



**MCG**  
**Study Guide**  
**The Atonement Week 4**  
**March 14<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup>**

**MISSIONAL**  
**COMMUNITY** 

My MCG Prayer Requests for this week:

**Wednesday March 14th – Universal Sinfulness**  
**Reading Romans 3:9 – 18**

“There is no one righteous...”

Part of the difficulty that people have with the Gospel is coming to terms with the fact that they are sinners. It seems as if they have reserved the term “sin” for those who are expressly evil – which isn’t them. Such justification is proving the point of their sinfulness.

The tendency to justify ourselves not only hurts our relationship with God, it also hurts other relationships also.

In their book *Mistakes Were Made (But Not By Me)*, social psychologists Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson describe how a fixation on our own righteousness can choke the life out of love. They write:

The vast majority of couples who drift apart do so slowly, over time, in a snowballing pattern of blame and self-justification. Each partner focuses on what the other one is doing wrong, while justifying his or her own preferences, attitudes, and ways of doing things. ... From our standpoint, therefore, misunderstandings, conflicts, personality differences, and even angry quarrels are not the assassins of love; self-justification is.[1]

Self-justification stands like a guard at the door of our hearts keeping out conviction, critique and accountability. It not only protects our sin, it is

sin. You can be sure that when you are feeling the need to defend yourself you are being tempted to sin.

When it comes to grappling with our sinfulness the alternative to self-justification is to admit our mistakes and own our sinfulness.

By the time Howard Schultz had resigned from Starbucks in 2000, the coffee chain was experiencing steady growth. Eight years later, when Starbucks was reeling from a bad economy and stiff competition, Schultz resumed his role as Starbucks' chief executive. He faced a challenging mission: to lead a turnaround. In an interview about his return, Schultz commented that before they could move forward, they had to deal with the past by honestly admitting their mistakes. Here's an excerpt from that interview:

“When I returned in January 2008, things were actually worse than I'd thought. The decisions we made were very difficult, but first there had to be a time when we stood up in front of the entire company as leaders and made almost a confession—that the leadership had failed the 180,000 Starbucks people and their families. Even though I wasn't the CEO...I should have known better. I am responsible. We had to admit to ourselves and to the people of this company that we owned the mistakes that were made. Once we did, it was a powerful turning point. It's like when you have a secret and get it out: The burden is off your shoulders.”[2]

When God points out our sin, it is not to shame us, embarrass us or condemn us. He wants to set us free, and that freedom starts when we admit that just like everybody else, we are sinners.

### **Meditation/Application**

Take some time to pray the prayer from Psalm 139:

“Search me, God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.

See if there is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.”

Respond to what God reveals to you below.

**Reflecting on the reading:**

From today's reading, list the ways in which humanity reveals their sinfulness:

Prayer Points:

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

- Skonberg family is working through end of life stage of Chris's elderly father; pray for their family
- Pray for youth drop-in as we begin to transition into a partnership with the Halton Boys and Girls Club

**Thursday March 15th – God’s Gift**  
**Reading Romans 3:19 – 24**

“Righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ...”

Perhaps it is a North American trait but it seems that people find it easier to be on the giving end of charity than on the receiving end. There is something humbling about receiving, and this may be why we find it so hard to receive from God without some kind of an attempt to pay Him back. However, that is not how the righteousness that God provides to us works. We can only receive it as a gift which is undeserved or merited in any way.

A few years ago, a friend and the owner of a local high-end department store gave me a very generous gift certificate. When I went to use the gift certificate he met me at the store, and walked with me as I selected a sports coat, a dress shirt, and a pair of shoes. I made sure to look at each of the price tags (on the sly) so I could overshoot the gift certificate enough and put some cash back into the store's register, thereby showing my gratitude for his generosity.

When I got to the register, I put my wallet on the counter and got out my credit card, but he placed the gift certificate in front of me and said, "Well, it looks like you've only spent a little more than half of your credit with us." I was shocked. In that moment I realized he had only been charging me half of the ticket price, which meant that I was still in his debt.

In a few weeks I returned to the store with my wife determined to show my appreciation by overspending the gift card. So, this time we approached the counter as a unified front, and with a huge armload of clothing and accessories. I handed our friend the gift certificate, and got my wallet out. He took the gift certificate in hand and started entering the purchases into the register.

Finally, when the bags were full, he turned to us and said, "You're not going to believe this, but I've rung everything up, and the total comes to

exactly zero." We started protesting: "That can't be right. The total should be well above what was left of our store credit."

Then he said, "I don't think you understand how this gift certificate works. No matter what you throw at it, the total will always read zero." We finally understood his arrangement. In our attempts to buy our way out of the debt, we had completely missed the value of the gift, which this generous man took such pleasure in bestowing upon us.[3]

The only appropriate response to God's gift of righteousness is to receive it with gratitude and praise. Any attempt to earn it or deserve it would insult the kindness of the one who has freely offered it to us.

### **Meditation/Application**

Think about how you would respond if someone, at great cost to themselves, gave you an incredible gift. How might you respond similarly to God's gift to you?

#### **Reflecting on the reading:**

In verse 20 we read, "through the law we become conscious of our sin." Why do you think we need to be made conscious of our sin? Why do Christians no longer need the law?

### **Prayer Points:**

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

- Pray March Break would provide opportunities to be refreshed as some families travel and be together.
- NBBC leaders meet tonight; pray for God's wisdom and clarity

## Friday March 16th – God’s Forbearance

### Reading Romans 3:25 – 27

“...because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished...”

I suspect that many people think that the word “forbearance” is synonymous with patience. In many ways it is but there is a nuanced difference that is important to understand.

The word translated “forbearance” literally means to hold back. God is delaying His punishment in the hope that people will receive His forgiveness before the punishment is meted out. God’s forbearance keeps Him from punishing us every time we do something wrong and take our time to repent. His forbearance allows us the time we need to mature and grow and our character to be built.

It is not that God is winking at sin saying, “that’s okay,” but God is patient with us, waiting for us to see and acknowledge our sin so that we might repent. This patient forbearance of God is what Peter was referring to when he wrote, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”[4]

The description “patient forbearance” does not characterize our world. An article on NPR claims that we have become “the Impatient Nation.” We want quick answers to complex problems. The article puts it this way:

We: Speed date. Eat fast food. Use the self-checkout lines in grocery stores. Try the “one weekend” diet. Pay extra for overnight shipping. Honk when the light turns green. Thrive or dive on quarterly earnings reports. Speak in half sentences. Start things but don’t fin ...We tweet stories in 140 characters or less, yet some tweets are too long. We cut corners, take shortcuts. We txt.

We: Send new faces to Washington every two years, then vote the rascals out two years later. Clamour for more safety in the skies, then complain when security takes too long and is inconvenient. Can’t take the time to drive to the video store or to wait for a DVD to arrive in the

mail, so we order them on demand or stream them on the Web—well, clips of movies at least.

In a world that is often reactionary and defensive, isn't the patience forbearance of God a beautiful contrast?

### **Meditation/Application**

Where have you found yourself anxious, impatient or reactionary? Commit those situations to God and ask that you might reflect his patient forbearance to others in your circle of influence.

#### **Reflecting on the reading:**

Today's reading says that "God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement... to demonstrate his righteousness." How do you think Christ's sacrifice demonstrated the righteousness of God?

### **Prayer Points:**

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

- Pray for the MCG's as the express patience in discerning where to join God at work. Also for others to capture the meaning of living life together in neighbourhood.
- Good Friday and Easter Sunday gatherings

## Saturday March 24th – Love

### Reading 1 John 4:7 - 12

“...let us love one another, for love comes from God.”

Andy Crouch shares this touching story: A few years ago I had the great gift of being invited into the bedroom of my friend David Sacks, born in 1968 just like me but brought to the end of his life by cancer that, by the time it was discovered, had erupted throughout his body. After a glorious and grace-filled year of life made possible by medical treatment, David's illness outran the drugs. In his last days he lay on his bed. His body was now unbearably thin and weak. David was an internationally celebrated photographer, but he would never make another image. He had sent me countless text messages over the years, but now he was beyond text messaging. He had created a Facebook group where he and his wife, Angie, chronicled the story of his cancer diagnosis, treatment, and all the ups and downs that followed, but he would never again update it.

But he was still there, still with us, still able, just barely, to hear us praying and singing—able, in moments of lucidity, to open his eyes, take in the small group of family and friends gathered around his bed and know he was not alone. His brother brought a guitar and several nights in a row, we sang Matt Redman's song "10,000 Reasons."

The technology was over. The easy-everywhere dream had ended. Now we could only be here, in our own vulnerable bodies, present to the immensely hard reality of a friend, father, son, and husband dying. Over the bed was a framed, calligraphed rendering of David and Angie's wedding vows.

It was one of the hardest places I have ever been. It was one of the most holy places I have ever been. It was one of the best places I have ever been.

We are meant to build this kind of life together: the kind of life that, at the end, is completely dependent upon one another; the kind of life that ultimately transcends, and does not need, the easy solutions of

technology because it is caught up in something truer and more lasting than anything our technological world can invent. We are meant to die in one another's arms, surrounded by prayer and song, knowing beyond knowing that we are loved. We are meant for so much more than technology can ever give us—above all, for the wisdom and courage that it will never give us. We are meant to spur one another along on the way to a better life, the life that really is life.

Why not begin living that life, together, now?

### **Meditation/Application**

Take time to think about those in your MCG by name and thank God for them in your life. Ask God to give you more love for one another.

#### **Reflecting on the reading:**

According to verse 12 what happens to us when we love? Why do you think this happens?

#### **Prayer Points:**

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

- Pray for those who are difficult to love or who are different than you. Thank God for those who speak into your life through their differences

**Sunday March 25th – The Clean Up Costs**  
**Reading Galatians 3:1 – 14**

Sermon Notes:

On the cross Jesus was...

- \_\_\_\_\_ for our \_\_\_\_\_.
- \_\_\_\_\_ our \_\_\_\_\_.
- \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_.
- \_\_\_\_\_ our \_\_\_\_\_.

**Meditation/Application**

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

**Prayer Points:**

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

- Rules can sometimes provide us a framework for freedom and other times restrict what God is doing in our hearts. Legalism keeps us from experiencing what God has for us. Pray that God would reveal His Truth of freedom into our hearts; yet be mindful of where He calls us to set boundaries.
- Grab a bulletin today to pray through this week

**Monday March 19th – Reconciling** (By NBBC’s Veronika Bankuti)  
**Reading 2 Corinthians 5:16 – 19**

“...God... gave us the ministry of reconciliation...”

Many believers – myself included – are somewhat confused between the meaning of forgiveness and reconciliation. They are not the same – connected, but different.

Reconciliation needs at least two people because it presupposes a previously existing, harmonious relationship. In this relationship we trusted each other, we felt like we could be ourselves, be accepted and loved just as we are. Admittedly, relationships like this are not a dime a dozen. It is rather rare that we come across a person, where these conditions are present and present for both parties! You would think that something this solid could not disintegrate, at least not to the point where it results in the cutting of all ties with each other. Yet this happens more often than we think!

Now we must look at the relationship, the reason for its disintegration, the part we played in this erosion. Was it a simple misunderstanding or does it reveal something deeper, something more fundamental that we may or may not want to repair? Forgiveness is still possible and necessary - and ideally reconciliation should follow! - but one can be done without the other.

Forgiveness is a single person act. “To forgive is to set a prisoner free, and discover that the prisoner was you.”[5] This could mean that we do not have to know the person who caused us hurt. Examples for this kind of hurt: the perpetrators of school shootings or terrorist acts, the people who benefit from the misfortunes of others. It could also be very personal: it could be a very close friend or family member who died and we can no longer talk face-to-face with them. We turn over in our head and spirit, words they said to us maybe 50 years ago, that hurt us and stayed with us. The things we said that we should not have said and the words we didn’t say that we should have, torment us precisely because we cannot make it right.

If the offending party is still very much alive, then there is another very important thing to remember: We are only responsible for our own actions. We need to be sure we have forgiven completely and unconditionally! Do not keep a list of “wrongs.” We must be sure we let it go! Whether the other party accepts or rejects our forgiveness, is no longer our concern. We did what we could!

As believers and community missionaries, we have a priceless gift we have done nothing to earn, but through the intervention of the Holy Spirit we gratefully received. We are now friends of God again – we have been reconciled. We are invited to freely speak with Him, walk with Him and listen to Him, and just as we received the message of reconciliation, we are grateful to have the privilege to pass it on so that others, too, may receive and respond to God’s forgiveness.

### **Meditation/Application**

Who in your circle of influence needs to know that God is waiting to be reconciled to them? Pray for them and pray that their hearts might grow tender to the God who is reaching out to them in friendship.

### **Reflecting on the reading:**

In verse 16 Paul writes “from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.” What do you think this means? How should we now view them (see vs. 19, 20)? How does this influence how we treat our neighbours?

### **Prayer Points:**

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

- See the back of the bulletin for prayer requests
- Pray for the leaders of NBBC

**Tuesday March 27th – Ambassadors** (By: NBBC’s Blair Clark)  
**Reading 2 Corinthians 5:20 – 21**

“We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors...”

For several years of my ministry with CBM, I functioned as CBM’s Diplomatic Liaison, relating to foreign ambassadors in Canada. In that role, I learned many important things about ambassadors. The appropriate salutation to be used when formally meeting ambassadors, is to address them as “Your Excellency”, which is heady sounding. I also discovered that, while their function is important and their status impressive, many of them are ordinary people. Finally, I realized that their importance, their authority, and their status is 100% derived from the head of state and the nation they represent. When an ambassador speaks on behalf of the head of state and country he or she is representing, they only speak that which they have been instructed to say.

One commentator describes the ambassador’s role as follows: “ An ambassador is at once a messenger and a representative. He does not speak in his own name. He does not act on his own authority. What he communicates is not his own opinions or demands, but simply what he has been commanded to say. However, at the same time he speaks with authority - in the case of a believer, the authority of Christ himself.”

Being designated as an ambassador of Jesus Christ has several implications for us. First, Paul is very clear that the message we have been appointed to communicate is a message of reconciliation. In verse 18, Paul explains that “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.”

Not only is the message that we are to communicate from God, but the authority by which we communicate is also from God. It is not on the basis of our own authority that we speak, it is on Christ’s authority. When we are sharing the message that has been entrusted to us, Paul says that “We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.” The one area where we are different from the ambassadors that I met in Ottawa, is in our perceived status. We are not normally addressed as

“Your excellency” by those to whom we communicate the message of reconciliation. We are much more like the apostle Paul, who in his letter to the Ephesians, written from his prison cell in Rome, described himself as “an ambassador in chains” (Eph. 6:20). While the world around us does not give us the honour normally due an ambassador, we nevertheless must understand that we are honoured by God as He has chosen us to be His ambassadors.

The good news from these verses is this: You are an Ambassador of the living God! You have a clear message to communicate, and you do it on the authority of God himself.

### 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 study. What from this week’s study made an impression on you or what confused you.
- PRAYER WALK/ACTIVITY: be creative and intentional as you pray/work together.

### Prayer Request:

Record the prayer requests that are shared at your MCG to inform your prayers this coming week below or on next weeks MCG Study Guide.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## **Missional Community Group (MCG) Covenant**

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

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

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

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

## **Missional Community Group Shared Practices**

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