

ONE MONTH OF

worship



Community Life Church
28 Day Devotional



ONE MONTH OF

worship

ONE MONTH OF WORSHIP is intended to be a time where as a community of believers-we the church, in a focused way, engage with God in order to reorient our lives around Him.

We are asking the basic question: *What is the worship that is acceptable to God?*

Or in more modern language *'What does God really want from me?'*

We are engaging in this, appropriately in the season of Lent where traditionally the people of God focus on three things:

- **FASTING** - giving up something for God as an act of worship
- **GIVING TO GOD** - as an act of worship (almsgiving or charity)
- **DEPENDENCY ON GOD** - (as experienced through prayer)

We could say that this season will hopefully be a time of **'spiritual spring cleaning'** for each of us individually which will impact our corporate worship.

There are **28 devotions** for you to do each day of the month. They only take about 5-10 minutes every day. There is a Bible passage for you to read, a short reflection, then a prayer or action step to practice. At the end of the week there is a suggested family activity. As a practice of your worship we encourage you to gather the family (I know it's hard!) at the end of the week and focus on the activity which will emphasise 'giving up for' and 'giving to' God. Of course if you can't on a Sunday then please choose another day. You are already practicing fasting by gathering as a family! You are fasting from whatever else takes your time in order to prioritise family time with God! The family activities are to help you think through any practices that need to change in your routine so that you do prioritise God. Hopefully we will experience God's transforming power through this series which will change our thoughts, practices and motives that we might become more like Jesus himself.

There are also included in this booklet some thoughts about fasting to help you and some ideas for almsgiving (charity) that you might want to use during this period as a family or individually.



ONE MONTH OF *worship*

SO TO START OFF... here are some quotes to help you position yourself as you begin this one month of worship.

In the daily round of life, dust and cobwebs accumulate in our souls. The hidden corners of our hearts become encrusted with grime or filled with forgotten debris. During the weeks of Lent, God's Spirit is given opportunity to clear away the clutter, sweep away the dust and wash us clean. We are invited to prepare ourselves—heart, soul, mind, and body—for the new life of Easter.

Marlene Kropf, U.S. Professor in spiritual formation
(Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary)

Maybe Lent is a good time to stop doing and try being. . . . Relinquishment lies at the heart of the Christian gospel and is a countercultural choice that hones our discipleship. If I let go of the assumption that my hard work will bring me all that I desire, I begin to look at the present moment, receive it with gratitude, and know what it asks of me. I learn when it is time to rest, time to plan, time to play, time to wait, time to act boldly.

Elizabeth J. Canham, U.S.
Teacher of spiritual formation and founder of Stillpoint Ministries

The first few pages of this booklet contain information about this series
and suggestions for fasting, charity, family activities.
The devotions start on page 7

Life groups involvement in ONE MONTH OF WORSHIP

During our series we are asking that you connect with a life group in order to look at some questions as a group that revolve around the Sunday sermons. The messages will be spoken out on the Sunday then Monday you will receive through email some questions on that topic and Bible passage. The questions are designed to help you focus on that one question we are asking 'What is the worship that is acceptable to God?'

If you are a life group coordinator you will need to look at the questions beforehand to shape them accordingly for your group.

Weekly sermon topics and Bible passages to work through in life groups are as follows:

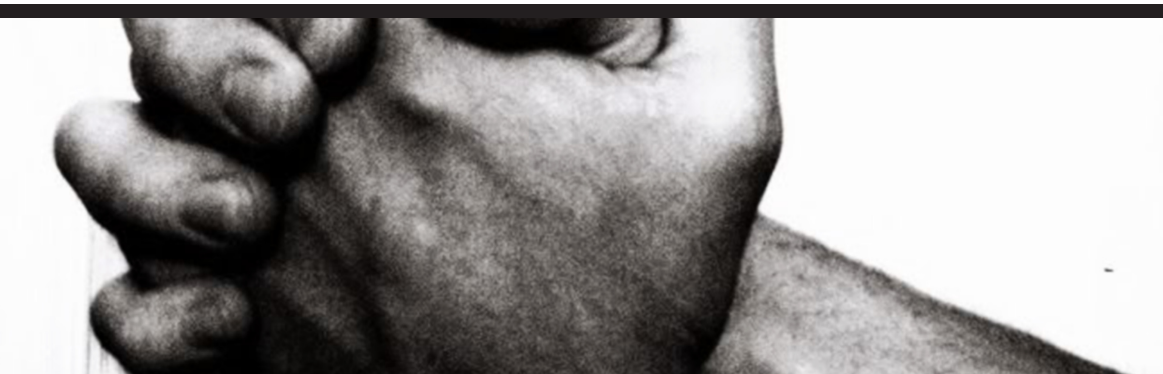
20TH MARCH: *Heart Check part 1*- What is the worship acceptable to God? Micah 6:1-8

27TH MARCH: *Heart check part 2*
Isaiah 58

3RD APRIL: *It's not about me*
Matthew 16:21-28

10TH APRIL: *Love justice and be kind*
Amos 5:21-27

17TH APRIL: *Walking humbly with God: What does dependency on God look like?* Luke 18:9-14



A BEGINNERS GUIDE TO *fasting...*

Fasting has a long tradition in most religions including the Christian tradition. We don't practice it very much in our day but Jesus expected his disciples to be engaging in fasting at least as regularly as they prayed (Matthew 6:5,16). Fasting was used for various purposes as can be seen in Scripture. A person or community could fast in order to:

- Obey God's command (to Israel) to fast on the 10th day of the seventh month for the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) from sunset to sunset.
- Receive revelation (Exodus 34:28)
- Dedicate themselves to God or to prepare themselves spiritually for a service of God (Luke 4:1-4)
- Worship (Luke 2:36-7)
- Mourn for sin (Matthew 9:14-15, 2 Samuel 12:16-17, 20-23)
- To make key decisions (Acts 14:23)
- Repent (Jonah 3:5)
- Intercede (Esther 4:15-16)
- Commemorate days- Zechariah 7:1-7, 8:19
(eg Catholics commemorate the death of Jesus on Good Friday by fasting from meat and only eating fish)

As we are engaging in lent in this series and lent focuses on prayer, fasting, almsgiving you might want to fast over the month or engage in fasting for a time within this series (eg on one particular day). Fasting does not have to be fasting from food (although this is the traditional way of fasting). The principle behind fasting is to give up something that you depend on (such as food) and as you do that you increase your focus on God as well as realise that you are dependent on him rather than even that very important need in your life. You are declaring he is greater. You can fast from:

- **Technology**
- **Coffee**
- **Chocolate**
- **Alcohol**
- **Media**

Fasting is never easy and people often experience discomfort when they fast however as a spiritual discipline it is probably worth considering incorporating fasting as an act of regular worship in our lives. Why not try over this month?

Here are some steps:

- Choose a reason for your fast (as listed above)
- Choose what you will fast from
- Choose how long will be your fast and how you will focus on God for that period eg prayer/ Bible reading/more attention to the presence of God

NOTE: Make sure that you allow God to speak to you as he wants to and give to you what he wants to during your fast. In other words come to the period of fasting with open hands rather than an agenda. Check your motives and make sure you are not using the fast to get what you want or to twist God's arm. Reflect on the pure motives concerning fasting that Jesus refers to in Matthew 6:16-18. A good way to do your first fast is to fast for the simple reason of worshipping God. Put aside what you depend on and focus on him. Give him your worship - how can a fast like this go wrong?



Almsgiving

(CHARITY)

Jesus expected his disciples to regularly practice almsgiving, or giving to those more needy than oneself. When Judas expressed his disgust at Mary who poured costly perfume over Jesus feet and said that the perfume could have been sold to give money to the poor (John 12:5), however wrongly motivated, it was the expression of a good Jew who had been taught the importance of regular almsgiving. When Jesus referred to praying and fasting in Matthew 6 he also referred to the regular act of almsgiving (Matthew 6:1-4). Clearly if we read all of God's word we see the emphasis that God gives to meeting the needs of those who are disadvantaged. When we practice almsgiving it challenges the consumerism of our day.

How does your family regularly practice the discipline of almsgiving? Have you connected to a charity yet? You could use this season of lent to as a family come together and decided on a charity to give to.

Why not involve the kids and rather than just giving money do a little research? It could be a family activity. You could choose a country that is disadvantaged, research that country and check out what the statistics are for education, health and food supplies. What tugs at your heart more? Which organisation will you choose that supports this country and tries to meet the needs of this nation? Have you ever thought of visiting that place on a low budget family trip? What else can you do to get involved rather than just send money?

Here are some suggestions:

- www.baptistworldaid.org.au/
- www.samaritanspurse.org.au
- www.opportunity.org.au/
- www.oxfam.org.au
- www.compassion.com.au/

You can also practice almsgiving this month a little closer to home:

- Cook some food or mow the lawn of a neighbour or friend who is struggling
- Help out as a family at a local soup kitchen

<http://www.missionaustralia.com.au/news/134-soup-kitchen-to-warm-hearts-of-australias-homeless>

<http://www.govolunteer.com.au/volunteer/stories.asp>

<http://www.savethechildren.org.au/>

How can you regularly practice the spiritual discipline of almsgiving that helps take our focus off ourselves and onto the less fortunate? How can you do this as a family and allow it to help shape your values as a family?



SUGGESTIONS FOR *family* OR *group* ACTIVITIES

This period is a good time to think about how as a family you can transform some routines and patterns that get in the way of prioritising God. Here are some suggestions for some more action steps and family activities other than the one already given in the devotionals.

- **Screen time verses family time:**

Screens make us more efficient but also more distracted. Sometimes screens can take us away from family time and time with God. Have a family meeting and discuss how screens have become a distraction in the life of your family. Do you need to put into place some 'screen free time' and commit to that as a family then replace that time with time spent together or with God?

- **Keep it simple:** Keeping things simple is not about cutting out the abundance of life but rather cutting out the things that are not really important so that life can be lived more fully. Review your calendar and budget to uncover wants versus needs. How are your wants revealed? Too many trips to the coffee shop? Spending on items that you don't really need? Too much expensive entertainment costs? Find something that is a want in your life then give it up for while and ask yourself 'did I really need that?' Give the money that you did not spend to a charity. Remember this is not about not enjoying life but rather to balance needs and wants is a better way.

- **Spend time getting to know a person from another religion or culture** and invite them over to dinner. Ask them about their religion not in order to convert them but to get to know them as friends.
- **Introduce yourself** to neighbours you don't know - bake cupcakes!
- **Who are the marginalised in your neighbourhood or community?**
How can you connect with them as a family or as a group?
- **Communicate with a local politician** (get the children involved) and write a letter about the things you care about. Let them know you and your family are praying for them.
- **Is your job or work consistently stopping you from living a meaningful life?** If so are there any decisions that you need to make to change that situation so you can find work and life meaningful? How can you impact your workplace for the better?
- **Organise a street barbeque** to meet your neighbours and start building relationships with them.
- **Have your children invite a friend to church** or another program that the church is running.
- **Do some fun Bible memorisation challenges together.** Choose a passage that is relevant for your family or group and challenge each other to learn a verse a week adding to it until you have learnt the passage. (If you are doing this with children – to make it more fun make up some actions to go along with the words. It helps with remembering too)
- **Secretly clean** another room in the house without being asked by your mum or dad.

YOUR KINGDOM *come*

A NORTHWEST COMMUNITY PRAYER GATHERING

*Come join us in
praying for our
churches and
community as we
unite to pray
God's kingdom
come to this City*

When: 8th April

Time: 8pm

Where: Cherrybrook Technology High
School Hall, Purchase Road, Cherrybrook

Child minding will be provided

For **more information** please contact
The Ministry Centre 9561-3534
ministrycentre@communitylife.org.au



ONE MONTH OF WORSHIP

Devotions

START HERE

Read Psalm 51:1-2

'Have mercy on me O God...'

An old and often repeated chant of monks as they worshipped God was 'Kyrie Eleison' which means 'Lord have mercy on me'.

In this Psalm David utters the same words to God as he realises the sin that is nestled in his heart. However Instead of turning away from God in shame he realises his only hope is in God who can pardon him. He turns to God in the middle of his sin in the hope that God will be merciful.

During the Christian season of lent which we are currently in, it is a time to do some spiritual 'spring cleaning' as we walk through the rooms in our heart and ask God to shine his light so that any secret or known sin can be exposed in the safe presence of God so that forgiveness can flow.

ACTION: Take a moment to ask God to come to your heart and walk through all the corridors to do some spring cleaning. What forgiveness do you seek from God? Are there others that you need to forgive?

Read Psalm 51: 15-17

'The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit...'

What is an acceptable gift to bring to the creator of the universe?

The answer according to this psalm is 'a broken spirit' and it is contrasted to burnt offering sacrifices.

The point is that physical sacrifices for God can be manipulated in various ways but a broken spirit, that is a human spirit that has been humbled of its pride and moved to dependency on God cannot be faked.

When a human realises that God is God and they are not this is the first step to beginning to truly worship God. This is the acceptable gift that pleases the creator of the human spirit.

ACTION: Reflect on why David would use the word 'broken' to describe what pleases God?

Christians used to sing **'Spirit of the living God Fall afresh on me Spirit of the living God Fall afresh on me Break me, melt me, mould me, fill me Spirit of the living God Fall afresh on me'** Would you dare to sing this to God right now?

Read Ezekiel 36:25-32

'I will remove from your body a heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh...'

When someone calls you a 'softy' what is your reaction?

Do you feel embarrassed or proud that you have shown a gentle side?

Softness sometimes in our world can be seen as a weakness but to God it is only a soft heart that is able to be changed by him. This passage is a prediction of the time when a soft heart will be accessible to all people through the gift of Jesus to the world. This heart will be more responsive to God, more awake to God, more able to be moulded by God, more in tune with the whisperings of his Spirit. What an amazing gift!

ACTION: Do you have a heart of stone or a heart of flesh?

Are you responsive to the whisperings of the Spirit or is your heart deaf to what God is trying to tell you?

Ask him to soften your heart so that he is able to teach you and mould you.

Read Jeremiah 17:5-10

'I the Lord test the mind and search the heart...'

How do you feel when you hear the statement God is watching you?

Do you feel like you want to run and hide or do you feel safe under his gaze?

This passage contrasts the 'cursed' person and the 'blessed' person. To be 'cursed' is to be separated from the presence of God which is described in verses 5-6. The person described here relies on his or her own strength for survival rather than on God as a result they are 'cursed' due to their choice to ignore God and the help he offers. The person who steps into the grace or power of God flourishes.

ACTION: Have you made a choice to step into the grace of God?

If so how can you make this choice moment to moment, becoming aware of his loving gaze and hands that offer you help?

Read Genesis 4:1-7

‘..but for Cain and his offering he had no regard.’

Have you ever bought someone a dodgy gift?

Have you seen them open perhaps another gift and remark how wonderful it is only to turn to your gift and politely say thank you but you knew they didn’t like it?

How did you feel?

Cain offered God a gift and so did his brother Abel and God liked Abel’s gift better than Cain’s. Why would God prefer Abel’s gift? Perhaps there is a clue in verse 4 where it emphasises that Abel gave the ‘best bits’ to God whereas by comparison Cain seemed a little blasé and careless regarding his gift to God.

ACTION: Reflect on whether your gifts to God which is your act of worship are careless or ‘the best bits’. How can you ‘master’ any sin against your worship of God that waits at the door of your heart? (v7)

Read Matthew 15:1-9

‘...in vain do they worship me’

A loophole is a ‘way of escaping a difficulty... as a means of evading compliance’. We look for loopholes when we are doing our tax return, when we are reading a contract and also generally speaking in life when we want to take the easier road that leads to our advantage.

This is what the legalistic Pharisees were doing in Jesus’ day. They found a loophole in the law of God by giving as a gift to God what they should have given to their parents. Jesus implies they should have done both. In their stinginess, they are trying to avoid giving too much to God. Jesus is scathing in his criticism and says they are merely following human rules plus he calls them hypocrites!

ACTION: Come to God under his loving gaze and ask him if you have found any loopholes in your worship that are unacceptable in the eyes of God

Read Romans 12:1-2

‘..present your bodies...which is your spiritual worship’

The word spiritual here in this passage can mean ‘reasonable’. So the sense is if God has given up so much to show you his love the least you can do is offer up your whole self to him as a pleasing sacrifice. This should not be done out of a sense of duty but rather from a heart that has come to be affected by the enormous love of God.

What else can we do other than give our whole lives to him? This is in contrast to our usual act of worship which is when we give to him a portion of our lives and hold onto the rest. The least we can do is give to him our whole lives. Giving him merely a portion in this light is an offence. If someone has just saved your life and you respond by giving them a box of chocolates, what you have given however lovely is out of order compared to what has just been done for you.

GROUP AND FAMILY ACTION: As a family or group talk with each other about how we do not always have it together and how we can do and say hurtful things to each other. Ask one another for forgiveness for the times that you have done things that hurt each other. Ask God for His forgiveness together as a family and ask Him to help each family member to know that they need God's love and grace to be able to love as he loved.

Ask each family member to share a way that they could spend time with God as a family, knowing that when you do this you are saying that you need God in your family and that you want to draw closer to him together. Eg reading a devotion, acting out a bible story, praying for each other, sing worship songs together, illustrating favourite bible verses etc.

Read Matthew 6:1-18

‘..do not sound a trumpet...so that you will be praised by others’

These days we often try to keep up appearances so that we are more acceptable in the presence of others. We can do this by trying to be happy when we really are not, raising our hands in worship when we are living in sin, trying to look moral when we are not, doing good deeds to get noticed by others.

It is this latter act that Jesus critiques. He says in fact that doing good things publically in order to get attention and praise, acceptance from others is hypocrisy. To really check your heart He says do acts of worship in secret. Worship God generously in secret and God will bless you because you are performing for an audience of One.

ACTION: What acts of worship do you sometimes engages in public in order to look ‘spiritual?’ Ask God to give you a desire to worship away from the crowds in secret to build up your spiritual muscle in the presence of the Lord. Cultivate a ‘secret life of worship’ this week with God.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:5-10

'...so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.'

Often we look at someone we say is anointed (full of the Spirit) and we admire and perhaps envy them. Have you ever thought that an anointed person must by logic be a weak person in and of themselves?

This passage reminds us that the power of God rests especially on weak people because God then has someone to fill. A person who is self reliant and strong does not need God and has no room for the power of God to fill them since they are already full- of themselves! As we get filled with God's power the result is that we are made strong as his glory reflects through us to change our world...this is truly an anointed person.

ACTION: What are some of your weaknesses? Ask God to fill you as you come to him so that power will be made perfect through your weaknesses and you will be strong for God.

Read Malachi 1:6-14

'When you offer blind animals in sacrifice is that not wrong?'

On the news we hear that Aussies like their fruit perfect so they are rejecting blemished fruit and choosing fruit that looks good on the outside. We accept the fruit that looks good and throw away as leftovers the fruit that is bad. Imagine taking this leftover fruit that looks terrible and putting it into a hamper then presenting it to someone as a gift?

This is what was happening in Israel. People were keeping for themselves the best produce and giving to God as their act of 'worship' their leftovers. So God took offence to this!

ACTION: Which acts of worship are you giving to God right now that could be seen as leftovers? Ask God to renew your heart for worship

Read Psalm 40:6-8

'...but you have given me an open ear'

This passage predicts the perfect offering of Jesus to his Father for the sins of the world. His willingness to offer himself to God is reflected in the comment 'I delight to do your will. Your law is within my heart'. Often we are weary in the worship of our God but here is a nice contrast to that tiredness we experience as we hear Jesus delight as he offers his body in the worship of God to suffer on that cross. Could we possibly have a similar attitude...no matter how great the pain of worshipping our God (and we hardly get called to die in our nation for God) can we still say I delight to do your will'. This comes from a heart that has been transformed by God and delights to follow the heart of God rather than merely the law of God. An open ear in this passage refers to the obedience and discernment of the Son as he worships his father.

ACTION: Assess your tiredness levels of worshipping God. How can this passage strengthen you? Reflect on Matthew 11: 28-30 and ask Jesus to work his power through your weakness that you might delight to give your sacrifice of worship to him.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

'But God chose what is foolish in the world'

Today for a portion of the day at least, we celebrate April fools where we often play tricks on one another. We feel like a fool when we get tricked because someone has outsmarted us.

This passage implies that God has 'tricked' humanity in the sense that as humans we usually vote for the powerful, look to the wise, accept the knowledge of learned teachers and we go to the experts for 'salvation'.

But God's wisdom was to bring salvation through an apparently 'foolish' act of nailing himself to a cross in humility and love. God's wisdom might look like foolishness to humanity but it is only through this 'foolishness that we will receive real salvation. We are not saved by our own wisdom, intelligence, talents or gifts but through the humble act of Jesus dying on that cross.

ACTION: When are you tempted to rely on your own wisdom, strength and intellect or talents in order to impress people?

What does it mean to look foolish in the eyes of the world as a Christ follower?

Ask that God would help you be more reliant on his power even though that might make you look foolish

Read Hebrews 13:15

'...a sacrifice of praise'

Do you ever find it hard to say thank you?

Sometimes if our pride has been wounded or we don't feel that the act done for us was worthy of a thank you we don't thank people. Sometimes however we take people for granted and we just assume that they will always be there to support us and help us. Often we even forget about all the things that they do for us because we have become so accustomed to their presence.

Do we ever take God for granted?

The longer we are Christians the easier it becomes to get used to the grace God has given to us.

ACTION: How can you thank God 'continually' as it says in this passage and continually praise all he has done for you?

Read Philippians 4:10-19

'I know what it is to have plenty'

It's hard to find someone who is truly content today. Most people are striving for more in some way or another. More power, more money, more for their family, more opportunities, more study, more gadgets. Some of these strivings are noble and some are not. In one sense it is that striving that advances our society, for example we hear that we need economic growth for our nation to prosper. I wonder then about this counter cultural statement that Paul makes that he can be content with what he has? He apparently knew prosperity and he was content in that season. He also was familiar with poverty but he says he was also content when that season came. He seems to allow God to be his strength and dependency whatever season he is going through.

GROUP AND FAMILY ACTION: Do you have a family calendar/diary or schedule?

Firstly discuss as a family what are your priorities in life. Then if you have a family calendar have a look at all of the things you are involved with as individuals and as a family and see if your desired priorities match up with your actual living.

Looking at your calendar is a great way of seeing what our actual priorities are. Can you see any contradictions between what you desire and the reality?

One writer says that calendars are 'moral documents'. Why do you think he meant by that?

How can you make your desired priorities better match your actual life?

Families can be very busy places especially with all of the activities the children are involved with.

Ask God to help your family to prioritise time together with God. Ask God to help prioritise what is important in life and to show us what we can give less attention to so we are able to give more time to Him. Make a commitment as a family (not just mum or dad saying so) to setting aside time to worship God together finding a time that is agreed upon. Maybe once a week for a family night or a few times a week after dinner for a short time?

Read 1 Corinthians 3:5-15

'What is Paul?'

Today we are familiar with the marketing term 'branding'. Similar products in order to distinguish themselves create a brand then attempt to gather a loyal following to that brand. You see that when people wear T-shirts that would otherwise be very inexpensive but are made expensive because a certain brand name is placed on the front of that T-shirt. We then realise that this person wearing that T shirt identifies with that brand for whatever reason.

This was happening in the early church. People were treating leaders like brands. One brand was Paul, another Apollos and each group was following each leader with loyalty. Paul challenged this and says what is Paul? What is Apollos? It's God who makes the things that matter possible anyway! We need to be careful that we are worshipping God not human beings or things that are used by God

ACTION: Have you been tempted to follow people or churches because of their 'branding'? Talents, gifts, wisdom are secondary in a person with a humble heart that is dependent on God and gives him all the glory for what he is doing through his vessels. Ask God to strip back anything in your life that you are worshipping other than Him.

Read Luke 12:13-21

'Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed...'

Tim Keller writes in his book 'Counterfeit gods':

'Some years ago I was doing a seven-part series of talks on the Seven Deadly Sins at a men's breakfast. My wife, Kathy, told me, "I'll bet that the week you deal with greed will be the lowest attendance." She was right. People packed it out for "Lust" and "Wrath" and even for "Pride." But nobody thinks they are greedy.

As a pastor I've had people come to me and confess that they struggle with almost every kind of sin. Almost. I cannot recall anyone ever coming to me and saying, "I spend too much money on myself. I think my greedy lust for money is harming my family, my soul, and people around me." Greed hides itself from the victim. The money god's modus operandi includes blindness to your own heart.'

ACTION: Jesus in this parable warns people to not be deceived by the hiddenness of greed. We often think people with a lot of money can be greedy but do you think someone with not a lot of money can be greedy? Ask God to check your heart for this hidden sin

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

'You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity...'

'God loves a cheerful giver' we are told. But how do we give cheerfully? This passage is incredibly optimistic about the giving nature of God and how our giving reflects his heart leading to God's blessings being poured onto our lives. As we allow God to check our hearts in this season and to free us from greed we are then ready to be filled with a spirit of generosity that comes from God. When we get rid of our self absorption and practice generosity towards others we are actually worshiping God.

ACTION: Pray that God will fill your heart with generosity towards others so that you give to God and others your time, money, gifts, energy not under compulsion but cheerfully, willingly, sacrificially.

Read Genesis 2:1-3 2

'...and he rested on the seventh day from all that he had done'

Why did God need to rest after 6 days of working?

Was he tired?

Did he need a break in order to face what was coming?

God rested because deep in the heart of God there is pleasure and delight in all that he does as he creates. God rested in order to draw pleasure, admiration, joy, satisfaction from his work.

Too often we are focused on production. As soon as we finish one thing we are already asking 'what's next?' We are avid consumers who want more products, more outcomes, more results, more things to do. Instead of consuming all day long and producing all day long we can learn from the heart of God and rest in the good work we have done. We can admire our work, enjoy the work of others, praise the accomplishments of others yet do this without having to keep up with the work we are admiring or striving to produce more than others. Rest can teach us to be still and just take pleasure in things rather than continue on the treadmill of consumerism.

ACTION: Lie down for at least 5 minutes and rest. Reflect on any 'good work' you have done today or this week. Take pleasure in what you have achieved. Receive the pleasure of God over you for your good work. Reflect on others who have produced good work and thank God for them. Think of them without having to compete or trying to match them. Think of some good products and reflect on their beauty and craftsmanship. Reflect on them without wanting them, having to possess them, without holding onto them so you feel satisfied even though you don't own it.

Read Joel 2:10-16

'...rend your hearts and not your clothing'

Fasting is a ritual that is common in many religions. We see the non believing Ninevites proclaim a fast when they turn to God in repentance (Jonah 3:5). We also see Nehemiah fast when he wanted to confess the sins of his people to show his dismay at the news he had just heard (Neh 1:4ff).

Fasting is a ritual that expresses to God our dependency on him. When we fast from something that is important to us like food or technology we show that we need God more than even those things which we find essential in life.

Fasting also acts as a partner to confession of sin expressing to God how sorry we are for our greed, selfishness, pride and lack of generosity to those less well off than ourselves.

However, God emphasises to his people in this passage that what God wants is a sanctified and transformed heart not the outward show of a ritual (the outward show of fasting was often to tear one's garments or wear tarnished clothes) . Fasting must take place with a heart that is set on God not on the outward show of our devotion. This is pleasing and right worship to God.

ACTION: Reflect on verse 13. You might like to fast from something for this week to show God your devotion. As you do this ask God to give you the right 'heart' as you worship him by giving up something to focus on him. Use it as a time for God to search you as you deny your 'self' so that if any hidden sin is exposed God can come with his mercy and love to overwhelm you with his forgiveness. As you 'give up' for God what can you 'give to' him?

Read Luke 16:19-31

'And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus...'

This story that Jesus tells really is incredible in many ways. One point that this story makes is the self focused attitude of the rich man. The story emphasises his wealth but this is not the problem. The problem is his excess (V19 'feasted sumptuously everyday'), his lack of compassion to the poor (v20 'and at his gate lay Lazarus covered with sores'), his self focus (v 24 'send Lazarus') and his insistence that he is right (v29 'No father Abraham but if someone goes to them from the dead..')

Clearly from this passage we see that worship involves giving up our selves and then giving generously to others- especially those who 'lay at our gates' (those who are right in front of us who need our help!)

ACTION: Can you notice those who are 'laying at your gates'? Who are the poor, marginalised, disadvantaged people near you who you are tempted to ignore because you are too busy, too tired perhaps too self focused like this rich man? Take time to reflect on these people in the presence of God and ask him what he would have you do.

Read Exodus 22:21-31

'You shall be people consecrated to me...'

We have an example in this passage of some of the laws that God gave to the Israelites as they were forming their identity. As their identity was moulded this could only happen as they knew more and more the character of God. The laws (however strange sounding to us today) actually reflect the character of God. In this passage we hear the heart of God for the poor, the disadvantaged and the refugee.

These laws were meant to be taught in a family setting and recited so that children would also learn them and capture the heart of God towards the poor (Deuteronomy 6:7). To worship God as a family meant taking action and helping the poor in their community.

GROUP AND FAMILY ACTION: Brainstorm some ways as a family that you could do together to worship God by helping the poor or vulnerable in your community. Choose a time that you could serve together. Visit a nursing home together, you may be able to find out who doesn't often get visitors and spend some time with them. Have your children use their gifts – if they play an instrument they could play some peaceful music for the nursing home residents. If they are crafty they could make some cards for the residents to let them know that they are special. You could make a meal for a new family in the neighbourhood welcoming them to the area and deliver it with a welcome card that your children have made. Write letters to a child that you sponsor or start sponsoring a child as a family. Have the children do jobs around to house raise money for a charity. You could contact some charities to see if there is anything you could do as a family to serve the poor.

Read Deuteronomy 8:1-20

'When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses.....then do not exalt yourself forgetting the Lord your God..'

How well God knows his people! He knew that while the Israelites were humbled and wandering around in the desert they would remain dependant on him but that when they 'settled down' and got into the stable routine of life ,building fine houses and eating the good food off the promised land, that they would be tempted to forget him in their relative prosperity.

In our middle class culture where we are settled, have nice houses, we eat good food and are blessed with many other gifts from God we need to hear this warning.

ACTION: Reflect on verse 3. What does it mean to not live on bread alone but on every word of God? Are you ever tempted to rely on your gifts, talents, money, health as you worship God? How can you cultivate dependency on God in your relative prosperity?

Read Acts 10:1-6

'Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God...'

Here we read about a man Cornelius who was not Jewish however God had taken notice of him! He is described as devout and very generous with his alms giving (v2). Because of this God 'remembers him' and his sacrificial act of worship rises up to God as smoke rises from an altar. This is a fragrant, pleasing offering to God!

When we give generously to others in an attitude of charity to the poor God is pleased and this is an offering or a gift that blesses God.

ACTION: Reflect on Philippians 4:18. Reflect on the words fragrant, acceptable, pleasing. These are the acts of worship that God delights in. How can you make almsgiving (charity to the poor) a more integral part of your worship to God?

Read Isaiah 1:10-17

'What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?'

We have a hard, corrective word here from God. The people are offering 'sacrifices' to God as their act of worship but God is not pleased. Why not?

Doesn't he want goats and rams and incense and celebratory festivals so that he realises how much his people are giving up for him?

What more does he want?

God is frustrated with his people (v14) and he says yet again what he wants is a humble, clean heart. He calls his people to worship him from a heart that is pure in motive and ridden of deep sin. This also importantly, and this is the point of the passage, means learning to do acts of justice in society and caring for the disadvantaged. God calls his people Sodom here reminding them that one of the greatest sins of Sodom was their neglect of the poor. (Ezekiel 16:49)

ACTION: Reflect on verse 17. Is this as important in your worship as it is to God? Pray through verse 18.

Read Genesis 8:20-22

'And when the Lord smelled the pleasing odour...'

Often in the Bible different characters will stop after an event, a revelation or, an encounter with God and set up an altar. On that altar they would place some type of offering to God such as grains, animals, drink. This was their worship. What they were doing was stopping to recognise God's presence, his power, his love and then take an opportunity to give thanks. It functioned as a memorial to remind that person about that encounter, revelation, event they had just experienced with God.

In this case Noah has just had an extraordinary experience with God after the flood. Noah would probably be setting up an altar of worship to thank God for protecting him, to recognise the power and faithfulness of God and to confess that he is not God!

ACTION: How can you stop after an encounter with God and thank him with your worship of him daily? Maybe you can even set up a physical sign as some characters in the Bible did to establish a memorial of that experience, encounter, revelation or help that you attained from God at that time.

Read Luke 10:38-41

'Mary who sat at the Lord's feet...'

How hard is it these days with all the distractions around us to 'sit at the Lords' feet'? It even sounds well... a little lazy to our ears.

Stopping to receive from God is a show of our dependency on him. When we busy ourselves continually we are subtly saying to God 'I have it all under control God you can lean on me!' When we stop, we come to an awareness that God has been at work the whole time quite constantly regardless of all our fussing, striving and activity. Of course if we do this we also need to allow God to do things in his way, his time and with his choice of people....not always what we asked for!

ACTION: This is truly an area that we often laugh off as an unavoidable consequence of modern day life. However it is an area that requires deep repentance if we really are going to allow God to lead us, speak to us and direct all our ways. Take time to ask God to reveal to you how you can change. Maybe there is something you need to fast from to be more dependent on God.

Read Psalm 27

'Come my heart says seek his face...'

The phrase 'one thing' was found in our reading yesterday and also in this psalm. The one thing that God always receives with absolute delight is our seeking of him.

God also passionately seeks us, he wants to be found but we must position ourselves as David did in this Psalm and strip away all that distracts us to focus on that one thing. David wanted to 'behold the beauty of the Lord' in the same way that Mary sat at Jesus' feet gazing into his face.

These two disciples of Jesus teach us to push aside all that distracts, all that clouds our lives and receive from God himself. This is our worship that God will never reject. He accepts this worship with open arms, with pleasure and delight over us.

ACTION: Sit down cross legged on the floor as possibly Mary would have at the feet of Jesus close your eyes but look up and imagine listening to Jesus. What is he saying? Can you feel his delight over you saying to you that you have chosen the right sacrifice to bring to God? You are offering him your attention, your heart and your devotion. He is pleased.

Read Luke 11:1-13

'...at least because of his persistence he will get up...'

Sometimes we don't like to bother people by asking them the same thing too much. We feel like we are nagging. God doesn't mind us bothering him! In fact he tells us to! In this parable we are not meant to see God as a disgruntled neighbour who has to get up and give to his friend in the middle of the night. Rather the point is that God responds to us as we persist in prayer. This is really encouraging! There is something in the heart of God that reacts when we come to him and again and again cry out for his action. We don't know why God does not seem to answer some prayers, however we can hold on to the truth that God encourages us to 'bother' him, he tells us to persist in prayer and he encourages us firmly to ask of him for our needs and the needs of our world. The basis for this persistence according to this passage is the love of God. It says to us that he is good and full of love so on that foundation we have the courage and boldness that we need to ask and ask and ask....

GROUP AND FAMILY ACTION: As we finish up this series we end with the recognition that prayer is the ultimate act of dependency on God. This is a pleasing act of worship to God when we pray. How can you make prayer more of a focus in your life? How can you persist in prayer even though you might want to give up sometimes?

As a family discuss the importance of prayer together and decide on a few things together that you can pray for. Maybe write a list of things or have a prayer page on the fridge with pictures (for children who cannot read yet) to remind the children what you are praying for as a family.

Most younger children will need some direction with praying and will not be able to give you instant prayer requests. Ask them some simple questions like – what about your

family makes you happy? If a child says “playing games” then you could thank God for fun times with your family playing games. You could ask about their friends at school pray for them and even their teachers.

You could ask the same things about God. What about God makes you happy? If they answer that “He loves me” then you can thank God that he loves you.

To go a little further you could ask the question is there anything that you did today or this week that you should ask God for forgiveness for? Remember to look outward too and have your children pray for their friends to one day know Jesus. This is a great beginning step in having your children aware that God loves everyone, including their friends, and it brings awareness to opportunities they might have to share about Jesus with them.

What do I do now?

Now that the series is over you have a few days before Good Friday coming up this week. You could do a few things in this week leading up to Easter when the Christian community celebrates the Risen Lord Jesus.

- Go over the last couple of weeks devotions this week and ask God to highlight some key things that he was saying to you.
- Reflect on how you can make changes to your life after your experience in reading the devotions and doing the life group inspirations over these four weeks.
- Take a look at some of the family activities suggested. Think about how to implement them in a consistent way to make them part of your routine as a family
- Celebrate communion with your family on Thursday night which is Maundy Thursday the day we remember when Jesus washed the disciples feet
- Take a look at some of the charities listed on the charities page and see if you would like to make a regular contribution with family or friends. How can you get involved rather than just sending money?
- Plan to celebrate the Risen Lord Jesus in a special way with family and friends on Sunday

‘Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me and the God of peace will be with you’. Philippians 4:9



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