



MCG

Study Guide

The Atonement wk1

February 21st – 27th

MISSIONAL
COMMUNITY 

Wednesday February 21st – The Power of the Cross

Reading 1 Corinthians 1:18 – 19

For the message of the cross... is the power of God.

Theologian, Walter Wink, argues that the myth of redemptive violence is the dominant religion in our society. One need only to recall Popeye cartoons.

The Popeye cartoons are based solely on the myth of redemptive violence. “In a typical segment, Bluto abducts a screaming and kicking Olive Oyl, Popeye’s girlfriend. When Popeye attempts to rescue her, the massive Bluto beats his diminutive opponent to a pulp, while Olive Oyl helplessly wrings her hands. At the last moment, as our hero oozes to the floor, and Bluto is trying, in effect, to rape Olive Oyl, a can of spinach pops from Popeye’s pocket and spills into his mouth. Transformed by this gracious infusion of power, he easily demolishes the villain and rescues his beloved. The format never varies. Neither party ever gains any insight or learns from these encounters. They never sit down and discuss their differences. Repeated defeats do not teach Bluto to honour Olive Oyl’s humanity, and repeated pummellings do not teach Popeye to swallow his spinach before the fight.”[1]

The myth of redemptive violence isn’t new. Walter Wink has traced it back to the Babylonian creation stories that are over 3,200 years old, and in Jesus’ time, the myth was equally a part of the Roman psyche.

Taking up the cross and following Jesus not only entails great cost, it is also viewed by the world as an utterly foolish thing to do. Yet it is where the power of God lies.

Think for a moment about Martin Luther King, Jr. He was a man who understood the falsehood of the myth of redemptive violence. Violence was not going to save America from the sin of racism. So, as a disciple of Jesus, he took up his cross and dared to challenge the power of racism non-violently. Utter foolishness. Except it worked. Racists

thought that they could save racism by killing King, but violence doesn't save, and anti-racism work continues.

God chooses to unleash God's power in foolish ways, in foolish places, and among foolish people. Perhaps the greatest irony of God's foolish power is that God has even promised to unleash God's power among us!

Meditation/Application

Think about the redemptive violence motif in movies and television. Why do you think this is so appealing? Is there any situation in your life where you are struggling with picking up the cross and embracing God's foolish power which set aside violence and revenge? Ask God for His grace to follow His example.

Reflecting on the reading:

In what way is the cross the power of God for those of us being saved? Or another way of asking it is, what did the cross of Christ save us from?

Prayer Points:

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

- Pray for those who have been giving up something for lent. Might you consider trying one thing for a day?
- Kids club meets tonight

Thursday February 22nd – Rules

Reading Isaiah 29:13 – 16

Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught.

Rules are a very important aspect of sport. They can help create order in classrooms. Rules of law help to govern a country and encourage civility. Rules have their place but rules in the spiritual life can act like shackles. They can impede true worship and genuine spirituality.

In June 2011, the city of Alameda, California, immediately changed its policies after first responders stood by and watched a man drown in San Francisco Bay. The first responders didn't venture into the muddy waters of the bay, even as the suicidal man started treading water and then eventually went under.

According to Michael D'Orazi, the Interim Fire Chief for Alameda, two things prevented authorities from taking action: First, because it was a crime scene, the police "felt that going into the water initially might not be the best idea because they were unsure if this individual was armed." Secondly, D'Orazi also said, "There was a policy in place that pretty much precluded our people from entering the water." The firefighters "were incredibly frustrated by this whole situation [because] they wanted to get in, they wanted to take action."

Local officials also noted that due to a lack of funding, firefighters had no one properly trained to go into the water. The Alameda Interim Police Chief was also quoted as saying, "It's muddy out there. We don't want [the police officers] sinking. We don't want them in distress."

Fortunately, the policies were changed only a few days after this incident.[2]

Those firemen may have followed the rules but they prevented them from doing their job. So too, we can follow the "rules" of being a

Christian: reading our Bibles, saying prayers, going to church but if our hearts are not engaged then no true worship is taking place.

One Sunday I asked a lady at church where her husband was. Her reply thrilled me. "He's with a neighbour who lost their son." He had been praying for an opportunity to connect with him and see how he's doing and his neighbour had suggested getting together on Sunday at 10:00.

He could have said "No" and gone to church to keep the "rules" and keep up appearances but instead he did what God would have all of us do - engage the mission to care for those outside of God's family. The reason we go to church is to become more effective in the mission of God. This guy understood what true worship looks like.

Meditation/Application

Is it possible that you have allowed some of your spiritual practices to become so routine that your heart is no longer in them? Sometimes that might mean changing up what you do and sometimes it is simply acknowledging it and telling God you are sorry and recommitting your heart to Him.

Reflecting on the reading:

In verse 15 of our reading it says, "Woe to those who go to great depths to hide their plans from the Lord, who do their work in darkness and think, 'Who sees us? Who will know?'"

In the age of technology, what ways do people try and "hide their plans"?

Prayer Points:

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

- Cindy Truman explained the purpose of Discipleship Resources Ministries. Consider how we get 'stuck' in our rules for what a disciple of Christ looks like. Pray that God will show you.
- Pray for your neighbour on your street to see and take the next step towards God. Perhaps you are a part of that next step.
- Consider joining those who gather to pray online tonight.

Friday February 23rd – Worldly Wisdom

Reading 1 Corinthians 1:20 – 21

Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

The “wisdom of the world” is called by many names:

- Human wisdom
- The wisdom of men
- The wisdom of this age
- Man’s wisdom

It may go by many names but it all looks the same. Worldly wisdom says: I must follow my favoured group in possessions, lifestyle, interests, social activities, fashion, diet, exercise, political correctness etc. We somehow convince ourselves that if our home is not painted in the “Pantone colour” of the year – then we will not be considered part of the in-crowd.

Maybe we should get into the habit of regularly asking ourselves questions like:

- Do I agree with the lifestyle, interests, social activities, fashion, diet, exercise, political correctness I am planning to follow?
- Do I even like the “Pantone colour” of the year?
- Can I afford to pay for all this without overextending my financial resources and going into debt?
- Does following the group mean re-arranging my priorities and foregoing or considerably reducing my charitable giving?
- What is the worst thing that can happen if I don’t follow the group?

Jesus compared humanity to sheep – lost sheep. Sheep are herd animals. They tend to follow each other. C.S. Lewis stated in *Mere Christianity*, one of the most important questions to ask about a fleet of ships on the open sea is “Where are they going?” [3] Sheep go where everyone else is going. It’s easier than trailing off in a different direction and following a road less travelled. If the others are heading to the edge

of the cliff and fall over a precipice – the only way a wise sheep could remain alive is to disaffiliate!

The classical view of seeking wisdom was through philosophy and human rationale. The first principle of Biblical wisdom is that people should humble themselves before God by obeying His Word - and who knows, these peculiar sheep that dare to march to a different drummer might just start a new trend!

Had I been Joseph's mother
I'd have prayed protection from his brothers
"God, keep him safe.
He is so young, so different from the others."
Mercifully,
she never knew there would be slavery and prison, too.

Had I been Moses' mother
I'd have wept to keep my little son:
praying she might forget
the babe drawn from the water of the Nile.
"Had I not kept him for her nursing him the while,
was he not mine?
and she but Pharaoh's daughter?"

Had I been Daniel's mother
I should have pled "Give victory!
this Babylonian horde godless and cruel
Don't let him be a captive-better dead,
Almighty Lord!"

Had I been Mary,
Oh, had I been she,
I would have cried as never mother cried,
"Anything, O God, Anything...
but crucified."

With such prayers importunate
my finite wisdom would assail
Infinite Wisdom.
God, how fortunate
Infinite Wisdom should prevail. [4]

Meditation/Application

Is there any aspect of your life where you are spurning God's wisdom because the world thinks differently? Ask God for grace to follow His Word. Do you need wisdom for a decision or circumstance? James tells us "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you." [5]

Reflecting on the reading:

In today's reading Paul rhetorically asks, "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" Can you think of a time when the world's wisdom was shown to be foolish?

Prayer Points:

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

- for wisdom to grow in you. To adhere to Scripture and the Holy Spirit as guides for wisdom
- Families dealing with terminal illness

Saturday February 24th – God the contrarian.

Reading 1 Corinthians 1:22 – 25

“...the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.”

It’s no accident that Jesus was raised in a backwater town and used simple illustrations to convey profound truth.

It’s no accident that the New Testament was written in the simple language of the marketplace rather than classical Greek – which was far more eloquent but way beyond the grasp of the common person. [6]

It seems that Jesus was always acting in ways that were contrary to the common logic of His day. Just when Jesus was becoming popular and crowds were gathering, Jesus tells His disciples it’s time to leave.

When Jesus performed a miracle, He would tell the person not to tell anyone. When the crowds wanted to make Him king, He snuck away. Even His own brothers once commented, “No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world.” [7]

It is the contrarian way of being that has led some to conclude that the Kingdom of God is upside down because its teaching is so counter-intuitive:

- To become a leader, be a servant
- To truly find life, die to self
- To get back at your enemy, love him
- To become rich, give money away
- If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also.
- If someone takes your coat, do not stop him from taking your shirt.

It is the contrarian way of God that can even make us wonder what God is up to in our lives.

Linda Holm, one-time member of the band Dallas Holm and Praise, found a malignant lump in her breast. Though her faith was strong and she was sure of God's providence, she crumbled emotionally when she heard the news.

She underwent a mastectomy and six months of chemotherapy. Her husband, musician Dallas Holm, said in an interview: "Sometimes in our valley and in our sorrow, we believe if we just knew what God was doing, that would settle it. I'm not sure that would make any difference. Faith is when you don't know. When it doesn't make sense. When you can't understand, yet you trust in God."

Although God acts in contrarian ways, He is always acting in love and wisdom.

Meditation/Application

Try to recall a time when something you thought was disastrous ended up producing something good. Consider sharing your story with your MCG on Tuesday.

Reflecting on the reading:

Paul wrote that, "Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom..."
What do you think people demand these days as "proof" regarding God?

Prayer - faith to rise in what we cannot see.

Sunday February 25th – The History and the Mystery

Reading 1 Corinthians 1:18 - 25

Sermon Notes:

Regarding the Crucifixion:

1. To many people the cross doesn't _____.
2. Roman crucifixion was a means of:
 - o _____
 - o _____
 - o _____
3. The cross is dealing with the problem of the _____.

Meditation/Application

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

Prayer Points:

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

- Worship gathering Thursday night at 7:30pm
- MCG and those who may be adjusting lifestyles to orientate themselves and their schedules to living life together in neighbourhood on mission

Monday February 26th – God chooses to use us.

Reading 1 Corinthians 1:26 – 29

God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things... to nullify the things that are.

We sometimes get or give the impression that people who come to church have their act together. Nothing could be further from the truth and yet God still chooses to use us.

Pastor Scott Sauls tells a story about an unnamed nursery worker who bumped into a first-time visitor named Janet who had dropped her two boys off in the nursery. Sauls writes:

After the service, while Janet was waiting in the nursery line to retrieve her boys, one of the nursery workers quietly approached her and said that there had been some issues. Both of her boys had picked fights with other children. Also, one of her boys had broken several of the toys that belonged to the church. In front of a room filled with other children and their parents, Janet scolded her boys and then screamed in a bellowing voice, "S—!" Deeply ashamed and feeling like a failure, Janet got her boys and skulked out of the building. No doubt, we were never going to see her again.

But that unnamed nursery volunteer called the church office that Monday and asked if I could check the visitor notebook to see if Janet had left her contact information. She had. I gave the nursery worker Janet's address, and unbeknownst to me, she sent Janet a note. The note read something like this:

Dear Janet, I'm so glad that you and your boys visited our church. Oh, and about that little exchange when you picked them up from the nursery? Let's just say that I found it so refreshing—that you would feel free to speak with an honest vocabulary like that in church. I am really drawn to honesty, and you are clearly an honest person. I hope we can become friends. Love, Unnamed Nursery Worker.

The nursery worker and Janet did in fact become friends. Janet came back the next Sunday - and the Sunday after that - and the Sunday after that. Eventually, Janet became the nursery director for the church. Later, I would discover that when Janet started coming to our church she was a recovering heroin addict.[8]

Sometimes we think “God can’t use me in my position” and yet the truth is that God can use anyone who is sensitive to where His Spirit leads and steps out in faith. Nursery workers can aid in the salvation of heroin addicts, and heroin addicts can be used to direct a church nursery. God uses any who make themselves available to Him.

Meditation/Application

Are there ways that God is using you right now, that years ago you would have said “no way”? Do you feel a nudge from God, a desire rising in your heart perhaps, regarding an area of ministry (formal or informal)? Ask God if there is a next step you should take.

Reflecting on the reading:

According to today’s reading, “God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are...” Why are we told He does this? Can you think of other reasons why God might do this?

Prayer Points:

- How might you use your gifts, abilities and availability in your neighbourhood; to your neighbours? Pray/listen.

Tuesday February 27th – In Christ

Reading 1 Corinthians 1:30 – 31

It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus

Paul writes that “you are in Christ Jesus” but what does that mean? Paul uses the expression hundreds of times in the Bible and yet the meaning can remain a bit vague.

To be “in Christ” means that Christ represents His people. Scholars sometimes refer to this under the heading of “corporate personality,” a leader who represents people or a group. Think of a sports team. When a forward on a hockey team scores a winning goal, that goal and the victory are credited to the entire team, even to the players sitting on the bench, even to the fans sitting in the stands or sitting on their sofas at home – even those fans who didn’t see the game (“You mean we won?”). They all participate in another’s triumph.

In the same way, Christ represents those who place their faith in him. If we are united to Christ, then we are united to Him in all that He has done for us. This is why the Bible talks about us being “crucified with Christ”, buried... with him”, and “raised with Christ” We are even “seated... with him in the heavenly places” now as we walk about with both feet on the ground. [9]

One day in 1677, a young man named Henry Scougal sat down to write a letter of spiritual comfort to a distressed friend, and though Scougal’s life would be tragically cut short a year later at the age of twenty-eight, his letter was copied, passed around, and soon published. You could say it went viral. It’s still in print today.

About half a century later, two brothers by the last name of Wesley were given Scougal’s letter by their mother, Susanna, who had cherished the letter herself. The brothers in turn, were so taken by it they shared it with their friend George, who upon reading it, commented, “I never knew what true religion was till God sent me that

excellent treatise.” That friend was George Whitfield, who went on to become one of the greatest preachers of the eighteenth century and a catalyst for what would come to be called the Great Awakening. Though he had been in church and a practicing Christian for years, Whitefield traced his own conversion back to reading Scougal’s letter.

The letter turns around a question that every age has asked in different ways, ” What is the heart of true Christianity?”

Scougal’s answer was that true Christianity consists not in the trappings of religion, not in going to church or in the saying of prayers, not in the making of orthodox affirmations or any external form. Rather, Scougal wrote, true Christianity consists in a “union of the soul with God, a real participation of the divine nature, the very image of God drawn upon the soul,” or, in the apostle’s phrase it is *Christ formed within us... a divine life.***[10]**

Preparing for your MCG

As you come to 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 study. What from chapter 5 of Daniel made an impression on you or what confused you?

PRAYER WALK/ACTIVITY: be creative and intentional as you pray/work together.

Notes from MCG meeting:

Prayer Request:

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

[1] Walter Wink, "Facing the Myth of Redemptive Violence," Ekklesia, http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/content/cpt/article_060823wink.shtml (posted 21 May 2012, accessed 22 January 2014).

[2] *Authorities make changes after first responders watch man drown*, CNN.com (6-1-11)

[3] C.S. LEWIS "Mere Christianity" Three parts of morality (not verbatim)

[4] *Prodigals and Those Who Love Them*, Ruth Bell Graham, 1991, Focus on the Family Publishing, p. 69

[5] James 1:5

[6] Osborne, Larry. *A Contrarian's Guide to Knowing God: Spirituality for the Rest of us*. Multnomah Books 2007, pg. 15.

[7] John 7:4

[8] *Adapted from Scott Sauls, Befriend (Tyndale, 2016) pages 29-30*

[9] Wilbourne, Rankin. *Union with Christ: The Way to Know and Enjoy God*. David C Cook publishing, 2016, p. 44 – 45.

[10] Wilbourne, Rankin. *Union with Christ: The Way to Know and Enjoy God*. David C Cook publishing, 2016, p. 95 – 96.

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 dependent upon the grace of God to enable us and so we joyfully enter this covenant in hope of what He might do in and through us.

Missional Community Group Shared Practices

1. Daily engage in reading Scripture and pray for God to bless NBBC in its missional calling.
2. Weekly, purposely and intentionally bless another person.
3. Monthly practice

^; 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.