



MCG
Study Guide

The Gospel According to Mark
Chapters 12 - 16
February 6 – March 12

Wednesday February 6th – Peer Pressure

(By NBBC's Veronika Bankuti)

Reading Mark 12:1 - 12

“But they were afraid of the crowd...”

Human beings have a preference for following directions. We find it easier to check off a list because it is tangible proof that we accomplished something. The Pharisees knew that and in their misdirected zeal for God and to please the people, they provided a longer and longer list to check off. The moral and ceremonial laws grew to 613, which had now become a huge burden God never intended. They thought they pleased the people, by giving them what they wanted and at the same time the endless list of dos and don'ts accomplished what the leaders truly wanted; strengthen their power over the people as they felt more and more helpless in the face of those endless and strict rules. They also knew that unless the crowd perceived a need for their leading and remained faithful to them, they would lose their powerful influence and cease to be relevant. Jesus was enthusiastically accepted and followed by the common people, so the Pharisees feared the crowds.

Everyone wants to be liked. When actress Sally Field won her second Oscar for her role in the 1984 movie *Places in the Heart*, she gave a memorable acceptance speech. She said, “I haven't had an orthodox career, and I've wanted more than anything to have your respect. The first time I didn't feel it, but this time I feel it, and I can't deny the fact that you like me; right now, you like me!” Many of us, like Sally Field, think we are good people only if other people think so.

Wanting to be liked is a natural desire. I want all of you to like me, and I like all of you - well, most of you - but an addiction is when a normal appetite is corrupted, and it starts controlling you. For instance (as I learned this week) “Approval Addiction”, along with its first cousin Co-dependency, is recognized as a real issue in the mental health field. People-pleasing also has serious spiritual consequences. By definition, if we are people pleasers, we cannot be God pleasers. We will be deaf to

the voice of God, we will be blind to the guidance of God, and we will never find the strength to obey God. ¹

Seeking the approval of others is the surest way to lead to repeated disappointment for the simple reason that people are all different and their one constant is that they are changeable. In addition, and most importantly, God created only one you. You are an original – do not settle for a poor imitation of someone else. The old saying stands: You cannot please all the people all the time, or even some of the time, but is there a better way? God gives us a profoundly simple command: “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.” (Matthew 6:33) In essence it tells us that if we perform to an audience of one, somehow everything else will fall into place.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

When is the desire to please others not wrong?

How do we decide when to please someone and when to allow them to be disappointed?

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Mark 8:31-38

1 Cor. 15:1-28

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 92

Ruth 1

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

¹ <https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/the-perils-of-people-pleasing-david-dykes-sermon-on-people-pleasing-178848?ref=SermonSerps>

Prayer Points:

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

- Pray for the pressure many feel to be a certain way before being accepted by Christ and others
- Pray for the kids on your street; be involved

Thursday February 7th – Integrity

(By NBBC's Bob Wilkins)

Reading Mark 12:13 - 17

“Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity.”

In this passage (Mark 12) some of the Pharisees and the Herodians were sent to Jesus with the sole purpose of catching Him out in His words. The Pharisees were key religious leaders, while the Herodians were key political leaders who supported the Roman occupation of Israel. They came supposedly recognizing Jesus as a man of integrity. Trapping Him in His words, especially about paying taxes, would tarnish His integrity immensely.

This raises the question of what people are looking for in their leaders, especially public leaders. If their character can be blackened in any way, they may end up not having much public support. What people are looking for in public leaders more than anything else is moral uprightness, purity, honesty, consistency, genuineness, truthfulness, wholeness, incorruptible, transparency, etc. In short, they are looking for integrity. In the Old Testament integrity is very often linked with righteousness, especially in the Psalms and Proverbs.²

There are also many examples of integrity in Scripture. David prayed when he finished preparing for the building of the temple, that he had done so with integrity, willingly and with honest intent. He also prayed for the continued loyalty of the people and that Solomon his son and successor would know wholehearted devotion - all marks of integrity.³ The Lord Himself challenged Solomon “to walk before me in integrity of heart as David your father did.”⁴ The Psalmist said of David’s reign, “And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them.”⁵

² Psalm 7:8; 25:21; Proverbs 13:6

³ 1 Chronicles 29:17

⁴ 1 Kings 9:4

⁵ Psalm 78:72

When Jerusalem was rebuilt under the leadership of Nehemiah, he appointed his brother Hanani to be in charge of the city “because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most men do.”⁶ This passage reminds us that integrity is more than outward behaviour. It is also a spiritual quality of the inner person. This was also true of Job who maintained his integrity against unusual suffering. In fact, he saw that what was happening to him as an attack on his integrity.⁷

When Paul left Titus on Crete to set things in order in the fledgling church, he charged him with the following words:

Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.⁸

It is clear that in both the Old and New Testaments, integrity is a critical quality of leadership. It is also noteworthy that God Himself acts and speaks with integrity. God says in Isaiah:

By myself I have sworn,
my mouth has uttered in all integrity
a word that will not be revoked:
Before me every knee will bow;
by me every tongue will swear.⁹

We have great Biblical examples as well as models of integrity and that we have known and experienced in our own lives, but the greatest model of integrity is God Himself, and we are to follow Him in all things.

⁶ Nehemiah 7:2

⁷ Job 2:3, 9; 6:29

⁸ Titus 2:6-8

⁹ Isaiah 45:23

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Reflect on the lack of integrity in our world and communities today. Where have you seen a lack of integrity?

Consider what integrity means to you and how you are to live a life of integrity in every area of your life. Take time to confess where you lack integrity and ask God for His grace to show more integrity in those areas in which it is lacking.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Mark 9:1-13

1 Cor. 15:29-58

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 93

Ruth 2,3

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 against the temptation to satisfy selfish desires
- Pray for those struggling with smoking, alcohol and other drugs
- Join our WORSHIP GATHERING @ NBBC 7-8:30pm for prayer, song and sharing

Friday February 8th – Error

(By NBBC's Blair Clark)

Reading Mark 12:18 - 27

“Are you not in error...”

We all make mistakes - it's a part of being human. Some mistakes have little impact or consequence, others can be more serious, but Jesus is not just talking about making a mistake, an error, in this passage. He is instead describing the Sadducees as being in error, as having such a wrong view or assumption that the results are always wrong. That is a much more serious problem.

Years ago, I flew into Penticton, BC at night from Calgary, and spent a week there speaking at various churches as part of an area missions event. As we made our approach, I could see the city stretched out around the end of Lake Okanagan, and I oriented myself based on the assumption that we were coming in directly from Calgary. That placed Penticton on the north end of the lake. Unbeknownst to me, since I had been sleeping, we had looped around and were coming into the city from the west, putting Penticton at the south end of the lake. For most of the week, I was frustrated because I simply could not get myself reoriented. I usually have a good sense of direction, but in this case, I made mistakes all week long travelling around the city, because my basic orientation, formed during the plane's descent, was in error. In this case, I had not looked at a map prior to travelling, so formed my orientation by looking out of the plane window while wrongly assuming from which direction we were approaching the city. Jesus gives two reasons for the Sadducees' wrong orientation: they did not know the Scriptures and they did not know the power of God. The Sadducees did not believe in resurrection, so their question was based on a scenario they did not believe. Many Christians today are making many mistakes, many wrong decisions, for these same two reasons. They do not know the Scriptures, and they do not know the power of God.

Since so much of Biblical teaching is counter-cultural (love your enemies, forgive those who wrong you) we as Christians will not make God-honouring decisions unless we know what Scripture teaches, and unless we know the power of God to vindicate us when we are attacked by the larger culture. A few areas where this is happening today is in our views on human sexuality (both positions on homosexuality and Biblically acceptable heterosexual practice) on creation and origins of the universe, in our understanding of the right use of money and material possessions and in our quest for and use of power. To make right decisions in each of these areas, it is imperative that we know both the Scriptures and the power of God.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Can you recall a time when an error caused you a great deal of trouble?

What practices do you engage in, in order to know the Scriptures and the power of God?

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Mark 9:14-32

1 Cor. 16

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 94

Ruth 4

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

Prayer Points:

- Pray that God would allow you to see the pathway to wholeness
- Pray for the IF:GATHERING (women meeting together @ NBBC)

Saturday February 9th – The Shema

(By NBBC's Student Intern Ben Froese)

Reading Mark 12:28 – 37

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”

Many world religions have central confessions of faith or particularly important prayers that their adherents will often recite. Muslims say (usually in Arabic) “There is no god but God. Muhammed is the messenger of God.” Christians (depending on which Christian tradition) often recite the Apostles Creed or the Lord’s Prayer. Jewish people have something that they’ve been reciting for thousands of years: the Shema.

Since ancient times, Jewish people would recite the Shema every morning and every evening. This was as much of the daily routine for Jews in Jesus’ day as brushing our teeth is to us now - and even today, reciting the Shema continues to be an important part of the life of Jewish people. The prayer functions as both an expression of praise and a pledge of allegiance to the God of Israel.

The most fundamental part of the Shema is found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5, and this is exactly what Jesus quotes in response to the question of which commandment is the most important.

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:29-30).

The fact that Jesus recites the Shema here reminds us of Jesus’ Jewishness. Sometimes we forget that fact about Jesus. Jesus lived as a Jew. He would have had a Jewish upbringing. He probably would have recited the Shema every day as he grew up.

Interestingly though, as Jesus responds to the question of which commandment is most important, he doesn't just leave it at the Shema. He adds a second command, "Love your neighbour as yourself," and he says, "There is no commandment greater than these" (v. 31).

Jesus puts those two commandments together into one. In order for one to truly be a worshipper of the God of Israel, love for neighbour must be the way that love for God is expressed. To love God with all one's heart, soul, mind, and strength entails loving people with everything! It seems that the Pharisees and teachers of the law failed at that part. Jesus, however, by living in complete obedience to God and with perfect love for neighbour, shows us how to truly live.

Can we, too, pray the Shema? Sure! Many of us have probably memorized these verses. Let's also apply it by committing to love our neighbour as ourselves.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

What do you find more challenging: loving God or loving neighbour?

Pray for opportunities to love the people around you in practical ways on this day.

Try to commit to memory Mark 12:29-30.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Mark 9:33-50

2 Cor. 1:1-11

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 95

1 Samuel 1-2

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

Prayer Points:

- Pray for the IF:GATHERING (women meeting together @ NBBC)

Sunday February 10th – Mark Chapter Twelve

Reading Mark 12

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:

Mark 10:1-16

2 Cor. 1:12-24

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 96

1 Samuel 3-5

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:

- Thank God for the freedom we have in Canada to worship
- Pray for those who watch on Cogeco and shut-ins who are unable to join us

Monday February 11th – Appearances

(By NBBC's Veronika Bankuti)

Reading Mark 12:38 – 40

“They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at banquets.”

In this verse Mark tells us what kind of picture the Sadducees projected about themselves to the people. In context, however he concludes that the impression given, covered up a very different truth.

This is a fundamental teaching of Jesus; your confession must match your behaviour. I remember when I was a brand new Christian, my very first Elder took me out for coffee and during our conversation I asked her a question that I am sure lurks in all of our minds: how can you tell who is a true believer? Her answer forever stuck in my mind; “while we are not allowed to be judge and jury, we are instructed to be fruit inspectors.”

I suppose it has always been true, but certainly in our hurried, high-tech, connected, materialistic world we are especially conscious of the image we project, partly because today it is so much easier to put our lives on display on social media. We are bombarded on Facebook and Instagram with the fabulous pictures of the fabulous lives of everyone we know. There is a variety of ways to react to this: try to do one better; get depressed and feel sorry for ourselves because our own ordinary lives cannot hold a candle to all this fabulousness; ignore it and never even look at those pictures in the first place; genuinely share in their happiness! If we can judge by the sheer number of likes, resends and new pictures from the responders on the one hand, and the alarming increase in depression, drug addiction and suicide especially in young people on the other hand – I suspect the first two reactions are the most common.

We all want to put our best foot forward when meeting someone for the first time, when interviewing for a new job, when in a social

situation. If putting our best foot forward means projecting a false picture, like the Sadducees did, we should ask ourselves: why is it that we feel being ourselves is not good enough? Is it because we feel we are flawed? If it is – we are correct; we are all flawed in some way, but so are the people to whom we want to appear something other than we really are – and - get ready for a newsflash - they are doing the same thing!

What my elder told me about being fruit inspectors holds true. People will compare the picture we put forward about ourselves with the actions and behaviours they witness. So, if we are trying to appear something other than what and who we really are, the façade will soon prove untenable. If, on the other hand, our best foot forward is the genuine result of our journey with the Lord and the honest manifestation of the gradual, sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in us, let's show it off, faults and all, and shout it from the rooftop – for His glory!

Meditation/Application/Reflection

In what ways do we see people putting forward a false impression of themselves?

Under what circumstances is it ever appropriate to “hide” who we are, or what we are like?

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Mark 10:17-34

2 Cor. 2

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 97

1 Samuel 6-8

Prayer Points:

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

- Pray for Mark Zammit as he continues to transition from a life of bondage to freedom
- Pray for two

families in our NBBC Directory

<https://people.planningcenteronline.com/>

*you can download the app by searching
PEOPLE PLANNING CENTER on your mobile device

Username: YOUR EMAIL

PSW: one you setup (need a password) email wayne@nbbc.ca

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

Tuesday February 12th – Generosity

(By NBBC's Blair Clark)

Reading Mark 12:41 - 44

“...but she, out of her poverty, put in everything...”

I love this passage because it affirms one of God's most radical, counter-cultural principles, namely that God measures our generosity and the size of our gifts in percentage terms, not in absolute numbers.

When Barry Sherman, the founder of pharmaceutical giant Apotex, and his wife Honey were found dead in their home last year, among the aspects of their life described in the newspaper accounts was their philanthropy. The articles described total giving of almost \$100 million, with the largest donation being \$50 million. Estimates of their net worth ranged from \$3.2 to \$4.6 billion. Not a single donation is described in percentage terms of their net worth.

For most of us reading the accounts of wealthy philanthropists, we are clearly aware that we cannot come close to ever making gifts of that size. Consequently, we tend to downplay the significance of our donations, but in God's eyes, and according to God's method of calculating the size of one's gift, most of the regular givers to NBBC are more generous than the Shermans, Peter Munk (Barrick Gold) Peter Gilgan (Mattamy Homes) or the Westons (Loblaws).

What is amazing about this principle is that it allows the poorest of God's people to out give the world's wealthiest. It also presents a challenge to the church, because we still tend to count and appreciate offerings based on their dollar amounts, not the degree of sacrifice that the gift represents. Some of this we are required to do by law, according to CRA guidelines and general accounting principles. The sad reality in the US and Canada, though, is that as one's income and net worth increases, the percentage of that income that we are willing to give away actually decreases.

What we need to challenge ourselves to do, though, is to use God's method of counting as we decide what we are going to give to Him, and the minimum that we should be considering is 10%, which is the tithe that God required of his people. For many of us who enjoy the affluence of Canada, we should be looking at 10% as our bare bones minimum, and instead be striving to give more than 10% to the Lord's work, both here at home and around the world.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Mark 10:35-52

2 Cor. 3

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 98

1 Samuel 9-10

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 February 13th – Discernment

(By NBBC's Blair Clark)

Reading Mark 13:1 – 8

“Watch out that no one deceives you.”

Among conservative Christians, the subject of the end times is one that generates all kinds of interest and speculation. Titles such as *The Late, Great Planet Earth*, *Armageddon*, and *Left Behind* both create and perpetuate this interest. In this passage, Jesus begins by predicting the destruction of the temple, an event that we know occurred in August, 70 AD. Jesus then goes on from that subject to a much larger discussion of the end times and what some of the signs will be. It is on this subject that He warns us to be careful that no one deceives us.

Particularly in North American Christianity, there has been both great interest and great disagreement around how the end will come. It is unfortunate that with some regularity a Christian leader will predict when the world will end and will go public with that prediction. To date, every one of them has been wrong. Unfortunately for their followers, they were all deceived.

Some recent predictions include Oct. 21, 2011 (Harold Couping) 2012 (Jack Van Impe) and Sept. 28, 2015 (Mark Blitz). Ronald Weinland has predicted Sept. 29, 2011; May 27, 2012; and May 18, 2013. Weinland's newest prediction is June 8, 2019. As a Christian, it is embarrassing each time some prominent Christian predicts the date of the Lord's return and takes followers to a particular location to greet the Lord on His return. It inevitably attracts media attention that ends up being detrimental to the cause of Christ.

When we review all of Scripture's teaching on the end times, there are three assertions that we can confidently make that will not deceive us. First, Jesus will return, as He repeatedly promised. Second, we do not know when He will return; even Jesus said that He does not know the

date that has been established by his Father. Third, we are to live in a state of readiness, prepared for that awesome event.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

If you believed that Jesus would be returning a week from this Friday, how might you live differently?

How can we live in expectation of Christ's return without growing discouraged by the wait?

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Mark 11:1-11
- 2 Cor. 4

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 99
- 1 Samuel 11-13

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 young adults that join with us in our gatherings
- Talk with God about a discernment practice that He might want you to engage in...
- Give thanks for the children of NBBC

Thursday February 14th – Scorn

(By NBBC's Veronika Bankuti)

Reading Mark 13:9 – 13

“Everyone will hate you because of me...”

It is interesting to follow the gradual and logical unfolding of revelation Jesus intended. A few weeks ago, he talked about peer pressure, how it motivated the Pharisees not to pursue Jesus because the common people followed Him. In order to do this well, to avoid negative reactions from the crowd, they appeared something other than what they really were. We too have a wardrobe of different masks to fit all situations. Now Jesus is giving us a reason why we behave that way – a very legitimate reason! We want to avoid being disliked, or as Jesus put it “everyone will hate you because of me...”

I was born and raised in Hungary, a country which, after World War II, was ruled by the communist ideals of the old Soviet Union. The leadership of socialist Hungary was imported from the Soviet Union. They were educated in soviet universities and within a matter of months someone with an 8th grade education came back from Russia with a Doctorate in political science and began to indoctrinate the people in the beliefs and practices of the new regime. Any adult who was not a member of the communist party (the only party in existence) was scorned, denied good jobs, promotions and a living wage. Some were arrested in the middle of the night, whisked away and taken to the infamous address: Andrassy ut 60 where they were tormented, interrogated, beaten and often killed. I was a member of the Young Pioneers in elementary school and the Union of Young Communists in high school. All religious education and all religious practices were forbidden. There were secret service agents in churches, making lists of those in attendance. They were notified that they must attend education sessions that will right their wrong thinking about God. The scorn of the state was upon those who continued to live according to

their conscience and remained faithful to their beliefs. Predictably, their numbers decreased week by week.

Jesus gave fair warning to his disciples; after my death and resurrection anyone who talks about me to others, anyone who carries my message and speaks against the status quo will be hated and persecuted. You will not be popular and beloved – you will be hated, spoken evil of, shunned by most of the people who used to be your friends, neighbours and co-workers, as well as those with whom you attended synagogue services. Your mother, father, brothers and sisters will disown you - and this is only the beginning! You will also be charged with insurrection and taken to the law, imprisoned and possibly killed. Are you still in? Because if you are not – you are not worthy of me! Imagine the complete silence after this declaration. It needs to sink in; it needs to be taken seriously - because it demands a response!

In these days of profusion of beliefs, “spiritual practices”, a plethora of self-help books on how to be the best you, how to listen to your inner voice, how to cause all your desires to become tangible reality when you attract the energy of the universe the right way – all man centered, and therefore very popular practices opposed to Jesus’s call to deny yourself, die to yourself and put God on the throne of your life - what is your response?

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Do you think Jesus’ warning of being scorned is seriously considered these days? If so why? If not, why not?

Have you ever experienced the scorn that Jesus talks about? In retrospect what was the result of that experience for you and your faith?

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Mark 11:12-26

2 Cor. 5

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 100

1 Samuel 14

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(s) who live next to you
- Pray for those who are difficult to love; might God act in you to do His perfect will
- Take your loved ones a gift (ie. word, gift, time)

Friday February 15th – False Messiahs

(By NBBC's Student intern Ben Froese)

Reading Mark 13:14 – 23

“For false messiahs and false prophets will appear...”

In today's text, Jesus warns about false messiahs and false prophets appearing and seeking to deceive people.

It may be hard to believe, but in the last 2000 years it has not been uncommon for people to claim to be Jesus himself reincarnated. An article on an Australian news website tells the stories of seven people around the world who've claimed to be Jesus just in recent years.¹⁰ Alvaro Theiss of Brazil claims that in 1979 God spoke to him and told him he was the same Jesus Christ who was crucified 2000 years ago. Today, a dozen disciples live full-time with the 69-year-old man who goes by the name “INRI Cristo.” Moses Hlongwane of South Africa claims that God identified him as the Messiah in 1992. Today, he lives a luxurious lifestyle, has about 40 disciples, and he says he will never see death as he lives out the mission God has given him. Matayoshi Mitsuo of Japan has also claimed to be Jesus Christ as well as God Almighty in recent years. He ran in several Japanese elections over the past two decades, claiming that he will conduct the Last Judgement of Christ through the Japanese political system. Matayoshi died in July of 2018.

I won't tell the rest of the stories from the article, but I think you get the point - there are quite a few people out there, even today, who are making ridiculous claims about themselves. These people have even convinced others that they are whom they claim to be. Perhaps these are examples of the kind of “false messiahs” that the real Jesus Christ warns about.

¹⁰ <https://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/real-life/seven-men-around-the-world-who-each-claim-to-be-jesus-christ/news-story/563e56671b7c9931b6606619df6be4c8>

Most of us, however, probably won't be deceived into following a person today who claims to be the embodiment of the second coming of Christ. Hopefully we're too smart to do something as foolish as that!

However, perhaps we need to check ourselves before we become too prideful. People, ideas, advertisements, etc. surround us every day, sending us deceptive and unhelpful messages. We need to watch out and be on our guard about what we're allowing to influence us.

Deception can even come from best-selling authors in the Christian section of bookstores! If we have questions about certain well-known Christian writers or speakers, it would be wise to do our research, talk with our brothers and sisters in Christ, perhaps talk with a pastor of our church, and maybe most importantly consult the Scriptures for ourselves.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Most of us won't follow a person today who claims to be the Messiah, but ask yourself these questions:

Who are your biggest influencers?

Is it possible that some of what you accept as truth could be tinged with falsity or deception?

What might it look like for you to make Jesus the biggest influence in your life?

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Mark 11:27-33

2 Cor 6

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 101

1 Samuel 15-16

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 PA DAYCAMP today @ NBBC
- Pray that the Lord will guard your eyes to recognize falsehood
- Pray for two families in our NBBC Directory
<https://people.planningcenteronline.com/>

*you can download the app by searching
PEOPLE PLANNING CENTER on your mobile device

Username: YOUR EMAIL

PSW: (one you setup) Need a password? email wayne@nbbc.ca

Saturday February 16th – Second Coming

(By NBBC's Bob Wilkins)

Reading Mark 13:24 – 27

“At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.”

This passage is in what some scholars have referred to as the *Olivet Discourse*, in which Jesus is answering the questions of His disciples about when the destruction of the temple would take place. Matthew's account also includes the time of Christ's coming and the end of the age as included in their questions. Ever since, the followers of Jesus have had great questions about Christ's second coming. Sometimes believers' questions have resulted in great debates about Christ's return, so much so that the convictions of some have been made tests of fellowship. Unfortunately, the importance of Christ's coming has often been lost in the arguments. The second coming is never referred to in the Scripture so that we might argue about it, but rather that we might be encouraged and given hope.

In 1987 the Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec produced a document entitled *This We Believe: Resources for faith* and was intended to be a study guide for the things we believe. The last chapter of the guide is called “Our Hope in God,” and includes the following statements.

- God has prepared for us things beyond our imagining.
- Our hope is for a renewed creation and for fullness of life in the age to come.
- As Jesus taught us, we pray, “Thy kingdom come.”¹¹
- Christ will come again.
- Only God the Father, knows when and how our Lord will return.
- Life had its beginning in God.

¹¹ This We Believe: Resources for Faith, 10.1

- In God it will come to completion and through the Spirit its meaning will be fully revealed.
- All creation will find fulfilment in God.
- Now we see in part.
- Then we shall see face to face.¹²
- Come, Lord Jesus.¹³

This is what Paul refers to in his letter to Titus as our “blessed hope,” which we wait for in a life of holiness, self-control, uprightness, and godliness.¹⁴ Jesus Himself said to His disciples that He was going to prepare a place for His followers and come again to take them to be with Him in eternity.¹⁵ In this life we will have trouble and even grief, but our grief is not like those who have no hope.¹⁶ Our hope is being with Christ forever, and we can encourage one another with that hope.¹⁷

Christ’s second coming is not just about hope. It also ushers in the final judgment. Matthew 25:31-46 uses similar language to describe the second coming of Christ - in the clouds, with great glory and accompanied by angels. In Mark the focus is on the gathering of the elect of God to eternal blessing, whereas in Matthew there is the gathering of all people for the final judgment. The people are separated as a shepherd separates the sheep and goats, the goats to eternal punishment and the sheep to eternal life.

¹² *Ibid*, 10.5

¹³ *Ibid*, 10.6

¹⁴ Titus 2:11-15

¹⁵ John 14:1-4

¹⁶ John 16:33; 1 Thess. 4:13-18

¹⁷ 1 Cor. 15:19

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Reflect on what it means for you to be prepared for the second coming of Christ.

Just as we often anticipate and imagine a vacation to somewhere exotic, take time now to anticipate and imagine yourself present in eternity with God. Allow this hope to fill you.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Mark 12:1-12

2 Cor. 7

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 102

1 Samuel 17-18

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 awareness of our returning Saviour
- Pray for your spouse, children

Sunday February 17th – Mark Chapter Thirteen

Reading: Mark 9

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:

Mark 12:13-27

2 Cor. 8

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 103

1 Samuel 19-20

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:

- Give thanks today for God's provision to you personally
- Pray for Merv as he continues to be faithfully in His Word in order to be true to it as he preaches

Monday February 18th – God’s Word

(By NBBC’s Student Intern Ben Wimmers)

Reading Mark 13:28 – 31

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”

It would appear that the best way to secure an eternal name for yourself is to build a massive structure that survives you and your descendants. There are many buildings and structures that have outlived their creators. The Great Wall of China was built over many centuries, with its most famous sections being built in 220-206 BCE under the direction of Qin Shi Huang. The Great Pyramid of Giza is even older still, having been constructed around 2560 BCE to house the sarcophagus of the Pharaoh Khufu. It is likely that even modern buildings, such as the CN Tower, will exist for generations to come. This is partly due to their construction success, but also the painstaking restoration and preservation work by archaeologists and historians. These structures, along with many other buildings deemed worthy of preservation will continue to exist long after we are dead. Their significance, as centres of worship, defence, or simply to be marvelled at, have captured people’s imaginations and are a testament to the great builders of the past. It seems that their names and their creations are deemed to last forever.

According to Jesus, this is not the case. The things that we have built on this earth, and even the very earth itself is going to come to an end. The how and when are forever debated, but the inevitable will come. The Pyramids will return to the sand, the Great Wall into a line of dust, and the CN Tower will be as flat as a pancake. So what will last? Jesus says that, “my words will never pass away”. The words of Jesus must be something special if they are going to outlast a Pyramid that has been standing for over 4500 years. They are just that, special. The words of Jesus are eternal because they are not of human creation, therefore they will outlast everything we have created. The Pyramids continue to

exist because we seek to preserve them. There are rules around who can access them, and no one can tear them down for development. Jesus' words don't need our help to be made eternal. They simply are.

Because Jesus' words, will outlast everything that we see around us, shouldn't we dedicate our time to these amazing words? If they are going to exist beyond the heavens and earth, shouldn't we spend time trying to apply them as a priority to our lives? We cannot build anything that will compete with the eternal glory that is Jesus so perhaps we should take an interest in the only thing that will last forever.

Optional Reading Plan

Meditation/Application/Reflection

How is your Bible reading going? Did you read today's text?

Can you think of anything else that that the Bible tells us will last into eternity?

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Mark 12:28-34

2 Cor 9

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 104

1 Samuel 21-23

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 this prayer request:

- Ask God to help you look at your weekly schedule through His eyes

Tuesday February 19th – Watch

(By NBBC's Blair Clark)

Reading Mark 13:32 – 37

“What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”

I don't know what sort of things you watch for, but most of us do watch for things to come. It may be a sale on something we want to buy, or it could be a deal on flights that we want to take. A student may be watching the mail or e-mail inbox for a university acceptance notice. Soon we will be watching for our 2018 income tax refund cheque or deposit.

The image that Jesus uses in this passage is that of servants and the gate keeper in a wealthy person's house. The owner is going away on a trip, and so he puts his servants in charge of different tasks that they are to be working at while he is away. The owner also promises that he will return, and that he expects his servants to be ready for his return, beginning with the gate keeper. The warning to the gate keeper is, don't be caught sleeping on the job when the owner returns.

Last year, the president of the company our son Brad works for was away on an extended business trip along with the two senior VPs. On the Friday afternoon heading into the weekend, most of the staff had left early, as they didn't expect the president to be back in the office until Monday. Brad had a project that he was working on that he thought he could finish by 5:00, so he was still at his desk working when, surprise, surprise, the president walked into the office just after 4:00 pm! The rest of the staff had a memo waiting for them when they came to work on Monday morning! While Brad wasn't particularly watching for the boss's return, he was found working when the president unexpectedly returned.

The primary context for this warning is the Lord's second coming, but it also has a secondary application, and that is to our death. We also don't

know when that will be, but it has the same finality and will also result in us entering the Lord's presence and giving an account of what we have done for Him....so what does it mean to watch?

First, it means that we should be conscious of the possibility of Christ's return on any day, at any hour. Many believers have become very lax, some even skeptical about Christ's return. It simply isn't front and centre for most of us, when we wake every morning, to wonder if this will be the day. Some of that is the consequence that it has already been 2,000 years that Christians have been waiting, and one cannot stay on high alert forever. Another factor is that life is so good for most of us that we want it to last as long as possible, so we are not eager for our Lord's return.

Second, it means that we are, on a daily basis, engaged in the work that the master has assigned to us. That includes sharing the Good News with those who haven't heard, showing God's love to all with whom we have contact, and living in a way that brings glory to our God. Given the certainty of Christ's second coming, every day that passes brings us one day closer to that day when he does return.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Mark 12:35-44
- 2 Cor. 10

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 105
- 1 Samuel 24-25

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 a story.

Wednesday February 20th – Responsibility

(By NBBC's Student Intern Ben Froese)

Reading Mark 14:1 – 11

"She did what she could."

We live in a world where there is almost an infinite number of "good things" we could possibly do in our lives. If we desire to serve God's purposes by loving and serving people, there really is no end to the possibilities of where we *could* invest our time, money and energy.

There are people who are hurting and people who are far from God in our own neighbourhoods. There are brothers and sisters in Christ whom we know could use some spiritual support and encouragement. There are thousands of charities that do amazing work and that depend on financial contributions. As we watch the news or open social media, we become aware of stories of brokenness from around the world and people who are desperately in need of help.

I've spent the last few years of my life studying sociology. Through this, I became aware of an almost endless amount of social issues going on in Canada and around the world today. At times I felt overwhelmed, thinking, what can I even do? Where can I start? How can I make any difference?

One of my professors from McMaster Divinity College offered some very wise words in a course I took last semester. She said that the real question we need to ask ourselves is not "What *can* I do?", but rather, "*What is God calling me to do?*" and "*For whom am I responsible?*"¹⁸

The issues going on in the world are almost endless. The possibilities of where we *could* invest ourselves as we seek to make a difference in the lives of others are also almost endless. However, our resources of time, money and energy are limited. The question we need to ask is, "*What is God calling me to do with the limited resources He has given me?*"

¹⁸ From Cynthia Long Westfall.

This forces us to think about our priorities. Lots of things are important, but some things are more important for us to do than others.

In today's text, some people got upset because the perfume poured on Jesus could have been sold for a year's wages and the money given to the poor. That wouldn't have been a bad thing at all, but it wasn't the priority at that moment. The woman who poured the perfume on Jesus' head is commended for prioritizing what mattered most. That seems to be a major part of what it means to take responsibility.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Even on this day you may have different opportunities that present themselves and decisions that need to be made. Pray and ask God that he would give you clarity into what is priority and what it is that He is calling you to do.

As a church we are also bombarded with many wonderful opportunities of what we could do. Pray for the leadership and congregation to discern God's will for our next season of ministry as a church.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Mark 13:1-13

2 Cor. 11:1-15

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 106:1-23

1 Sam. 26-28

Prayer Points:

- Take a moment to sing a song of prayer to God

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

- Pray for our interns at NBBC: Ben Wimmers & Ben Froese

Thursday February 21st – Corruption

Reading Mark 14:12 - 26

“Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me... Surely you don’t mean me?”

No one begins to walk with Jesus with the intention of turning away. This is true of each of us who claims allegiance to Jesus. Even if someone claimed to see into the future and told us we would betray Him, we would deny it. Such is the human heart, and yet within each one of us there lies the potential to fall away. J. B. Philips translates 1 Corinthians 10:12 in this way, “So let the man who feels sure of his standing today be careful that he does not fall tomorrow.” This warning comes because no one is exempt from having their hearts corrupted.

In 1975 Dan Barker was an ordained minister with the Assemblies of God denomination. He wrote Easter children’s musicals, for which he still receives royalties. Barker has appeared on dozens of national television and radio shows but not to preach the Gospel or commend the Christian faith.

Dan Barker is the president of the “Freedom from Religion” organization, and the faith he once held and subscribed to, he now ridicules and warns against! His book, *Godless: How an Evangelical Preacher Became One of America's Leading Atheists*, tells the story of his fall from Christianity and his betrayal of the Lord he once worshipped.

He is not the only one, Charles Templeton once preached alongside Billy Graham and yet ended up writing his book, *Farewell to God: My Reasons for Rejecting the Christian Faith*.

Journalist Lee Strobel interviewed him for his book, *The Case for Faith*. Templeton was 83 and suffering from Alzheimer's disease. He revealed some of the reasons he left the faith:

“I started considering the plagues that sweep across parts of the planet and indiscriminately kill - more often than not, painfully - all kinds of people; the ordinary, the decent and the rotten, and it just became crystal clear to me that it is not possible for an intelligent person to believe that there is a deity who loves.”

Lee Strobel then asked him about Jesus and was surprised at the response. Templeton believed Jesus lived but never really considered himself to be God:

“He was the greatest human being who has ever lived. He was a moral genius. His ethical sense was unique. He was the intrinsically wisest person that I've ever encountered in my life or in my readings. He's the most important thing in my life. I know it may sound strange, but I have to say I adore him! Everything good I know, everything decent I know, everything pure I know, I learned from Jesus. He is the most important human being who has ever existed. And if I may put it this way, I miss Him.”

Templeton's eyes filled with tears and he wept freely. He refused to say more.

The Bible is clear, we do not stand by our own merits and confidence. We stand because of God's ongoing grace to sustain us and we ought not to take that grace for granted.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Do you know someone struggling with their faith? Take time to pray for and uphold them. Consider reaching out by a phone call or invitation for coffee just to see how they are.

Are you struggling in some areas of your own faith? Invite someone into your struggle. Ask them to pray for you and be open to their help.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Mark 13:14-31

2 Cor. 11:16-33

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 106:24-48

1 Sam. 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 the Board, Elders and Council as they meet tonight
- Ask God to reveal to you any areas where there is corruption in your life and neighbourhood
- Pray for two families in our NBBC Directory
<https://people.planningcenteronline.com/>

*you can download the app by searching
PEOPLE PLANNING CENTER on your mobile device

Username: YOUR EMAIL

PSW: one you setup (need a password) email wayne@nbbc.ca

Friday February 22nd – Good Intentions

Reading Mark 14:27 – 31

Peter declared, "Even if all fall away, I will not."

How many of us have started off with good intentions but have not followed through? It is still less than two months after the New Year in which many of us may have made goals or resolutions with every intention of keeping them. How's that going?

Very often the problem with good intentions is that they are blind to future circumstances, blind to other people's needs, or blind to our own failings. Our intentions may be good, but we overestimate our ability to influence our future outcome.

In the wake of the destruction from Hurricane Harvey, Americans rallied to provide aid and relief, but not all of the "help" actually helped. Some of it led to more complications and burdens. In an Acton Institute Powerblog, disaster relief expert Juanita Rilling said, "Generally after a disaster, people with loving intentions donate things that cannot be used in a disaster response, and in fact may actually be harmful." For instance, she continued, "People have donated prom gowns and wigs and tiger costumes and pumpkins, and frostbite cream to Rwanda, and used teabags, 'cause you can always get another cup of tea.'"

Following 1998's Hurricane Mitch, Rilling recalls finding loads of boxes on an air strip that were filled with winter coats (it was summertime in Honduras). Likewise, after the disastrous tsunami of 2004, beaches in Indonesia were so filled with donated clothes that the donations were eventually set on fire due to oncoming rot. After the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, American mothers donated breast milk, not thinking about the challenges of keeping it fresh.¹⁹

¹⁹ Joseph Sunde, "The 'second disaster': When humanitarian relief goes wrong," Acton Institute Powerblog (7-17-17)

In regard to the tendency to over promise because of good intentions the Bible offers some very practical advice:

- Do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.²⁰
- Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."²¹

An old business principle offers sage advice, "It is better to under promise and over deliver than to over promise and under deliver." We would be wise to heed this advice in all areas of life.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Why do you think we are often quick to speak out about our good intentions?

Do you have an outstanding good intention that you have failed on? How might you amend this?

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Mark 13:32-37

2 Cor. 12:1-10

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 107

2 Samuel 1-2

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

²⁰ Matthew 5:36, 37

²¹ James 4:13 - 15

Prayer Points:

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

- Pray for our SUMMER STUDENT JOB application and the opportunities to appoint students in the summer
- Pray for that neighbour who seems to be isolated

Saturday February 23rd – Temptation

(By NBBC's Blair Clark)

Reading Mark 14:32 – 42

“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.”

The contrast between Jesus and Peter in the face of temptation could not be greater. Jesus knew what lay ahead for him in the next 12-18 hours, and so he committed himself to prayer that he would remain faithful to his Father's will. The temptation to abandon his mission was real for Jesus. He could have bailed. Hebrews 4:15 states the Jesus was tempted in every way just as we are, but was without sin.

Peter, on the other hand, was overconfident, even cocky, when Jesus predicted his betrayal. That overconfidence led Peter to feel no need to pray for strength in the face of temptation. Peter also underestimated the power of the temptation that he would face. These are the two aspects of the challenge that we face as well – overestimating our ability to resist and under estimating the power of the temptation to defeat us.

The two words of advice that Jesus gave to Peter are relevant to us as well – watch and pray. Watching suggests that we are to always be alert to the reality of the temptations that we will face. Some of the most common temptations in our culture today include the temptation to lie to avoid taking responsibility for things that we have done. We see this temptation demonstrated almost daily by political leaders and celebrities. Then there is the temptation to cheat and steal, not as in robbing a bank but in more subtle ways like completing our tax returns, filling out expense accounts or helping ourselves to supplies from our workplace. As believers, we also face temptations to deny important Biblical truths and doctrines that are no longer popular in an increasingly secular and relativistic culture that denies the existence of absolute truth. The big three temptations in our affluent culture today are the temptations of money, sex and power, but they are not new. They have been around and have been destroying lives for millennia.

Jesus' second word of advice is to pray - pray that we will not "fall into temptation". This wording implies that we are not actively looking for temptation, but rather that we are blindsided by it, that temptation catches us by surprise. That was certainly the case with Peter. He didn't intend to deny Jesus, he didn't expect to be identified as a disciple by random people, given away by his Galilean appearance and accent. In the aftermath of Jesus' arrest, Peter was unprepared for the fear that would create in him. The lesson from Peter is that where I feel I am least vulnerable to temptation is where I am actually most vulnerable, because I don't reach out to God for his strengthening and assistance to either resist or flee.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

In what areas of your life do you feel least vulnerable to temptation? Pray that God not lead you into temptation in those areas.

Do you know someone caught in temptation? Pray for them today as if the difference between their being free or trapped was dependent upon your prayer.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Mark 14:1-11
- 2 Cor. 12:11-21

Read through the Old

- Psalm 108
- 2 Sam. 3-4

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

Prayer Points:

- Pray for those struggling with mental illness
- Pray for our 40th anniversary celebration on March 2 and 3

Sunday February 24th – Mark Chapter Fourteen**Reading: Mark 14****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:

Mark 14:12-31

2 Cor 13

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 109

2 Sam. 5-7

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 this prayer request:

- Pray for the staff and their families

Monday February 25th – Betrayal

(By NBBC's Veronika Bankuti)

Reading Mark 14:43 – 52

“The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.”

How incredibly wise of our God to send his living Word in human form to dwell among us. By this one act God the Father perfectly qualified Jesus to be our high priest *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet is without sin.”* (Hebrews 4:15). One of the most painful experiences human beings endure is betrayal. In an earlier devotional I mentioned the early years of the communist era in Hungary and betrayal then was the main weapon the secret service was able to use against people who did not bow down to the new regime. Their so-called friends or even relatives often betrayed them in order to prove themselves valuable and possibly secure important positions for themselves.

There is an old saying that you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. The best-selling book *“How to win friends and influence people”* by Dale Carnegie – originally published in 1936 and has never been out of print since - has made this point very convincingly. Being encouraging and complimentary to people is always a good idea and it will ensure that we will have a captive audience. The method is a good one, if it is sincere! It is the underlying intent that can turn a good method into a devastating weapon. Jesus chose his twelve disciples and one of them was Judas Iscariot. He lovingly taught them and trained them in the ways of the kingdom for three years to get them ready to carry his message to the entire world. He loved them and at the last supper washed their feet, knowing that one of them would betray him that very night! So, when the Roman soldiers showed up in full weaponry lead by Judas, he pointed Jesus out to the soldiers by kissing him on the cheek! The very demonstration of deep friendship in the Middle East was used for betrayal!

The very first occurrence that felt like betrayal happened when I was 14 years old. There were four of us inseparable girls, very best of friends. One morning I went to school, stepped into the classroom and made my way to sit with my friends. They all turned their faces from me in unison. They refused to acknowledge me or speak to me for several days. Those days felt like decades. I was devastated. I can't even remember why they shunned me, but to this day I remember the pain!

Can you relate? Did a friend ever talk to others about a deep secret you shared with him or her in confidence? Did you ever go to work after being off for a few days and found yourself demoted and now reporting to the "friend" you thought you had at work? Did a fiancé or a husband/wife betray your sacred trust by having an affair with another? Did gossip ever harm your reputation and even after it is proven to be false – the damage is done. If we love our neighbour like ourselves, we will never intentionally cause this kind of pain.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

One of the ways we can be tempted to soothe our pain when betrayed is by harbouring vengeful thoughts. Jesus calls us to forgive. Ask God if there is anyone you need to forgive.

Have you ever betrayed someone? It may have even been years ago. Invite God to examine your heart in this matter and if he reveals an incident ask Him what you must do.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Mark 14:32-42
- Galatians 1

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 110
- 2 Sam. 8-10

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

Tuesday February 26th– Denial

(By NBBC's Bob Wilkins)

Reading Mark 14:53 - 72

He began to call down curses, and he swore to them, "I don't know this man you're talking about."

Whenever I think about Peter, I think of how quick he always seemed to respond with his mouth to challenging situations. I suppose the most famous 'quick-with-the-mouth' responses of Peter was his denial of knowing Christ in the courtyard of the high priest shortly following the arrest of Jesus. However, there were other times when Peter was quick on the draw with his mouth.

One was following Peter's great confession of Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah.²² Jesus began to teach his disciples about his sufferings and rejection by the religious authorities, ultimately resulting in his death by crucifixion. Peter took Christ aside and rebuked him. Jesus then found it necessary to rebuke Peter in front of the other disciples in very strong terms. "Get behind me Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."²³ That rebuke, however, didn't stop Peter from opening his mouth unadvisedly. On the Mountain of Transfiguration when Peter didn't know what to say, said something anyway - about building shelters for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah.²⁴

Jesus knew Peter's vulnerabilities. Following the Last Supper, Jesus predicted that all the disciples would fall away from him. Peter's response was quick and categorical. "Even if all fall away, I will not."²⁵ It was then that Jesus predicted Peter's three denials following the crowing of the rooster.²⁶ It is of note that in Luke's account Jesus attributes Peter's denial to the activity of Satan. "Simon, Simon, Satan

²² Mark 8:27-33

²³ Mark 8:33

²⁴ Mark 9:2-8

²⁵ Mark 14:29

²⁶ Mark 14:30

has asked to sift all of you as wheat, but I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”²⁷ Despite Jesus’ words, Peter said that he was ready to go with Jesus to prison and even to death.²⁸

Denying Christ is probably not something that we think about very often. We hear about Christians facing persecution and torture denying their faith only to rescind their denial if they are ultimately set free. Others have refused to deny their faith and have become martyrs for the Lord. We need to know that denying Christ can take many forms. We can deny Christ not only with our words as Peter did, but also, we can deny Him with our lives. Jesus said that people would know that we are his disciples if we love one another.²⁹ Therefore, lack of love is a kind of denial of Christ. We can also deny him by our silence. When we have failed to bear faithful witness to Christ, we have denied him.

There is however, a kind of denial that is important for us to engage in, which is what Jesus is looking for in our lives. It is self denial and the taking up of our cross to follow Him.³⁰ As Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “When Christ calls a man He bids him come and die.”³¹ As Paul wrote to Titus using the same Greek word for denial, “For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.”³²

²⁷ Luke 22:31-32

²⁸ Luke 22:33

²⁹ John 13:35

³⁰ Mark 8:34-38

³¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*. Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc. New York. P. 99

³² Titus 2:11-12

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Mark 14:43-52

Galatians 2

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 111

2 Sam. 11-12

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 February 27th – Silence

(By NBBC's Veronika Bankuti)

Reading Mark 15:1 – 5

“But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.”

Have you ever been in a position, when no response could possibly be as appropriate as silence? Jesus faced a situation when the truth was self-evident and those who refused to acknowledge it, knew it, but went on in their stubborn refusal.

Human beings, fallen as we are, nonetheless have some remarkably defined skills. The most finely tuned of these skills is that we are all excellent at deceiving ourselves. We have not been taught this, there are no courses about how to deceive oneself successfully (although there may be some that teach how to deceive others) but somehow, we are very good at it! We might say it is an inborn ability. If we need proof of our fallen nature, this exquisite skill is as good as it gets! When we deceive ourselves, we know exactly what we are doing and why we are doing it! This is what self-deceit is – blinding our own eyes because we don't want to see!

A simple example; I have not had a full physical in 3.5 years because I was not prepared to hear what might be discovered! I did not want to know! I finally had one this October after my doctor threatened to take me off his patient list! When he did – I had no answer. I knew this was stupid, I knew this is just postponing the inevitable and if there is something wrong, discovering it later can only make it worse. I know that, I don't think I am ignorant – yet I refused to do what I knew needed to be done!

Jesus's silence was his last public act before Golgotha. It was a manifestation of both his heartbreak for his people according to the flesh, and his determination to finish His mission, the mission only He

could accomplish; the fulfillment of the Father's will - the redemption of all humanity.

After you have proven repeatedly and consistently the quality of your character, the honesty of your words, the willingness of your spirit to always help those who ask you, your willingness to put others before yourself, when you display the powers that have been given to you to demonstrate that you are the promised Messiah according to prophecy, when your confession lines up with your actions and it is still not enough, the wise person chooses silence. Those who accuse and point fingers unjustly hear this silence - and it is deafening!

Pilate heard the silence - and he washed his hands in his golden bowl showing that he was not responsible for the execution of Jesus, although – humanly speaking – he alone had the authority in his particular protectorate to pronounce a death sentence on a Jew.

God's living word teaches us "When you are brought before the synagogues, rulers, and authorities, do not worry about how to defend yourselves or what to say. For at that time the Holy Spirit will teach you what you should say." (Luke 12:11-12) There are times when it will be silence!

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Do you find it harder to speak up or shut up?

Have you ever had an experience when you spoke and should have remained silent that you still regret?

Consider memorizing Psalm 141:3 and making it your prayer:

"Set a guard over my mouth, Lord;
keep watch over the door of my lips."

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Mark 14:53-65

Gal. 3:1-14

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 112

2 Sam. 13

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

Prayer Points:

- Spend some time in silence and see if God speaks through it
- Pray for two families in our NBBC Directory
<https://people.planningcenteronline.com/>

*you can download the app by searching
PEOPLE PLANNING CENTER on your mobile device

Username: YOUR EMAIL

PSW: one you setup (need a password) email wayne@nbbc.ca

Thursday February 28th – Barabbas

Reading Mark 15:6 – 15

“...the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.”

Barabbas. Here’s an interesting side note to the story of the Crucifixion, but it is a side note that all four of the Gospel writers comment on. Why did Matthew, Mark, Luke and John feel that this fellow, who in many ways is just a tangent to the story, ought to be mentioned? They didn’t mention the name of the guards who flogged Jesus; in fact they give relatively little information about that horrific aspect of Jesus suffering. They don’t tell the names or the exact nature of the crimes of the other criminals who hung on either side of Jesus, so why talk about Barabbas?

Mark tells us that Barabbas “was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising”, implying that Barabbas himself was an insurrectionist and had at least contributed to murder. Luke however, is a little more definite he tells us “Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.”

Barabbas was a local hero, having tried to overthrow the Roman occupiers by force. Quite possibly he was motivated by religious zeal. Within Palestine was a group of Jews called the Sicarii, which meant dagger-bearers. They were fanatical nationalists, who would carry a curved knife beneath their cloaks and murder Romans and those who collaborated with the Roman occupying forces.

And then there was Jesus. Here was a man who acted as if love was stronger than hate, who believed that humble service to others was a greater leadership practice than force - and those kinds of actions, that kind of thinking, is subversive to a nation which is bent on conquest by power and force.

Here at Jesus’ trial, we find that ironically it was not actually Jesus who was on trial - it was the religious rulers and leaders, and they were presented with a choice. Will they choose the way of Barabbas; a way of

force, hate and aggression or will they choose the way of Jesus Christ; a way of gentleness, love and submission?

Silly Jewish leaders; making the wrong choice. Didn't they know? Wasn't the way of Jesus obviously right? More compelling? Had we been in their place we would never have chosen Barabbas, would we?

Well, actually the question is not really one of would we, but do we? I suspect that this choice between Barabbas and Jesus Christ presents itself to us many times in a day - and we must choose which one will be crucified.

Each day we decide who lives and who goes free. Which of these two role models will be lived out in your life? Now don't get me wrong they were both subversive, they were both trying to change their world, both would have professed a zeal for God and a desire to do what is right, but they chose different ways to model that and each day, in many seemingly small decisions, we choose who will be let loose and who will be crucified.

When someone speaks an angry word at you because of something they claim you've done, or what they judge as your motives or how you came across, how you respond to them will be a choice between the way of Jesus who served, loved and healed and the way of Barrabas who plotted, killed and rioted.

When someone deals dishonestly with you do you see it as an opportunity for revenge or forgiveness; the way of Barabbas or Jesus? When someone corrects you do you defend yourself or humble yourself? Do you choose Barabbas or Jesus? When we see the filth and corruption in our world do we see it as a justification for outrage and complaining or an opportunity to bring the cleansing presence of Jesus, serving a world riddled with the horrors of sin and the consequences of sinful choices?

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Why do you think we find it so hard to imitate the way of Jesus rather than the way of Barabbas?

Are you facing a situation now in which you are struggling to follow the way of Jesus? Consider asking your MCG to pray for you in following the way of Jesus.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Mark 14:66-72
- Gal. 3:15-29

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 113
- 2 Sam. 14-15

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

Prayer Points:

- Pray for freedom from addictions
- Pray for Shari and the Family Ministries

Friday March 1st – Mockery

Reading Mark 15:16 – 20

“And they began to call out to him, “Hail, king of the Jews!”...And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him.”

It seems that mocking and bullying is not disappearing any time soon. Online social platforms have all created new ways to humiliate others. However, mocking is not simply an activity in which we engage, it is first an attitude.

Leighanne Bromley was listening to a message from staff at her son’s school, and she later said when she heard the whole thing, her jaw hit the floor.

Bromley’s ten-year-old son with autism had been out of school with a cold, and the message was ostensibly a basic check-in about his return. After the point where the woman thought she had disconnected the call, however, the voicemail recorded an exchange between her and another male staffer, joking about whether or not he could be kept out till the end of the year.

Bromley understands that her son had some behavioural struggles, but was still taken aback by their cavalier disposition. “I was gobsmacked and horrified someone who is entrusted with my son's care had that attitude towards him.” The episode especially rankled Bromley because she’d only received reports of minor problems in her son’s three years of previous attendance, and even his most recent struggles were concerning enough that she’d reached out to school officials on how to best strategize solutions.

The incident also prompted questions of whether or not such disrespectful staff behaviour was widespread, since more than half of the students at the school are also on the autism spectrum. In response, school headmaster Rob Jones personally apologized for their behaviour, and offered a statement on the school website:

“This type of behaviour is not acceptable and goes against the values of our school. We are taking this matter seriously and a full internal investigation is taking place.”³³

Eventually our attitudes will reveal themselves. An attitude which mocks others will bleed out into our conversations, attitudes and treatment of others. It is best that we confront them before God before they get exposed before the world.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Have you ever been the subject of mockery?

Have you ever mocked another?

Take time to forgive those who have mocked you, repent (if you haven't already done so) of your mocking and allow yourself to sense God's forgiveness.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Mark 15:1-15

Gal. 4:1-20

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 114

2 Sam. 16-17

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

Prayer Points:

- Pray for our ministries <http://www.nbbc.ca/ministries/>
- Pray for your neighbour who seems to take a lot of mocking

³³ Bridley Pearson-Jones, “School staff inadvertently record foul-mouthed chat about autistic pupil on his mother’s voicemail ... after believing they had hung up,” MSN (7-17-18)

Wednesday March 2nd – Serendipity

Reading Mark 15:21 – 32

“Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross.”

The word “serendipity” is defined as: the occurrence and development of events by chance in a happy or beneficial way. These are the unplanned, unexpected delights that pop up when we least expect them. Sometimes, they come to us disguised and it is only in retrospect that we see how delightful they were and how blessed our life became because of them.

I wonder if years later, Simon, who was commanded to carry the cross of Christ, would have looked back over his life and thought that that day was the most significant of his life? Little would he have known that on that day such a privilege would be bestowed on him. I suspect that at the time he did not consider it a privilege. How unaware he would have been, walking into the city, as he would have done many days before, that he would be thrust into the story of God, the pages of Scripture and the history of the world.

I think this is often how God orchestrates some of His greatest events in the course of our lives - not through our careful planning, but serendipitously - and it is not until afterwards that we look back and see how truly significant it was. How important it is to be present to God in each moment and to be present in the moments of our lives.

"In the mid-1970s, a young engineer named Steve Sasson invented the world's first digital camera. He secured a patent for it on behalf of his employer, then pitched his bosses on a new business model based on the invention. They passed. Today, digital cameras are ubiquitous—and Sasson's company, Kodak, is emerging from bankruptcy."

Sometimes we miss the blessing that God is bestowing. Someone has once said, “There are some things that must be spiritually discerned and appreciated, and if eyes are blind, and heart is dull, and the soul

desensitized. No wonder it is difficult to appreciate the higher things of God. It might be that God is about to present some opportunity in your life that might be a blessing you never imagined coming to you in quite that way.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Have you ever met with an event that ended up delighting you in a way you did not expect?

How do you think we can grow more sensitive and discerning?

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Mark 15:16-32

Gal. 4:21-31

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 115

2 Sam. 18-19

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

Prayer Points:

- Praise God that He hears your prayers
- Pray for Wayne and the worship teams as they continue to desire to be close to God and allow others that opportunity

Sunday March 3rd – Mark Chapter Fifteen**Reading: Mark 15****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:

Mark 15:33-41

Gal. 5:1-12

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 116

2 Sam. 20-21

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

Prayer Points:

- Pray for a family member
- Pray for our Board Chair Ancilla Ho-Young

Monday March 4th – Women

(By NBBC's Student intern Ben Froese)

Reading Mark 15:33 – 41

“Some women were watching from a distance... Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.”

When you think about the most important figures in the New Testament who faithfully served God's purposes (other than Jesus himself) who do you usually think of?

Paul? Peter? Perhaps James and John as well? Maybe the twelve disciples who became the apostles?

We're not wrong to have these people be the first ones who come to mind. It's largely because of their work of spreading the gospel that the church grew like it did after Jesus' ascension. If it weren't for the Apostle Paul's ministry, for instance, we might not even be here as Christians today. However, there is something that all these people have in common – they are all men, and this fact could lead us to forget about the prominent role that women played in the early church.

In today's text, we see that Jesus experiences the agony of the cross. Not only does he suffer the most horrific death imaginable, he does so without the support and presence of his twelve closest friends – the disciples had deserted him.³⁴ Who stuck around? A group of women. These women seem to be the only people who were faithful to Jesus when it was most difficult.

We read that some of the women who were present had followed Jesus in Galilee and cared for his needs. In Luke's Gospel, we find another list of women who supported Jesus' ministry financially.³⁵

As the story of Jesus continues to unfold, we find that women were the first ones to discover the empty tomb. God providentially allowed women to be the first ones who got to share this good news!

³⁴ Mark 14:50

³⁵ Luke 8:2-3

In the rest of the New Testament, we see many examples of women playing significant roles in ministry. Priscilla and Aquila (not just Aquila!) explain to Apollos the way of God more adequately.³⁶ Phoebe was perhaps the first person to publicly read the book of Romans.³⁷ Philip the evangelist had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.³⁸ Lydia likely supported Paul's ministry financially and helped found the church at Philippi. The list could go on and on.

Today, women continue to do extraordinary work in advancing God's kingdom purposes. Most pastors, well-known church leaders, and others who do the work of ministry full-time are still men, and so sometimes the contributions of women may be overlooked.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Men: Take note of all that the women in your life (especially your wife, if you are married!) do to enhance your life as well as to serve God's purposes in the world. Be sure to appreciate them.

Women: Do not hold yourself back from pursuing God's purposes wholeheartedly. Ask God if there is any courageous step of faith He's asking you to take today.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Mark 15:42-47

Gal. 5:13-26

Read through the Old

Psalm 117

2 Sam 22

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

Prayer Points: Pray for your local school and principal

- Pray for the marginalized in your area

³⁶ Acts 18:28

³⁷ Rom 16:1-2. See Michael F. Bird, *Bourgeois Babes, Bossy Wives, and Bobby Haircuts* (Zondervan, 2012).

³⁸ Acts 21:9

Tuesday March 5th – Identifying

(By NBBC's Bob Wilkins)

Reading Mark 15:42 - 47

“Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council... went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body.”

Requesting to receive the body of Jesus from Pilate was truly a bold act on the part of Joseph of Arimathea. The whole atmosphere surrounding the so-called trial of Jesus, the wild frenzy of the crowd calling for his crucifixion, the crucifixion itself, and the abandonment of Jesus by his closest followers, made any association with Jesus very risky indeed. Joseph was a prominent member of the Sanhedrin, a wealthy person, as well as a good and upright man who was waiting for the kingdom of God. Matthew's and John's account of the burial of Jesus indicate that Joseph had in fact become of a disciple of Jesus.³⁹ However, according to John he was a secret disciple because he feared the Jews. Most of the Jewish leaders had rejected Jesus, but there was a number of them who were secret disciples. As opposition to Jesus mounted among religious authorities, John writes:

Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him, but because of the Pharisees they would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved human praise more than praise from God.⁴⁰

These secret followers of Jesus, were obviously not an organized movement, but they no doubt created friendships and supported each other as they could. Nicodemus, who also was a member of the Sanhedrin and who had come to Jesus by night, and had also become a secret follower of Jesus, came with Joseph to request the body of Jesus. Apparently, since Jesus had been executed as a criminal his body

³⁹ Matthew 27:57-61; John 19:38-42

⁴⁰ John 12:42-43

belonged to the state. Thus, it was necessary to request the release of the body from Pilate.

By requesting the body of Jesus from Pilate, Joseph was making a bold and even a political statement and was in fact identifying himself with Jesus. Perhaps he would be kicked out of the Synagogue, but he was now ready to take that risk. He had already identified himself with Jesus at the Council the day before by not consenting to the Council's decision and action to condemn Jesus.

It can be risky, unpopular, and costly to identify with Jesus. How that may play out will be determined by the circumstances. Identifying with Jesus can have repercussions in families and in the work place. Many followers of Jesus often find themselves the only Christian in their family. It can become very difficult to maintain the faith among family members whom we love, and desire would come to know the Saviour. Opposition from family can be very stressful. Some Christians have even lost jobs or felt they needed to leave their posts because of faithfulness to Christ. Jesus said some strong things about the divisions that his followers would face, even in the family.

“Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law”.⁴¹

Churches and Christian institutions have and will continue to have strong opposition even in western culture where freedom of religion is espoused but often not supported in specific cases. Trinity Western University in BC has had its proposed law school opposed by various Canadian law societies because of their Christian lifestyle stance. This past summer many Christian churches were refused government grants for summer student employment because they refused to tick off a box

⁴¹ Luke 12:51-53

in the grant application in support of the government on lifestyle issues. To boldly identify with Jesus in such circumstances can be very difficult.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Mark 16

Gal. 6

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 118

2 Sam. 23-24

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

Prayer Points:

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 March 6th – Barriers

Reading Mark 16:1 – 3

“Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?”

Intimidated? Perhaps. Scared? Most likely, but with resolute determination the women who watched Jesus die were determined to see that he received a proper burial. It was the right thing to do, but as they approached the grave they wondered, “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?”

Most of us have the image of a large stone rolled in front of the tomb of Jesus (illustration A) but according to archeological evidence the stone was more likely to have been like a cork that was butted into the cave entrance (Illustration B).⁴²

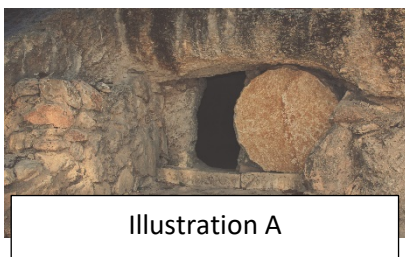


Illustration A

Regardless of the type of stone, there is no question that the women would have had a great deal of difficulty moving it, and this was their concern.



Illustration B

Very often when we desire to do the right thing we hesitate or even fail to make the attempt because we can't find a way to accomplish what is good in our own strength and by our own ingenuity. In other words, we lean on our own understanding, our own effort to do the good we believe God calls us to, but in doing this we seldom leave room for God to act and do the impossible among us.

⁴² <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/jerusalem/how-was-jesus-tomb-sealed/>

I suspect that most of us want to live lives in which God does great works and miracles. Yet, if we do not give room for God to act how will we ever see His miraculous power working? The most important thing is to confirm if God is calling you to do something. If that is the case, do not focus on the “stones” but commit yourself and your efforts to God.

Hudson Taylor, the great missionary to China, wrote, “Depend on it. God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply. He is too wise a God to frustrate His purposes for lack of funds, and He can just as easily supply them ahead of time as afterwards, and He much prefers doing so.”

Meditation/Application/Reflection

In what areas of your life are you leaving room for God to act?

Why do you think it is so hard for North Americans to trust God with the impossible?

Is there something that you feel God might be calling you or your MCG to do that will need God's help?

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Luke 1:1-25

Ephesians 1:1-14

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 119:1-8

1 Kings 1

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

Prayer Points:

- Pray that the barriers between neighbours would be broken

Thursday March 7th – He Leads

(By NBBC's Student intern Ben Wimmers)

Reading Mark 16:4 – 8

“He is going ahead of you...”

Many years ago, my cousin and I were walking in the bush beside my parent's property. We approached a pile of brush that my dad had built by placing all the broken or sawn off limbs of the trees around the property. The pile was quite large, but its size was masked because it sat in a depression in the land. My cousin and I were determined to walk across it, though we were hesitant because we were unsure if the branches would support our weight. We decided that I would go first, slowly, to see if the pile of brush was up to the task. I made it across with little difficulty. Now, it is worth noting, that I can't have weighed very much as I was a small kid, no more than 8 years old. My cousin, who is 5 years older was at least three times my size. I suppose you can guess what happens next. About halfway across, the branches give way and my cousin falls into the brush. No harm done, but he fell through butt first, folded in half, with his hands and feet sticking straight up in the air. With the assistance of my mom, we threw him a rope and hauled him out.

We approached this uncertain event with caution but chose the wrong person to go ahead and lead the way. It would have been smarter to have my bigger cousin go first and exercise more caution or simply walk around. Heading into a new event always gives some cause for concern. The unknowns about the future can be terrifying. It can be unnerving to be leading people into the future, or not to have confidence in the person leading you.

When the angels appear to the women at the tomb, they tell them not to be afraid. They are to take comfort in the risen Lord, knowing that he has already gone ahead of them. Jesus has walked the way before his disciples. He has already gone ahead and has prepared the place where

they will meet him. How excitedly they should have rushed out to meet him there!

Jesus has already gone ahead of the next item in your agenda. He has already gone ahead into 2020 and beyond. He is not just passively waiting there either. He is walking along side us helping us on the way. The invitation that he gave to his disciples, and the invitation he gives to you is the same.

Follow me, for I am already ahead of you and will lead you there.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Do you find your heart anxious about the future? Take time to tell God what you are anxious about and hear His reassurance that He goes before you.

Can you recall a time when you were pleasantly surprised because the worst case scenario you expected didn't materialize?

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Luke 1:26-38

Eph. 1:15-23

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 119:9-16

1 Kings 2-3

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

Prayer Point:

- Pray that God would go before your attempts to connect with neighbours and co-workers

Friday March 8th – Unbelievable

(By NBBC's Student intern Ben Froese)

Reading Mark 16:9 – 11

“When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it.”

Many people find Christianity to be unbelievable. Some think that the idea of an all-powerful and all-loving God just doesn't make sense with the amount of evil we see in the world. Some think that science now answers the questions that people once looked to religion for. Others think that Christian morality is impractical or even harmful in our culture today.

Finding it difficult to believe doesn't seem to be anything new. We discover in today's text that even the disciples found the claim that Jesus was alive to be unbelievable.

We might think that first-century people were naïve or ignorant. However, they had this same knowledge that we have today: Dead people stay dead! - so it was hard for them to believe as well.

In Matthew 28 we find an interesting story about the response of Jesus' disciples to his resurrection. The eleven disciples see the risen Jesus at a mountain in Galilee. We're told, “When they saw him, they worshipped him; *but some doubted*” (v. 17). They worshipped him. And they doubted. I imagine they would have thought, “Could this really be happening right now?”

The claim that Jesus rose from the dead does seem a bit crazy. For those of us who've heard this story many times, perhaps we take it for granted and perhaps it loses its shock. However, for those disciples who first saw the risen Jesus as well as for people today who are looking at Christianity from the outside, perhaps some questions need to be answered before one is ready to make the step of faith.

This could serve as an encouragement for us to try to get into the minds of non-believers. Asking people questions like, “What do you believe?”, “Why do you believe it?” and, “What are your thoughts about Christianity?” Genuinely listening to their reply can be a great first step in evangelism/discipleship.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Do you have people in your life who find the Christian message unbelievable? Do you know why they think this?

Pray that God would show you if there are any next steps He wants you to take in terms of sharing your faith in these relationships.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Luke 1:39-56

Eph. 2:1-10

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 119:17-24

1 Kings 4-5

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

Prayer Points:

- Miracles? Pray for God to reveal Himself in the most desperate situation in your life, friend’s life or neighbourhood
- Pray for an unbelieving family member

Saturday March 9th – Stubbornness

(By NBBC's Student intern Ben Wimmers)

Reading Mark 16:12 – 14

“...he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe...”

The boy who cried wolf is a well-known fable of Aesop. A boy, who is tasked with watching the village's sheep runs into town declaring that there is a wolf among the flock. The men of village hastily run out to defend their precious sheep. It is a false alarm, which the boy finds hilarious. He pulls the same prank, with the same result. The village men become increasingly displeased each time. Eventually, a wolf does appear to attack the flock and the boy runs to town to fetch the men. They laugh at him because they won't be fooled again and so they do not go, no matter how much the boy pleads. The wolf eats the flock and the boy is left in misery. The point of this tale is be truthful always, for if you are liar, you won't be believed even when you tell the truth.

The refusal of the men in the village to aid the boy was well warranted. They were correct to stubbornly refuse his cries, since he has proven to be a liar. The fable reflects poorly on the boy, but how would it look if the men refused to rush out at his first call? Without any history of falsehood, would their stubborn disregard of the boy be allowed? Of course not! The shame would be theirs to ignore the boy and have their flock eaten.

In Mark 16:9-11, the disciples are told by Mary Magdalene that Jesus has risen, but they refuse to believe her. In today's passage, Jesus appears to the disciples and rebukes them for their stubbornness, their refusal to believe. We are not given much insight into Mary's relationship with the disciples, but it may be fair to say that she was not a habitual liar. This woman had seven demons cast out of her by Jesus (Luke 8:2) and she attended to him even after death (Mark 16:1). Mary was dedicated to Jesus and his message - so why wouldn't the disciples believe her? Did they dismiss her testimony because she was a woman?

Were they lost in their own grief? Or afraid that they would be next to be crucified by the Romans? Whatever the case, they were so preoccupied with their own surroundings that they failed to remember Jesus' promise that he would be resurrected after death. They failed to remember that he was the Messiah and so they stubbornly refused to believe that Jesus was alive and active.

How often might we miss Jesus and the workings of the Holy Spirit in the world around us, in the testimony of others because we are stubbornly entrenched in our own situations and bound by our current worldview? Do we have hearts that are hardened to the workings of our risen saviour around us? Whether our stubbornness comes from past experiences, cultural norms, or the hidden prejudices of our hearts, Jesus can push past them. Jesus made himself known to his disciples and did not leave them in their unbelief. It can't have been an easy conversation for the disciples, but the result led to the birth of the church and the spreading of the gospel to the world. Jesus is alive and active in the world; how might we see him better?

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Take some time to pray, asking God to show you the areas in your life where your stubbornness is preventing you from seeing the risen Jesus acting in the world.

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Luke 1:57-66

Eph. 2:11-22

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 119:25-32

1 Kings 6-7

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

Sunday March 10th – Mark Chapter Sixteen**Reading: Mark 16****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:

Luke 1:67-80

Eph. 3:1-13

Read through the Old

Testament in a year:

Psalm 119:33-40

1 Kings 8

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

Prayer Points:

- Pray for your local MP and MPP
- Discover the NBBC directory and pray for 2 families

Monday March 11th – Preaching

Reading Mark 16:15 – 18

“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.”

I suspect when we think of preaching we immediately think of what takes place as we gather on Sunday. To us a sermon is, hopefully, a well-researched, carefully crafted, specifically worded type of public speech. This would not have been what was first thought about when Jesus told his disciples to preach the Gospel.

To preach is simply to announce something, to proclaim it. In this sense preaching takes place every day on radio and TV. People are always announcing or proclaiming news.

A discouraged pastor attended a conference, where many famous and powerful speakers were preaching, hoping to be encouraged. This is what he wrote about that conference:

Several years ago, I heard David Ring speak. David has cerebral palsy and a speech impediment so bad that you can barely understand him. But he held 11,000 people in that arena spellbound for twenty minutes. He told us how as a little boy he was close to his mother, and when she died, he had nowhere to turn but to the Lord. He then said, "They said I would never ride a bike, but I did. They said I would never get married, but I did; I have five kids to prove it. They said I would never preach, but last year I preached 265 times. I have cerebral palsy, but I preach. What's your problem?"

For two days I had heard some of the greatest speakers in the world and never shed a tear. When David Ring spoke that morning, tears flooded from my eyes. What God didn't do for me through some of the best-known authors in the land, he did through a young man with cerebral

*palsy. I said to myself, If that young man with his trial can still preach, I can't wait to preach again.*⁴³

You don't have to be eloquent to preach. You don't have to be ordained or trained or specially educated. It doesn't need to take place in a crowd. It doesn't have to take place among strangers or even adults. You simply need to tell people the news that you have discovered about God and His Kingdom.

We've imagined that preaching is a specialty activity, when in reality it is meant to be an everyday activity that we all get to participate in.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

If you would like to hear David Ring, the man mentioned in the illustration, speaking why not check out this sermon on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U72ZGz28f7U>

Why do you think we often discount our own efforts to tell news about Jesus as something less than preaching?

How can we become better at preaching?

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Luke 2:1-20

Eph. 3:14-21

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 119:41-48

1 Kings 9-10

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

⁴³ R. L. Russell, "Triumphing over Trials," Preaching Today, Tape No. 119.

Tuesday March 12th – Enthroned

(By NBBC's Bob Wilkins)

Reading Mark 16:19 – 20

“...he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God.”

Theologians in discussing the person and work of Christ have most often organized their material around what they refer to as the states of Christ. There are basically two states of Christ: his state of humiliation, which includes the incarnation, his earthly ministry, his sufferings, his crucifixion and burial; and his state of exaltation, which includes his resurrection, his ascension back to heaven, his being seated at the right hand of the Father, and his second coming in power and glory. His being seated at the right hand of the Father is most often referred to as his session or his enthronement. The ascension and enthronement of Christ do not have as prominent a place in the biblical material as do the crucifixion and resurrection. This does not, however, mean that they are unimportant. They are in fact critical to our understanding of the person and work of Christ.

For Jesus, being seated at the right hand of God the Father was important to his own identity. As Jesus was being tried before the Sanhedrin, the High Priest challenged him directly, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” “I am,” said Jesus. “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven,”⁴⁴ a clear reference to Psalm 110. Jesus had already used Psalm 110:1, accepted as a messianic Psalm by the Jewish teachers, to argue that David’s Lord (the Messiah) was more than just David’s son. He is David’s Lord, the incarnate and exalted son of God who sits at the right hand of God.⁴⁵ Jesus is clearly claiming to be that person who sits at the right hand of God the Father. No greater claim could Jesus have made to being the Messiah. The high priest

⁴⁴ Mark 14:62

⁴⁵ Psalm 110:1; Mark 12:35-37

understood well enough the radical claim that Jesus was making when he tore his clothes and said, “Why do we need any more witnesses?” he asked. “You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?”⁴⁶

It is also clear that the early disciples appealed to Jesus’ session at the right hand of God to support their conviction that the exalted Jesus was none other than the long-awaited Messiah. Peter argues for this very position in his great sermon on the Day of Pentecost and appeals to Psalm 110, the very Psalm that Jesus himself appealed to.⁴⁷ In his second sermon recorded in Acts, Peter says of Christ, “God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Saviour that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins.”⁴⁸ It is the exalted Christ who bestows salvation on repentant sinners.

Peter in his Pentecostal sermon argues that what happened on the Day of Pentecost was that the exalted Christ at the right hand of God had poured out his promised Holy Spirit on His followers, which Spirit He continues to pour out upon his disciples to fulfill their God given mission in the world.⁴⁹ The enthroned Christ not only has authority on earth by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit but also has authority in heaven where he is our advocate with the Father and where He constantly intercedes on our behalf.⁵⁰ Christ’s enthronement is therefore critical to who Christ is and to our salvation and relationship to God. One of the amazing things for us is that in eternity Christ will give to us the privilege to sit with him upon his throne. How glorious is that!⁵¹

⁴⁶ Mark 14:63-64

⁴⁷ Acts 2:33-35

⁴⁸ Acts 5:31

⁴⁹ Acts 1:4-11; John 14:15-26; 16:5-16; Matthew 28:18-20

⁵⁰ 1 John 2:1; Romans 8:34

⁵¹ Revelation 3:21-22

Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Luke 2:21-40

Eph. 4:1-16

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 119:49-56

1 Kings 11

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

Prayer Points:**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.

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.