Chapter One

Reading Mark 1

Sermon Notes:

Meditation/Application/Reflection

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

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Matthew 13:24-43

Acts 19:1-22

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 31

Exodus 21-23

Questions about your reading? Jot them down here to discuss with our MCG:

Prayer Points:

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

- Junior Alternative meets during our gathering today. Pray for this group of Grade 6-8s that they would continue to walk close to their Heavenly Father.

Monday October 15th – The Priority of Prayer

Reading Mark 1:35 – 39

“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.”

Growing up, my all-time favourite superhero was - and still is today - Superman. I loved the Superman movies starring Christopher Reeve and much like the 1977 movie poster, I too, ‘believed a man could fly.’ It started when my dad showed me his 1992 comic, “The Death of Superman.” In this comic and many like it, one of the more popular associations with the character of Superman is his ‘Fortress of Solitude’. This is the place where he would go to consult with his biological father during moments of necessity, crisis, or celebration.

The older I got, the more I associated Superman’s ‘Fortress of Solitude’ with that of how Jesus consulted with his Father in heaven. The same can be said when we go to God in prayer. Today, as we explore more of Mark’s gospel, we find one of many examples where Christ would find solitude to speak with his Father. Through these experiences, it behooves the readers of the New Testament to adopt a similar posture.

Commentators on the book of Mark suggest there is a literary sequence of events taking place between Mark 1:35-39. Jesus, now established as a healer and teacher, gets up in the cool of the morning to pray, in solitude.³ Scholars suggest that his intention to pray was to express some grievances of people’s shallow and superficial response to who Jesus was as a person and why he came to earth. Where people should be more invested into restoration of their soul, instead they focused on the physical restoration - which was not Jesus’ primary mission. Therefore, he sought solitary supplication with his Father in Heaven.

Early in the text, we see Jesus’ disciples coming to find him. The disciples clearly had a misunderstanding of values, as they interrupted Jesus from his time in solitude, not comprehending his necessity to be

³ Expositor’s Bible Commentary, *Mark*, 629.

alone in prayer. Finally, the passage concludes with Jesus approaching his disciples with announcement that he, along with his disciples, will travel to the next town to continue ministering.

Jesus' job was incredibly important, and quite burdensome at times. I consider the words of Martin Luther who once said, "I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer." Jesus' example should serve as a reminder of the necessity for solitude where we can go to God in prayer. Adopting this posture denotes our commitment, not only to God, who deserves it, but to the mission He invites us to join. For many, this moment of solitude might be beside our bed before we go to sleep. Others might find solitude in their car on the way to work. Regardless of the venue, do not neglect the benefits of being one-on-one with God.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Share with your MCG when your preferred time for prayer is.

Do you find that your prayer time often cuts into other things you need to do or that other things cut into your prayer time? What do you think should be the priority and, if it's not, how might that be changed?

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Matthew 13:44-58

Acts 19:23-41

Read through the Old Testament Psalm 32

Exodus 24-26

Questions about your reading? Jot them down here to discuss with our MCG:

Prayer Points:

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

- Pray for the neighbour who lives to the right of you.
- Pray for the Jr High Drop In that happens today from 3:30-5:30pm.

Tuesday October 16th – The Willingness of Jesus

(By NBBC's Bob Wilkins)

Reading Mark 1:40 – 45

“I am willing,’ he said.”

This passage is the record of Jesus healing a leprous man of his disease. What is remarkable about this healing is that Jesus even agrees to do it. Modern day leprosy is also known as Hansen’s disease and is a long-term infection by the *bacterium Mycobacterium leprae* or *Mycobacterium lepromatosis*⁴. Apparently, it is contagious but not excessively so. Today, it can also be cured by a multidrug therapy treatment. However, the effects of the disease are usually permanent.

In Jesus’ day, and for most of human history, there has been a social stigma associated with leprosy. Those who had it were separated from society and were regarded as socially and spiritually unclean. In the Old Testament,⁵ there were elaborate rituals regarding leprosy, and those who had it could not participate in religious rituals or spiritual feasts. It is highly unlikely that much of what was referred to as leprosy in the Old Testament was equivalent to modern day Hansen’s disease. Nevertheless those who were regarded to have leprosy were not to be associated with, and certainly were not to be touched for they were “unclean,” and were often placed in leper colonies. It is this ritual “uncleanness” that provides the context for Jesus healing the leper in Mark 1.

Certainly, Jesus healed many other lepers during his earthly ministry, although there are only two such healings recorded in the Gospels.⁶ Also, there is mention of Jesus staying in the home of “Simon the Leper.” It is highly likely that Jesus had healed him of his leprosy and he was forever known after that as “Simon the Leper.” Further more, when the disciples of John the Baptist were sent to find out whether

⁴ Leprosy Fact sheet No 101. World Health Organization. January 2014.

⁵ Leviticus 13-14 KJV

⁶ Mark 1:40-45; Matthew 8:2-3; Luke 5:12-13; and Luke 17:11-19.

Jesus was in fact the Messiah, Jesus' reply to them was, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor."⁷

So when the leper himself asks Jesus, "If you are willing, you can make me clean," he had no doubt that Jesus could heal him either through witnessing or hearing of other such healings. Also, when Jesus says, "I am willing," this was not something new for him, but the remarkable thing is that by touching him and saying, "Be clean," he is going against every social norm and practice. Lepers were the "untouchables" and the stigmatized of society.

It is of note that when Jesus sent his disciples out on their "practice mission" that in his commission of them he said, "As you preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons." Jesus sent his disciples out on the exact same mission that he came to fulfil.⁸

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Matthew 14:1-21

Acts 20:1-12

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 33

Exodus 27-29

Questions about your reading? Jot them down here to discuss with our MCG:

⁷ Matthew 11:5.

⁸ Matthew 10:7-8

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)
- STUDY: Share from your time of Meditation/Application from each day's study. What from your Bible reading made an impression on you or what confused you?
- PRAYER WALK/ACTIVITY: be creative and intentional as you pray/work together.

Wednesday October 17th – Bringing Others to Jesus

Reading Mark 2:1 – 5

“Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them.”

As the narrative begins in Mark 2, Jesus had been travelling away from the comforts of a home as he journeyed around Galilee. He had only recently arrived home in Capernaum and the community got wind of his arrival. It didn't take long before the home where Jesus was staying - Peter and Andrew's home - was surrounded by crowds so large they couldn't even reach the threshold of the front door. With everyone assembled, Jesus began teaching the Gospel.

Archeologists and Biblical scholars tell us that most houses were no doubt small, most would only have one room and had a flat roof. To gain access to the roof, there would be a staircase on the outside of the house.

We are told that four men came carrying a paraplegic man to the house where Jesus was teaching. Knowing they couldn't get to him through the house, they dug a hole through the roof. These men showed a great amount of faith in bringing the lame man to Jesus. The paralytic man trusted not only in the ability of Jesus to heal him physically, but he also had great trust in the four men who would take him to the source of healing.

We are unaware of the names of each of the four men who brought the man to Jesus. What we do know of these men is that they had earned the trust of their paraplegic friend; they loved him enough to take him to Jesus; they thought him worthy enough to take the risk of tearing up another person's roof in order to bring him to Jesus.

It seems to me that these are the same qualities that we will need to exhibit to bring our friends and loved ones to Jesus: trustworthiness, love and risk.

The famous evangelist D.L. Moody once said, “If you can really make a man believe you love him, you have won him; and if I could only make people really believe that God loves them, what a rush we would see for the kingdom of God!”⁹

When we bring God’s love to people through our lives, we can bring people to God’s loving gift to them. First, love them and then we can bring them.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Take time to pray for those God has called you to love, who have yet to meet Jesus.

Think of a time when you took a risk to share God’s love with another. How might you follow up?

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Matthew 14:22-36

Acts 20:13-38

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 34

Exodus 0-31

Questions about your reading? Jot them down here to discuss with our MCG:

⁹ D.L. Moody, Christian History, no. 25.

Prayer Points:

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

- Kids Club continues tonight. Please pray for the many kids who attend, may they find a place where they know love and acceptance.
- Pray for the group of leaders who serve at Kids Club every week.

Thursday October 18th – Mind Your Thoughts

(By NBBC's Blair Clark)

Reading Mark 2:6 – 12

“Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts...”

Most of us who are married, at one time or another after a communication failure with our spouse, have in frustration declared, “I’m not a mind reader!” Unlike us, though, God is a mind reader. The Psalmist wrote, “You discern my thoughts from afar” (Psalm 139:2). Through the prophet Ezekiel God declared to Israel, “I know what is going through your mind” (Ezekiel 11:5) and on judgment day, even our thoughts will be exposed and judged by God (Luke 8:17, Romans 2:16).

In spite of this knowledge though, most of us struggle to take this truth seriously. We know that someone may hear what we say, and so we exercise caution. I may be thinking “What an idiot”, but I am not likely to say it out loud. Likewise, we know that someone may see what we do, so again we make ourselves exercise restraint in our actions. The thought of being seen or heard by someone is a powerful deterrent for us but when it comes to our thought life, we have no such human experience of someone ‘reading our mind’, so we treat it as though it is our private domain, unknown to anyone but ourselves. This way, we can allow ourselves to entertain all kinds of nasty, vulgar or despicable thoughts about others.

King Solomon wrote in Proverbs, “As a person thinks within him/herself, so is he/she.” (Proverbs 23:7, NASB). Jesus explained to his disciples in one teaching session why they needed to guard their hearts and their thoughts. “But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these defile you. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what defile you.” (Matthew 15:18-20)

If we want to live Godly lives, taking every thought captive for Christ, then we need to heed Paul’s advice. “Finally, brothers and sisters,

whatever is true, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things." (Philippians 4:8) We do this for two reasons. First, because our thoughts eventually impact our behaviour; and second, because God knows even our thoughts - nothing is hidden from Him!

Meditation/Application/Reflection

What do you think our world would be like if everyone could hear everyone else's thoughts?

It is not necessarily the presence of a thought that is sinful but the dwelling on a thought that leads us into sin. Ask God to reveal those thoughts that you may be dwelling on that He wants you to stop.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Matthew 15:1-20

Acts 21:1-26

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 35

Exodus 32-33

Questions about your reading? Jot them down here to discuss with our MCG:

Prayer Points:

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

- Pray for the Board, Elders and Council leaders who meet tonight to cast vision, care for and lead our church.
- Pray for the staff and their families.

Friday October 19th – Eating with

(By NBBC's student intern, Ben Wimmers)

Reading Mark 2:13 – 17

“...many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples...”

As with many stories in the Gospels, we see a sharp contrast drawn between Jesus and the Pharisees. In this passage, the difference is in the company they keep. Jesus has just called Levi, the tax collector, to follow him and is dining in his house with other tax collectors and sinners. The Pharisees couldn't wrap their brains around a teacher of the law like Jesus eating with the scum of society.

Now, the Pharisees did not believe that they were without sin. They kept the law better than most and made all the necessary sacrifices. Amidst all this law-keeping, the Pharisees missed the heart of God.

Jesus reaches out to the sinners and tax collectors. He spends time with them, enters their homes and learns their names. Importantly, the sinners Jesus ate with heard his message and desired to know more. They wanted to be in his presence and learn. They recognized their need for Jesus. The Pharisees needed Jesus too, but they did not realize it. Instead they put up a wall between the life of Jesus and their understanding of how to be right with God. To draw closer to God, the Pharisees alienated themselves from the people they were supposed to minister to, and ultimately missed the Messiah they had been waiting for.

I often reflect on how this might look today. Have the churches we built and worship in created an invisible divide between us and those that have yet to experience Jesus? Are we waiting for the “sinner” to come to us when they realize they need Jesus? It would better reflect the ministry of Jesus to go out into our communities and demonstrate Christ in action. Jesus has already shown us an excellent way to reach out to people - through food.

Think of your favourite food. Steak perhaps. Or Thai green curry. Or ice cream. Or homemade apple pie. God could have just made fuel. He could have made us to be sustained by some kind of savoury biscuit. Instead he gave a vast and wonderful array to choose from.

Food is a central experience of God's goodness The world is more delicious than it needs to be. We have a superabundance of divine goodness and generosity. God went over the top. We don't need the variety we enjoy, but he gave it to us out of sheer exuberant joy and grace.¹⁰

Perhaps he did this so that we might enjoy the varieties of his goodness with a variety of other people.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Is there a person (or people) that you could invite into your home, to share a meal with? Talk over your calendar and plan to share a meal with someone this month.

Get to know their story and share yours, highlighting the way God works in your life.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Matthew 15:21-39

Acts 21:27-40

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 36

Exodus 34

Questions about your reading? Jot them down here to discuss with our MCG:

¹⁰ Tim Chester, *A Meal with Jesus* (Crossway, 2011), pp. 67-68

Prayer Points:

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

- Pray for our pastoral staff as they set aside the day to meet together for discernment, connection and vision.

Saturday October 20th – Fasting

(By NBBC's Bob Wilkins)

Reading Mark 2:18 – 20

“...on that day they will fast.”

The practice of fasting was an important religious observance for the Pharisees of Jesus' day. The Old Testament law only prescribed fasting once a year on the Day of Atonement¹¹, but at the time of Christ the Pharisees had prescribed fasting as a practice to be done twice a week!¹² John the Baptist's disciples also continued this very rigid schedule of fasting, but Jesus and his disciples did not adhere to such a rigid format. When Jesus is challenged on this he uses the illustration of a wedding (vv. 19-20). A wedding is no time for fasting. As Alan Cole says in his commentary, “Fasting is, in the Bible, either a sign of disaster or of voluntary abasement of the spirit.”¹³ Jesus' presence and time of ministry is likened to the presence of the bridegroom at the time of a wedding. Feasting, not fasting is the order of the day. There will be an appropriate time for fasting when the bridegroom is taken away - no doubt a reference to Christ's death.

The point, of course, is that fasting was never intended to be a rigid law, although Jesus did expect his disciples to fast at times. There are times when it is appropriate - especially times of crisis and sorrow, times for concerted prayer and self denial - but never to be followed as a law.

For us the challenge to our religious practices may be different. It may not be about fasting, but about other things that we have elevated to rigid tradition that we are willing to go to the wall for, like: worship style and times of worship, established programs, constitutional matters, lifestyle issues such as moderate drinking, movies, dancing, etc. It is so

¹¹ Leviticus 16:29

¹² Luke 18:12

¹³ R. A. Cole, *The Gospel of St. Mark*. Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1961, p. 71

easy to turn some of these things into rigid rules that we impose on others.

I find it interesting that John's disciples are mentioned here as an identifiable group. By this time John was either in prison or already beheaded by Herod the king¹⁴, but his disciples persisted even after the resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵ The goal of John was to decrease¹⁶ and to point even his own followers to Jesus and not to establish an ongoing institution on his own behalf. There were some of his disciples however, who wanted to hang on to the traditions as the Pharisees did. However, the coming of Jesus disturbed all of the stuff they felt was important. Jesus will do the same for us and will help us to understand that things like fasting, while they may have their own importance, must never be the priority. The important thing is that we do not seek to maintain our own agenda and traditions, but to make sure we are behind his agenda. Fasting has its place. Sometimes it is appropriate and sometimes it is not.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

What are some of the secondary things that we have turned into a law? What can we do to avoid the trap of legalism in our personal lives and in the life of our church?

¹⁴ Mark 6

¹⁵ Acts 19:1-7

¹⁶ John 3:30

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Matthew 16:1-12

Acts 22

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 37:1-22

Exodus 35-37

Questions about your reading? Jot them down here to discuss with our MCG:

Prayer Points:

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

- Invincible Girls meets today. Pray for the young girls in our church as they develop a sense of self-worth and who they are in Christ.
- Pray for Shari and her team as they continue to launch Family Matters Centre.

Sunday October 21st – The Gospel According to Mark: Chapter Two

Reading Mark 2

Sermon Notes:

Meditation/Application/Reflection

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

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Matthew 16:13-28

Acts 23:1-11

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 37:23-40

Exodus 38-40

Questions about your reading? Jot them down here to discuss with our MCG:

Prayer Points:

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

- Sr. Youth gather tonight, pray for these students as they navigate high school and the many challenges it can bring.
- Pray for those who may enter into our gathering today for the first time.

Monday October 22nd – New Wineskins

(By NBBC's Veronika Bankuti)

Reading Mark 2:21 – 22

"...no one pours new wine into old wineskins."

What is the wineskin that Jesus is speaking about? There are two ways in which this statement can be understood, and it is possible that He had both of them in mind.

The first is the old wineskin of Judaism, the rituals of animal sacrifice, the festivals, the codes and dietary laws. The life of the Spirit could never be contained in the restrictive straight-jacket of the Old Testament's religious system.

Jesus disrupted all of the rituals and traditions the Pharisees grew up in and strictly maintained in the temple as well as taught to all their disciples and followers. He nullified dietary rules by stating that nothing going into you can defile you, but what is already in you will defile you. Strict Sabbath observance has been disrupted when Jesus demonstrated that doing good to your fellow humans who need your help is always appropriate, because the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.

However, Jesus also brought a very radical and unpopular message; your hearts are desperately sick and there is no cure. Nothing less than radical surgery will do! You need a heart transplant. Your old, sick heart cannot receive and contain the message of the Kingdom. In fact, unless and until you receive a new heart, you are unable to understand His message, and of course, for the final blow to the old system: there is nothing you can do to receive this new heart. It is the work of the Holy Spirit. "That is why I said that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I Am who I claim to be, you will die in your sins."¹⁷ The radical message is: your outward, very religious, pious behaviour is meaningless, because your heart is not right!

¹⁷¹⁷ John 8:24 New Living Translation

Despite what many think, “The world is more religious than it has ever been. Around the globe, four out of every five people claim to belong to an organized faith, and many of the rest say they attend worship services. In Latin America, Pentecostal Protestant churches have converted tens of millions, and Catholics are going to Mass in unprecedented numbers. There are more churchgoing Christians in Sub-Saharan Africa than anywhere else on earth, and China may soon become home of the most Christians. Meanwhile, although not growing as rapidly as Christianity, Islam enjoys far higher levels of member commitment than it has for many centuries, and the same is true for Hinduism. In fact, of all the great world religions, only Buddhism may not be growing. Furthermore, in every nook and cranny left by organized faiths, all manner of unconventional and unchurched supernaturalisms are booming: there are more occult healers than medical doctors in Russia; 38 percent of the French believe in astrology; 35 percent of the Swiss agree that “some fortune tellers really can foresee the future,” and nearly everyone in Japan is careful to have a new car blessed by a Shinto priest.”¹⁸

Old religious hearts must also be changed. We need new hearts if we are to contain the effervescence of the Spirit of God, and this change of heart is what Jesus offers - a new wineskin to be filled with the new wine of His Spirit.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Why do you think so much of the world gravitates to religion?

Do you think that religion is always in opposition to the work of the Spirit? Why or why not?

¹⁸ Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Faith* (Intercollegiate Studies, 2015), page 1

Tuesday October 23rd – Sabbath

(By NBBC's student intern Ben Froese)

Reading Mark 2:23 – 28

“The Sabbath was made for man...”

Have you ever thought, “If only I had one extra day this week, then I would get all the stuff done that I need to do!” I know I have - as a matter of fact, that thought runs through my head quite frequently.

We live in a culture of busyness. There is always more work to be done, more texts and emails to respond to, more people to connect with, more events for your kids, etc. I personally dream of the day when everything will be completed on the “to-do” list that I keep on my phone, but in reality, the list only keeps getting longer because new things keep coming up!

All of this can make Sabbath-keeping a difficult idea to follow through with. We may get a day or two off every week, but we might spend those days running so many errands that they don't end up feeling very restful.

In today's passage we hear Jesus say that “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (v. 27). The Pharisees had essentially reduced the Sabbath to a list of “don't do's”. They had made Sabbath-keeping a burdensome thing. Jesus rebukes the Pharisees and reminds us that the Sabbath is actually God's gracious gift to us. We humans weren't *made* to keep the Sabbath, but the Sabbath was made for us and our good.

Although the Sabbath doesn't function the same way in the New Covenant as it did in the Old (cf. Col. 2:16-17) taking a day off every week to rest, play and worship is a wonderful principle to follow. When we step away from the busyness of life, we can further embrace the fullness of what we were created for. We can be reminded that we are not productivity machines, but human beings. We were not just created to *do* things, but to *be* in relationship with God and others.

As you think about today's devotional, contemplate these two quotes:

- "We've forgotten how to inhabit time in ways that are fully human. For this, we need to recover the Sabbath."¹⁹
- "To cease striving - to relinquish achieving and embrace being - is an act of faith."²⁰

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Matthew 17:14-27

Acts 24

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 39

Leviticus 5-7

Questions about your reading? Jot them down here to discuss with our MCG:

Preparing for your MCG

As you come for your 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)
- **STUDY:** Share from your time of Meditation/Application from each day's study. What from your Bible reading made an impression on you or what confused you?
- **PRAYER WALK/ACTIVITY:** be creative and intentional as you pray/work together.

¹⁹ Barry Jones, *Dwell: Life with God for the World* (InterVarsity Press, 2014), p. 158.

²⁰ Barry Jones, *Dwell: Life with God for the World* (InterVarsity Press, 2014), p. 171.

Wednesday October 24th – Making Jesus Angry

(By NBBC's Blair Clark)

Reading Mark 3:1 – 6

“He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts...”

Anger is a universal human emotion. We all experience it at one time or another. What differs from person to person, though, is what makes us angry, how quickly we get angry, and what we do with our anger. It is important to stress that anger in and of itself is not necessarily wrong. It is an emotion, just like joy or disappointment. Even God gets angry. After the Israelites worshipped a golden calf while Moses was meeting with God on Mount Sinai, God becomes incredibly angry with the people and wants to destroy them. Any time we see God angry in Scripture, it is always completely justified, and what He does in his anger is always justified.

In this instance, it is Jesus who is angry, and the object of his anger is the Pharisees - religious leaders who were distorting God's law and oppressing His people. He is angry with them because they were nitpicking and oppressing God's people with wrongly understood laws, rather than liberating them with God's mercy and grace. They were completely insensitive to both the purposes of God and to the suffering of the marginalized and disenfranchised people that God loves and cares deeply for.

When Christians in general, and conservative evangelicals in particular, are criticized by those observing us, it is most frequently for our legalism and our lack of grace and mercy towards those with whom we disagree. The three most significant issues that are challenging the Western church in this regard today are abortion, homosexuality and euthanasia. In each of these, we face the daunting challenge of determining *what would Jesus do?* (WWJD). How would he uphold God's standard of righteousness and holiness, maintain God's purposes for people created

in His image and likeness, but also express God's redemptive love and grace?

Most Christians never identify themselves with the Pharisees, and we rarely apply Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees to ourselves, but it is imperative that we consider whether or not on these and other critical issues, we are responding in ways that are Pharisaical and in the process making Jesus angry, or are we responding as Jesus would? Matthew 23 is a sobering read for every established Christian. The two most instructive passages as to how Jesus handled critical and morally difficult situations are Jesus' treatment of the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-42) and his interaction with the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11).

For you and me to avoid making Jesus angry with our actions, we need to be constantly asking ourselves and seeking to determine, "What would Jesus do?"

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Think back to the last time you got angry. Was your reaction something that Jesus would do? If not, replay that situation in your mind but rewrite your reaction, imagine yourself doing what Jesus would do.

What habits might we participate in to keep us from being the type of people that make Jesus angry?

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Matthew 18:1-14

Acts 25:1-12

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 40

Leviticus 8-10

Questions about your reading? Jot them down here to discuss with our MCG:

Prayer Points:

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

- PACT (Preschool and Adult Coffee Time) gathers today. Pray for the young moms who are in the midst of raising little ones. Pray for wisdom and strength.

Thursday October 25th – Boundaries

(By NBBC's Veronika Bankuti)

Reading Mark 3:7 – 12

"...those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him."

Do you remember when you were a child and came down with the flu? You had a fever and felt crummy. You did not want anything to eat or to play with your favourite toy. It seemed nothing could comfort you, but then your mom would take you in her arms to hug you and tell you that all will be well. You cuddled into her tight and immediately felt better. There are no boundaries with someone you trust and with whom you feel safe.

Statistics show that in this second decade of the 21st century there are more single person households than ever before. This means there are a lot of people who may have all their material needs met, but they often miss deep, trusting relationships.

We are all aware of the artificial boundaries we learn to observe as we grow into adulthood. These are there to separate us from each other (income, social status, fame, prominence etc.) but there is one fundamental thing which unites us; our brokenness. It is the one overarching commonality that runs through all humanity. Everyone looks for someone who can heal this brokenness.

Among the crowd in our own lives, we will hopefully find at least one person who fits the bill, but there will also be people who do not come to us for the right reasons. Even In our own families there may be problematic relationships, where we are not encouraged to develop our best selves, our abilities are belittled or ignored, our weaknesses emphasized. The experts call these "toxic relationships" and it is necessary under these circumstances to set up healthy boundaries to protect ourselves from harmful influences.

It was very much the same during the first century. The crowd that ran to Jesus consisted of a wide variety of people and they came for a wide variety of reasons. Some came out of curiosity, some came because they heard about him and his supposed supernatural powers and wanted to test him, and others came full of animosity and a desire to hurt him. There were others however - probably a small minority - who came because they believed that He was who He said He was and fully expected to receive healing. Jesus maintains a physical boundary with this crowd - He sought safety in a boat.

Relational boundaries are not always physical. Developing healthy relational boundaries is important, especially to be kept safe from toxic people, but we also need to learn to let down our boundaries among those who love us or need us. We know from the story of the woman with the issue of blood²¹ that even though a multitude touched him, Jesus immediately recognized the “touch of true faith” and healing was granted to her.

Jesus invites us all to demolish our boundaries and come to Him. He will show us who He is, and we will all receive comfort, healing and love.

²¹ Luke 8:43-48

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Why do you think it is hard for some people to let down their boundaries in relationships?

Why do you think it is hard for some people to establish proper boundaries in relationships?

What kind of boundaries do we put up in our relationships, good or bad?

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Matthew 18:15-35
- Acts 25:3-27

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 41
- Leviticus 11-13

Questions about your reading? Jot them down here to discuss with our MCG:

Prayer Points:

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

- Pray for the online prayer gathering today at 8pm.
- Pray for those who suffer with mental illness.

Friday October 26th – With Him

(By NBBC's Bob Wilkins)

Reading Mark 3:13 – 19

“He appointed twelve that they might be with him...”

This passage is the record of Jesus choosing the twelve Apostles. It is important to set the event in its context. What precedes the appointment is what could be called a day in the life of Jesus.²² Jesus withdraws with his disciples to the lake and a large crowd gathered, not only from Galilee, but also from Judea, Jerusalem, Transjordan and the northwest coast of the Mediterranean. His reputation as a teacher, preacher and healer was spreading far and wide, and the crowds were getting larger and larger. The ministry was expanding exponentially. People were being healed and were being delivered from the evil spirits which had possessed them.

It was in this context that Jesus appointed the 12 Apostles. They had already been following Him but He felt the need of a group into whose lives he could pour his own life - a group who could share his ministry, help to carry the burden of responsibility and form the nucleus of the new community of faith which would carry on his ministry when his time on earth was done.

So, on a mountain side Jesus chose from among His followers the twelve that He called apostles, which literally means “sent ones.” He chose them to be with Him and to send them out on mission tours. You might wonder why Jesus would choose these particular twelve. When you think about who they were, they are not the group that many of us would have chosen. Most of them had issues that they had to deal with. Peter was often too hasty with his words. James and John had bad tempers. Matthew was a despised tax collector. Simon was a political Zealot - and then there was Thomas the doubter and Judas who

²² Mark 3:7-12

betrayed Him. It is interesting to note that Jesus still chooses the most unlikely. Just consider yourself!

The commentator, Alan Cole, says that Jesus, in His choice of the twelve, had both a primary and secondary purpose.²³ The primary purpose was that they might be with Him. The secondary purpose was to send them out on mission tours. Before we can share in Jesus' ministry, we must share in his life. We must be with him. We must sit at his feet and learn of him. We are often so task oriented that we forget the primacy of our relationship with Jesus. Like Martha we get caught up with so much to do and fail to experience the relationship with Jesus that her sister Mary knew.²⁴ Here is the secret to sharing in Jesus' ministry. This little expression, "that they might be with him," underscores what being a Christian and serving Christ is all about. It is not primarily about believing the right stuff, although that is important. Nor is it all about having the rights gifts. It is about having a personal relationship with Christ our Lord and Saviour. This rag tag group of disciples could never have become what they did, without being with Jesus. To share in Jesus' ministry is to share in his life and in his character by spending time with him.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Consider what it means for you to spend time with Jesus. How does this prepare you to be a "sent one" in His service?

What might happen if we try to engage in ministry without first being with Jesus?

What might happen if we simply focus on being with Jesus but never engage in ministry?

²³ R. A. Cole, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1961, p. 79

²⁴ Luke 10:38-42

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Matthew 19:1-15

Acts 26:1-18

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 42

Leviticus 14-15

Questions about your reading? Jot them down here to discuss with our MCG:

Prayer Points:

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

- Coffee and Conversation takes place today in the Fireside Room. Pray for those who might be lonely, to have courage to join in this time of fellowship.
- Pray for Ruth Munyao who serves as a missionary in Kenya and is one of NBBC's Partners in Mission.

Saturday October 27th – Accusations

Reading Mark 3:20 – 22

“He is out of his mind... He is possessed by Beelzebub!”

2018 may be known as the year of sexual assault accusations, and while our hearts ache for those who have been victims, we hope that at least some of the accusations aren't true. It is very likely that all of us will, at some point in our life, be accused of having done something even if it is a minor infraction like eating the last cookie or leaving the toilet seat up! Today's reading gives a brief window into the accusations of those listening to the teachings of Jesus, the Messiah. Even the best of us will get accused from time to time - it's how we handle those accusations that makes the difference.

In his book *Confessions of a Pastor*, Craig Groeschel offers some advice on how to handle the accusations of critics:

It's a fact that "hurt people hurt people." They usually dislike themselves and criticize others in a misguided effort to validate themselves. If one of these injured souls lobbs a criticism grenade in your direction, defuse it with understanding. Part of considering the source is seeking awareness of what that person may be going through...

One time I was praying during worship, a few moments before preaching. Eyes closed, focusing on God, I felt someone slip a note into my hand. I never saw who it was, but the note was marked "Personal." I thought to myself, "Someone probably wrote a nice note to encourage me before I preach." A warm, loving feeling settled over me as I unfolded the paper.

A moment later, I lost that loving feeling.

Evidently, the note was from a woman who had tried to see me on Friday, my day off. She took offense at my absence and blasted me with hateful accusations. This happened literally seconds before I was to

stand up to preach. In that moment, I had a choice. I could internalize the offense and become demoralized and discouraged. Or I could ask myself, I wonder what she's experiencing that caused her to lash out? I chose compassion over depression. My heart hurt for her. I knew that such a disproportionate reaction must indicate deep pain, so I didn't take her note personally.

Consider the source, and consider the possibility that the jab may have come from an injured heart. Dismiss it and move on. If you don't, you may become the very thing you despise.²⁵

Jesus' clear intentions make it evident that the accusations pitted against Him wouldn't stick. Consider the latter half of the chapter where Jesus talks about a divided house. A house divided on itself cannot stand. What he means here is if he was working for Beelzebub, then casting out demons is counter productive to that mission. In short, His actions speak for themselves. The way in which we can avoid suffering the consequences of unjust accusations is to make sure our actions are aligned with the intent of your heart.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Have you ever been falsely accused of something? How were you able to clear your name?

Have you ever accused someone of something only to be proven wrong? How did that make you feel?

How do you think Jesus felt when He was wrongly accused by both family and opponents?

²⁵ Craig Groeschel, *Confessions of a Pastor* (Multnomah, 2006), p. 169.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Matthew 19:16-30

Acts 26:19-32

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 43

Leviticus 16-17

Questions about your reading? Jot them down here to discuss with our MCG:

Prayer Points:

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

- Pray for the NBBC Staff & leaders
- Pray for the new elected government officials in your riding

Sunday October 28th – The Gospel According to Mark: Chapter Three

Reading Mark 3

Sermon Notes:

Meditation/Application/Reflection

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

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Matthew 20:1-16
- Acts 27:1-26

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 44
- Leviticus 18-20

Questions about your reading? Jot them down here to discuss with our MCG:

Prayer Points:

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

- Pray for our LIGHT THE NIGHT EVENT and the MCG QUARTERS POTLUCK

Monday October 29th – Division

Reading Mark 3:23 – 30

“If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.”

In a sermon by Andy Stanley called, “Let the Blames Begin”, he makes the following point:

I used to do a lot of marriage counselling, and often one spouse would come in the office and start ranting and raving, "My husband does this ...;" "My wife never will do that ...;" and it would go on and on. I would sit there thinking, “This counselling isn't going to be very effective, because the person who apparently needs to change isn't even in the room.” So I would get a pad of paper, draw a circle on it, and say, "This is a pie that represents all the chaos in your marriage. Now, 100 percent of the blame is in that pie, because that's where all the chaos is." I would give them the pen and say, "I want you to draw a slice of pie that you think represents your responsibility for the chaos." The piece of pie that that client would draw was never very big, but I would say, "Okay. So why don't you and I talk about just this. Let's talk about this piece that is your responsibility. Let's talk about your slice." You know what? My approach never worked. I could never get anybody to stay on his or her slice of the pie.

So here is what I want you to do this week: As you experience relational conflict at work, at home, with your friends - any conflict of any sort, big or small - stop and think about your own slice of the pie. Ask yourself, “What is in my slice of the pie? Have I really taken responsibility for my life, or am I enjoying the blame game so much that it has allowed me to ignore what I am ultimately responsible for?”

In any relationship, if you can ever get the two parties to own their piece of the pie, you can make progress, but if everybody is focused on the other person's slice, you will just have chaos.²⁶

²⁶ Andy Stanley, from the sermon "Let the Blames Begin"

If we are to reflect the nature of God to those around us, then we must reflect the unity that exists in His triune nature. Father, Son and Spirit in complete and perfect unity. In a world which is becoming increasingly fragmented and divided along all kinds of lines, the church is to show the unifying power of God's Spirit. In fact this was Jesus' prayer for his church in John 17.

When we fail to strive for unity we are engaging in self-mutilation, for it is surely true that a house divided will not stand. We are only as strong as the bonds between each brother and sister in Christ is maintained.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Why do you think we find it easier to talk about other people's "piece of the pie" rather than our own?

What might happen if each of us focussed upon correcting our contribution to the chaos and conflicts we find ourselves in?

Ask God if there is an area where you have not taken responsibility for your "piece of the pie" and make restitution if needed.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Matthew 20:17-34
- Acts 27:27-44

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 45
- Leviticus 21-23

Questions about your reading? Jot them down here to discuss with our MCG:

Prayer Points:

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

- Consider joining a MCG QUARTERS POTLUCK tomorrow
- <https://nbbc.churchcenter.com/groups/missional-community-groups>
-

Tuesday October 30th – A Family of Obedience

Reading Mark 3:31 – 35

“Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”

I sometime wonder how Jesus’ relatives felt about this statement. Did they feel insulted? Perhaps they thought He was saying that their relationship with Him was not valued or important. However, this was not the point that Jesus was making. He was talking about affinity, about that which knits Jesus’ hearts to others. His point was simply that he felt closest, more akin, to those who focused their lives towards obedience to God.

Obedience in action has always been the true mark of a Jesus follower. Doctrine is important but we all know people who have knowledge but never act on what they know. Jesus seems to indicate that, when it comes to the spiritual life, it’s not the amount of knowledge that matters, but the application of knowledge to your life that is most important.

Author Eugene Peterson wrote about a realization he had in this regard:

At age 35 I bought running shoes and began enjoying the smooth rhythms of long-distance running. Soon I was competing in 10K races every month or so, and then a marathon once a year. By then I was subscribing to and reading three running magazines! Then I pulled a muscle and couldn’t run for a couple of months. Those magazines were still all over the house, but I never opened one. The moment I resumed running, though, I started reading again.

That’s when I realized that my reading was an extension of something I was a part of. I was reading for companionship and affirmation of the experience of running. I learned a few things along the way, but mostly it was to deepen my world of running. If I wasn’t running, there was nothing to deepen.

The parallel with reading Scripture is striking. If I'm not living in active response to the living God, reading about his creation, salvation and holiness won't hold my interest for long. The most important question isn't "What does this mean," but "What can I obey?" Simple obedience will open up our lives to a text more quickly than any number of Bible studies, dictionaries and concordances.²⁷

MCG gatherings are less about Bible study per se, and more about Bible application. If we want to know the Bible we study it, if we want to know God we apply it, and when we apply it we will find our hearts growing in kinship with Jesus.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Matthew 21:1-11

Acts 28:1-16

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 46

Leviticus 24-25

Questions about your reading? Jot them down here to discuss with our MCG:

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)
- **STUDY:** Share from your time of Meditation/Application from each day's study. What from your Bible reading made an impression on you or what confused you?
- **PRAYER WALK/ACTIVITY:** be creative and intentional as you pray/work together.

²⁷ Eugene Peterson, *Eat This Book* (William B. Eerdmans, 2006), pp. 70-71.

Wednesday October 31st – Scattering Seed

(By NBBC's student intern Ben Wimmers)

Reading Mark 4:1 – 12

"...he was scattering the seed..."

For many years I worked as a landscaper, entering with the crew to a backyard to rework it. A large part of any backyard project is ensuring that you leave a lush green lawn behind. To give the grass seed the best chance to flourish you need good soil. It takes time to pick out rocks, break up hard areas of soil, and pull weeds out from their roots. Then the grass seed can be spread over the soil. Inevitably a rock or root was missed, and an area of soil left shallow. Coming back after a few weeks you clearly see the areas that the seed fell upon but did not grow. Back to work. Prepare the soil again. Re-seed.

The *Parable of the Sower* uses the familiar work of planting to illustrate a point. Jesus is the sower, scattering the seed of the Gospel. The seed goes everywhere. He is not selective in his placement of seed. Unfortunately, it does not always fall on good soil. Whether by personal rejections, outside influences, or the work of Satan, the seed dies. The different soils in the parable do not simply represent four different types of people. They can represent four different areas in our lives. We all have rocky places, hard places, weedy places, and fertile places in our lives. Jesus has sown the seed of the Gospel into all those areas. It is possible to have growth in our church ministry but have a rocky marriage. We can have flourishing relationships with our children but struggle in the weedy environment at work.

It takes work to prepare soil for seeding. Thankfully we do not have to do that work alone. The Holy Spirit is active in our lives and more than willing to partner with us in the garden. The church and your MCG are important aids in the work of developing the Gospel in your life.

We often think of conversion as a onetime event rather than an ongoing process in our lives, but following Jesus requires a continuing conversion of every aspect of our lives. Jesus wants fruitfulness in every area. He scatters seed so that there might be abundant fruit.

In the classic discipleship tale, *My heart, Christ's Home*, the writer compares the coming of Jesus into our life with Him entering our home and renovating it. In the book, the last room to be given over to Jesus was a small locked closet. It represented an area of the person's life that they didn't want Jesus to enter. Reluctantly the person surrenders, "So with trembling fingers I passed the key to Him. He took it from my hand, walked over to the door, opened it, entered it, took out all the putrefying stuff that was rotting there, and threw it away. Then He cleaned the closet and painted it, fixed it up, doing it all in a moment's time. Oh, what victory and release to have that dread thing out of my life!"

Jesus wants all of our life, every aspect, to be able to receive the seed of His word which He scatters in our lives, and bear fruit for His glory and our pleasure.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Can you identify areas in your life where the soil of your heart is hard, weedy and rocky?

Take time to celebrate where the soil is good, and you can recognize growth!

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Matthew 21:12-22

Acts 28:17-31

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 47

Leviticus 26-27

Questions about your reading? Jot them down here to discuss with our MCG:

Prayer Points:

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

- Pray for safety for families and children tonight
- Pray that your neighbourhood might see THE LIGHT in LIGHT
THE NIGHT

Thursday November 1st – Worries

(By NBBC's Blair Clark)

Reading Mark 4:13 – 20

“...the worries of this life... choke the word, making it unfruitful.”

This parable is one of Jesus' most brilliant, drawing on the everyday experience of his listeners to teach profound spiritual truth. Most people in that day were experienced farmers, growing much of their own food, and so they would have experienced the different situations that Jesus describes.

On a regular basis, I see the choking effect of weeds on my lawn. Ever since the banning of chemical pesticides, I have struggled to control the weeds in our front lawn, especially in the narrow strip of grass between the curb and the sidewalk. Weed seeds blow down from the large park up the street and take root in my lawn. Whether it is plantain, dandelions, or chickweed, they have a spreading effect that eventually kills the grass around them. What I have discovered in this battle is that I cannot have a goal of simply containing the weeds. I must make it my goal to eradicate them completely. Otherwise they quickly resume their choking influence and will eventually kill the grass.

I have been amazed over the years at the number of people I have known who had been deeply committed Christians, active in the ministry of their church, whose spiritual life has been choked in the exact manner described by Jesus, rendering them eventually uninvolved and unfruitful for Christ's Kingdom. It is the deceitfulness of wealth and the desire for other things that has choked their spiritual life. What is particularly dangerous about this threat to our spiritual life is that it is gradual.

Like the arteries carrying blood from our heart that eventually become clogged with the build up of deposits, the reduced flow is almost unnoticeable on a daily basis, and so it is easy to ignore. The longer we let the situation develop, the more difficult and radical the steps that we must take to reverse it. In the early stages, if we heed certain

warning signs, adjustments to a more heart-wise diet and a stronger commitment to regular exercise can be sufficient to effect positive changes in our condition, but if left unchecked and allowed to deteriorate, and if we are fortunate enough to survive a heart attack, the remedy is usually radical bypass surgery.

The deceitful advertising messages of our culture, that fancier homes and cars, more recreational opportunities, more exotic and frequent vacation travel will bring us happiness, is an ever-present challenge for us. It is also readily apparent that the more possessions one has, the more one worries about having the means to protect and preserve them. The end result is a diminished trust in God and His provision and a choking off of our spiritual life that leaves us unfruitful.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

As you read today's devotional did you find yourself getting defensive, or irritated? Might God be touching on an area in your life that you need to deal with?

Take time to practise the art of contentment. Create a list of things for which you are thankful. Try to add to it each day for the remainder of the week.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Matthew 21:23-32
- Romans 1:1-17

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 48
- Numbers 1-2

Questions about your reading? Jot them down here to discuss with our MCG:

Prayer Points:

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

- Pray for the mental health & anxious thoughts you know are around you
- Listen to the song WHAT A FRIEND by Matt Maher

Friday November 2nd – Hearing and Heeding

(By NBBC's Veronika Bankuti)

Reading Mark 4:21 - 25

“If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear. Consider carefully what you hear...”

Dr. Amos Purnell Bailey tells the following story:

We hear what our ears are tuned to. Anthropologist Ethal Alpenfels once told me about a woodsman who was walking down Fifth Avenue in New York City with a friend. All at once the woodsman said, “Why, I hear a cricket.”

“Nonsense,” scoffed the city man. “In this uproar? Not a chance.”

“But I do,” said the woodsman, “and I’ll show you.” At that he took a dime out of his pocket and dropped it on the pavement. Instantly, people within 30 feet turned around to see whose coin had dropped. “You see,” said the woodsman, “people hear what their ears are tuned to. Mine happen to be tuned to crickets.”²⁸

In this age of commercialism and materialism does anyone still hear the cricket in the city?

What we hear is important, but it is equally important how we hear. Have you ever noticed that when you are in conversation with someone you tend to listen only partially? You listen long enough to get the major point, but you miss the finer details, the nuances, the body language because you are already formulating your response in your mind. In this age of social media when communication is limited to 150 characters, our attention span is rapidly shrinking. Listening is probably one of the most important characteristics of people which others appreciate. Someone with the ability to listen makes you feel like you are the only person on the face of the earth, that you are important, you are worth

²⁸ A. Purnell Bailey, columnist Capper’s Weekly

getting to know, and you will never be forgotten. Listening well may indeed be the foundation of all genuine, long lasting relationships - from marriage to friendship.

Jesus still speaks through the parables He told centuries ago. If we listen well, we will be able to understand the deep meaning of these stories and start on the journey to more and more wonderful discoveries. Our diligence will not go unrewarded as Jesus promises that anyone who understands even a little bit will receive more and more.

Once we understand, we still have one final, crucial step to take. We need to act on what we understand and believe. Without this final step of moving this understanding 15 inches down from our head to our heart and begin living it out - it will remain valuable, or indeed, life changing information, but we will not experience the new, abundant life Jesus came to give us. It is something like having a three-carat flawless diamond held in our safety deposit box. We know we have it, but we never get the thrill and joy of wearing it, looking at it sparkle and feeling the weight and fire on our finger. There is no substitute for living the truth.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Think about how intently you listen to Jesus, what does your listening say to Jesus about your relationship?

What are the barriers that keep us from hearing Jesus?

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Matthew 21:33-46
- Romans 1:18-32

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 49
- Numbers 3-4

Questions about your reading? Jot them down here to discuss with our MCG:

Prayer Points:

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

- Listen today in silence and solitude

Saturday November 3rd – God at Work

(By NBBC's Bob Wilkins)

Reading Mark 4:26 – 29

“All by itself the soil produces grain...”

One of the characteristics of Jesus' teaching ministry is His teaching through parables, often referred to as “the parables of the Kingdom.” As He taught, He would use parables based on the ordinary experiences of life in the first century such as finances, weddings, farming, etc. He would often begin with the expression, “The kingdom of heaven is like,” and then He would tell His parable. He told a number of parables about growth in the kingdom, such as the sower, the wheat and the tares, and the mustard seed. The one before us is also a growth parable.

For most of my ministry life, there has been in the evangelical church a great emphasis on church growth. Over the years I have attended a great number of church growth conferences and seminars. Some, of course, were more helpful than others, while some strategies could never be translated into the context where I was serving.

Perhaps the most helpful approaches have been those that have emphasized the importance of good soil in which growth happens, in particular the relationship between healthy churches and growing churches. In the parable, once the farmer has sown the seed there seems not much else he can do. Other forces in the soil have to take over for growth to happen. The soil produces grain all by itself. The Greek word is *automate*, meaning “automatically.”

Of course, we know that there is more going on than meets the eye as growth happens. To us it is often mysterious. The fact is that at the end of the day it is God who makes things grow. Paul said, “What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe - as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed,

Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.”²⁹ So, from the human perspective, Kingdom growth happens automatically according to the soil, but from God’s perspective He is the one who produces the harvest. The amazing thing is that God delights to include us in the harvesting. Jesus said, “The harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field.”³⁰

Meditation/Application/Reflection

If the secret of growth in the Kingdom is that God is at work behind the scenes and that the soil produces growth automatically, what can we do to participate in the harvest?

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Matthew 22:1-14
- Romans 2

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 50
- Numbers 5-6

Questions about your reading? Jot them down here to discuss with our MCG:

²⁹ 1 Corinthians 3:5-6

³⁰ Matthew 9:37-38

Sunday November 4th – The Gospel According to Mark: Chapter Four

Reading Mark 4

Sermon Notes:

Meditation/Application/Reflection

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

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Matthew 22:15-33

Romans 3

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 51

Numbers 7-8

Questions about your reading? Jot them down here to discuss with our MCG:

Prayer Points:

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

Monday November 5th – Mustard Seed Kingdom

(By NBBC's student intern Ben Froese)

Reading Mark 4:30 – 34

“What shall we say the kingdom of God is like...It is like a mustard seed...”

I remember being about six years old when my sister and I were each given small sapling trees at school one day. We each planted our trees in the yard of our house. If I remember correctly, my tree didn't last long before it died, but my sister's tree grew and grew and grew... to the point where it had to be moved to a new location. Now, about two decades later, a large tree now exists in my parent's backyard. It's hard to believe where this tree came from.

In today's passage of Scripture, Jesus uses the mustard seed as an illustration for the growth of the Kingdom of God. The black mustard seed was just a tiny seed, but it produced a large bush. It took 725-760 mustard seeds to weigh just one gram, but within just a few weeks in the Palestinian soil, its shrubs could reach a height of 12-15 feet!³¹

Similarly, the Kingdom of God is a kingdom that grew from very small to very large, and it continues to grow to this day. It all started with Jesus and just twelve disciples. After Jesus' resurrection, these followers of his hoped that the fullness of this Kingdom would come right away; they asked, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6) but that's not the way things work with this Kingdom.

The Kingdom of God grew and expanded slowly but surely, as God used His people to spread His Gospel message. It wasn't to spread through warfare and violence (as kingdoms usually did) but through acts of love and words of hope and truth. Today, 2000 years after Jesus spoke this parable, the Gospel continues to go forth to the ends of the earth.

³¹ John D. Grassmick, in eds. John F. Walvoord & Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary (New Testament)* (SP Publications, 1983), p. 121.

Today, we as “neighbourhood missionaries” in Burlington (or wherever we live) get to continue to partner with God in the growth of His Kingdom. How exciting is that! So often we can do this through little steps of faith, responding rightly to God as He nudges us. “Go talk to that person.” “Ask that person how they’re doing?” Taking those little steps sometimes opens up the most amazing opportunities to share the love of Jesus.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Who are the people God has put in your life who don’t yet know the love of Christ? Take some time to pray for them today, and pray that God would open up doors for you to share your faith with them. Pray that God would use you as an agent for the growth of His Kingdom.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Matthew 22:34-46
- Romans 4

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 52
- Numbers 9-11

Questions about your reading? Jot them down here to discuss with our MCG:

Tuesday November 6th – Fear and Faith

Reading Mark 4:35 – 41

“Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

Fear and faith are like oil and water, they cannot mix. Where there is fear in your life, there is room for more faith. Fear is a chain that chokes us from experiencing the life and freedom that Jesus has set us free to experience.

In 1975, Roger Hart conducted a study on where children felt safe to play. He focused on 86 children between the ages of three to twelve in a small town in Vermont. Hart would follow the kids throughout the day, documenting everywhere the children went by themselves. He then took that information and made physical maps that measured the distance each child was allowed to go by themselves and what the average was for every age group.

Hart discovered that these kids had remarkable freedom. Even four or five year olds travelled unsupervised throughout their neighbourhoods, and by the time they were 10, most of the kids had the run of the entire town - and the kids' parents weren't worried either.

Then several years ago (about 2014) he went back to the same town to document the children of the children that he had originally tracked in the '70s, and when he asked the new generation of kids to show him where they played alone, what he found floored him. Hart said, "They just didn't have very far to take me, just walking around their property." In other words, the huge circle of freedom on the maps had grown tiny. Hart added, "There is no free range outdoors. Even when the kids are older, parents now say, 'I need to know where you are at all times.'" But what's odd about all of this, is that the town is no more dangerous now than it was before. There's literally no more crime today than there was 40 years ago.

So why has the invisible leash between parent and child tightened so much? Hart says it was absolutely clear from his interviews. The reason

was fear. Here's the conclusion to his new study: fear of the world outside our door narrows the circle of our lives.³²

When we allow fear to guide our lives, we allow its influence to grow.

It is not simply that we fear, it is what we fear that is taking hold. Fear is an act of homage, we are giving our hearts over to that which we fear, and it dictates our actions. We literally end up serving that which we fear and give it more power. Jesus desires that we fear none but God and experience the freedom that faith in Him truly allows.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Matthew 23:1-12
- Romans 5:1-11

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 53
- Numbers 12-14

Questions about your reading? Jot them down here to discuss with our MCG:

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)
- STUDY: Share from your time of Meditation/Application from each day's study. What from your Bible reading made an impression on you or what confused you?
- PRAYER WALK/ACTIVITY: be creative and intentional as you pray/work together.

³² Adapted from NPR, "World with No Fear," Invisibilia podcast (1-15-15)

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 anticipation of what He might do in and through us.

Missional Community Group Shared Practices

1. Daily engage in reading Scripture and praying for God to bless NBBC in its missional calling.
2. Each week, 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.