

MCG
Study Guide
The Gospel According to Mark
Chapters 5-7
November 7 – November 27



Wednesday November 7th – Pain

(By NBBC's Phil McAllister)

Reading Mark 5:1 – 5

“...he would cry out and cut himself with stones.”

Matthew 5:4 says, “blessed are those who are in pain, for they will be comforted.” In the book of Matthew, the context refers to those mourning their feelings of alienation in a sinful world, not feeling like they fit in, as well as mourning their own sinful nature. Considering this makes one contemplate the grief felt by the man who was possessed by demons as he was endlessly tormented in a graveyard and crying out with extreme gashes on his body due to self-harm.

I do not suggest that those who cry out and cut themselves are those who are demon possessed. However, the internal torment that leads to self-harm is on the increase. Between 2009 – 2014, there was a 102% increase of young girls ages 10 to 17 being hospitalized due to self-harm.¹ There are many people who suffer internal battles, mental illnesses, and opt for negative coping mechanisms to deal with their pain – including cutting. The following passage looks at a man suffering an internal battle of his own. The remedy, Jesus Christ, comes to meet him where he is at, providing restoration as he cries out in total despair.

The Mark 5 text opens up with an established Messiah who is now known for his ability to calm winds and seas during moments of chaos, and readers are familiar with the divine nature of Jesus. The outset of the chapter depicts a connection between Jesus and a demon possessed man a graveyard. Biblical scholars consider this exchange to take place in the cool of the night. The man, overtly oppressed by society, finds residence and pseudo-comfort among the dead. Furthermore, speculations by experts claim the man was driven from society and previous efforts had been made to control him without success.² Jesus

¹ https://www.cihi.ca/web/resource/en/info_child_harm_en.pdf

² Expositor's Bible Commentary, *Mark*, 657.

speaks directly to the demons in the tormented man's body and they rush out into a heard of pigs who throw themselves over a cliff.

Reflect back to Matthew 5:4 and consider that the one who is in pain will soon be comforted. The writer of the Old Testament book, Isaiah, foreshadows a comforter who will alleviate the pain of the world.³ This is referring to Jesus, the Messiah. Much like the people of Jesus' time who are familiar with his abilities to calm the chaotic weather, modern readers of Mark's Gospel are able to determine the credibility of Jesus to heal both their physical ailments, sins, and even internal pains (e.g., mental illness). Jesus, being eternal, can step into the temporal and govern as the Divine to bring healing in both domains.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Perhaps one of the hardest things to reconcile as a Christian is knowing that God *can* heal but does not always choose *to* heal. Why do you think God doesn't always take away our pain?

As you have read today's devotional have you become aware of some pain you are carrying around? Take time to offer it to God to do with as He wishes.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Matthew 23:13-24

Romans 5:12-21

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 54

Numbers 15-17

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

Prayer Points:

³ Isaiah 61:2

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

- Pray for PACT (Preschool and Adult Coffee Time)
- Pray for the kids on your street

Thursday November 8th – Demonic Possession

(By NBBC's Blair Clark)

Reading Mark 5:6 – 13

“Come out of this man, you impure spirit!”

This is one of the more sensational events in Jesus' public ministry. Visualize a herd of 2,000 pigs running down the hillside, plunging into the water and drowning. Imagine the story that those tasked with watching the pigs would have recounted to the owner and to their friends. This was an unbelievable encounter between Jesus and demonic powers, and Jesus clearly demonstrated his power and authority over them.

Today, we in the “enlightened West” generally pretend that such realities do not exist today, but in a Biblical world view, Satan and demonic powers and spirits are real and are to be taken seriously. When we lived in Indonesia and worked among animistic people, evil spirits and the powers of darkness were ever-present realities for the people, and one of the very evident benefits of becoming a follower of Jesus was to no longer have to live in fear of the spirit world and of demonic powers.

However, it is not just in the remote jungle villages of Borneo that the powers of darkness challenge the church of Jesus Christ. I recall talking with Dr. Bruce Milne, then senior pastor at First Baptist Church in Vancouver. He shared with me that a few months earlier a young woman had come to Christ, and as part of her testimony had shared how she had been part of a coven of witches that met weekly to pray to Satan against the ministry of First Baptist. Bruce commented on how this news had awakened his people to a reality that they had pretty much totally ignored, and that it had led his people to pray for their ministry with a fervency that he had never experienced before.

As we attempt to rescue people who are trapped in sinful desires and behaviours, we need to recognize that there are three powerful forces at work – the world, the flesh and the devil. In some situations all three

can be operative, in others just one or two, but to ignore the possibility that there may be demonic powers at work is to live naively in the modern world and to significantly handicap ourselves. In Jesus' liberating ministry, he addressed many situations in which there was no need to attack demonic powers., but there were also situations such as this one in which Jesus recognized the presence and power of evil spirits and used his power and authority to bring freedom and release to the oppressed.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

How do we see Satan at work in our world?

How should we overcome the power of Satan?

Take a moment to pray for the ministry of NBBC to be protected from Satan's power and to reveal God's Kingdom in those places which are most dark.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Matthew 23:25-39

Romans 6:1-14

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 55

Numbers 18-20

Questions about your reading? Jot them 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 against any spiritual strongholds that are in your neighbourhood.

Friday November 9th – Testifying

(By NBBC's Veronika Bankuti)

Reading Mark 5:14 – 20

“...tell them how much the Lord has done for you...”

Before I go to see a movie I usually go on line and read some critic's opinion about the particular movie I am considering. I also ask around and get the opinions of people who have seen the movie. If I get very negative feedback, chances are I will forego the experience regardless of what the critic said.

If I hear feedback given in an enthusiastic manner where it is obvious to me that the person has been touched in some way, I will certainly see the movie. There is power and impact in personal testimony that overrides the well-crafted opinions of professional movie critics.

When we are face-to-face with someone, in addition to hearing their words we are also able to observe their voice modulations, facial expressions, body language, laughter or tears – all of which indicate the level of involvement they have with the subject matter. The more involvement, the more I am persuaded that the movie is worth seeing.

Our Lord knew the power of personal testimony. That is why he sometimes encouraged people to go and tell their stories to others. Other times Jesus discouraged verbal testimony, but encouraged action (i.e. when the leper was cleansed Jesus told him not to tell anyone, but to go and show himself to the elders of the temple.)⁴

Earlier this summer, I was visiting with my neighbour with whom I serve on our Board. Our coordinator had been diagnosed with an illness in May and we were talking about her long road to recovery and healing. This gave me an opportunity to tell her about my daughter's surgery seven years ago and how the Lord heard my prayer and answered it. I also told her about some of my earlier experiences and her reaction

⁴ Matthew 8:4

suggested that this maybe the right time to invite her to accept Christ, which she joyfully did. We prayed together and she told me that she had been thinking about becoming a Christian for some time and that my testimony showed her that it is what the Lord wants her to do.

The Lord does not ask us to perform superhuman tasks; He only asks that we tell others about the change, hope and joy in us that we did not have before. The Lord promises us abundant life, life lived more fully. Let's tell others there is another way to live. Let's share with others that He keeps His promises.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Why do you think we sometimes find it hard to share with others a story about God at work in our lives?

Take some time to think of where you have seen God at work around you this past week or so. Come prepared to share a story at your MCG, on Sunday Morning, or on the NBBC Facebook group.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Matthew 24:1-14

Romans 6:15-23

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 56

Numbers 21-22

Questions about your reading? Jot them 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 that God would open your eyes and heart to what He is doing on your street
- Pray for the leaders and staff of NBBC as they meet together this evening and tomorrow

Saturday November 10th – Pleading

Reading Mark 5:21 – 24

“He pleaded earnestly with him...”

When we read stories of Jesus healing, like this one today, we may find ourselves wondering why Jesus doesn't sometimes answer our pleading for healing. Isn't God meant to hear the cries of the broken-hearted? Just because we plead doesn't mean that we get what we ask for, but when we plead, God *is* attentive and often responds by giving what we *really* need rather than what we think we need.

Richard Moore of Derry, Northern Ireland, was just ten years old when blinded by a British soldier who fired a rubber bullet at him at point-blank range as he was on his way home from his local school.

For as long as he could remember, Richard wanted to meet the soldier who shot him. Thirty years after the incident, he finally did. After discovering who the soldier was and where he lived, Richard wrote to him to get permission to visit, and then he met with him face-to-face, offering his personal, heartfelt forgiveness.

Here's what Richard later said about the experience:

"After that, something peculiar and wonderful happened. Something inside me changed, something paradoxical. I began to realize that the gift of forgiveness I thought I was bestowing on the soldier who shot me was actually a gift from God to me.

It didn't even matter whether the soldier wanted or needed forgiveness; the gift freed me, leaving me with a sense of serenity and blessedness. All through my boyhood my mother had wanted the impossible for me - that I would be given back my sight. I even woke up one night to find my dear mother on her knees, next to my bed, pleading with God. When I met the soldier and forgave him, I believe my mother's prayers were

answered. I was given a new vision, and my real wound, the one that needed healing more than my eyes, was healed."⁵

We can sometimes think that the reason that we aren't getting what we want is because we are not praying hard enough. We think that we need to plead with God more earnestly, but sometimes God is answering our prayer differently. This is when we need to ask God to open the eyes of our heart⁶ so that we might know what He is doing and how He is answering.

There are times when we need to persist in prayer. There are also times when we need to accept God's answer as "no" but there are other times when God is answering in ways different than what we have asked.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Can you remember a time when God answered your prayer differently than how you were praying?

Are you praying for something that you don't see God answering?
Ask God to open the eyes of your heart to see what He might be up to.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Matthew 24:15-35
- Romans 7:1-12

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 57
- Numbers 23-25

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

⁵ Richard Moore, interview by Pat Coyle, www.sacredspace.com.

⁶ See Ephesians 1:18

Prayer Points:

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

- Pray for those you are waiting on God to answer their prayer
- Pray for Bright Corner as it meets this morning

Sunday November 11th – Mark Chapter Five

Reading Mark 5

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 24:36-51

Romans 7:3-25

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 58

Numbers 26-27

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

Prayer Points:

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

- Thank God for the freedom we have in Canada to worship

Monday November 12th – Healing Clothes

Reading Mark 5:25 – 34

“If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.”

In the times of Jesus, and also today, a pious Jew would wear a prayer shawl, called a Tallit, around his shoulders. During prayer the shawl would be used as a head covering.

The word translated “clothes” in the story is translated elsewhere as “wing”. The Jewish prayer shawl, or tallit, has a very important, knotted, blue cord that hangs from the corner. This area is called the “wing”. When Hebrews prayed, they held the “wings” of their prayer shawl out to form a “tent”. This was their prayer closet. With this understanding in mind, an ancient Jew under the prayer shawl could be said to be dwelling in the secret place of the Most High and under His wings (Psalm 91:1-4).



Old Testament scripture foretells that when Messiah comes, there will be “healing in His wings”.⁷ When we realize the significance of this concept to the first-century Hebraic mind, it becomes clear why this woman was instantly healed. The woman familiar with this scripture knew to touch the “wing” of His prayer shawl to be healed. She was expressing her faith in Jesus as the Son of Righteousness with healing in His wings and declaring her faith in Jesus as the fulfillment to God's prophetic Word.

Reaching out in faith is risky, but as one writer explains:

In my experience, signs follow decisions. The way you overcome spiritual inertia and produce spiritual momentum is by making tough decisions,

⁷ The King James Version translates Malachi 3:2 in this way, “But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings...”

and the tougher the decision, the more potential momentum it will produce. The primary reason most of us don't see God moving is simply because we aren't moving. If you want to see God move, you need to make a move!

I learned this lesson in dramatic fashion during the first year at National Community Church. We had been praying for a drummer to join our worship team for months, but I felt like I needed to put some feet on my faith, so I went out and bought a four-hundred-dollar drum set. It was a Field of Dreams moment: if you buy it, they will come. I bought the drum set on a Thursday. Our first drummer showed up the next Sunday - and he was good. He was actually part of the United States Marine Drum and Bugle Corps.

I cannot promise that signs will follow your faith in three minutes or three hours or three days, but when you take a step of faith, signs will follow. God will sanctify your expectations, and you will begin to live your life with holy anticipation. You'll hardly be able to wait to see what God is going to do next.⁸

⁸ Mark Batterson, *Wild Goose Chase*, (Multnomah, 2008), pp. 32-33

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Have you ever “reached out” in faith and been surprised by what God did? Come prepared to share this story with your MCG.

Have you ever “reached out” in faith and been disappointed? How should we process these times so that our faith is strengthened?

How might your MCG reach out to Jesus in faith for your community? Is there something you might attempt together? Come prepared to discuss your ideas.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Matthew 25:1-13

Romans 8:1-17

Read through the Old

Testament in a year:

Psalm 59

Leviticus 28-30

Questions about your reading? Jot them 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 those who need God’s healing touch in their physical being

Tuesday November 13th – Why Bother

(By NBBC's Bob Wilkins)

Reading Mark 5:35 – 43

“Your daughter is dead,” they said. “Why bother the teacher anymore?”

This passage in Mark is the record of two miracles: the raising of Jairus' daughter and the healing of the woman who had been haemorrhaging for 12 years, and how they are interlocked together. Jesus has just returned from the relative seclusion of the region of the Gerasenes where he delivered that wild man from his multitude of demons. He is probably back in Capernaum and a great crowd of people gather to hear him and to watch him perform miracles. Among those gathered was Jairus, a synagogue ruler, and he falls before Jesus and cries out, “My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live (verse 23).” It simply says that Jesus went with Jairus.

Here was clearly an emergency case that required the immediate attention of Jesus. but in the crowd of people there was also a woman who had been haemorrhaging for 12 years, and while she had sought treatment from many doctors she only got worse. She believed that if she could just touch the clothes of Jesus she would be healed. When she was able to touch him and was healed, Jesus stops and engages her in conversation. From Jairus' point of view, this was no doubt an interruption and a slowing down of Jesus ever getting to heal his dying daughter. As a matter of fact, the delay resulted in Jairus' worse nightmare. Some men came from Jairus' house saying that his little daughter had died and there was no longer any reason to bother Jesus. It was no longer an emergency case.

However, Jesus knew differently. He says to Jairus, “Don't be afraid; just believe.” The end result was the healing of Jairus' little girl. Do we give up too quickly when things take a turn for the worse? Do we get discouraged over delays in treatment and attention? Do we play the game of “what if” in trying to account for disappointments? Do we stop bothering Jesus when our worst nightmare happens?

This passage of Scripture has an important place in my life. In 1991 our daughter Faith was literally dying of cancer. She was no longer responding to the chemo treatments. Her only hope was a bone marrow transplant which still only gave her a 20% chance of survival. She went to Vancouver for the procedure. At the time she and her husband had two girls, ages 4 and 2. My wife and I were caring for them while they were in Vancouver. I began praying Jairus' words, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." I had a deep concern that the two little girls might grow up without a mother. One day, while I heard no voices, it was as if the Lord said to me. "Wilkins, your own father died when you were 6 years of age and you are okay." What a comfort that was to me.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Matthew 25:14-30

Romans 8:18-39

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 60

Leviticus 31-32

Questions about your reading? Jot them 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.

Wednesday November 14th – Faithlessness

Reading Mark 6:1 – 6

“He was amazed at their lack of faith.”

In an article in The New York Times Magazine, writer Dana Tierney described how both she and her husband John had rejected their childhood faith. They had their son Luke baptized to placate their families, but that was it. When Dana's husband went to Iraq as an imbedded reporter, she was understandably fearful, but she was surprised at how calm four-year-old Luke was. She assumed that it was just youthful naiveté, until one day when they were watching a TV interview with a U.S. soldier who was sharing his fears about returning to Iraq. For just an instant, Dana saw Luke form his hands to pray. When she asked him about it, Luke at first denied it, but after he did it a second time, he confessed that he had been praying.

Dana was stunned, partly by Luke's faith, and partly by how his faith allowed him to be calm and her lack of faith caused her to be fearful. She was also embarrassed that her four-year son instinctively knew that praying for his dad was socially inappropriate.

When Dana asked Luke when he first began to believe in God, he said, "I don't know. I've always known he exists." Throughout the article Dana never patronizes believers. At one point she described how many of her non-religious friends feel freed from religion as if they've been liberated from superstition. Not Dana. She feels like she is missing out. As Dana explained, "[My religious friends] have an expansiveness of spirit. When they walk along a stream, they don't just see water falling over rocks; the sight fills them with ecstasy. They see a realm of hope beyond this world. I just see a babbling brook. I don't get the message."⁹

Faith, like enthusiasm, can be contagious. When we allow our faith in Jesus to be seen it encourages the faith of others. Edelman, a leading

⁹ Adapted from David Hart Bradstreet, *Star Struck* (Zondervan, 2016), pages 108-110

global communications marketing firm, publishes a yearly "Trust Barometer" report. A recent report (2018) shows a plummet in trust across the United States. Here's a summary of the report:

"The United States is enduring an unprecedented crisis of trust," said Richard Edelman, president and CEO of Edelman. "This is the first time that a massive drop in trust has not been linked to a pressing economic issue or catastrophe ... In fact, it's the ultimate irony that it's happening at a time of prosperity, with the stock market and employment rates in the US at record highs."¹⁰

In a world where trust is in crisis, Christians are in a unique position to show who is truly trustworthy. When faith is present it invites Jesus to act in a way that doesn't happen when faith is absent.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

What makes trusting in Jesus hard for you?

Is there something in your life that you are trusting God for? Come prepared to share with your MCG so that they can pray in support of your concerns.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Matthew 25:31-46
- Romans 9:1-18

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 61
- Leviticus 33-36

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

¹⁰ Cision PR Newswire, "2018 Edelman Trust Barometer Reveals Record-Breaking Drop in Trust in the U.S." (1-21-18)

Prayer Points:

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

- Pray for the young adults that join with us in our gatherings
- Give thanks for the children of NBBC

Thursday November 15th – Partnering

Reading Mark 6:7 – 13

“...he began to send them out two by two...”

When Jesus sent the disciples out to minister He did not send them alone. Christianity was never meant to be a lone-ranger enterprise. Ministry is a team effort. There is much wisdom in Jesus’ method. At the very least, when we are with others we find help when we are in need.

More than 37,000 runners competed in the 2012 London Marathon. Wilson Kipsang, from Kenya, won the race in an impressive 2:04:44. Simone Clarke took more than three times as long, but her finish may be more impressive.

Simone is a 39-year-old epileptic. Simone suffers about four seizures a day and needed someone willing to train and run with her. Her friend, Tally Hall, agreed to run the marathon with her and help her if she had a seizure while running, but none of their training runs prepared them for what was to come.

On the beautiful spring morning of the London Marathon, Simone and Tally joined the tens of thousands at the starting point and took off as the gun sounded. For the first seven miles, everything went well. It was at mile eight that pain from an ongoing stomach problem triggered Simone's first seizure. Tally caught Simone and got her safely to the ground. Simone was completely unconscious for 30 seconds before Tally could rouse her.

And then, remarkably, Simone woke, got up, and started running again. Over the next 18 miles, Simone had 19 more seizures, each time collapsing and losing consciousness for 30 seconds or more. Each time, Tally caught her, eased her to the ground, and protected her until she regained consciousness, and each time, Tally helped Simone up, and they continued.

'By the time we got to 15 miles," Simone said afterward, "I was in tears because I was so annoyed we had lost the pace, but by that stage I had already had lots of (seizures), and I was still standing, so I thought, stuff it, I'm just going to finish it."

Simone and Tally crossed the finish line in 6½ hours.

The Bible compares our faith with a race that we are called to run to the finish line. When we race with others we are more likely to succeed.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Can you think of other reasons why Jesus would have us minister together?

As a group, how are you doing in sharing the work associated with your MCG? Are you taking turns opening your home? Are you each bringing generously to the pot lucks? Are you each coming prepared with your study completed and with stories to share? Talk as a group about these matters and how your MCG may become better at ministering to one another and your neighbours together.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Matthew 26:1-16
- Romans 9:19-33

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 62
- Deuteronomy 1-3

Questions about your reading? Jot them 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 to the left of you
- Pray for the board, elders and council as they meet tonight

Friday November 16th – Confronting Worldly Powers

(By NBBC's Ben Wimmers)

Reading Mark 6:14 – 20

“John had been saying to Herod, ‘It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.’”

As I sat down with a cup of tea and the only English newspaper I could find in St. Petersburg, Russia, I was startled by what I read. The day before, approximately 40 protestors were arrested by the Politsii outside of St. Isaac’s Cathedral. It was shocking to me because I had walked past the same spot on that very day a few hours before the protestors had assembled. They were protesting Russia’s involvement in Crimean politics during 2014 (which resulted in annexation and an ongoing civil war in Ukraine). I agreed with the protestors but would not have been a part of the vocal protest. I was trying to fly under the radar with my missionary work in Russia to avoid deportation. It made me think, would I have the courage to stand up to my government in the same way - even if I know that imprisonment was a very real possibility?

In today’s scripture, we read about how John the Baptist stood up to the government of his day. He spoke to Herod about the adulterous relationship he had with his brother Philip’s wife. It cost John his life. John knew the risks he was taking by speaking to Herod and his wife about the integrity of their relationship. So why say anything? Surely there were plenty of other adulterous people with less power that needed to hear the same message. Despite the danger associated with confronting Herod, John obeyed the call God placed upon his life. John refused to soften the message of God, nor did he shy away from the confrontation. John went into the throne room of Herod with the full confidence that comes from obedience to God.

Yet it is not enough to simply point out the problems in culture. In his book *Culture Making*, by Andy Crouch, he reminds Christians that it is not enough to condemn culture. Nor is it sufficient merely to critique, copy or consume it. The only way to change culture is to create culture. Christians are to be culture makers, being used by God to help

transform the culture around us. When we do, we may find ourselves in conflict with other powers and authorities, but we are called to serve a higher authority than anyone here on earth. When confronted with a choice between serving our earthly authorities and God, we must always choose God; knowing and trusting that His way is greatest.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Is there an area of your life where you are holding back on what you believe to be true? How can you boldly bring the gospel of Jesus into this area of your life?

As you think about the city of Burlington, are there injustices that need to be confronted? Discuss this as a group at your MCG.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Matthew 26:17-35
- Romans 10

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 63
- Deuteronomy 4-5

Questions about your reading? Jot them 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 government of Canada

Saturday November 17th – Peer Pressure

(By NBBC's Ben Froese)

Reading Mark 6:21 – 29

“...but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her.”

In the early 1960s, American psychologist Stanley Milgram designed an experiment to discover how many people could be talked into doing something that would violate their ethical standards.¹¹ Participants were asked to give an electric shock to a person in another room every time that person failed to properly recite a list of word pairs. The participants could hear the other person's response to the shocks (in reality, however, the other person was only an actor, and no shocks were being given, but the participants didn't know this). With each error, the voltage (marked 0 to 450) was to be increased by 15 volts.

It was predicted beforehand that most people would refuse to give a shock beyond 150 volts, but the results were surprising. About two-thirds of the participants obeyed the experiment facilitator to the fullest extent. They obeyed, continuing to give shocks of increased voltage, no matter how much the victim shouted for them to stop. They obeyed to the extent that the other person would have been electrocuted to death if the shocks were actually being given.

The pressure put on us by other people can get us to do things that we would never do otherwise.

This is the story of Herod in today's Scripture passage. Previously, Herod had “protected [John], knowing him to be a righteous and holy man” (Mark 6:20) but after making an oath to give Herodias' daughter anything she wanted and being surrounded by dinner guests, Herod did not want to disappoint. Herod went against his conscience and what he believed to be right. He ordered that John be beheaded, put to death.

¹¹ Stanley Milgram, “Behaviour Study of Obedience.” *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 67 (1963): 371-378.

We too face social pressure to go against our consciences and what we believe to be right. Sometimes we may “give in” to an extent where we make choices we deeply regret. Other times we “give in” in smaller ways.

We can be pressured to downplay the significance of Jesus in our conversations with others. We can be pressured to go against our convictions, being told that “everyone is doing it.” We can be pressured to go along with the crowd in taking part in gossip or negative speech. The list goes on.

But we also have Jesus with us every moment of every day. Jesus was “tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin” (Hebrews 4:15). He is there to help us in our battle against peer pressure and temptation.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Sometimes we think of “peer pressure” as something that only teenagers deal with, but this is simply not true. In what ways do you experience peer pressure? What are the ways in which the people around you might influence you in a negative way?

What do you plan to do next time you are pressured to do something that goes against your conscience?

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Matthew 26:36-56
- Romans 11:1-24

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 64
- Deuteronomy 6-8

Questions about your reading? Jot them 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 youth at NBBC who experience peer pressure daily
- Pray that you will remain firm in your convictions

Sunday November 18th – Mark Chapter Six

Reading: Mark 6

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 26:57-75
- Romans 11:25-36

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 65
- Deuteronomy 9-12

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

Prayer Points:

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

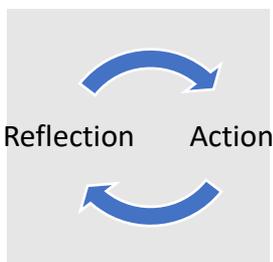
- Pray for the Deeper series
- Give thanks today for God's provision to you personally

Monday November 19th – Action Reflection

Reading Mark 6:30 – 44

“The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught.”

It seems like a rather simple practice, one that most would take for granted, perhaps assume that it is being done and yet most people don't do it enough. It is the practice of thinking about what you do and why you do it. When we take time to report what we've done and why we've done it to others it allows an even richer time of reflection and refinement of those things which we do.



This is what Jesus did with His disciples. After having sent them out two by two he calls them together and they debrief on how their ministry went. This pattern is often referred to as “action – reflection”. It is a basic way to improve our ministry efforts and get better at what we do.

One blogger tells the following story:

We had a student aide who, like so many of the students in a community college, was a "mature learner." She had done some hard living in her time -- including a period of her life when she'd had to move from apartment to apartment in search of the cheapest rent. It seemed like she was always packing and unpacking. It got so that she just didn't unpack anything she didn't immediately need. One day, when her life had settled down and she was in a house where she stayed for a while, she decided to go through the oldest boxes, and she found one box which had been moved, unopened, from one home to another from the very start.

She opened it, and what was in it?

Trash.

Not junk. Not stuff she wished she had thrown away a long time ago. It was actual trash which she HAD thrown away a long time ago. Food wrappers, packing material and tissues. She'd put it in a garbage bag and set it aside to throw out as she left that first house... and some helpful soul had kindly packed it in a box for her and stuck it on the truck.

And for a decade she toted that box of trash with her from house to house.¹²

When we take time to unpack the activities we are involved in, we may find that there is some “trash” that we can get rid of the next time we do it. Jesus encouraged the disciples to be in this habit of refining their ministry activities through this action – reflection process. As we seek to minister to others, it is a good practice for us to engage in also.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Do some personal reflection on your ministry as a representative of Him at work or at home. Invite Jesus to reveal how you might be more effective in ministering His presence to others. What changes will you make in light of what you reflect upon?

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New

Testament in a year:

Matthew 27:1-10

Romans 12:1-8

Read through the Old

Testament in a year:

Psalm 66

Deuteronomy 13-17

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

¹² <http://daringnovelist.blogspot.com/2011/07/baked-ham-joke-and-problem-with-legacy.html>

Prayer Points:

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

- Ask God to help you look at your weekly schedule through His eyes
- Pray for the Jr. High Drop In at 3:30pm today

Tuesday November 20th – Courage

(By NBBC's Bob Wilkins)

Reading Mark 6:45 – 56

“Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

All of us have the emotion of fear in our lives, even if we will not admit it, or even deny it. Some people do seem to be fearless, especially when they are young. In our youth we are more likely to take risks than when we get older. Think of when you were young and the risks you were willing to take – fast cars, extreme sports etc.

However, fear eventually catches up with us and sometimes it even surprises us. Some of us seem to live in some measure of fear and anxiety most of the time – fear of the past, the present, the future; fear of our kids, fear of our spouse, our job. You name it and we can fear it. Some fears are legitimate such as being caught in a hurricane; or being involved in a serious accident; being directly involved in war, either as a victim or as a combatant. Other fears are not well founded, and we usually call them phobias such as claustrophobia, or even phobophobia, which is the fear of having a phobia!

It is interesting how often the disciples of Jesus found themselves in fearful situations, most of the time because Jesus put them there. Such is the case in this passage. The disciples were caught in a storm out on the lake and Jesus comes to them walking on the water, a situation that could terrify any one of us. To allay their fears, Jesus says to them as he comes to them on the water, “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

There are at least three reasons from this passage why the disciples could take courage in the face of fear. One is that they were in the will and purpose of God. While they did not realize it at first this was no happenstance in their lives. Jesus told them to get in their boat and head for Bethsaida ahead of him while he went to a mountainside to pray. The point here is that we need not be overcome by fear if we are doing what Jesus asked us to do.

A second reason to take courage in the face of fear is that Christ not only puts us in the situation, but he also knows exactly what we are facing. It says in verse 48, “He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them.” When life is against us it is encouraging to know that Jesus knows and understands exactly what we are facing.

A third reason to take courage in the face of fear is that Jesus does come to us in the midst of our need, even though it may not be at our timing. We would rather that He would come at the first watch of the night and not the fourth, which was 3:00 to 6:00 a.m.! Sometimes waiting for Jesus to arrive is more difficult than the fearful experience we are having.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Matthew 27:11-26

Romans 12:9-21

Read through the Old Testament through in a year:

Psalm 67

Deuteronomy 18-21

Questions about your reading? Jot them 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.

Wednesday November 21st – Vain Worship

(By NBBC's Blair Clark)

Reading Mark 7:1 – 8

“They worship me in vain...”

None of us likes to waste our time doing something useless. I remember when we lived in Indonesia, and Janet pointed out to one of our helpers that she had neglected to sweep down the cobwebs that were in our living room. Her response was instructive. She said “But Ibu, (mother) they will just be back tomorrow!” For her this was an example of doing something in vain.

This is a pretty mild but straightforward statement by Jesus, compared to what some of the prophets said to the people. For example, Amos, speaking for God, said “I hate, I despise your religious festivals; I cannot stand your assemblies.” Isaiah wrote, “Your incense is detestable to me...I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals I hate with all my being. . . even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen.” (Isaiah 1:13-15)

Worship is vain and worthless when it places human rules, human preferences above God’s laws and desires. I am always intrigued when people dismiss a worship experience because they didn’t like it. The critical question to ask is, “was God pleased with this?” After all, our worship is offered to Him. It’s His opinion that counts.

I was speaking in a church in New Brunswick and made the comment that if you are in church, and a young boy from the community has come to the service, and he is wearing his baseball hat in the service, and you are so upset that you can’t focus on worship, there is a problem. But it is you who has the problem – not the boy from the community, and certainly not God! Jesus’ words in Mark 10:14 express God’s heart: “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”

Think of Christians and congregations in the 50s and 60s who discriminated against people of other skin colours. That was vain worship! They were honouring God with their lips, but their hearts were far from Him. They maintained their custom of discrimination, segregation, and racism, saying, "That's just the way things are done around here," while they rejected God's commandment to love their neighbour as themselves.

Worship starts as an attitude of the heart. When the form of worship trumps our attitude of worship, we are worshipping in vain.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Consider some of the typical ways we worship (i.e. traditions) with regard to:

- Time
- Place
- Means

How might these worship traditions make our worship empty and vain?

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Matthew 27:27-44

Romans 13

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 68

Deuteronomy 22-26

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

Prayer Points:

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

- Take a moment to sing a song of prayer to God
- Pray for the neighbour across from you

Thursday November 22nd – Traditionalism

(By NBBC's Bob Wilkins)

Reading Mark 7:9 – 13

“You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!”

As Baptists and evangelicals who pride ourselves in being a part of the free church tradition, we often think that we are immune to the ritualistic rules of other traditions, but we can be just as tied to human tradition as others. Just try to change things when it comes to worship style, structures, programs, procedures etc. We feel so strongly about some things that to change them or not to do them is to be accused of being unspiritual. It is amazing how many great battles have been fought over the “tradition of the elders.” The religious leaders that Jesus encountered and debated with felt that spirituality was all about the right words and forms and they forgot about the heart.

Of course, not all human tradition is bad or evil and sinful, but it is when tradition becomes the foundation of our trust and hope that it is wrong, or when our tradition actually circumvents the commands of God (v 8).

In this passage Jesus gives an example of this very thing committed by the Pharisees. The 5th Commandment in the Decalogue (Ten Commandments) is: “Honour your father and your mother.” In the Old Testament there was even the death penalty for those who cursed their father or mother – try that one on today!¹³ There were, of course, many aspects to honouring your parents, including supporting them in their need or in their old age. The New Testament says that those who will not look after the members of their own family are worse than unbelievers.¹⁴ But these religious leaders had devised a way that the obligation to support their parents could be circumvented. They could simply declare their available resources as “Corban” or devoted to God so that it could not be used in support of their parents – and no doubt

¹³ Leviticus 20:9

¹⁴ 1 Timothy 5:8

they would be able to free it up for themselves later on. This was but one example of the casuistry (justifying) of these leaders in making their religious practices serve themselves – so their traditions nullified the word of God. True spirituality does not avoid God’s commands or God’s will. Obeying God is critical to our relationship with Him.

King Saul thought that making sacrifices under the circumstances of being threatened by the Philistines was more important than obedience to God. Here is what the prophet Samuel said to King Saul in his rebuke of him:

“Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD?

To obey is better than sacrifice,
and to heed is better than the fat of rams.

For rebellion is like the sin of divination,
and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.

Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,
he has rejected you as king.”¹⁵

Honouring the commands of God is critical to our spirituality and our relationship with God.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

What are some examples of how the word of God is nullified by our traditions?

What do you think is the difference between having traditions and traditionalism?

¹⁵ 1 Samuel 15:22-23

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Matthew 27:45-56

Romans 14

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 69:1-18

Deuteronomy 27-28

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

Prayer Points:

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

- Ask God to reveal to you any areas where you place the tradition above the purpose
- Pray for NBBC's Annual Meeting

Friday November 23rd – Heart Health

(By NBBC's Phil McAllister)

Reading Mark 7:14 – 23

“For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come...”

The Greek philosopher, Aristotle once said, “Excellence is never an accident. It is always the result of high intention.” Today, may we consider that the intentions of our heart should be excellent and never an accident – well thought through and for God’s glory.

Think of a time where you had good intentions. Often, I feel the desire to support my friends however I can: spend time, get them coffee, or listen to their grievances and even their moments of celebration. My intention during those moments of service and communion with my friends should reflect excellence and genuine interest – an intentional heart.

Computer scientists have coined a popular term describing the quality of the output being contingent upon the quality of the input (Known as the Garbage in – Garbage out theory or Gi-Go). Similarly, what we digest through visual and audio stimulation, and the quality thereof, suggests the quality of what a person sends out in data.¹⁶ Jesus, in Mark 7, clearly distinguishes the Gi-Go theory which helps outline characteristics of a healthy heart of good intentions.

Jesus enters a house, Peter’s house in Capernaum. He opens up to the listeners and explains to them the meaning of his teaching. This conversation with Jesus and his disciples happens all the time. Jesus asks if they, after all this time, still do not understand the spiritual truth. V.19 – nothing entering from the outside defiles, because it enters the stomach, not the heart. It’s at the heart that lies the true issues of life. Isaiah 29:13. “These people come near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me”.¹⁷

¹⁶ Rouse, *Garbage In Garbage Out*, 2008.

¹⁷ Expositors Bible Commentary, *Mark*, 680.

The text started with Jesus speaking directly to Pharisees and law teachers, but in this conversation Jesus wants these people to hear the essence of his word: the words out of our mouths are influenced by the intention of our heart. He has a conversation about things clean and unclean – a familiar conversation found in the Old Testament. What makes a person unclean comes from within - the heart of the matter. Much like athletes who condition their bodies with exercise and nutrition, so Christians ought to be aware of the ‘nutrition’ we put in our bodies as we act, or ‘exercise’ in Christlike ways. Be careful what you ingest this week: media, gossip, relationships, curt words – they will have a direct impact on the intention of your heart and will impact to those around you.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

In what ways do you guard your heart from taking in that which will negatively influence your heart and mind?

One of the ways that we are encouraged to keep our minds from becoming “polluted” is by Bible memorization. Work on memorizing Philippians 4:8: “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Matthew 27:57-66
- Romans 15:1-13

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 69:19-36
- Deuteronomy 29-31

Questions about your reading? Jot them 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 Shari and her team as they hold a PA Day Camp today
- Pray for the neighbour to the left of you

Saturday November 24th – The Messianic Secret

Reading Mark 7:24

“He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it...”

Have you noticed in your reading of Mark so far, how often issues regarding Jesus’ identity being kept hidden appear?

- He tells the man who was healed not to tell others it was him (1:44).
- He commands demons to be silent about telling who He is (1:25, 1:32, 3:12).
- After Jesus calms the storm the disciples are terrified and ask, “who is this?” (4:41).
- In his own hometown the people are speculating about His identity (6:2, 3).

Even King Herod is found speculating about His identity, as rumour about who this man was were swirling. Throughout Mark’s Gospel you will find all kinds of references to Jesus’ identity.

Jesus seems to want to keep His identity a secret. This fact has been picked up by theologians who refer to it as the “Messianic Secret”.

At this point we should ask ourselves why Jesus was so careful to keep His identity hidden. In order to answer this question, we have to look at the common Messianic expectations in first-century Palestine. Most of the nation was looking for a Messiah who would be a political revolutionary. They were looking for a king who would come in and release the nation from Roman domination. The demand for the release of Barabbas, a political zealot, instead of Christ (Matt. 27:15–23) shows that most of Israel wanted a political saviour.

While these expectations were not wholly erroneous, most of the nation failed to grasp the full role of the Messiah. They failed to grasp the expectations in the prophetic writings (especially Isaiah 53) that the Messiah would not only be a political ruler but also a suffering servant. Jesus kept His identity hidden so that He would not encourage these

incomplete expectations and bring upon Himself the wrath of the Roman government before the appointed time.

It seems that Jesus doesn't like to be put into a box. He will not fit our neat but restrictive categories. Just as He did not do what a Messiah was "supposed to do" for the Pharisees or act like a Messiah was "supposed to act." Likewise, Jesus will not always do as we *want* Him to.

This can be a source of frustration, but it can also be a source of delight and wonder. There is always more to Jesus than we expect. He is often blowing open our limited and inaccurate caricatures of who He is. Jesus wants to be known by us for who He really is, and He is so much more than we often limit Him to be!

Meditation/Application/Reflection

What are some of the expectations that people place upon Jesus today that He often does not cater to?

What are some of the misconceptions that society has about Jesus?

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Matthew 28:1-10

Romans 15:14-33

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 70

Deuteronomy 32

Questions about your reading? Jot them 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 those struggling with mental illness
- Pray for the upcoming Christmas season

Sunday November 25th – Mark Chapter Seven

Reading: Mark 7

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 28:11-20
- Romans 16

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 71
- Deuteronomy 33-34

Questions about your reading? Jot them 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 staff and their families

Monday November 26th – Table Scrap Faith

(By NBBC's Veronika Bankuti)

Reading Mark 7:25 – 30

“even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”

This story in the Bible is one of my anchors. It is a simple story, but if you stop and think about it, it will reveal untold riches. It actually ties in beautifully with Merv’s wisdom sermon series in September about the simple. This Syrophenician Gentile woman showed great prudence.

First, she did not get offended when Jesus called her a dog (something few of us would take kindly to, these days) and second, not only did she not get offended, but she humbly accepted Jesus’ estimation of her and crafted her answer with this in mind. Her argument was disarming and very true. We who own pets, know that our little furry friends hang around our table when we are eating and wait for the smallest little crumb to fall (accidentally on purpose) so they can run and get it.

Knowing they are patiently waiting for their “reward” and watching them as they look at us with those pleading eyes, tilting their little heads in that special way; we want to give them our whole dinner! How can a request like this be turned down? Jesus not only promised the woman that her daughter will be delivered from the demons, but also commended her for her faith. It seems that all through the New Testament it was Gentile women in particular to whom Jesus revealed most. The woman at the well was the first human being on the face of the earth to whom Jesus plainly revealed himself as the promised Messiah.

If we can make a point of learning not to get easily offended and persevere until we get the answer we need we will notice a major positive impact in every area of our lives. Think of how many times our relationships with our spouses, children, siblings or friends have been harmed by someone taking offence and allowing bitterness to grow in our hearts. Bitterness will stop us from perseverance in building and nurturing the relationship and before we know it, the damage is done.

In a career, taking offence and growing bitter not only hijacks our prospects for a promotion but transforms every day from an opportunity for something great into “another day in the salt mines”. It will rob from us the thrill of achieving our career goals, wipe out our energy and ruin our health in general.

Does this same principle also apply to our communication with God? The sheer volume of Bible promises regarding persevering and believing prayer is astonishing. God wants us to be bold and persevere, even when we do not hear the answer. Silence does not mean refusal – maybe God is waiting for a persuasive argument – just like the one of the Syrophenician woman!

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Have you had a time of prolonged waiting for God to answer a prayer? How did He eventually answer?

How do you know if you are to keep praying of if God has answered “no”?

Why do you think Jesus called the woman a dog?*** (attempt to answer this question before consulting the footnote below)

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Mark 1:1-8

1 Corinthians 1:1-17

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 72

Joshua 1-2

Questions about your reading? Jot them 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 elderly in your neighbourhood
- Pray for those in your extended family

** In the time of Jesus all Gentiles were referred to as dogs. It was meant to be an insult and showed the cultural pride and prejudice within Judaism. Gentiles would be familiar with this label, but here Jesus does something different. First, Jesus does not use the usual word for dog. He uses a diminutive word which described, not the wild dogs of the streets that was used to insult Gentiles, but the word used for little pet lap-dogs of the house. In Greek, diminutives are characteristically affectionate. Jesus took the sting out.

Second, without a doubt His tone of voice makes all the difference. The same word can be a deadly insult *or* an affectionate address, according to the tone of voice. We can call a person a “big dummy” in a voice of contempt or a voice of affection. Jesus’ tone took all the poison out of the word.

Tuesday November 27th – The Amazing Jesus

Reading Mark 7:31 – 37

“People were overwhelmed with amazement.”

How do we describe this man named Jesus? Many attempts have been made.

Origen, in the third century, had a great analogy. He told of a village with a huge statue—so immense you couldn’t see exactly what it was supposed to represent. Finally, someone miniaturized the statue so one could see the person it honoured. Origen said, "That is what God did in his Son." Paul tells us Christ is the self-miniaturization of God, the visible icon or image of the invisible God (Colossians 1). In Christ we have God in a comprehensible way. In Christ we have God’s own personal and definitive visit to the planet. In short Jesus was the audible, visible Word who expressed the heart of the inaudible, invisible God. Jesus Christ is God's great Visual Aid.¹⁸

Jesus' question “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”¹⁹ has produced literally thousands of statements of faith across the centuries. Jaroslav Pelikan has collected hundreds of these statements about Jesus. Among them is the Masai Creed. This creed Africanizes Christianity by declaring that Jesus "was always on safari doing good." It also declares that after Jesus had been "tortured and nailed hands and feet to a cross, and died, he lay buried in the grave, but the hyenas did not touch him, and on the third day, he rose from the grave. He ascended unto the skies. He is the Lord."

In his book “Who is This Man” John Ortberg writes:

Normally when someone dies, their impact on the world immediately begins to recede. As I write this, our world now

¹⁸ Dale Bruner, theologian, from "Is Jesus Inclusive or Exclusive?" *Theology, News, and Notes of Fuller Seminary* (Oct. 1999), p.4

¹⁹ Matthew 16:13

marks the passing of digital innovator Steve Jobs. Someone wrote that ten years ago our world had Bob Hope, Johnny Cash and Steve Jobs; now we have no Jobs, no Cash, and no Hope. Jesus inverted this normal human trajectory, as he did so many others. Jesus' impact was greater a hundred years after his death than during his life; it was greater still after five hundred years; after a thousand years his legacy laid the foundation of much of Europe; after two thousand years he has more followers in more places than ever... It is in Jesus' name that desperate people pray, grateful people worship, and angry people swear. From christening to weddings to sickrooms to funerals, it is in Jesus' name that people are hatched, matched, patched and dispatched.

From the Dark Ages to Postmodernity, He is the man who won't go away.²⁰

In short, Jesus is absolutely, undeniably, outstandingly amazing! People all through history have found this out about Him – He is the Amazing Jesus!

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Mark 1:9-20
- 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 73
- Joshua 3-5

Questions about your reading? Jot them 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.

²⁰ John Ortberg, *Who is This Man?*, Zondervan 2012, pg. 14

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.

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.