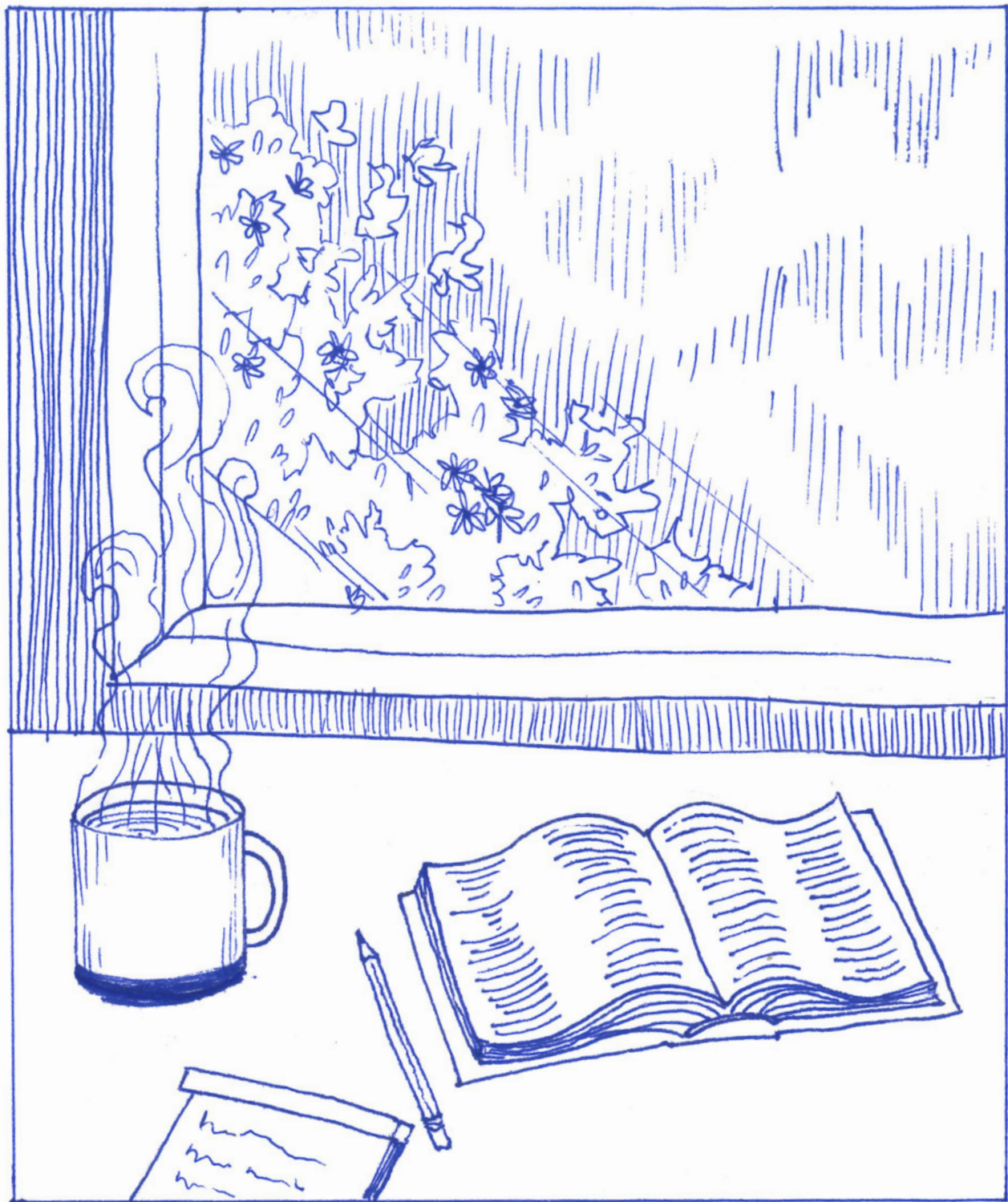


TEN MINUTES TO SHAPE YOUR DAY



EPHESIANS & JONAH @HLAYSON_ART

INTRODUCTION



"Your word, Lord, is eternal;
it stands firm in the heavens.
90 Your faithfulness continues through all
generations;
you established the earth, and it endures.
91 Your laws endure to this day,
for all things serve you.
92 If your law had not been my delight,
I would have perished in my affliction.
93 I will never forget your precepts,
for by them you have preserved my life.

- Psalm 119:89-93

The month of September is a chance for us to commit to read the Bible, reflect on God's word and respond in prayer. This year we are focusing our reading on the New Testament book of Ephesians, a book that reminds us of God's grace to us, the unity that comes from being part of God's church and the transformation that comes through living for Christ. We will also focus on the Old Testament book of Jonah, a well-known story but a book that also shows us God's heart filled with a longing for his enemies to be saved, and his overflowing grace and mercy to all people, including Jonah.

So often our devotional life is done in private and so it is tricky when we get stuck, or tired or defeated but our hope is that September will give us a chance to talk more openly and encourage each other. As a community of God's people at St James we get to talk, pray and encourage each other throughout the month over coffee, in our growth groups and as we catch up on a Sunday.

I've invited our Growth Group Leaders & staff to write these reflections and I love their insights in understanding the passage. It expresses one of the wonderful themes in Ephesians that we are all responsible for encouraging and growing each other towards maturity in Christ.

***“Instead, speaking the truth in love,
we will grow to become in every
respect the mature body of him who
is the head, that is, Christ. From him
the whole body, joined and held
together by every supporting
ligament, grows and builds itself up
in love, as each part does its work”.***
Ephesians 4: 15-1

I pray you will be encouraged by their wisdom and understanding.

Each day includes a Bible passage, a guided reflection and a question for you to ponder and some directions to prayer. They should take you about 10 minutes to do each day. If you are starting out with personal devotions this is a great way to start and if you are a person with good devotional habits, you may just like to add this for a while so that you can encourage others.

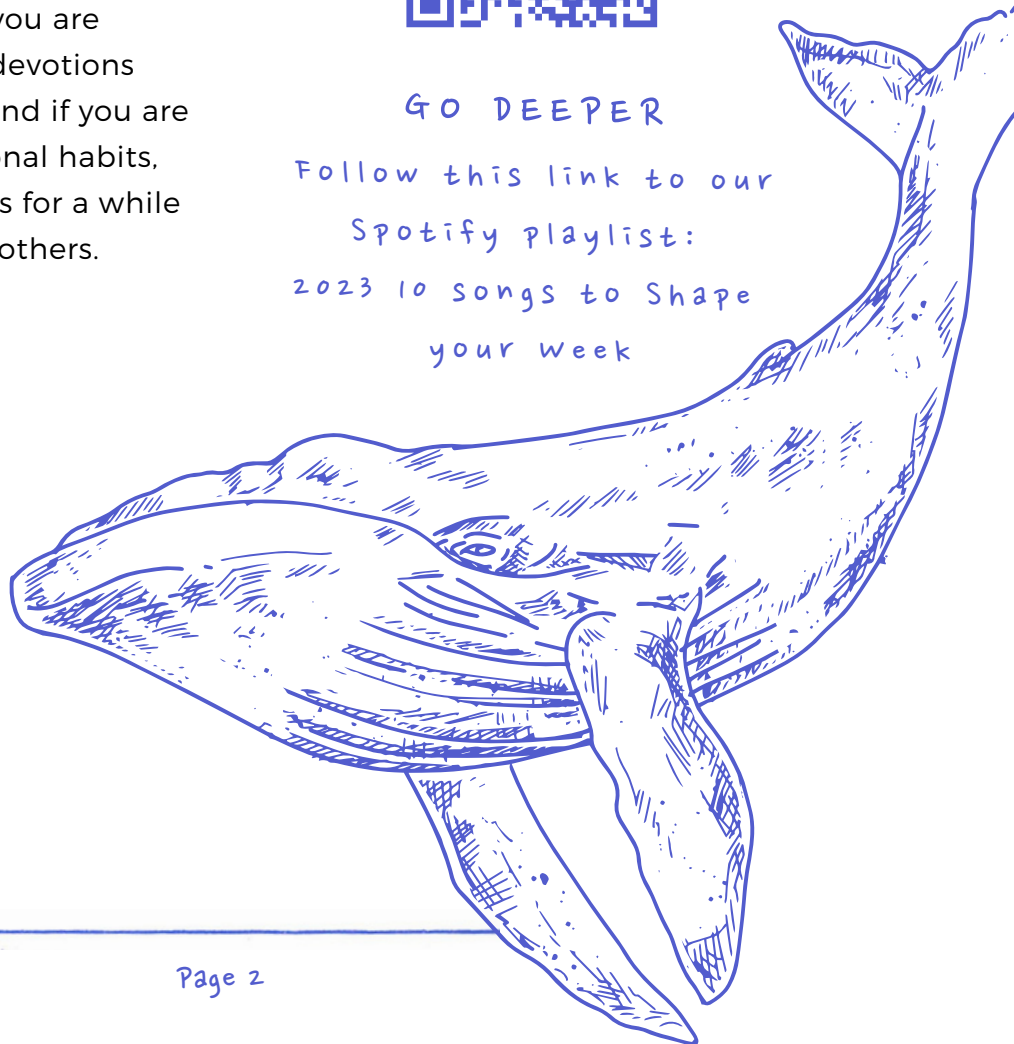
May God use this booklet and conversations to help us delight in Scripture, trust him in prayer and shape our days around his word.

In His Service,
Caroline Andrews
Growing Believer's Minister
#stjames10mins



GO DEEPER

Follow this link to our
Spotify playlist:
2023 10 songs to Shape
your week



PSALM 119:25-32

Meditate on God's wonderful deeds.

Caroline Andrews, Growing Believers' Minister

What is it that takes up your headspace each day? So many things fill our heads; pressures at work, worries about family, mapping out meals for the week, remembering to pick up the kids from swimming. Often, we are burdened by anxieties and our brains scratch away at these concerns, running them round and round in our brains.

Psalms 119 offers some balm to our heads and hearts. Today's passage is a prayer to God in a time of lowness and burden. A call on God to meet with the Psalmist and to strengthen him. It is the cry for all of us who long to draw near to God and have him draw near to us amid the pressures of life.

The Psalmist asks for understanding so that he can meditate on God's wonderful work in the world- seen in his faithfulness to Israel and for us, the fulfillment of his promises in Jesus who brings salvation and life. The writer is weary with sorrow and asks for strengthening through God's word. He asks for protection from being led away from God through God graciously teaching him his way. He makes a commitment(vs 30-32), a pledge to set his heart on God's laws, statutes and commands found in the Scriptures,

knowing that God will speak through his word and draw near. In God's word, as we take time to let it shape us, we find the resources we need to live for him and through it he grows us, lift us up and reassures us in our doubts, troubles, and griefs.

CONSIDER:

What things can you put in place during September to help you "take 10 Minutes" to meditate on God and his wonderful deeds?

PRAYER:

My soul is weary with sorrow,
strengthen me according to your word.

EPHESIANS 1:1-6

Blessings from God

Lesley Read, 10.30am Congregation

How would you feel if you were chosen to play in the Australian soccer team? Delighted, full of purpose, special, gifted, thankful. It makes you wonder how you feel about being lovingly chosen by God, before the beginning of the world, to be one of His people and receive His spiritual blessings in this world now and eternally. Blessings such as knowing God, sonship, forgiveness, insight, gifts of the Spirit and the hope of living forever with Christ.

This makes us special and loved, not due to anything we do, but through our salvation, by Jesus's sacrifice in making us "holy and blameless" in God's eyes and part of His family here in Croydon and beyond. As we reflect on who we are, let us not forget our original identity as God's precious child. This can also challenge us to think about how to use these spiritual blessings, that we have been given, to bless others and for God's purposes in our ongoing daily life. Let us not forget the preciousness of our life with Christ so we can be the faithful in Christ Jesus at St James.

CONSIDER:

How can we be more faithful in Christ Jesus – responding to His great love for us?

PRAYER:

Dear gracious heavenly Father, help us to remember how precious it is to be chosen as your child, through grace, receiving all spiritual blessings and help us put all our life under Your will.

GO DEEPER

watch a video on the whole
book of Ephesians from
Bible Project



EPHESIANS 1.7-12

Refresh your wonder

Alan Lukabyo, Senior Minister

One of the challenges for us as Christians is becoming familiar or even bored with things that are amazing. Ephesians 1 is a brilliant example of how not to fall into that trap! Paul has been a Christian for years when he writes, but he's still astounded by God's kindness to him.

In this short section we find God's preposterous blessings to those who neither sought nor deserved them:

- They are rescued from slavery ('redemption') at the cost of Jesus' life ('through his blood')
- They have complete forgiveness of sins
- They are told God's plan for his creation – that all should glorify and be ruled by Christ
- They didn't choose God, yet they were chosen by God to be saved

- They are invited to live for the greatest purpose imaginable: the praise of Christ's glory.

He couldn't have put it better when he says the 'riches of God's grace' have been 'lavished on us'.

Our joy and motivation is sustained by refreshing a sense of amazement in these things, but we must make time to reflect deeply on them.

CONSIDER:

Which item on the list strikes you most? Spend a couple of minutes thinking just about this one truth.

PRAYER:

Father, thank you that you have lavished the riches of your grace on me. By your help today I am seeking to live to the praise of your glory.



Amelia Jang - 6pm Congregation

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Matthew 6:26.

EPHESIANS 1:13-14

To the Praise of his Glory

Kevin Sherack, 10.30am Congregation

What is it in life that gives you a sense of security? Perhaps it is meaningful work and financial stability. Perhaps it is good health and a feeling of overall wellbeing or maybe it's having a loving family and good relationships. On the other hand, maybe the trials of life have left you feeling jaded and exhausted and life seems somewhat out of control. Whatever the situation, we as Christians need to remind ourselves of the great things God has done for us in Christ and to see afresh his grand and ultimate purposes for our lives.

In the preceding verses to our reading, Paul draws our attention to key truths at the heart of our Christian faith, namely the immense spiritual riches that we possess in Christ. In the text before us (v13-14), God put his mark of ownership on us by the Holy Spirit given to us when we believed. He is the first payment or deposit guaranteeing that all the blessings of our salvation will one day be fully realized. As God's Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead works in and through us, we are empowered to live a life pleasing to God. Indeed, Father, Son and Holy Spirit have worked in perfect unity in pouring out every spiritual blessing on us.

So, what is God's goal in blessing us so lavishly? God wants us to know and reflect upon how spiritually rich we are in Christ, how secure we are in his love and how great and sure is our hope of eternal life. Gratitude and praise should stimulate us to move forward in the things of God and to live a life worthy of our calling. God has given us his Spirit to do just that. Ultimately, nothing else will give us greater security and fulfilment.

CONSIDER:

How might meditating on each of our spiritual blessings make us see our lives and the world in a different perspective?

PRAYER:

Pray that God will work in us to fully know and appreciate how spiritually rich we are in Christ.

EPHESIANS 1:15-23

Praying for others to our sovereign God

Michelle Wyatt, 9am Congregation

What do you pray for your family and friends? Do you ever turn to God in prayer, think of people fondly and wonder what to pray for them? Should we pray that they have a good day, that everything goes well for them or that they will get the desires of their heart? Paul's prayer gives us a great insight into what to pray for others.

Paul begins this section with "for this reason", referencing all that has come before. He is mindful of God's grace lavished on us in every spiritual blessing – redemption, forgiveness, hope, the Holy Spirit.

As Paul prays, he expresses his overwhelming thankfulness for the faith of the Ephesians. He knows that their hearing of the truth and believing the gospel was part of God's plan and so he thanks God for their faith in him and love for God's people. This should be our first response when we hear of the faith of others – overwhelming thankfulness to God.

Now here is what he prays for them – he prays that they would know God better. This means having a deeper understanding of God's character and plan leading to a life-changing relationship with him.

Paul knows that they already have the Holy Spirit, but he prays that the Spirit would work in them to provide wisdom and revelation. He wants them to have the insight to grasp three important truths:

- the hope of our calling (the anticipation of eternity with Christ and being presented faultless before him)
- the riches of God's inheritance in his people (we are his glorious inheritance. Can you imagine! What a privilege and incentive to live for God's glory)
- God's great power (that raised Christ is working in us)

I don't know about you, but this is what I would love others to be praying for me!

CONSIDER:

What do you pray for your family and friends? Can you incorporate some of these ideas into your prayers for them?

PRAYER:

Please God give me the Spirit of wisdom and revelation that I may know you better. Remind me to keep asking this for my friends and family too.

EPHESIANS 2:1-10

Before and After

Lydia Soo, Ministry Trainee, serving with Kids Ministry

One of the classic visual marketing strategies is the “Before and After” comparison. I’m sure you’d be familiar with that guarantee to “change your life”—think anti-aging skin creams that reduce wrinkles in only a matter of weeks or a laundry powder that can remove ground-in stains in a single wash. Without the “Before” as a point of contrast to the “After”, we can’t fully understand how drastic the transformation actually is.

In this passage from Ephesians 2, Paul helps us to understand the miraculous transformation that takes place when we commit ourselves to Christ by pointing us to the reality of who we were before we received Christ.

Before: we were under the curse of sin, enslaved to the ways of the world and desires of our flesh, and deserving of condemnation (v.2-3).

After: we receive salvation, new life, and the hope of resurrection through Jesus (v.4-9)

Only by realising how helpless and sinful we were “Before” do we see the true measure of what God has done for us through his love and mercy.

Importantly, this transformation isn’t something that we can achieve by our own efforts. It is the gift of God by grace, through faith (v.8).

And this is our present reality, not something that is still to come. God made us alive; God raised us up with Christ; by grace, we have been saved. Therefore, we should no longer live as we did “Before”—subject to the power of sin—but pursue the life of grace and good works that God has planned for us (v.7, 10).

Unlike what those advertisements would have you believe, we know that true, lasting, life-changing transformation can only be found through Jesus.

CONSIDER:

What could you do to change this and to live out the reality that you have already died to sin and been made alive in Christ?

PRAYER:

Thank you for your gift of salvation through grace. Please help me to embrace the new life I have been given in Jesus.

EPHESIANS 2:11-18

Two into One

Steve & Karen, Ministry Partners serving in Central Asia

Paul has just outlined to the Ephesians what God has done for them in Christ – chosen, adopted, redeemed, forgiven, brought into God's family, having been saved by His grace.

However, this raises the issue of how the 'new' people of God fit in with the 'old' people of God. The first point Paul makes is indeed the Ephesians as Gentiles, non-Jews, or "the uncircumcision" were indeed ones "having no hope and without God in the world."

But now those who were once far from God have been brought near by the blood of Christ, his death making them acceptable to God.

However, the death of Christ also solves a less recognized problem. In the Old Testament prophetic writings, it was stated that the people of God had a heart problem. Their hearts of stone needed to be replaced with hearts of flesh.

The "law of commandments and ordinances" wasn't doing the job. Hence when Christ came, he preached peace both "to you who were far off and to those who were near". Thus, both the 'old' and 'new' people of God come to God on the same basis, both having "access in one Spirit to the Father."

Consider:

As you look around you, do you see people, regardless of their place in society, as "having no hope and without God in the world"? Is it the primary lens through which you see people?

PRAYER:

LORD, enable me to see people more and more as you see them, as people with no hope and without God in the world. Keep reminding me that this is where I was, until you brought me in. Give me the grace strength to reach out to others with that same grace you showed me.

GO DEEPER

Find out more about Steve and Karen and their ministry in central Asia. Sign up for their prayer letter.



EPHESIANS 2:19-22

A Temple for God's Spirit to Dwell

Paul Counsell, Senior High Growth Group Leader

Not many people desire to live in buildings that have crumbling and crooked walls. In fact one does not need to be an architect to understand the importance of one stone's placement upon another in order to construct a building fit for someone to dwell.

God made Jewish and Gentile believers one in the church, thus making a new entity out of two (v. 14-15), both given access to God through the same Spirit (v.18). In other words, Gentile and Jewish believers are now fellow citizens of the same heavenly household, because of their common faith in Christ.

Indeed, all Christians are part of one great holy temple: the universal church built on the teachings of apostles and prophets. Yet the critical part of the temple's foundations remains to be Christ, as the cornerstone. At the time Paul wrote the cornerstone was the stone with which the builder aligned every other stone, including the other foundation stones.

Sadly, our sin takes our alignment off course, and we see sinfulness within the church slow down the growth of the living temple rather than build it up.

For the spread of the gospel and for the glory of Christ, the church needs to live as a single new humanity, a household of united brothers and sisters who love their heavenly Father and love each other, each a stone placed in accordance with the cornerstone, Christ Jesus our Lord. Only then, will the church be fit for purpose. Only then will it be a dwelling fit for God's spirit.

CONSIDER:

Where can you rejoice in being part of God's family and how can you continue to align yourself to Christ?

PRAYER:

Gracious God, we thank you that we are not foreigners but are now near to you by Christ's death on the cross. This is a great gift. Help us to be aligned, sure and steady on the foundation of your church of which Christ is our chief cornerstone.

EPHESIANS 3:1-13

The mystery made known to me
Jenny Kemp, 9am Congregation

Here Paul repeatedly talks about a 'mystery' (vs 3, 4, 6 and 9). It's a mystery that I must admit doesn't feel so mysterious to me all the time. I probably take Paul's message for granted. That I (a Gentile) am now an heir and member of the one body with God's people the Jews (v6) and that I, through faith in Jesus, can now approach God with freedom and confidence (v12).

What struck me about this passage is that Paul is super excited about the gift that's been given to him by God to share the news of this mystery with the Gentiles. God has shown him much grace, even though Paul acknowledges that he is 'less than the least of all the Lord's people' (verse 8). Paul has the task of making plain to everyone how it is possible for ALL people to know the boundless riches of Christ. And this message will not come only through Paul. He says that is through the church (v10) that God's wisdom will be made known to all (even rulers and authorities).

Do you ever think about how we, as the church, will be used by God to make the mystery of God's wisdom known to the world? It's us, who often feel the

least worthy and least powerful, that have been gifted with Paul's task of sharing the news that all people can freely approach God with confidence. I hope that today we can feel inspired by Paul's joy at the grace God has shown us to use us for his great purposes.

CONSIDER:

How can God's grace to me help me feel joy at the prospect of sharing the boundless riches of Christ with others?

PRAYER:

Lord, we thank you for bringing all people in the world to you through Jesus. Thank you that we are members of the one body that share together in the promises of Jesus. Help us to be excited about sharing this gift with others so they can approach you with freedom and confidence.

GO DEEPER

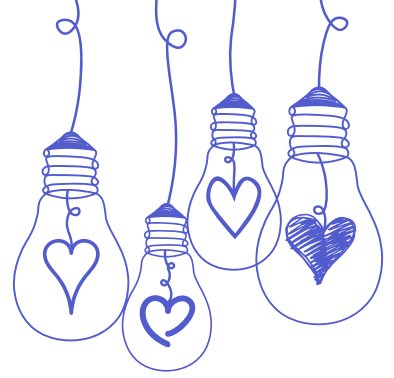
Listen to a podcast on
the One New Humanity
found in Jesus



EPHESIANS 3.14-21

Desires of your heart.

Naomie Nguyen, Senior High Growth Group Leader



Prayer has a way of revealing certain things about us. It shows us what we truly long for, what we really believe about God, and what we really believe about ourselves. If you've ever prayed with little children, you'll know that this is true! An old hymn puts it this way: 'prayer is the soul's sincere desire.'

Today we see the apostle Paul's desires and concerns for the Ephesians as he prays. He asks the Lord to strengthen the Ephesians spiritually (v 16), and for Christ Jesus himself to dwell in their hearts (v 17). He prays that they would be firmly rooted in love (v 17), and that God would give them power, alongside all Christians, to grasp the boundless love of Christ (v 18). He even asks that the Ephesians would be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God (v 19) – that the infinite creator God would completely fill and dwell in every Christian!

What Paul believes to be true about God is also on display in this passage. Paul prays in light of this purpose ("for this reason" in v 14), recognising God as the giver of life and perfect father (v 15), and knowing that it is God's Spirit who works in us (v 16).

He acknowledges that God is more powerful than we can comprehend (v 20) and is worthy of eternal glory and praise.

As we continue reading through the book of Ephesians, let us ask God that we would respond to His word with changed hearts and minds, and that we can do so through transformed prayer.

CONSIDER:

How do your prayers reflect your soul's sincere desires? How do they reflect how you think about God?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, thank you that I can come before you in prayer today. You are the creator of all things, powerful to do above and beyond anything I can think of or ask you for. Please strengthen me and grow me as a follower of Jesus, that I may understand more the love of God and be firmly rooted in love.

EPHESIANS 4:1-6

Living Worthy

Cahleb Leyshon, Ministry Trainee serving with Kids & Youth

If you think back on your life have you ever been asked the question, 'What is your calling in life?' Or 'What do you think you are supposed to do with your life?' It is easy to be caught up with the many options that we are given in our life and for Christians this is no different. In Ephesians 4:1-6 we see that Paul tells us the calling that Christians are to live by. Paul urges the Ephesians (and by extension all Christians) to live a life worthy of the calling they have received. The calling that Paul points towards is the call to follow Jesus, to live by being humble and gentle; patient and bearing with one another in love. Paul instructs us to love others the way Jesus loved us first.

What's uniquely hard about this call is that we are part of a church where people are different to us. Paul recognizes this and urges his readers to keep the unity of the Spirit. A reminder that that we don't need to bring peace between each other that has been accomplished by Jesus we need to keep and protect it.

As I come to this passage, I feel especially challenged to think about the relationships that I have where it takes a lot more effort to show love. I am challenged in this passage that I get the great privilege to love those my brothers and sisters and that I should be seeing them through the eyes that Jesus see them through.

CONSIDER:

Where do you find it hard to have unity with others? What's one way that you can keep peace with other Christians this week?

PRAYER:

Lord heavenly father, thank you that you have brought peace to your people. Lord, help me to keep the peace between those around me, help me to love them, and to see them as your precious children and my brothers and sisters in Christ.

EPHESIANS 4: 7-13

Every member Ministry

John Stott from his Bible Speaks Today commentary on Ephesians

Here is incontrovertible evidence that the New Testament envisages ministry as the privileged calling of all the people of God.

The New Testament concept of the pastor is not of a person who jealously guards all ministry in his own hands, and successfully squashes all lay initiatives, but of one who helps and encourages all God's people to discover, develop and exercise their gifts. His teaching and training are directed to this end, to enable the people of God to be a servant people, ministering actively but humbly according to their gifts.

What model of the church, then, should we keep in our minds? The model of the bus, in which the pastor does all the driving while the congregation are the passengers slumbering in peaceful security behind him. Quite different from the bus is the biblical model of the body. The church is the body of Christ, every member of which has a distinctive function.

So Christ's immediate purpose in the giving of pastors and teachers to his church is through their ministry of the word to equip all his people for their varied ministries. And the ultimate purpose of this is to build up his body, the church. For clearly the way the whole body grows is for all its members to use their God-given gifts. These gifts are so beneficial both to those who exercise their ministry faithfully and to those who receive it that the church becomes steadily more healthy and mature.

CONSIDER:

How can you use the gifts God has given you to build up his church this week?

PRAYER:

That the body of Christ at St James might be built up in unity of faith and knowledge as we serve each other.

EPHESIANS 4:17 - 24

Your new self

Lindsay Counsell, St James Office Administrator

Do you ever long to change? Have you ever downloaded the Couch to 5k app only to sheepishly delete it months later, or in good faith, purchased a few extra vegetables only to watch them wither for weeks at the back of the fridge?

The Bible tells us that on our own, our ways are 'futile'. Paul captures this in Romans 7 when he confesses that what he wants to do, he does not, but what he hates he does. I know this feeling! Even with our best intentions, we need help to live lives as God intended.

Interestingly, the help we are offered is not an app, a supplement, or extra reserves of self-control. It is a simple reminder of the truth we have already been taught: that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). As believers, our spiritual identity is now in him and whoever is found in him, is a new creature (2 Cor 5:17).

It is easy to get disheartened when in day-to-day life we do not *feel* renewed. But here Paul appeals not to how we feel but instead to what we *know*. He encourages us to focus on the 'attitudes of our minds' and 'put on' our new self.

So often I dwell on how I am feeling - it is the most common question I am asked after all. This passage makes me wonder if I should rather spend more time dwelling on what I am thinking, and pay attention to what I am putting on each day.

CONSIDER:

Is there any area of your life where you are still living as your 'old self'? Consider how you can put on the 'new self' and transform into the likeness of Christ.

PRAYER:

Kind, Heavenly Father, help me today to live as you intended, not living without hope but instead turning my mind toward the truth that is in Jesus.

EPHESIANS 4:25-32

Agents of Grace.

Bas and Jen, Ministry Partners Serving in South Asia

These verses flesh out the command in the preceding vs 24, “Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.”

This is certainly a weighty command. So what does this look like? What are we throwing off (vs 22) and then putting on in its place? We are called to be agents of grace, for we have been shown grace upon grace by our heavenly Father. Living in response to the grace we have experienced shapes our day-to-day life in real and practical ways. It’s about how we relate to those around us, how we use our words and hands and manage our anger. Reflecting on the examples in these verses, there is undoubtedly something challenging in this list for everyone, and we encourage you to meditate on these verses and ask God to speak specifically into your life.

We love that in these verses, we are not just told not what to do, but God points us to a better way. To speak truthfully, to be someone who doesn’t dwell in anger, to be generous and use our words to benefit others. These verses call us into action, not only because it is the right response to the grace we have been shown but also to build others

up and meet one another's needs (v 28, 29). As we are all members of one body, we must act for the benefit of others. We are called to be outward-focused and remove all falsehoods that stop us from being kind, compassionate and forgiving people (v32), for these falsehoods grieve the Holy Spirit and damage our families, friends and fellow members of the body of Christ.

CONSIDER:

Where can you show greater compassion and kindness today?

PRAYER:

With the help of the Holy Spirit, may we all strive to be a kind, compassionate and forgiving church.

GO DEEPER

Find out more and pray
for Bas and Jen as they
serve God's people.



EPHESIANS 5:1-7

A much better option

Jamie Byrne, Ministry Trainee serving with Reaching the Lost

Paul tells us to 'walk in the way of love'. What he is describing is not a gait but a lifestyle that is characterised by and founded on, love. And not any love, but the love we see in Christ as he offers himself up for us, the love that God shows us as He welcomes us into His family.

What does this lifestyle look like? Avoiding even a hint of 'sexual immorality, impurity, and greed'. These categories of sin describe a life centred on self-gratification and self-indulgence – to the harm of others. This kind of life is totally incompatible with being a child of God. A person can't be devoted to both God and their own desires anymore than they can run in opposite directions at the same time.

But Paul doesn't leave us with a list of 'DO NOTs', he gives us a much better option than self-indulgent living and the crass speech that goes with it: thanksgiving. While we might have expected the alternative to be politeness or even silence, thanksgiving is a remedy that goes beyond our words and addresses the sickness of our hearts. While a life of greediness comes from a mindset of being discontent and always wanting more,

thankfulness flows from recognising how much we have been given. We who have experienced God's grace and been given much in Jesus can choose this better option.

CONSIDER:

What is one area in your life where you can choose thankfulness and make a regular practice of giving thanks to God?

PRAYER:

Dear God, how good it is to be your dearly loved children! Thank you that when it comes to walking in love we can follow your example, like children copying their parents' good habits. Help us to overflow with thankfulness in a way that shows up the greediness and neediness of our world.

EPHESIANS 5:8-14

The old you and the new you

Alan Lukabyo, Senior Minister

What do you expect of yourself as a Christian? Do you expect to see sin, worldliness, and spiritual lukewarmness as a permanent and unsolvable reality? Or do you expect transformation, prayerfulness, and growing love for Jesus?

The New Testament sometimes shocks me with its spiritual optimism and ambition. It speaks to real, normal Christian like us, and anticipates consistent and obvious growth in Christlikeness. We look at the gospel of grace, and I console myself that the sin in my life has been paid for on the cross. But passages like this start with the spiritual miracle of my adoption by God, and expect that new identity to unleash its transforming power in my life. 'Once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light!'

To be a Christian isn't the same old you, just forgiven. You are a new you, strengthened by God's Spirit to get rid of sin in your life and increasingly live out your true identity.

Augustine was a 4th century believer who was converted as a pleasure-seeking young man. The story goes that one day in town shortly after his conversion a familiar sex worker called out to him. He ignored her and hurried on. She followed him calling, 'Augustine, it's me!' He finally turned and said, 'Yes – but it's no longer me.'

CONSIDER:

Do you expect ongoing transformation in your life? What aspect of your new identity can you particularly seek to live out today?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, thank you that you have not only forgiven me, but given me a new spirit and identity as your child. Show me today how I can live out my identity as a 'child of light'.

EPHESIANS 5:15-20

Sing to the Lord

Tom Wright, Paul for Everyone: The Prison letters

This passage and similar ones in the New Testament indicate that singing was then, as it has remained ever since, an important part of Christian worship and of building up the church in celebration and instruction.

Paul doesn't see these hymns and songs as simply decorative, a pleasant aural embroidery around the Christian faith and practice. Singing, whether aloud or in your heart, was, he thought an excellent way of actually practicing this faith. If you don't want your gardens to grow weeds, one of the best ways is to keep it well stocked with strong, sturdy flowers and shrubs. If you don't want your heart and mind to go wandering off into the realms of darkness, one of the best ways is to keep them well stocked with wise and thankful themes, so that words of comfort, guidance and good judgement come bubbling up unbidden from the memory and subconscious.

Hymns and psalms today can still provide exactly this kind of exactly this kind of nurture. They are not merely entertainment; they are instructions, consolation,

warning and hope. The singing that Paul has in mind is the ultimate antidote to living in the darkness of immorality that pervades the surrounding world.

CONSIDER:

What is your favourite song or hymn?

What truths does it remind you of about God and his love for you?

PRAYER:

Give thanks for the music and our musicians and for the opportunity we have each Sunday to sing and make music to the Lord.

GO DEEPER

Listen to O come to the Alter
to speak God's love and
forgiveness into your heart.



EPHESIANS 5:21-24

Wifely submission...in the year of the Barbie Movie!?

Jeri Jones Sparks, Reaching the Lost Minister

Isn't this passage oppression-of-women-101? An understandable reaction. Wifely submission has indeed been poisoned into meaning wives should endure abuse, infidelity or obey their husband as a child does their parent. But, long before the Barbie Movie could, Paul advocates for a counter-cultural dignity for the wives in Ephesus. He's pointing us even further back to the original and beautiful intent for marriage between the equal counterparts of husband and wife.

Wives are called to accept a standard of marriage goodness that is a natural outcome of mutual honour and humility. Instead of the wife being subservient to her husband, she is called to depend on a husband who serves her with Christ-like humility. Instead of the husband holding the power, he's called to give it up. Personally, I can testify that a husband who loves you like Christ does is easy to trust in everything.

Paul gives distinct instructions to wives and husbands here, which I think is a nod to their complementary roles. Other thoughtful Christians disagree on that point and applications of it vary from marriage to marriage, so wisdom is needed and mutuality should be protected.

Mutuality is the life-giving antidote to relationship dysfunction. All Christians are given a high calling (single or married) to submit to each other (vs. 21). When the dynamic is mutual submission, oppression fails to thrive. Instead, people flourish, feel loved and find forgiveness for each other. When Christ's love sets the agenda, the curse of sin unravels.

CONSIDER:

Mutual submission helps us depend on each other. How is this counter-cultural in our individualistic culture?

PRAYER:

Dear Father, thank you for Christ who shows us exactly what it means to love with humility. May we find the strength and joy to love like Him by your Spirit. We bring before you our relationships now and ask that you would help us depend on each other. For the honour of Christ,

EPHESIANS 5.25-31

We are the bride, dearly loved

Myles Elton, Discipling the Young Minister

I adore weddings as a celebration of love between two people. I love weddings even more because for a moment I get the sense of the incredible relationship of love that I am welcomed into. In this passage we see marriages are not the end in themselves but as C S Lewis says they are only *"the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited."*

A few reflections on the passage -

Sacrificial love - as husbands are called to love their wives it is tied with Jesus' love for his church, the character of which is sacrifice. The posture of husbands is not what am I getting out of this relationship today but how am serving; blessing; building; caring; feeding; fueling; supporting; nourishing and sacrificing for the one you have promised to love.

Redeemed relationships - In this description of the husband and wife relationship we see a transformation from the curses of sin. In Gen 3.16 the marriage relationship moves from peace to conflict, competing for rulership over the other. For those in Christ, by the power of the Spirit,

We say no to the curses of sin to live out relationships shaped by the love given to us; no longer in competition but serving each other for the glory of God.

We are the bride - We see how marriage is now a small taste of something so much greater. Of the sacrificial love of our Lord and Saviour, who gave himself up for us that we would be his and to show his glorious love which we are all invited to receive in the Lord Jesus.

CONSIDER:

Do you think of yourself as being a part of the bride of Christ?

PRAYER:

Father, thanking for sending the groom for us the bride. For those married at St James, help them to love as Christ as loved; a taste, an aroma, an echo of the wonderful love we have been given in our Lord Jesus

EPHESIANS 6:1-4

Obey your parents!

Kelly Whiting, 10.30am Congregation

Here is a domestic set up I can really get behind! Paul wants obedient children and involved fathers. Think of all those nice hot cups of tea that won't grow cold if this happened everyday!

I think we all long for our children to be obedient. There are so many moments with young children where I just feel like I'm herding cats. But he means more than just children doing what they are told. They need the posture of obedience in order to learn about God and this is far more important- their spiritual lives are at stake. So, ahem, children, somebody else with lots more authority is telling you to listen to me! And Dad too.

After he tells children to put their listening ears on, he instructs fathers to teach, but not to aggrieve. (Google says mothers would be understood to be included in this address too. It hurts that we don't get a specific address, but this is written in a different century.) It is too easy to be harsh in moments of anger, or when children fail to grasp what we think is easy, or when they are exasperating us. Paul cautions us that the feelings of our children matter, and exasperated children do not make good listeners!

We should therefore also take heed because our children's spiritual lives are at stake!

CONSIDER:

How does our discipline teach our children (if you have them) about God's love for them? How can we encourage and support parents in our church community?

PRAYER:

Father God, empower us to disciple our children lovingly and enable them to receive instruction so that they may find eternal life.

GO DEEPER

Watch a talk by Paul Tripp
on Parenting to encourage
you as you parent:



EPHESIANS 6:5-9

A passage you might disagree with

John Sandeman, 9am Congregation

Centuries ago, some Muslims dubbed a part of the Koran ‘The Satanic Verses’ because they were read as though they offered praise to three tribal Goddesses. But in time, the doctrine that the Koran is infallible caused the idea of Satanic Verses to become unthinkable.

Maybe you had a fleeting thought that today’s verses should not be in the Bible. Slavery is abhorrent, and Wilberforce’s decades-long battle to abolish it is noble Christian history for many of us. Who wants to be on the side of slavery?

Some Christians respond by pointing to the debt slavery described in the Old Testament. Roman slavery, household slaves could be treated well but also included people being sent to the salt or copper mines or imprisoned on a galley.

Was Paul endorsing Slavery? The book of Philemon, described by author John Dickson as lighting a slow fuse that resulted far too late in the abolition of slavery, suggests not. Paul describes Onesimus, the slave sent back to his master Philemon “no longer as a slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother.”

Paul is making the best of a bad societal situation. The ghost of Spartacus, the leader of a futile slave rebellion, can be considered to loom over this passage. Paul is being pragmatic.

Some interpreters of the relationships in Ephesians describe them as a set of permanent hierarchal relationships. But the dissolving of slavery puts that into doubt. The second way Christians interpret this passage which is to say this ‘kind of’ addresses modern-day employment, seems to me to blink as the word ‘slavery’ is read. But we can all agree on applying verses 7 and 8 to our lives today. Serve wholeheartedly! Do the best job you can because in whatever role you have, you are serving the Lord.

CONSIDER:

How do you respond when the Bible bumps into what is considered a noble cause in modern society?

PRAYER:

Dear Father, in whatever place we are in society, help us serve you with a joyful heart, seeking the good of those we work for and with.

EPHESIANS 6:10-17

GEAR UP FOR THE BATTLE!!

Pat Taylor, 10.30am Congregation

Were you aware, when you became a Christian, you had immediately become a target in a powerful war with Satan and his massive spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms? A frightening thought! – if it were not for the powerful equipment God has given us which guarantees triumph and victory!

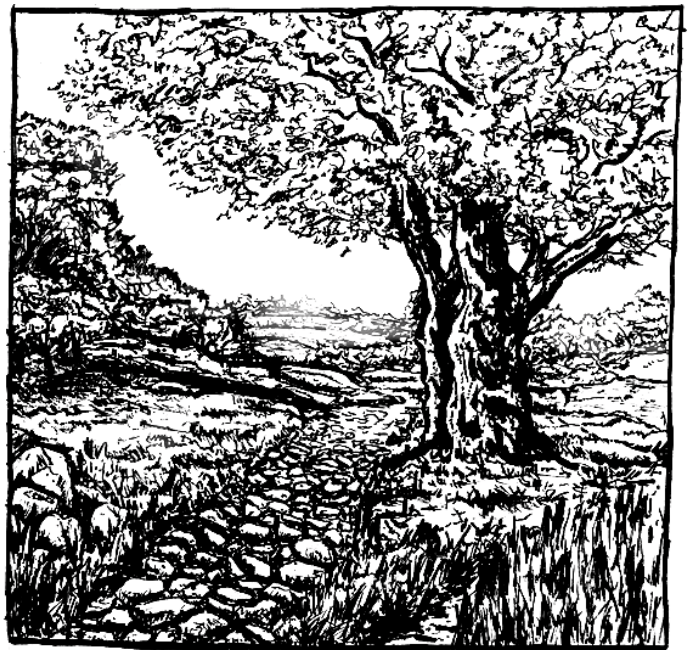
When preparing to bring our 5th child home from hospital, at a time when unexplained cot deaths were on the rise, I not only refused to leave Jess in anyone else's care, but I'd constantly pace past her room, checking to see if she was still breathing. One day, so gripped with fear and anxiety, I literally couldn't move away from her doorway. As I cried out to God for help, he brought Scripture to mind: 2 Tim. 1:7: "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and self-control". I realized if my growing "possession" of Jess continued, it would ruin her life. I released her into God's possession, and dismissed Satan with that scripture, out loud. From that moment the fear left. This was the first time I had recognised the true source of my battle, and experienced such immediate effect from putting God's word – our combative weapon in the battle – into action, rather than just holding it in head-belief.

CONSIDER:

In some of the "battles" in your life, where can you see attempts to undermine your faith and trust in God? Where could you release people from your control, by refusing to allow Satan a foothold on which he can build, in your mind?

PRAYER:

Dear Father, thank you for the overwhelming provision of your Word for every aspect of my life here on earth. Give me insight to recognize the true source of my spiritual battles, and faith to take up arms in Jesus Name!



Jordan Milburn - 9am Congregation

*Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,
and who meditates on his law day and night.
That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither – whatever they do prospers - Psalm 1: 1-3.*

EPHESIANS 6:18-24

Fearless

Jeri Jones Sparks, Reaching the Lost Minister

17 year-old Taylor Swift wrote about being fearless in her title track, “fearless is getting back up and fighting for what you want over and over again ... even though every time you’ve tried before, you’ve lost.” It is a song about young love and the inspiring resilience of human hope.

In a different context, the apostle Paul also writes about being fearless. To the watching world, his words probably seemed slightly unhinged, not inspiring. He’s in jail and it looks like he’s lost. But he writes with a higher hope as an ambassador for Christ. Whether he gets out of jail or not, Christ has already won, and the gospel needs to be shared. If Swift can write so earnestly about temporary wins being worth fighting for, then how much more can we echo Paul’s words about sharing the gospel?

The gospel is just too good to keep to ourselves. The stakes of sharing it are eternal. Today, we may be weighed down stuck by those stakes or completely avoiding their urgency. Our fears are real, and they are worth fighting. But we can’t just determine to be more fearless. We need to be empowered by the Holy Spirit and hold each other up in prayer.

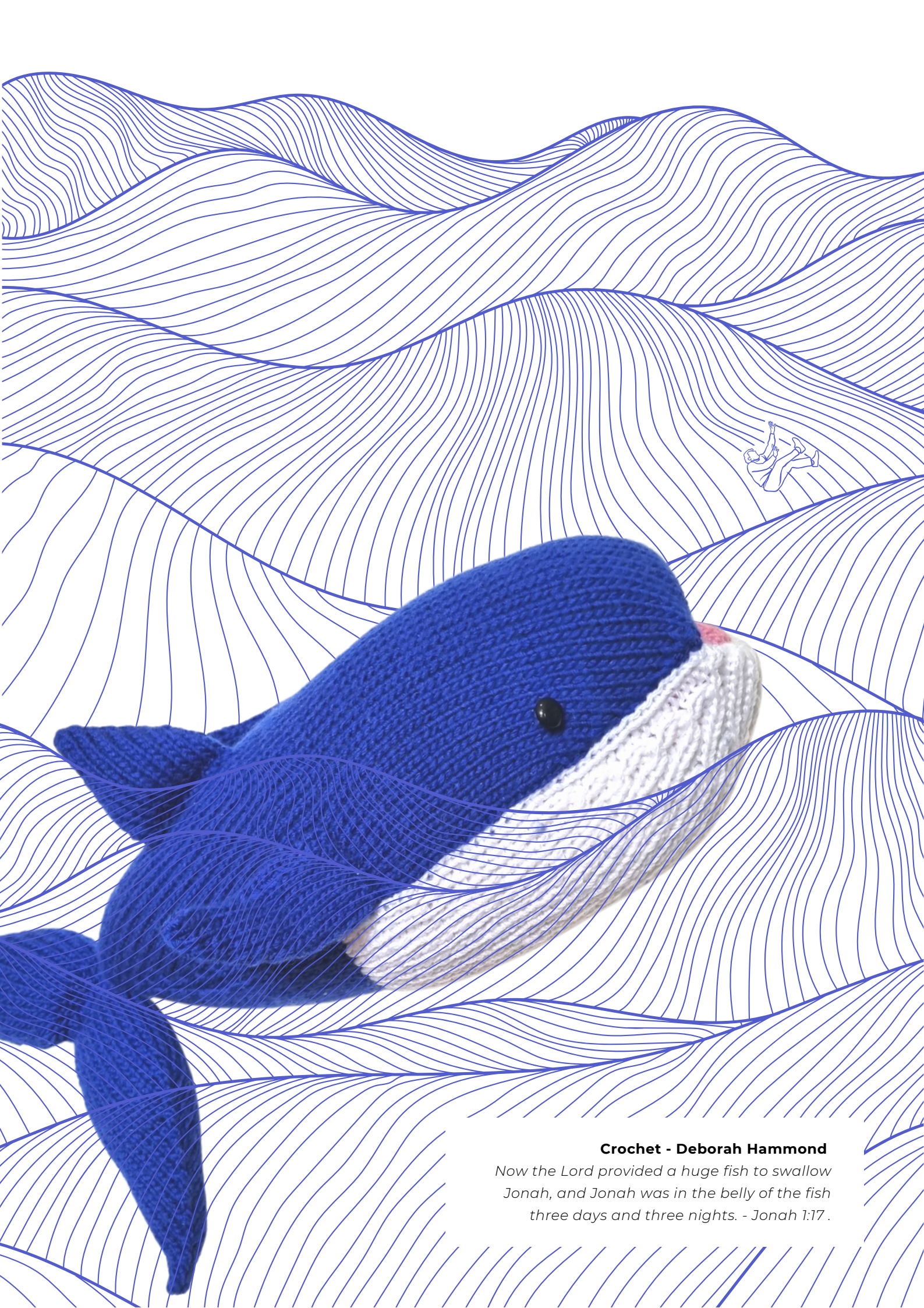
St James, God has entrusted us as ambassadors of the gospel. The only way we can do that is by depending on God. The good news is that asking for gospel-sharing opportunities is a prayer God loves to answer! So, let’s be fearless in our prayers so we might be ready for the opportunities that God will provide.

CONSIDER:

What’s an aspect of sharing the gospel of Jesus that brings you fear?

PRAYER:

Dear Father, let importance and power of the gospel grip our hearts again today. We name before you the fears that prevent us from sharing it. May we as a St James community be alert to spiritual dangers and collectively desire the salvation of many around us. For His Glory,



Crochet - Deborah Hammond

*Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow
Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish
three days and three nights. - Jonah 1:17.*

JONAH I

Another Appointment

Tyler Heesh, 6pm Congregation

Life just makes sense when we love God and others. We feel this when a coffee turns into a moment of listening as a friend honestly shares their history. We feel it when we are hurting too much to talk and someone sits with us and prays.

But knowing what God wants for us is different to doing it. God opens us up to ways of relating to people that require us to take risks, or to love those whom we may be uncomfortable with. And sometimes we run from these appointments. We fail to do what we were made for.

In Jonah 1, we encounter someone appointed by God. Jonah is to share God's word with a people who Jonah cannot stand. So Jonah runs. And we see that in running from what God asks, Jonah is attempting to flee from God. On the boat, confronted with calamity, Jonah chooses the ocean over reconciliation with God and what God has appointed him to do.

It's in the ocean that Jonah encounters another that God has appointed. A rescuer, of sorts. The appointment God has asked Jonah to fulfil for the

Ninevites is matched by the fish's role in his life. It's this second appointment that stops Jonah from perishing. We all need another to be appointed.

We listen to God not based on our own willpower, or intuitions, or even our knowledge, but on the basis of a rescuer who longed to fulfil his appointment to save us. We love God and others only in light of and through Jesus.

CONSIDER:

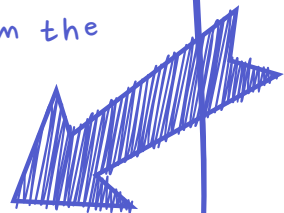
What areas of our lives are we relying on our own strength to listen to God?

PRAYER:

Jesus, apart from you I can do nothing. Help connect your rescue of me to the things I do every day.

GO DEEPER

watch the video to give you an overview of the book of Jonah from the Bible Project:



JONAH 2

Compassion and Grace

Catherine Turner, 10.30am Congregation

Here we have yet another biblical example of the disobedience and rebellion of God's people, and God's grace and forgiveness towards them. Jonah blatantly disobeys God who calls for him to declare His word to Nineveh (1:2-3), he runs away going in the opposite direction.

Jonah is thrown into the ocean so that the wrath of God would end and the people in the boat would be saved. Yet God, in his infinite mercy spares his life by providing a great fish to swallow him (1:17). 3 days and 3 nights in the stomach of a fish (it would be pretty disgusting in there, but not as bad as being cast away from God) is enough time to contemplate the depths of his sin, his need for repentance, and turning back to the living God. He is in a deep and dark place, banished from God. He acknowledges a God who listens to his cry, brought his life up from the pit, and his response is to turn back to Him, worship Him, thank Him, declare that Salvation comes from the Lord (2:9).

This story is the same as ours, as his people how often do we purposefully disobey God's commands, living the way we want, ignoring Him as Lord

and King, thinking we will get away with it? Our foolishness leads us to dark places, places of sin and regret, yet God in His infinite mercy is still there for us, waiting for us to repent and turn back to Him. This is the God of the Old Testament who is the same God now. The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love (Psalm 103:8.. read all this Psalm and join David and Jonah in "Praise the Lord, O my soul")

CONSIDER:

Do you need to come before God in repentance today and to receive his forgiveness and grace?

PRAYER:

Gracious Father, Forgive me my sins, wash me clean and by your Spirit let me live a life full of repentance and faith,

JONAH 3

Radical Obedience

Rob Yemm, Student Minister, 6pm Congregation

What stops you from obeying God? Maybe it's fear of how people will respond, whether it's your friends, family, co-workers, some random stranger on the street, or perhaps even yourself. Obeying God can be scary because it carries the risk of going outside of our comfort zone. What things in your life make you scared to obey God?

We see this exact issue addressed in this section of Jonah. We see God speak to Jonah a second time. Commanding him to go and preach the message to the people of Nineveh. However, unlike last time, Jonah obeys God and preaches God's message to the people. What is his message? Judgement. Ouch, a hard message to preach to anyone. How did the people of Nineveh respond? They "believed God" (v5), repenting and turning to God. From the King to the lowest animals, the whole city turned to God, hoping he would relent from his judgement. But look at v9 "Who knows? God may yet relent" Who knows! The people of Nineveh responded despite not knowing how God would respond, just hoping that God would look favourably on them. Which, in his grace and mercy, he does.

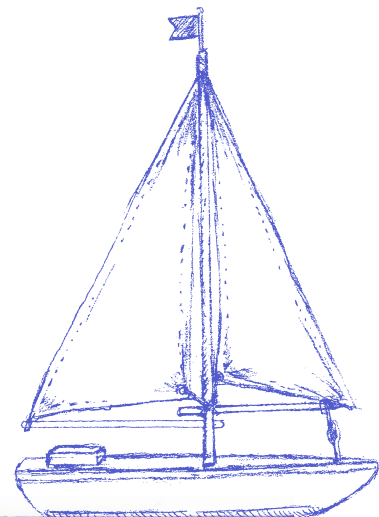
We are also given a message to proclaim. Jonah's message was one of judgement; ours is a message of salvation, that Jesus has come to rid the world of sin, death, and Satan. We can be confident that as we follow Jesus, obeying his commands to proclaim the good news of salvation, God will use this to lead people to Jesus.

CONSIDER:

What makes sharing the gospel with the people around you hard? Maybe think of one thing you can do to help share the gospel with those around you.

PRAYER:

Lord, thank you for the people in my life who shared the gospel of Jesus with me. Please help me through your Holy Spirit to see the need for others around me to hear the good news and give me the courage to share it with them.



JONAH 4

When God isn't who we want him to be

Sam Austin, Youth Minister

"So you're telling me that if *insert heinous dictator here* had asked for forgiveness from God right before they died, God would have forgiven them?". I must have come across this question in youth ministry over 10 times. It's a question about God's character and how committed he is to showing mercy. Implied in the question is this assumption: it is wrong for God to forgive really deep evil and evil deserves to be punished. In a weird way, Jonah 4 feels like an extended conversation on this very topic. It touches on our assumptions of what it really means for God to be committed to showing mercy to even the most evil people.

Let me encourage you to meditate on the words of Jonah and the words of God today. Here's what we see in Jonah, the prophet who doesn't like who God is. We see someone who knows who God is (v2-3) but disobeys him and hates what he does. We see someone who can enjoy the goodness of God's world (v6) but wrongly assumes it's all about him (v7-8). We see someone who cares more about staying cool (v6) than they do about the fate of hundreds and thousands (v10-11).

And here is what we see in God. Our God is patient, even when his people are arrogant and proud. Our God wants to teach his people how good it is that he is God, and they are not.

Our God wants us to care about what he cares about. Our God loves to show compassion, even when that compassion feels way too generous.

CONSIDER:

Where in your life might you be similar to Jonah? In pride? In not wanting God to forgive? In not caring enough about other people?

PRAYER:

Merciful Father. Change me so that I might more and more love who you are. Help me to rejoice in your forgiveness of me, a sinner, and more and more desire the same for others.



Amelia Jang-6pm Congregation

For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock. Psalm 27:5.

PSALM 119:33-40

Teach me to do your will, O Lord.

Alan Mugridge, 10.30am Congregation

Psalm 119 is a kaleidoscope of themes, but one dominates using a number of equivalent terms, and this short section is a window into the burden of the whole psalm. The author was dreading disgrace (v.39) and praying for his life to be preserved from some danger (v.40). He was clearly at risk, and the world around him had attractions that could draw him away from the Lord and threaten his devotion to Him and His will - there were 'worthless things' (v.37) and 'selfish gain' (v.36). The world around had its charms and its dangers, so he turned to the Lord God in prayer for help in troubled times to remain faithful and live a life in accord with His will.

The thrust of his prayer was to acknowledge the revelation that God had given in his Word - his decrees, his law, his commands, his statutes, his promise, his laws and his precepts. In this section, he expressed his delight in having these insights into the will of God (v.35), but he also prayed for God's help to follow those decrees and keep them - he would need to be taught (v.33). He prayed that he would understand that law and obey it wholeheartedly (v.34). He asked God to guide him in how to live out those

commands (v.35), and for the Lord to incline him inwardly to prize them above all else. He asked for help not to focus on what is of little profit (v.37), but his final aim was not so much for himself as for people to honour the Lord (v.38).

He yearned to do the will of God and prayed for all the help he needed to do that, and we who have even more revealed to us about God and his will through Jesus, in a whole Bible, can pray like that too.

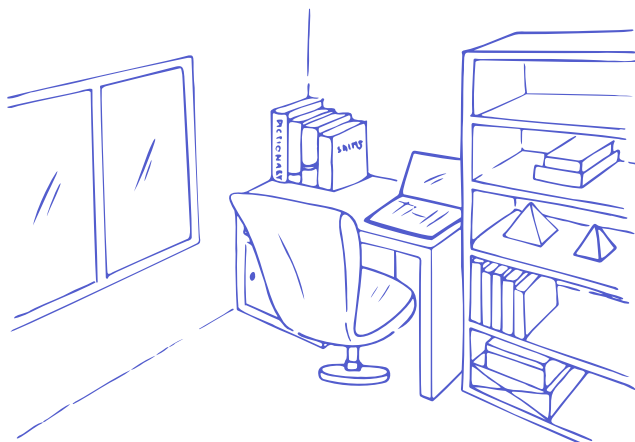
CONSIDER:

Do we delight in knowing the Lord and doing his will? What is the main aim of our prayers?

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, help me to know your will in a complex and changing world, and to delight in doing it. Teach me, keep me from harm, and help me to focus on your will and not on selfish gain or worthless things.

KEEP TAKING 10



"Teach me knowledge and good judgment,
for I trust your commands.
Before I was afflicted I went astray,
but now I obey your word.
You are good, and what you do is good;
teach me your decrees.
Psalm 119:66-68

As we finish our St James booklet, now is a great chance to keep building on that habit and reading your bible and responding in prayer.

Sign up for **Daily devotions** in your inbox from the Bible Society Australia



Download one of the following Apps

- **YouVersion**- sign up for a reading plan. Some good ones to start with:
 - Jen Wilken- Reflecting God's Image.
 - Paul David Tripp- My heart cries out.
 - John Stott- Reading Romans
- **Bible on One Year**- read through the whole of the bible over the year in bite size pieces. Their express program allows for 10 mins of reading.
- **Lectio 365**- a meditative morning and evening prayer.

our thanks to Beth Abbottsmith for her design work on this beautiful booklet.



Prayer Retreat

Saturday 23 September
St James Grounds

Are you keen to grow in your intimacy with God?

Do you want to carve out some time without distractions to pray to God?

Do you want to learn new prayer skills to help you dwell with God?

Our prayer retreat gives you a 3 hour period of time to pray and some guided prayer material to help focus you and give direction to prayer.

Morning Session 9.30am - 12.30pm

OR Afternoon Session 2pm - 5pm

.Give me understanding,
so that I may keep your law
and obey it with all my heart.

Direct me in the path of
your commands,
for there I find delight.

Psalm 119:34-35



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