

JOURNEY^{WITH} *Jesus*



31 DAY DEVOTIONS FROM THE GOSPEL OF MARK

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Hello!

So you've picked up this book; congratulations! You've made a fantastic decision to accept Jesus Christ into your life as your Saviour! What you have in your hand is a great place to start your journey of discovering more about Jesus. Through these historical records, as penned by one of Jesus' followers, John Mark, you will see how Jesus demonstrated His love and power by healing the sick, calming the storm and giving His life for many.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God who died for the sins of man – who is He? What is His story? Take time each day to read the Bible and this set of Devotions to find out more!

The stories we read about this God may date back to hundreds of years ago. Yet, it is the very same God who also cares about our struggles, fears and hopes today. I pray that the words in this book will encourage you as you walk in your journey of knowing God.

Go ahead, read on; let God's Word change your lives!

Blessings,
Pastor Jeffrey Chong

Introduction

At the heart of the Christian faith is Christ. When we call ourselves Christians, we are saying that we are a people who believe in and follow Christ.

But how can we believe in and follow a Person we do not know much about? No matter how great the Person is, if we know little about His life – His teachings, works, values and views – we will not be able to follow Him with clarity of mind and conviction in spirit.

We can take small steps to grow in our understanding of Jesus Christ by reading the Bible. The Bible is not just any ordinary book. It contains stories and messages from God that reveal who God is – His character, thoughts and awesome plan for mankind. This is why Christians today call the Bible the Word of God.

Reading the Bible is spiritual work. So before we open the Bible to find out more about Jesus, let's pray that God may open the eyes of our hearts and minds to see His goodness and greatness.

Using the devotions

This compilation of devotions based on the Gospel of Mark provides a glimpse into the life of Jesus while He was on earth more than 2000 years ago.

Lasting 31 days, the devotions aim to guide the reader through a month of discovering and reflecting on Jesus' life. Each devotion focuses on a passage in Mark. It contains a simple explanation of God's Word, a reflection based on the passage and application points.

Please read the Bible before the devotions. The devotions do not replace the Bible. The Bible is the Word of God, while the devotions are just tools to guide you in understanding and reflecting upon God's Word. You are encouraged to share your learnings with a more mature Christian who is able to answer questions you may have and guide you to understand what you've read.

It's okay to struggle with what you read from the Bible and devotions. Just persist in understanding Jesus. Your efforts will not be in vain. God always reveals Himself to those who desire to know Him.

Build your faith deep

Don't settle for a shallow faith. Instead, build your faith deep. Take the time and energy to know Jesus more. Everything that you do as a response of faith depends entirely on how well you know your Lord and Saviour.

When you're tempted to give up on your faith or take a shortcut, remember that Jesus has gone all the way for you. He didn't give up on saving you, He didn't withhold His wonderful purpose from you.

Jesus has given us His life. Let's faithfully live ours in Him.

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. (*Colossians 2:6-7*)

DAY 1

Encountering Jesus



Mark 1:1-20

Remember the last time you waited eagerly for something to happen? Perhaps it's the release of the latest mobile phone, or your favourite pop star's concert, or the birth of your first child.

At the beginning of the book of Mark, people were buzzing with excitement too. Jesus Christ, the Saviour foretold by ancient prophets, was finally coming! His arrival would change history for ever because He was not just a man but the beloved Son of God (*v10-11*).

Pause and chew on this amazing truth – God, the supreme and limitless Creator of heaven and earth, took on the finite flesh of a man. Jesus slept, ate, breathed, moved and hurt like you and me. This transformation is as drastic as a man shrinking to look and live like an ant. Jesus was 100% man, but He is 100% God as well. His ministry (*what we do for God out of our faith in Him*) was unique, powerful and mind-blowing.

People prepared for an encounter with the Saviour by turning away from their sins (*thoughts, words and actions that fail to meet God's perfect standards*) and living a new life in Jesus (*v5*).

Everywhere Jesus went, He drew people to Him. At Jesus' call, Simon, Andrew,

James and John immediately dropped everything they were doing in order to follow Him (v14-20). There must be something wonderfully special about Jesus that made them abandon all that they had to pursue Jesus. Their lives would never be the same again.

You may have already invited Jesus into your life and are wondering what is ahead. You may have many questions and doubts. That's okay! We're all on the journey of knowing Jesus more.

Life with Jesus is fulfilling, with plenty of unexpected discoveries. You can look forward to encounters with Jesus that will stun you, shake you and shape you to become more like Him. Jesus calls us to let go of our old mindsets, habits and values in order to model our new lives after Him.

Are you ready to know this Jesus more? Are there concerns or fears that are holding you back? Pray to God about them. Share your thoughts with your church family who will support you in your walk with Jesus. Pray that God may show you how wonderful Jesus is as you read the Gospel of Mark.



DAY 2

Who do you think Jesus is?



Mark 1:21-45

Most of us probably have individuals in our lives whom we call the “all-rounders”. These people are good at everything – academics, sports, cooking, singing, you name it. They seem to excel at whatever they are doing. We may wonder, “How can someone so capable and smart exist?”

Jesus is the ultimate all-rounder. He taught with such authority that it awed His audience (v21-22). He chased evil spirits out of people with ease (v22-28, 34). He healed many people at such a rate that it would put the best doctors to shame (v32-34). Jesus impressed and surprised people so much that they couldn’t help but think, “How can this guy be a mere man?”

Clearly, Jesus was not your average guy next door. No ordinary man could so freely exercise authority over every kind of sickness and evil spirit as Jesus had done. Jesus is more than a miracle worker too. His understanding of God and the Scriptures amazed His listeners. Even the evil spirits recognised His divine nature – they called Him the “Holy One of God” (v24).

Jesus’ unique identity could not be hidden. People who heard of His great works ran to Him for help. They sat down at His feet to hear His teachings about God. Jesus looked like any normal guy, but His works were anything but ordinary.

The great impact of Jesus’ three-year ministry on earth has continued more than

2000 years later to this day. Christianity is the largest religious group in the world with an estimated 2.4 billion believers. That's nearly a third of the entire world's population!

The Bible, containing God's revelations about Jesus, is the best selling and most widely distributed book of all time. The lasting influence of what Jesus has done testifies to the uniqueness and authenticity of His ministry.

Who do you think Jesus is? Is He a miracle worker, a wise man, a good moral teacher or more? If you've taken the step to be a follower of Christ, what do you think about Him?



DAY 3

Jesus and sinners



Mark 2:3-6

All of us have a past. We may have been selfish and hurt others along the way. We may have done things we are not proud of. We may regret some terrible wrongs. We may have secrets so deep and dark that we wonder and even fear how people would react if they knew what we were hiding. Would they still accept and love us? For some of us, our past is a chokehold making us breathless with insecurity and anxiety.

Let us come to Jesus. He demonstrates God's love for us who have sinned against God in one way or another. His mercy destroys the stranglehold of sin over us.

During His time on earth, Jesus ate with tax collectors, who were widely despised because of their profession. There were also "sinners" at the dinner table, who were shunned by society (v15-16). Jesus reached out to them and offered forgiveness. Jesus' ministry is about bringing forgiveness, healing and restoration to people.

Does this mean that Jesus doesn't care whether we sin or not? Absolutely not! In fact, He cares greatly about sin's impact on us. He taught passionately against sin (Mark 9:42-49) and commanded His followers to be devoted to the Holy God (Mark 12:28-33). Near the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus would also give His life to cleanse us of our sins. By dying on the cross, He sacrificed His life to take away our sins. He provided a way for us to live freely from the control of sin.

When we come face to face with our sins, we may feel overwhelmed by guilt. We may be hurt by harsh judgment from others. But Jesus graciously reaches out to us with forgiveness of our sins. He wants us to recognise our sins and realise our need for forgiveness.

Pray and ask God to forgive you of your sins. Repent of your sins today. Repentance means to turn away from your wrongdoings and to walk towards a right life with God. Make repentance a regular activity in your life so that you never forget how you are always in need of God's mercy.

After you have repented, stop dwelling on your past. Jesus has forgiven you. Move on with a deep gratitude to God and a joyful determination to do what's right in His eyes!



DAY 4

Are you a spectator or a disciple?



Mark 3:7-19

What do Olympic champ Michael Phelps, celebrity Kim Kardashian and business heavyweight Jack Welch have in common? They all love the book *The Purpose Driven Life* written by preacher Rick Warren. The book has sold tens of millions of copies to date. People around the world are looking for a purpose greater than themselves. To Christ-followers, Jesus has given the greatest purpose of all – to be his disciples who will make more disciples.

During Jesus' ministry on earth, there were many people who were part of the crowd. They came to Jesus because they needed His help, or they might come to hear Jesus' wise teachings. They came, heard, received and went on with their lives. In other words, they were spectators who watched from afar but did not get involved. They never really experienced what it meant to follow Jesus.

However, there were some who became Jesus' disciples. The disciples shared in Jesus' life and ministry. They knew Jesus intimately as they lived, ate and travelled with Him. They were taught and often corrected by Him. They followed Jesus everywhere and played important roles in Jesus' mission on earth.

Jesus wants every Christian to be His disciple, to follow Him and to fulfil God's will on earth. Because we are created by God for God, nothing will satisfy us more than to live for Him. We are not made for ourselves or other people, but for Jesus. There is no greater purpose than to know Jesus and to obey Him.

Today, we can decide to be a disciple by learning humbly from Jesus and actively applying what we learn. We learn from Jesus by reading the Bible, listening to others teach from it, and watching others live by it. We model our lives after Jesus' by putting godly values and principles into practice. We will see our lives changed as we live for a greater purpose – God's purpose.

As someone who professes faith in Jesus Christ, do you think you are a spectator or a disciple? Which one do you want to be? Why?



DAY 5

One day they will understand



Mark 3:20-35

You have just come to know Jesus and you're excited to share about His goodness with a friend or family member. After hearing you politely for about 20 seconds, they interrupt you and say, "Sorry I'm not interested." Your mum and dad advise, "It's okay to believe in a religion but don't get obsessed with it." Your friends poke fun at your faith, "How can you believe in something as dumb as the Bible? Are you 'holier' than us now?"

If any of that happened to you before, know that Jesus had it worse.

When He was surrounded by the crowd at His home, His family thought He was crazy and tried to restrain Him (v20-21). More insulting than being called a lunatic, Jesus was also accused of being a lackey of Satan, the devil. The scribes, who were teachers of the Law, claimed that Jesus could cast out demons because He was possessed by the prince of demons (v22)! This was such a severe accusation that Jesus strongly told them off for blaspheming (*saying disrespectful things against*) the Holy Spirit (v28-30).

When we follow Christ, people may misunderstand us. They could doubt our enthusiasm or be wary and sceptical of the changes that they see in us. We may experience misunderstandings and tension in our relationships as a result.

When misunderstood and falsely accused, Jesus remained steadfast in His mission.

He defended His ministry with reason (v23-27). To Jesus, those who did God's will were His true family (v31-35).

It's natural to feel rejected, hurt and torn between following Christ and pleasing our loved ones. Sometimes the tension may be overwhelming, but we can always find encouragement from God and fellow believers.

Take heart also that God will give us the wisdom and strength to deal with opposition. He will empower you to bring about positive changes in your life so that others can see how good Jesus is. One day those who object to your faith will understand your love for God and even come to know Jesus through your life.

Do you face obstacles and opposition because of your faith? Ask God to help you love those who misunderstand you, and pray that they too will one day know Jesus.



DAY 6

How's your heart?



Mark 4:1-20

The heart is one of the primary organs in the body. It is responsible for pumping blood to the head right down to the toes. It ensures the proper circulation of essential nutrients such as oxygen throughout the body.

Without the heart, we cannot function effectively. One reason you can read this now is because your heart is sending oxygen-rich blood to your brain.

Just as the heart is important to our physical wellbeing, our heart condition towards God's teachings is crucial to our spiritual health. Mark 4:1-8 is a parable about a farmer sowing seeds on different kinds of ground. The seed represents the Word of God (v14), and the grounds represent the different heart conditions of the listeners.

The first three grounds – the path, rocky places and thorns – are unsuitable for the growth of the seed. Characteristics of people with such heart conditions include a shallow understanding of the Word, failure to persevere in times of trouble and persecution, and distraction by worries, wealth and other pleasures. Though they receive God's Word, they are not able to flourish in the faith.

Finally, we have seed that falls on good soil. The seed grows and produces a crop (v8). Only those who hear, accept and commit to the Word will have a rooted and fruitful faith (v20).

Jesus shared this parable so that His listeners could reflect on their heart conditions towards the Word and things of God. We may listen to teachings from the Bible during weekend services. We may go online to hear sermons by powerful preachers. Yet all these won't matter if we don't approach the Word of God with the right attitude. Our heart conditions determine how His Word will grow and produce fruit in our lives.

Today, is your heart rejecting God's Word or responding to it with faith? Know that Jesus loves you and desires for you to turn to Him. How do we turn our hearts into fertile soil for God's Word to grow and flourish?



DAY 7

Don't block the light



Mark 4:21-34

Night falls, and the house is in darkness. If you were the owner of the house and have a lamp, would you hide it under the bed or bowl? Probably not, as that would dim the light and defeat the purpose of having a light source.

Would you put the lamp on a lampstand? Held up high, the lamp would easily light up the whole house. Surely any owner would place the lamp where it can shine the brightest without hindrance!

God is eager to shine His light into the world of darkness too. He has generously revealed His heart, thoughts and instructions to anyone who needs His light. The lamp (v21-23) represents God's life-giving message which He has freely made known to us. He does not hide His revelation. Rather, He has put His truth out there, making it easily available to those who want to know it.

Some of us may think that God only discloses important stuff to those who are "super Christians". But God has already made His truth known through the Bible to everyone.

We do not know everything about God. He is way too awesome and powerful for us to completely comprehend! But what He has revealed to us through the Bible, about His character and plan for humankind, is enough for us to love Him and live a godly life.

The question then is, how are we responding to the message that God has revealed? Are we giving God's Word the respect it deserves? If the message is really from God, then it demands our obedience. If the revelation is truly from God, then it is the absolute truth that we ought to live by.

The two parables in verses 26-34 reveal how the supernatural growth of the Kingdom of God occurs because of God's power and man's effort. God desires for us to respond to Him in the right way, to join Him in His work.

Is there anything that hinders you from approaching God's Word with the right attitude? How can you deal with it so that it doesn't block the light of God in your life?



DAY 8

Jesus' power, our response



Mark 4:35-6:6a

What might Jesus have accomplished if He hadn't departed from the earth? Perhaps He could have advised presidents and prime ministers, united North Korea and South Korea, settled border disputes and stopped terrorists. He could have gone to the hospitals and healed the sick. The list goes on. If we had seen these acts of Jesus, what would our response be?

In Mark 4:35-6:6a, Jesus demonstrated His power on different occasions. He calmed the storm, restored a demon-possessed man, healed a woman and raised the dead. All of these demonstrations are supernatural, spectacular and stunning. Yet what is more interesting is the different responses of the people towards Jesus when they saw His works.

Responses ranged from fear to faith. In one incident, a bleeding woman was desperate for healing. By faith, she reached out for Jesus' clothes, believing that she would be healed just by touching His garments (5:25-34). Jesus honoured her faith and freed her from her suffering (5:34). By contrast, in 6:1-6a, Jesus did not demonstrate His power among the people in his hometown because of their lack of faith.

From the various responses, we learn that faith doesn't come naturally to us just because we witness a miracle or wonder of Jesus. It's an intentional decision on our part to trust in Jesus after what we've seen.

Faith is also not a feel-good feeling or a sense of confidence based on our circumstances. It is the determination to believe in the big God who is always in control, whatever the challenge we're facing.

Faith is not rooted in spiritual experiences. These experiences may open our eyes to more of Jesus' mighty deeds, but they do not make us believe. Faith stems from a decision to follow Jesus, who has revealed Himself to be our powerful God and gracious Saviour.

What is a spiritual experience you're seeking, or a prayer you want answered? If Jesus seems silent or gives you a different answer from what you desire, will you still trust Him? Why?



DAY 9

Who Jesus sends, He empowers



Mark 6:6b-13

Imagine, one day, the most powerful person in Apple now calls you to his office. He shares with you all the latest iPhone and MacBook products, even those that are yet to be released to the market. Thereafter, he gives you a task – to manage his company on his behalf! How would you feel?

Perhaps you would embrace the task with enthusiasm, especially if you're a geek or Apple fan. Or you may hesitate and ask, "Can I really do it? What if the company collapses under my watch?"

When Jesus told His disciples that they were going to do what He had been doing – preaching, healing and casting out demons – they might have had different reactions. Some might have gleefully grabbed at the opportunity to participate in the work of God. Others might have struggled with doubt because they weren't sure they could accomplish the task.

In any case, Jesus gave His disciples the power and authority to complete the mission. Power is the ability to do something, and authority is the right to exercise that power.

The disciples obeyed Jesus and out they went, preaching repentance, healing people and expelling demons (v12-13). Jesus specifically instructed the disciples to leave behind their essentials because what He had given them was more than enough to

accomplish the mission (v8).

When Jesus sends us to do His work today, He gives us both power AND authority! As Jesus' disciples, we are empowered to do the good works He has called us to do. These include sharing the Good News with our friends and families, applying godly values at the workplace or school, and volunteering at the church.

Life as Jesus' disciple is exciting and meaningful! How do you feel knowing that Jesus will give you power and authority when He sends you on a mission?

The disciples trusted Jesus that even without their essentials, they would not be in lack when they obeyed Him. How does this change the way you see serving Jesus?



DAY 10

Who or what do you follow?



Mark 6:14-30

Everyone is following someone or something. Some follow in the footsteps of people they admire. Some follow fashion brands. Some follow certain philosophies of life. Some follow social media influencers.

Who or what we follow will eventually show in our actions and speech. We dress and speak like the influencers we follow. We make decisions based on the philosophy of life we subscribe to. How about you?

From the actions and decisions of John the Baptist, it is obvious that He was a follower of God. He was a prophet sent by God to urge people to repent and seek forgiveness for their sins (*Mark 1:4*). John even baptised Jesus in water (*Mark 1:9*). John's life is a clear example of how following God can sometimes lead to a tragic end. John was jailed and killed by King Herod for speaking out against the latter's sin of taking his brother's wife for himself.

One significant characteristic of a follower of God is the bold decision to live by God's truth. John chose to stand by the inconvenient truth that King Herod was committing a sin, though it would cost him his life.

Today, Jesus calls us to be representatives of His truth. Living in a world where lies and avoidance of truth may be easier alternatives, it takes courage and trust to follow Jesus and persist in His truth.

The Internet and social media are flooding us with many “truths” about how to live our lives. We live in constant danger of being swayed by worldly values. We are taught to do whatever we want, and that what we feel is right must be right. We are also fed with the falsehood that the wealthier we are, the happier we’ll be. The more lies the world throws our way, the more we need to understand and stand firm on God’s truth.

Who or what do you follow? Are you aware of the values you hold onto, whether they are of God’s or the world’s? How can you train yourself to be a representative of Jesus’ truth?



DAY 11

Problems of the hardened heart



Mark 6:31-56

Those of us who play the guitar would notice that after some time, the fingers we use to play the instrument would become rough. If we do not do anything about them, the regular friction between our fingers and the guitar strings would create a layer of hardened skin.

Seeing or hearing about Jesus' signs and wonders is like strumming a guitar. Our hearts may come into contact with the miracles that demonstrate Jesus' power. But because we do not anything about what we see or hear, our hearts may become hardened after some time.

The disciples were in a similar situation. Though they had seen Jesus' miracles, they did not understand the significance of these signs and wonders. They did not exercise faith. In one instance, the disciples were struggling to row their boat against the strong wind (v45-48). When they finally saw Jesus miraculously walking on water, they weren't happy to see Him at all. Instead they were frightened because they thought He was a ghost (v49-50)!

Some of us may be confused by the disciples' reaction. Earlier on, didn't they witness Jesus feed five thousand people with five loaves and two fish (v31-44)? It was clear that Jesus had power over nature. Why would they find it strange then that Jesus could take a stroll on the lake? Shouldn't they be relieved that Jesus was there to help them?

The Bible gives the answer – the disciples were terrified because they had hardened hearts (v52). They did not understand what the miracles had demonstrated about Jesus’ authority over nature. They did not look beyond the signs and wonders to know the God who performed them. Their hardened hearts limited their expectation of what Jesus, the Son of God, could do. They failed to see Jesus’ divinity.

Signs and wonders are supposed to point us back to Jesus Christ, to show us how special and powerful He is. They are a gateway for us to exercise our faith in the power of Christ. But when our hearts are hardened, we miss out on the opportunities to know Christ and act in faith.

It is important to look beyond the signs and wonders to reflect on who Jesus is and respond to Him with faith. Think of miracles performed by Jesus that you have read or heard about. What do they say about Jesus – who He is and what He can do? In light of that knowledge, how can you step out in faith today?



DAY 12

The sins from within



Mark 7:1-23

What would you do if you see dirty water flowing out of your tap? Most of us would call the plumber to find out the cause and solve the issue as soon as possible. Perhaps the inner lining of the tap is rusty, or the water pipe is covered in unwanted chemicals and bacteria. In any case, the water has become undrinkable and unusable because of a problem that happened on the inside.

Sin works like that too. It contaminates our hearts before it pollutes our thoughts, words and actions (*Luke 6:45*). If we do not deal with the sins in our lives, the infection of our hearts will worsen. Everything else that we think, do and say will be stained with sin.

Jesus taught that evil starts from the heart, which leads to wicked behaviours such as sexual immorality, greed, pride and hatred (*v20-23*).

Yet not all agreed with Him. The Jewish authorities insisted that as long as they fulfilled their man-made traditions, they would be considered 'clean' and good people (*v1-4*). Jesus rebuked them for relying on human rules and regulations to justify themselves. By doing so, they had separated themselves from God (*v6-13*).

Even Christians can fall into this trap of depending on human efforts to make ourselves right with God and appear good. We may rely on our attendance at services and Life Group sessions to demonstrate that we are growing in the

faith. We may participate in meaningful causes to show others that we are living purposefully. We may even want to please our parents, friends and colleagues just to prove that we are loving people.

These outward actions are not wrong in themselves. But they do not take away our sins and make us right with God.

Only Jesus can free us from sin's control and make us righteous before God (2 Corinthians 5:21). He died on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins, making it possible for us to not just be sinless but holy. Today, with the Holy Spirit's empowerment, we have the strength to reject sinful desires and embrace the righteous life that God has in store for us (Romans 8:9-14).

Now take some time to look deeper within your life. What are some thoughts, emotions, words and actions that come from sins in your heart? Go to Jesus for forgiveness. Pray and ask God to help you change from the inside out.



DAY 13

Breaking barriers



Mark 7:24-8:21

In Singapore, foreign workers and domestic helpers often gather at public places during weekends. If a Singaporean joins them, he or she would stand out among the crowd right away!

When Jesus, a Jew, entered a Gentile (*non-Jew*) region and interacted with the people there, He stuck out like a sore thumb too. It is highly unusual for a Jew to hang out with Gentiles, because Jews traditionally thought of Gentiles as ‘unclean’ and of lower status than them.

Clearly, Jesus did not follow the norm. He did a few unthinkable things in the eyes of people at that time. He went into the house of a Gentile to help the people there and meet their needs. He cast a demon out of a Gentile girl, healed a deaf Gentile, and fed a crowd of four thousand.

From this, we know that Jesus’ heart is not just for people of a single culture but for the whole world. His desire is for Jews and Gentiles alike to know the powerful and loving God. In Christ, all are equal, regardless of their culture, background, gender or occupation (*Colossians 3:11*). He destroys the hatred and prejudices we have against individuals of another culture, gender or socioeconomic status. He makes peace and builds bridges among people.

Today, most of us in Singapore are Gentiles. As God’s people, we have the privilege

and responsibility to live out Christ's barrier-breaking, peace-making love. The passage below tells us how:

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. (*Colossians 3:12-15*)

Are you harbouring hatred towards someone? Would you let go of your animosity and forgive them? Do you have prejudices against people of other cultures or socioeconomic backgrounds? How can you change your thoughts, speech or actions towards them?



DAY 14

Help us see



Mark 8:22-33

Signs and wonders abound in Jesus' ministry. The people He touched were healed immediately.

But not this blind man at Bethsaida. The first time Jesus touched him, he could only see partially. Jesus had to touch him again before he fully restored his sight.

It's not that Jesus did not love this man as much as He loved others. Nor was Jesus having a bad day at ministry. Rather, the Bible is using the blind man to depict the spiritual state of the disciples. They had only partial insight into who Jesus really was. It would take some time before they could clearly see that Jesus is indeed the Son of God.

Though Peter once proclaimed that Jesus is the Saviour (*Messiah*), he couldn't accept that Jesus would have to suffer a terrible death (31-32). Peter was blinded by his limited perception of the Messiah; he too only had partial insight into Jesus' identity. He was unable to understand God's plans for mankind.

Similarly, we may not be able to see clearly what God is doing in our lives. Some of us may see it as God's blessing that our lives are productive, smooth-sailing and carefree. By contrast, we find it hard to imagine that God can bless us through the troubles that we face, such as a financial difficulty or a tough time at work or in school.

Because our sight is blurred, we begin to doubt and question God's authority and character in times of trouble. Yet He could be using these very situations to test our faith and strengthen us to press on for Him:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (*James 1:2-4*)

Even when you're puzzled, will you choose to trust that God knows and desires what's best for you? Will you allow God to work in your life according to His wisdom, not yours? It's easier said than done. But it's possible when we grow in our understanding of Jesus and learn more about His character and deeds through the Bible. Pray that God may help you to see things from His perspective.



DAY 15

Lose and find



Mark 8:34-91

Think of something you really, really want. Is it the latest gadget, an exciting job opportunity, or a relationship with that great guy or girl?

Now ask yourself this: would you be willing to give it up in order to follow Christ? Why?

According to Jesus, if we want to be His disciples, we are to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him (v34). We make ourselves smaller and enlarge Christ. We say no to our self-centred ways and yes to what Christ commands. We place more importance on Christ's interests and desires than our own.

Jim Elliot was an American missionary. His love for Christ and people motivated him to bring the Gospel to the Huaorani tribe in Ecuador. Tragically, he and his teammates were killed by the very people they wanted to reach out to.

Jim Elliot remains an inspiration to Christians today. He once said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." His words echoed one great paradox of the Christian faith – whoever is willing to lose his or her life for Jesus and for the Gospel will find it (v35). To Jim Elliot, giving his life for Christ and the Gospel was the best thing he could ever do. He might have lost his physical life, but he gained the eternal life that Christ has promised to those who follow Him wholeheartedly.

There is no better way to live than to devote ourselves fully to the Gospel. How can we live for the Gospel today? How should the Gospel influence the way we treat our family, classmates, colleagues or our church? How can we tell others about the Gospel?

Living for Christ and the Gospel may bring about hardships and heartaches. But just as we share in Christ's sufferings now, we will participate in His glory in the future. At the end of the day, we know that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life (*John 14:6*). Knowing this truth, we can be assured that all that we go through for Christ will be worth it.

What hinders you from following Christ wholeheartedly? How can you overcome the obstacles and develop a single-minded love for Christ and the Gospel?



DAY 16

Faith comes from understanding



Mark 9:2-29

“I need to see it before I can believe it.” This is a common statement that many make when they are asked to trust in a person, idea or concept. Their experience determines their faith.

Sounds like a fool proof way to make sure that we don’t just blindly believe in something? Perhaps. But our senses are limited. We may misinterpret the signals we are receiving. Places like the Trick Eye Museum use the fact that our brains can “deceive” us to see things that aren’t real to create optical illusion paintings and installations.

Led by Jesus up a high mountain, Peter, James and John probably thought that their eyes were playing tricks on them too. They witnessed Jesus, dazzling white in His glory, talking to Elijah and Moses, prophets who supposedly lived and died ages ago in Israel. No wonder the disciples were afraid and at a loss for what to say and do (v3-6). Then a thundering voice from a cloud commanded them to do what Jesus said and suddenly, they were alone with Jesus again (v7-8). Nothing made sense!

Doubts could have emerged: “What just happened? What does Jesus mean when he says that he will rise from the dead (v9-10)?”

The confusion continued. Back at the bottom of the mountain, a desperate father was seeking help to heal his possessed child (v17-18). Jesus’ disciples could not drive

the spirit out because they lacked faith (v19). They failed to rely on God to do His ministry (v28-29). Though they should have experienced Jesus' miracles by now, they still could not understand the nature of His work.

Today, this is a struggle that many believers have – just like how the disciples recognised that Jesus is special, we may say that Jesus is the Son of God. Yet we do not understand what it really means. Faced with uncertain life circumstances, our faith wavers as we try to make sense of God's ways. As a result, we are not able to trust Him fully in various areas of life.

We can take heart that our struggles of faith are not out of the norm; the disciples too had their moments. They learnt from their mistakes, but held onto Jesus, following Him. Eventually they became the apostles of the early church. Faith is more than what we say or feel about Jesus. Faith is based on knowing who Jesus is and choosing to live in a way that honours Him as God. In other words, faith is a decision based on understanding.

Let's be honest with God about our lack of faith, if that's our condition today. Ask God to help us overcome our unbelief by guiding us to not just experience, but understand who Jesus is.



DAY 17

A different kind of success



Mark 9:30:50

How would you define success? Is it getting straight A's at school or scoring a spot on the national team? Or does it lie in possessing the 5C's – car, cash, credit card, condominium and country club membership?

In a society that prioritises results, many pursue achievements that rank them above others. In this game of survival of the fittest, being the best in academics, sport and our careers is everything. Many define success as being stronger, smarter and richer than the rest.

Similarly, Jesus' disciples were looking to beat one another in the game of "who's the best" (v34). They desired the recognition that came with the title of Jesus' greatest disciple. Jesus grabbed the opportunity to teach them God's definition of success.

Instead of acting like they were better than others, or looking down on those they thought were unimportant (v36-37), disciples of Jesus should serve everyone else (v35). They should humble themselves and place others' needs above their own. They should be willing to forsake their comforts and rights in order to lift others up.

Jesus is the ultimate example of humble service – He, who is the King of kings, has served the world by giving up His life to save us from our sins (v31). He put aside His divine and royal status to live and die like a servant on earth (*Philippians 2:6-8*).

But that's not the end of Jesus! God the Father has raised Jesus up from the dead and has given Him authority over every man and living creature (*Philippians 2:9-11*). From Jesus' life, we see that success in God's eyes is not 5C's but 1S – servanthood out of obedience to God.

Living the life of a servant may seem like a daunting task. Yet we can have confidence that God will help us. Through the Holy Spirit, He gives us the power to serve with spiritual gifts (*1 Corinthians 12:4-11*). Through the Word, He teaches us the attitudes we ought to have when we serve (*Ephesians 4:25-32; Colossians 3:12-17*). We can serve with gratitude because of God's love in our lives. We can take the 'last place' of a servant with joy because God has promised us a great and glorious eternity with Him.

How do you define success? Is your perspective influenced by worldly values or godly principles? How can you be a great servant today?



DAY 18

Marks of a true disciple



Mark 10:1-31

What makes a true disciple? Do we have to be perfect in all that we say and do? Are we supposed to serve others till we drop, not giving a care for ourselves? Through interactions with three different groups of people, Jesus reveals what it takes to be a true disciple.

A true disciple seeks God's will

The Pharisees were the A* scholars of their day. They could easily recite Scripture by heart, and knew just about every religious ritual there was. Intending to trap Jesus, they asked Him a question regarding the Jewish law and divorce. Instead of focusing on divorce, Jesus directed the Pharisees back to God's original intention for marriage (v6-9).

A disciple yearns to discover and do God's will. He or she wants to know and follow God's unchanging intentions for how we ought to live our everyday lives.

A true disciple has childlike faith

People were swarming Jesus, wanting Him to bless their children. The disciples decided that their Lord had no time for pesky, insignificant children, so they tried to keep the children away. Perhaps they expected Jesus to be grateful to them now that He had more room to breathe. Instead, Jesus told his disciples off. He called the children back and blessed them. He used them as an example to teach the importance of having childlike faith.

Disciples should approach God with complete trust and humility like a child, rather than with doubt and pride (v14-15).

A true disciple is wholeheartedly devoted to Jesus

In spite of following rules all his life, the rich young man lacked one key feature of a disciple – wholehearted devotion. He had done all the right things, yet he was unwilling to let go of his wealth. He wanted eternal life, yet he didn't value the kingdom of God enough to forgo his riches on earth (v21-22).

It's not that Jesus wants His disciples to be poor. Instead, Jesus is challenging us to follow Him wholeheartedly.

Out of these three characteristics, which one do you want to grow in? Identify the steps you need to take to develop yourself in this area and grow as a disciple.



DAY 19

Is Jesus your Lord?



Mark 10:32-52

If you're a fan of superhero movies, you would notice that the good guys share these traits:

- 1) They have a special skill or talent.
- 2) They are regarded with honour.
- 3) They have a mission to save the world.

Jesus might very well be the superhero of biblical times. People were awestruck by His great wisdom and unusual boldness in the face of opposition. They were stunned by His supernatural works. It's no wonder that his disciples James and John desired to claim the prestige of being His top followers (v35-37).

Little did they know that before they could bask in Jesus' glory, they would have to suffer pain and humiliation like He would as He served others (v42-45).

Today, Jesus calls us to follow in His footsteps of selfless service.

Some of us may gamely take on Jesus' invitation. Others may hesitate. Perhaps it's because we gladly receive Jesus as our Saviour but we are not ready to call Him our Lord. Calling Jesus our Lord means that we will do whatever He says, whatever the cost. We hesitate to follow Jesus because we may not be ready to pay the price of discipleship.

Like the beggar Bartimaeus, we were spiritually blind and poor. Out of His mercy, Jesus has healed us and given us spiritual sight to recognise Him as our Saviour and Lord. In response, will we be like Bartimaeus who willingly gave up all that he had to follow Jesus (v50-52)?

Bartimaeus didn't have much to offer to Jesus. He was a blind beggar who owned nothing but a cloak to his name. The crowd expected Jesus to ignore him – surely there were people and matters far more worthy of His attention. But Jesus stopped for Bartimaeus. Overwhelmed with gratitude, Bartimaeus threw his possessions aside and ran to Jesus. That day, Bartimaeus chose to live for Jesus.

You were once spiritually blind but now you see. The world may not think that you're important but Jesus does. You may think that you do not have much to give to Jesus, but He calls you anyway. Will you follow the Lord who has saved you?



DAY 20

Return of the King



Mark 11:1-11

One of the top grossing, most critically acclaimed trilogies in Hollywood history is J.R.R Tolkien's Lord of the Rings. In Tolkien's fantastic universe of humans, hobbits, elves, wizards, dwarves and monsters, a great evil threatens to cover the world in darkness and make every living being its slave. Chaos is the order of the day. Fear rules the hearts of most. Hope is faint.

Yet amid the darkness, there are flickers of light in the love, unity and courage of a few heroic characters. One of them is Aragon, who is destined to be king. The trilogy ends with his long-awaited return to the throne and triumphant deliverance of his people.

In the real world today, we are also waiting for the return of King Jesus.

Mark 11:1-11 tells of Jesus entering Jerusalem to the cheers of the crowd. His arrival on a donkey fulfilled a 500-year-old prophecy about the King of Jerusalem (Zechariah 9:9). This was a big deal for the Israelites, who had been looking forward to a King to save them from foreign oppression and restore Israel's former glory. After years of waiting and suffering under oppression, the Israelites were finally able to declare the arrival of their King, openly singing songs of praise and glory unto Him. What a celebration it was!

One day, Jesus will return to earth in all His glory (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). He will

save and reward those who are faithful to Him (*Revelation 22:12*) and reject those who disobey the Gospel (*1 Peter 4:17-18*).

This is a comforting truth for believers of all ages and all over the world. Today, many Christians are persecuted for the sake of Christ and the Gospel. Persecution can come in the form of physical torture/death, economic pressure, or social marginalisation. According to Christianity Today, a Christian online magazine, more than 200 million Christians face high to extreme persecution. In secular nations, and even in nations that call themselves “Christian”, our values and way of life may receive rejection and ridicule.

If you are suffering for your faith today, you’re not alone. Take heart that many believers are going through it too. Hold onto Jesus, knowing that your suffering has a purpose. We who put our trust in Jesus will enjoy eternal life with Him when He returns with victory and salvation!



DAY 21

Tough love



Mark 11:12-12:12

Think back to the time when a teacher or instructor corrected you. Their remarks probably stung. Their rebukes could have been harsh. They might even have ended up on your “Most Hated” list. But more likely than not, they were concerned about the mistakes you were making and wanted you to learn to do what was right.

Similarly, because He cares, Jesus warned and scolded the Jewish chief priests, scribes and elders for their faithlessness towards God. Though they claimed to worship God, their religious system had failed to make known God’s salvation to the nations (11:15-17).

Though they had the Scriptures (*God’s revelation*), they refused to accept that God had sent Jesus to save the world. Instead, they plotted to get rid of Him (12:1-12).

Jesus’ harsh rebuke towards the Jewish religious authorities reflected His frustration with their stubborn hearts. He was disappointed at their lack of faith in Him (*Luke 13:34, Matthew 23:37*). He even delivered a scathing criticism of their hypocrisy, spiritual blindness and acts of violence against God’s servants (*Matthew 23:1-36*).

Jesus didn’t have anger management issues. So when He was upset, it was for a really good reason. Jesus takes faithlessness very seriously. He knows the danger of rejecting God’s revelation. He can see through people’s false humility and empty religion. He does not want us to sink into faithlessness.

Instead, He wants us to be faithful. Faithfulness is believing in God's revelation about who Jesus is. It is trusting in God and forgiving those who hurt us (11:22-25).

Let's pause for a while and reflect. Are there areas in your life where God has shown you what He wants you to do, yet you're unwilling to act on it? How can you turn from faithlessness to faithfulness?

As you reflect on the passage, write a prayer to God to help you apply what His Word says.



DAY 22

Re-adjusting our worldview



Mark 12:13-37

Going for an interview can be a nerve-wracking experience. You are scrutinised for what you wear, how you carry yourself, and where you studied and worked previously. And then there are those difficult questions that cut into you and drag out your inner thoughts and insecurities. Feeling dissected and vulnerable, you struggle to answer more questions.

During his ministry on earth, Jesus had to answer difficult questions several times. He wisely handled them, some of which came from people who tried to trap and discredit Him.

In Mark 12:13-37, Jesus was questioned by three different groups of people in three areas:

- 1) His allegiance to God (v13-17)
- 2) His understanding of the faith with regards to the resurrection (v18-27)
- 3) His approach to God's Law (v28-34)

Jesus' answers were so wise and thought-provoking that His listeners gasped with wonder (v17). Besides being corrected in their wrong understanding (v27), they gained a deeper insight into God's truth (v32-33). Jesus was so good at answering difficult questions that no one dared to challenge Him again (v34).

Jesus was able to silence His critics and guide people to the truth because of His

solid, biblical worldview. Our worldview is how we see and understand ourselves and the world. Amid the lies that the media and Internet are throwing at us, it is of utmost importance to build our worldview on the truth that God has revealed in the Bible.

Our worldview has a direct impact on our priorities, decisions and actions in life. It enables us to navigate challenging situations where we have to make tricky ethical choices or tough decisions.

One day, people may bombard us with tough questions about our faith. They may do so with sincere intentions to find out more about Jesus, or they may be asking out of ill intentions to discourage us and ruin our reputation. We need to be ready to handle all kinds of questions about our faith with gentleness and respect (*1 Peter 3:15*).

Aligning your worldview to the Bible's starts with small steps. Identify one or two people who can challenge your perspectives and support you to develop a biblical outlook on life. What questions would you ask them to find out more about the Christian worldview?



DAY 23

Empty no more



Mark 12:38-44

For many people, life is like a giant masquerade ball. They pretend to have joy from seeking pleasures. They fake smiles of satisfaction from their achievements. Yet when they are alone and take off their masks, they feel empty.

God sees beyond our external appearance, achievements and acquisitions to our hearts. He knows our secret thoughts and deepest longings. He understands the depth of our emptiness.

In Mark 12:38-44, Jesus looked through the external acts of people and zeroed in on their inner intentions and attitudes. Here we see two contrasting sets of characters.

The scribes (*teachers of the Law*) were dressed in flowing robes and uttered long prayers (v38-40). They looked good, spoke well, and enjoyed high status among the people. They loved receiving honour from others while exploiting poor and helpless widows. Their goal was to gain greater prominence for themselves. The scribes might have fooled their fellow men, but not Jesus. The Son of God saw through their empty religion and pointed out their hypocrisy.

In contrast to the arrogant scribes was the poor widow (v41-44). She was probably dressed shabbily and was unknown to most people. She could only afford to give two pitiful copper coins as an offering, while the rich around her poured in huge

sums of money. Perhaps they were sneering at her for her lack.

But Jesus was moved by this widow. He praised her sincere faith for she had given to God all that she had (v44). The two small copper coins could very well have been her entire earnings for that day. By offering them she would have barely enough left to survive. Jesus declared that she had contributed more than others (v43). He was so impressed by the poor widow, that He used her as an example of faithfulness.

God is not looking for empty religion – superficial Christian behaviour centred around selfish desires and devoid of sincere love. Rather, He is looking for true and sincere faith. He wants a solid faith that is based on His revelations and consistently displayed in everything that we do and say. What steps can you take to grow your faith in truth and sincerity?



DAY 24

Are you prepared for the End?



Mark 13

The National Geographic Channel runs a series called “Doomsday Preppers”. It features people who go to extreme lengths to get ready for the end of the world. Think underground weapons arsenals for fear of zombies, or large medicine stashes in anticipation of an outbreak.

The word “doomsday” sounds like something terrible will happen as the age that we live in comes to an end. In some sense, it’s true. There will be widespread persecution of Christians as Satan fiercely attacks the Church (*v9-13*). A man of lawlessness will brazenly call himself God (*2 Thessalonians 2:4*). Evil beings, with fake signs and wonders, will deceive those who reject God and choose wickedness (*2 Thessalonians 2:9-12*). Distress, fear and chaos will be the order of the day (*v14-22*).

But evil won’t have the last say. Jesus will return in His glory to save His followers (*1 Thessalonians 4:16-17*) and punish those who reject God’s truth and mistreat God’s people (*1 Peter 4:17-18*).

While we may not store weapons or hoard medicine, we need to prepare for Jesus’ arrival. Because we won’t know the exact time He will come, we need to be watchful and ready to receive Him (*v32-36*).

One important way we prepare for Jesus’ return in the future is by living a life of holiness in the present (*1 Thessalonians 4:3-8*). Being holy means to be set apart

for God, to offer ourselves for God's purposes. Holy living includes honouring God with our desires and behaviours (*Colossians 3:1-10*); loving people around us (*Colossians 3:12-14*); and studying or working diligently for God (*Colossians 3:23-25*).

Sounds difficult? It is. But if we submit to the Holy Spirit, it's possible. We find the power for holy living through the Holy Spirit, who promises to lead us into a fruitful life (*Galatians 5:22-26*). We don't rely on rules and regulations to keep ourselves in check. Instead we depend on the Holy Spirit to lead us to honour God with our lives.

Do you want to grow in holy living, but feel helpless to do so? Speak to more mature Christians around you. Ask them how you can experience and obey the Holy Spirit.



DAY 25

Love at all costs



Mark 14:1-11

We often hear the phrase, “Diamonds are a girl’s best friend.” It’s an advertising line targeted at men who will buy the expensive gemstones for their girlfriends or wives. Love is a powerful incentive to loosen the purse strings, and advertisers know it.

Some of us are very willing to spend a bomb on people we love. Think of parents who shower their children with toys, or the smitten husband who splurges on flowers and jewellery for his wife. Giving gifts is a natural way to communicate love and appreciation.

In Mark 14, there is a woman who loves Jesus so much, she presents Him a gift of really expensive perfume (*it’s worth more than a year’s salary!*) By pouring the perfume on Him, she is expressing her adoration and thanksgiving to Him. Her extravagant gesture of love, however, draws criticism from those around her (v4-5).

Jesus jumps to her defence and openly praises her for her “beautiful” act of blessing Him and preparing for His burial (v6-9). What an honour it is to be affirmed by Jesus, the Son of God!

Put yourself in the woman’s shoes for a moment. Would you be willing to pay the price of loving Jesus? The cost may come in the form of resources, time and energy. We can love Jesus by giving generously to ministry, serving the church with our

hearts and hands, and loving people by sharing the Gospel to them.

Sometimes these acts may attract criticism from our friends and families who do not know Jesus or understand why we want to give our lives to Him. They may even question our motives. However, a deep love for Jesus keeps us going.

What are some things you can do out of love for Jesus? When your love for Him attracts opposition or requires a great deal of sacrifice, what will motivate you to continue in the faith?



DAY 26

An everlasting covenant



Mark 14:2-26

At a wedding, the bride and groom pledge their faithfulness to each other before God and witnesses. They promise to stay together “for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do us part”. What a serious commitment that is! In God’s eyes, the wedding vow is a covenant between a man and a woman that is binding for life and more intimate than any other relationship.

Christ has also made a marriage covenant with the Church. The Bible likens our relationship with Christ to that between a husband and wife (*Ephesians 5:25-27*) and encourages us to look forward to the day when we will have a glorious wedding with Christ (*Revelation 19:7*). This covenant that Christ has established with us is also known as the New Covenant.

The New Covenant is built on Jesus’ blood. As Jesus observed His last Passover with His disciples, Jesus prophesied that His body would be broken and His blood spilled for many (*v22-24*). Traditionally, the Passover commemorated God’s deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt. Many years ago, when God punished the Egyptians with a plague that killed the firstborn son of every household, He spared the Israelites because their doors were marked by the blood of an unblemished lamb (*Exodus 12:1-14*). Just as the blood of the lamb marked the Israelites as God’s people and ensured their deliverance, the untainted blood of Jesus seals us as God’s beloved and secures our salvation.

The Passover has great significance for Christians today because Jesus has redefined it as a reminder of the new, everlasting covenant He has made with us. The covenant is a reliable assurance of His constant presence. It is a rock-solid promise that we will receive the blessings and privileges as His chosen people if we continue to live according to His ways.

Every Christian experiences seasons of ups and downs in the journey of faith. In every season, remember Jesus' everlasting covenant with us. He wants us to have joy in Him, be comforted by His presence and draw strength from Him.

Another term for the Passover meal that we use more often today is the Holy Communion. The next time you take the Holy Communion during a service or Life Group meeting, pause and reflect on its meaning. How does Jesus' covenant with the Church add courage to you in your faith journey? Will you fulfil your part of the covenant today?



DAY 27

Obedience against all odds



Mark 14:27-52

If you had to give up a promotion at work because you refused to make unethical decisions, would you still choose to honour God at the workplace? If you had to score worse in a project because you refused to cheat, would you still stand firm on godly values? If people you love were to cut ties with you because of your faith, would you still follow Christ?

Choosing to obey God can cost us our achievements, resources and relationships. Understandably, we struggle with discomfort, disappointment and discouragement.

Jesus knows how that feels like. Facing impending death, He experienced the betrayal of a disciple (v43-46), immense sorrow (v33-34) and abandonment by His closest companions (v27, 50). He was in so much distress that He asked God if there was a way out of His suffering.

Yet Jesus chose to remain in God's will. He understood that complete obedience was necessary. He would not consider an easier alternative if it was not aligned to God's plan. He determined to obey God in tough and trying circumstances, even to the point of death.

Living our lives according to God's will will bring challenges. No one is untouched by trouble and everyone goes through trials. But it is through adversities that we experience God's love and grow in endurance and character (*Romans 5:3-5*).

Obedying God requires more than just verbal declaration or even fierce determination. It requires faith. Trusting God, Jesus was calm and controlled when He faced opposition from the Jewish leaders and hostile crowd.

Faith is trusting God even when you are not certain what lies ahead (*Proverbs 3:5-6*). It is being confident that God will lead the way. It is persisting to obey God and doing His will.

Our faith in God is not a blind leap into the unknown. It is a trust that comes from knowing who Jesus is. Studying the Bible and spending time with Jesus in prayer gives us opportunities to understand Him. What can you do to know Jesus more today? List some ways you can cultivate a heart that will follow Jesus in obedience.



DAY 28

Surrendered not to men, but to God



Mark 14:53-15:15

Hardly anything is more surprising than an underdog beating a frontrunner in a competition. Rarely is a match more exciting than a losing team scoring a hat trick and claiming victory in the end.

Jesus, with his normal appearance and gentle spirit, looked like the underdog who was up against the powerful political and religious leaders of His day. As He stood before the Jewish leaders and Roman authorities on trial, many gave false testimonies in desperate attempts to pin a crime on Him.

Though no evidence of wrongdoing was found (14:55-56), Jesus was wrongly accused of blasphemy (14:64) and sentenced to death by crucifixion (15:15), a capital punishment that was highly cruel and humiliating. What a terrible injustice!

Was Jesus defeated by His opponents? Had He succumbed to their evil schemes? Absolutely not! The truth is that Jesus willingly endured suffering out of surrender to God the Father, not to men. Jesus chose to fulfil God's plan when He declared, "...Yet not what I will, but what You will." (Mark 14:36b).

Unknown to those who wanted Him dead, Jesus' death was part of God's plan all along. He has scored the ultimate hat trick. He has turned the situation on its head. He has won!

Jesus' death is also our win, because by His wounds we are healed of our slavery to sin so that we can live righteously for Him (*1 Peter 2:24*). On the cross, Jesus completely defeated the true Enemy, Satan, and all other spiritual powers (*Colossians 2:15*).

By surrendering to God, Jesus has won. Surrendering is the attitude of giving in to God. Instead of insisting that we know it all, we entrust ourselves to the One who is truly in control. Instead of persisting in 'my way', we allow God to lead us in living life 'His way'.

What is one area in your life that God is calling you to give in to Him? If you find yourself struggling, focus on God. Know that He has your best interests at heart and trust that He has a perfect plan for you. There is no one and nothing more trustworthy, loving and powerful than Him. You're in great hands. Give in to Him today!



DAY 29

If words could kill



Mark 15:16-32

Were you ever wrongfully accused of something you did not do? Or humiliated by family members, classmates or supervisors though you were innocent? How did you feel? Do these experiences still haunt you today?

Jesus understands how it feels like to undergo verbal abuse. If words could kill, He might have died many times.

After His disciples deserted Him, Jesus was left alone to face the insults and ridicule of men. Soldiers mocked Him insolently (v16-20) and passers-by sneered at Him while He hung on the cross (v29-30). The Jewish religious leaders taunted Him for saving others but not Himself. Even the two robbers crucified alongside Him piled on insults (v31-32).

Jesus was disrespected and mocked by people from all levels of society, from the high and mighty Jewish leaders to the lowly and disgraced criminals. The verbal barbs hurled at Him did not diminish Jesus' resolution to go to the cross for mankind. He even forgave those who hurt Him.

Without a doubt, Jesus could have delivered Himself from the cruel humiliation. He is fully God! Yet for our sake, He chose to die on the cross. For our sake, He received degrading jokes and scathing sarcasm until He breathed His last. He loves us so much that He readily endured all of that.

Jesus' love is constant and unchanging, it does not wane and will not fade. With the same measure of love that brought Him to the cross, Jesus loves you as much today and forever.

What emotions or thoughts come to you when you know that Jesus loves you? In what way is He worthy of your adoration and trust? The next time you encounter verbal abuse, remember that Jesus understands what you are going through. He chooses to forgive and love those who hurt Him. Will you follow His example?



DAY 30

Why did Jesus have to die?



Mark 15:33-47

Hanging on the cross with the sins of all mankind upon Him, Jesus cried out to God. Spurned by the very people He came to save, He drew His last breath and died (v37).

Jesus was determined to save us from sin even though it would literally kill him. Why the need to go to such extreme measures? Why did Jesus have to die?

The answer is righteousness. God is holy and just – He cannot tolerate sin and rightfully punishes those who persist in it. When we sin, we deserve God’s anger and are unworthy to have a relationship with Him. Yet out of mercy, God does not want to leave us like that. He wants to cleanse us of sin so that we can be with Him.

Sin is dirty. Just as a single ink blot mars a clean sheet of paper, so sin stains our life. Just as carelessly discarded waste chokes up a drain, so sin pollutes our relationship with God and obstructs our access to Him.

Sin is deadly. Many trivialize sin to a harmless wrongdoing or a joke. However, the Bible says clearly that the consequence of sin is death (*Romans 6:23*). Everyone has sinned (*Romans 3:23*) and thus everyone deserves to die. If that sounds terrible, it is. Sin is a death sentence that none of us can overturn.

Did Jesus do wrong? Not at all. He is completely innocent. However, Jesus loves us

so much that He willingly bore the penalty of our sins (*Romans 5:8*). He went to the cross for you and me. He has served our death sentence for us.

God's justice demands a penalty for sin. God's mercy compels Him to send His Son to be the sacrifice that will pay for it once and for all (*Hebrews 10:12-14*). At the cross, God's justice and God's mercy meet.

Through Jesus, we can enjoy a relationship with God. Because of Jesus, God forgives our sins and blesses us with a purposeful life in Christ.

Celebrate that you can be right with God because of Jesus! How will you express your gratitude to Jesus for what He has done for you?



DAY 31

The struggle is real



Mark 16

If you have been through the demise of a beloved parent or grandparent, or experienced the tragedy of losing a child, you would know that the death of someone you love can bring great grief.

This was probably how the women who followed Jesus felt. They had experienced His power and kindness. They had heard His amazing teachings. They loved Him as their Teacher and Lord. They were crushed by His death.

Three days after Jesus' crucifixion, the women went to His tomb to prepare His body for a dignified burial. To their shock, they met an empty tomb and a strange being who declared that Jesus was no longer dead. Jesus has risen and is alive!

You would think that the women would be relieved or happy to have Jesus back. Instead, they ran away and kept quiet, for they were greatly puzzled and afraid (v8). They were not the only ones who struggled to believe that Jesus has risen. Even His disciples rejected the testimonies of those who had seen the resurrected Son of God (v14).

Today, Christians face the same struggle of faith. We may read from the Bible that Jesus is the Son of God. We may sing about Him during services. We may pray in Jesus' name. We may even be serving Jesus in ministries.

But there will come times when we will struggle to believe. We may be tempted to pursue pleasures and wealth instead of Jesus. We may give in to opposition towards our faith. We may fear death when we are down with dreadful diseases.

The struggle of faith is real and can come in many other forms. When tempted, we may struggle to see the purpose of living for Jesus. When facing opposition, we may forget that Jesus has promised everlasting life to those who are faithful to Him till the end. When battling an illness, we may find it tough to trust that Jesus has already defeated death.

Since we will struggle, let's build our faith strong. Continue to deepen your relationship with Jesus by reading the Bible, listening to the counsel of more mature Christians, spending time with your church family and praying to God.

How else can you prepare yourself for the struggle of faith?



At the heart of the Christian faith is Christ. When we call ourselves Christians, we are saying that we are a people who believe in and follow Christ.

But how can we believe in and follow a Person we do not know much about? No matter how great the Person is, if we know little about His life – His teachings, works, values and views – we will not be able to follow Him with clarity of mind and conviction in spirit.

The Bible is not just any ordinary book. It contains stories and messages from God that reveal who God is – His character, thoughts and awesome plan for mankind.

