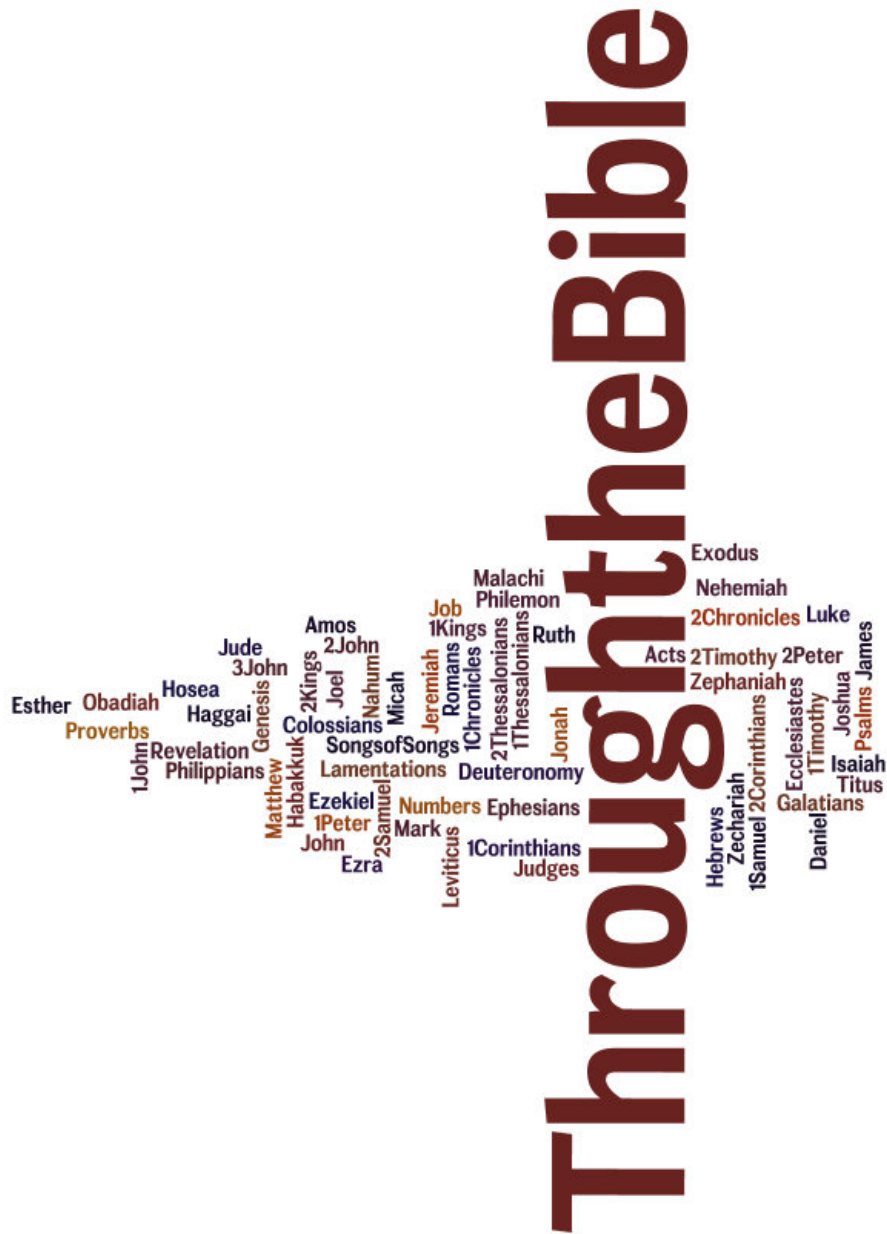




# Cornton Baptist Church

Demonstrating God's love in action  
in the community of Cornton



August 2013

*What God has joined together, let man not separate. (v.6)*

A little girl at playgroup heard the story of Snow White for the first time. She was so enthusiastic about the story she retold it at the tea table. After telling how the prince had arrived on his white horse and kissed Snow White back to life she said, half asking, ‘And do you know what happened then?’ ‘Of course,’ said her big brother, ‘they lived happily ever after.’ ‘No they didn’t,’ responded the girl, keen to tell the rest of the story herself, ‘they got married.’

The implication may well be that marriage isn’t always living happily ever after. And certainly in our day and age that seems to be the case. Divorce is so easy and is seen as an easy way out. Marriage is almost a thing of convenience and when it is no longer convenient we end it.

Divorce had begun to be a contentious issue in Jesus’ day. One camp asserted that men might divorce their wives for almost any reason; the other faction allowed for divorce only if the wife was immoral. The religious leaders are keen to catch Jesus out and test him on this issue, so they come and ask him if it is lawful to divorce for any and every reason (v.3). Jesus does not answer that question directly and go through every situation case by case. He sidestepped the petty debate over technicalities. He went back to God’s original design and purpose for marriage: to join a male and a female together in an inseparable bond (v.4-6). Specifically, two separate individuals would leave their families of origin and come together to form an entirely new entity. ‘*They are no longer two but one*’ (v.6). This explains why husbands and wives were never meant to separate, and also explains the tremendous pain felt when divorce occurs.

Jesus has a high view of marriage and we ought to as well. Choose your spouse carefully. If you are married then work at it with all your heart. If you are not married then pray for those who are – that God would protect that marriage and that their love for each other would continue to grow.

**Pray:** thanking God for the gift of your spouse.

**Reflect:** how can I practically show my love for my spouse today?

*The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve. (v.28)*

Eta Linnemann had a position that few achieved and many envied as a theology professor in a German university. Yet for all her academic acclaim, Eta felt something was missing. At the invitation of her students, she attended an evangelical prayer meeting and committed her life to Christ. She then resigned her position at the university and went to Indonesia to teach in a Bible college as a missionary. She found true fulfilment in her work of service rather than in what the world considered success.

For many that seems odd. We want to be the best and achieve the best, and earn fame and fortune. Being part of God's team means being different and being willing to lay down what the world values as important. Here in Matthew 20 we find a mother coming to Jesus with a request for her sons. She loves them with all her heart and wants the best for them. Her sons are James and John and they have been following Jesus for some time now. They know about the Kingdom of God that Jesus has been speaking of and have no doubt shared that with mum. She asks if they can sit at his right and left in his kingdom. She wants them to have privileged seats. Jesus explains that this is not his call and that they do not understand what they are asking.

The rest of the disciples get upset by the request from the brothers' mum. They are indignant we read. Jesus then explains an important lesson about kingdom living – we are to serve rather than be served. He tells them that even he has come to serve others and not to be served.

We live in an ambitious world. We want to know who is the best, fastest, smartest, strongest, loudest, longest, and richest. Eta got it right. She was willing to lay aside all of that in order to serve. The believer's talents are not to be laid up for self - they are to be laid out in service. What gifts do you have? Consider how you can use them to serve others.

**Pray:** asking God to help you look out for the needs of others.

**Reflect:** how can I serve someone else in the church family today?

*And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him. (v.32)*

There was a man who had worked all of his life, had saved all of his money, and was a real miser when it came to his money. Just before he died, he said to his wife, “When I die, I want you to take all my money and put it in the casket with me. I want to take my money to the afterlife with me.” And so he got his wife to promise him with all of her heart that when he died, she would put all of the money in the casket with him. Well, he died. He was stretched out in the casket, his wife was sitting there in black, and her friend was sitting next to her. When they finished the ceremony, just before the undertakers got ready to close the casket, the wife said, “Wait just a minute!” She had a box with her; she came over with the box and put it in the casket. Then the undertakers locked the casket down, and they rolled it away. So her friend said, “Girl, I know you weren’t fool enough to put all that money in there with your husband.” The loyal wife replied, “Listen, I’m a Christian, I can’t go back on my word. I promised him that I was going to put that money in that casket with him.” You mean to tell me you put that money in the casket with him!!!!?” “I sure did,” said the wife. “I got it all together, put it into my account and wrote him a check. If he can cash it, he can spend it.”

For that silly husband, it was too late. And for the religious leaders here in Matthew 21 it is going to be too late as well. Jesus has just ridden into Jerusalem on a donkey. This is Passion Week and he is heading to the cross although only he knows this at this point. The religious leaders are indignant at what is happening we read in verse 15 and then in verse 23 they challenge his authority. Jesus tells them a parable which he uses to show them that they have had ample opportunity to hear the gospel and respond, and yet they refused. It is too late for them.

Don’t let it be too late for you. If you have yet to confess Jesus as Lord, do it soon before it is too late. And tell others so they hear in time as well.

**Pray:** asking God to give us the boldness and courage to share the gospel.

**Reflect:** who can I share the good news with today?

*All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. (v.40)*

In the Jewish books of the Law, the first 5 books of our English Bibles, there are 613 laws given to people. Of these laws, 248 are considered positives in nature while 365 are considered to be negative. That is, some compel us to do certain things while others forbid us from certain activities. It is these 613 Laws that formed the basis for Jewish belief and practice and it seems to have been the practice of the religious elite, the Pharisees and the Scribes, to spend most of their time debating which of these 613 laws was the greatest in importance. And so when the Pharisees heard that the Sadducees trick questions to Jesus have failed, they try and catch Jesus out with a serious question that they often debate the answer to here in Matthew 22. They ask Jesus which is the greatest commandment.

Jesus takes all 613 rules and regulations and sums them up in 2 great statements of divine truth. Jesus, in essence, boils all the Law, the Commandments and all the teachings of the prophets down into one word: Love.

He says in verse 37 *‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’* We are to love God above everything else. This neatly summarises the first four of the Ten Commandments. If we love God we will not want to put anyone else first or make and worship idols, nor misuse God’s name and we will want to keep the Sabbath holy.

He moves on though from the supreme commandment to offer a secondary commandment *‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’* And here he neatly summarises the remaining six of the Ten Commandments. If we love our neighbour we will not want to murder them, steal from them, falsely accuse them, etc. He then says that everything in the Law hangs on these two. And how right he is!

**Pray:** asking God to help us love Him and love others.

**Reflect:** how can I show my love for God and others today?

*For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. (v.12)*

Booker T. Washington, the renowned black educator, was an outstanding example of the truth ‘A truly humble man is hard to find, yet God delights to honour such selfless people.’ Shortly after he took over the presidency of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, he was walking in an exclusive section of town when he was stopped by a wealthy white woman. Not knowing the famous Mr. Washington by sight, she asked if he would like to earn a few dollars by chopping wood for her. Because he had no pressing business at the moment, Professor Washington smiled, rolled up his sleeves, and proceeded to do the humble chore she had requested. When he was finished, he carried the logs into the house and stacked them by the fireplace. A little girl recognised him and later revealed his identity to the lady.

The next morning the embarrassed woman went to see Mr. Washington in his office at the Institute and apologised profusely. “It’s perfectly all right, Madam,” he replied. “Occasionally I enjoy a little manual labour. Besides, it’s always a delight to do something for a friend.” She shook his hand warmly and assured him that his meek and gracious attitude had endeared him and his work to her heart. Not long afterward she showed her admiration by persuading some wealthy acquaintances to join her in donating thousands of dollars to the Tuskegee Institute.

Humility is not one of the words Jesus would have used to describe the religious leaders. He issues seven woes against them here in Matthew 23 as he warns his followers not to do what they do for they do not practice what they preach. He says that they do things to be seen and noticed whereas their motive should be to do things out of love and in service to others. Jesus himself said back in chapter 20 that he came to serve and not to be served. He was, as Paul describes in Philippians, the humble servant, and we are encouraged to have the same attitude as him.

**Pray:** asking God to help us obey his commands in all we do.

**Reflect:** how can I serve another person today?

*So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. (v.44)*

A surprise publishing phenomenon of the late nineties and early new century has been the success of the bestselling Left Behind novels. Publishers Weekly called them “the most successful Christian fiction series ever.” ABC News said the books are “fun and engaging, with fast-paced plotting, global drama, regular cliff-hanger endings, and what has to be the quintessential villain: Satan himself.”

Authors Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins want the stories to reach a mainstream audience with biblical truth. Even one secular reviewer could see that “the characters are constructed to cause readers to identify with them in their search for meaning and, in time, faith.” They are only fiction.

People today would be well served looking to Matthew 24 and reading what Jesus has to say about the end of the age. He speaks of the signs that we will see. There will be many wars and rumours of war; famines and earthquakes; nation rising against nation, and even kingdom against kingdom. There will be some who falsely claim to be Jesus. Just the other week on holiday I read of an Australian who claims to have been reborn as Jesus and his wife as Mary Magdalene. And people are gullible enough to believe it. Jesus warns that we need to be on our toes and be sharp to notice such evil around us and avoid it. He calls for us to stand firm and to keep preaching the gospel (v.13-14).

So there are definite signs around us. Does that mean we can make a date for Jesus’ return? Not at all...but it is undoubtedly getting closer. Jesus says the day and hour is unknown. He urges us to keep watch and to be ready. It says in verse 43 that he will come like a thief in the night – unexpected. How can we be ready for his return? Keep obeying His Word and avoiding sin.

**Pray:** asking God for strength to stand firm in these days.

**Reflect:** am I ready for Jesus’ return?

*Well done good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things. (v.23)*

Speaking in Edinburgh, missionary John Williams held his audience spellbound with thrilling accounts of God's work among the tribes people of the New Hebrides Islands. A soft-spoken missionary followed Williams with a brief report of his work. In a low and trembling voice he said, "My friends, I have no remarkable success to relate like Mr. Williams. I've laboured for Christ in a far-off land for many years and have seen only small results. But I have this comfort: when the Master comes to reckon with His servants, He will not say, 'Well done, thou good and successful servant,' but 'well done, thou good and faithful servant.' I have tried to be faithful!"

And that is the great encouragement that comes from Jesus' parable of the talents in Matthew 25. Jesus speaks of a man being given five talents who returns a gain of five, a man given two talents who returns a gain of two, and a man with one talent who hid it and gave it straight back to the master. Jesus speaks well of the two who have returned gains but notice it is not because of the great success they may have gained – it is because they were faithful in using what was given to them. The man who hid his talent was chastised for being lazy and doing nothing with it.

From Jesus' story here we learn that unequal gifts exercised with equal diligence will receive equal reward. In the parable, talents represent God given abilities to carry out God assigned responsibilities. God has given each of at least one gift and ability in life. He wants us to use those gifts in his service.

What's important is not how much we accomplish, but our motives and the quality of our labours. God is looking for faithful servants who will use the gifts he has given. What are you doing with the gift(s) God has given you?

**Pray:** thanking God for the opportunity to serve him.

**Reflect:** what gift has God given me and am I using it?



*Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing but the body is weak. (v.41)*

Joe Lewis was the heavyweight boxing champion of the world. He fought 71 times professionally; he lost only once. During the decade and a half he held his title, he defended it 25 times. Bill Stern, the voice of American sports on radio, decided toward the end of the Brown Bomber's career that he would interview him and find out the technique or the secret that Lewis employed in fighting his opponents and how he could win over people who were at times much larger than he. His answer was very simple "I study my opponent; I plan my fight very carefully. The results are always the same. 1) I'm never surprised and 2) I stay on the offensive". That sounds like how we ought to handle our enemy, Satan. Stay alert.

Matthew 26 is big chapter – not just because of its size but because of the events that begin to unfold in the latter days of Jesus' life. He is anointed with fine perfume at Bethany, shares the Lord's Supper with his disciples explaining why they should keep this meal in future days, predicts Peter's denial, prays for strength and courage in the Garden of Gethsemane and is then arrested and tried. Jesus watched and prayed and he did not fall into temptation.

The same cannot be said for the disciples. They didn't watch and pray and they fell into trouble. Look at Peter as the prime example of falling into temptation and sin. He was overconfident. When Jesus warned him about denial Peter boldly proclaimed that even if he had to die he would not disown Jesus (v.35). He lacked prayer. It was late and he was tired and he didn't see the importance so he fell asleep with the others. He followed from a distance. Instead of staying close to Jesus he lagged behind. He warmed himself at the enemy's fire.

Friends, let us watch and pray. Don't be overconfident – even the best of us can fall into sin. Pray always and stay close to the Lord.

**Pray:** asking God to help us stay close to him.

**Reflect:** do I watch and pray so that I do not fall into temptation?

*And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.  
(v.50)*

In 1968, Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, Jr., took command of the American naval forces in Vietnam. In an effort to reduce U.S. casualties, he ordered the waterways sprayed with the chemical defoliant Agent Orange. This would push back the jungle and make it harder for North Vietnamese to ambush Navy river patrol boats at point blank range. One of those boats was commanded by 21-year-old Lt. Elmo Zumwalt III. The tragedy and irony of the story is that today he suffers from a usually fatal form of lymph cancer that both father and son believe was caused by his exposure to Agent Orange. Theirs is the heartbreaking story of a father who made a decision that unintentionally resulted in great suffering for his own son. Yet they both agree that it was the right one.

In conquering sin and death to provide salvation for us, God the Father intentionally made a decision that resulted in immeasurable agony for His only begotten Son. After deciding to save the human race through His Son, He watched Him suffer much. Matthew 27 details Jesus before Pilate and the rejection of the crowds who cried out ‘Crucify him!’ We then see the mockery of the crowd, the lashes of the whip, the imprint of the crown of thorns, the spitting and the striking on the head with the staff.

Jesus is then led out to be crucified. Here he suffers more - the pain of the nails through His hands and feet, the inexpressible weight and humiliation of our sins, and the indescribable agony of isolation and abandonment. And then he breathes his last, satisfied that he has accomplished the task – the forgiveness of our sin.

I don't like reading this chapter if I'm honest because it brings me face to face with the reality of what Christ had to suffer for my sin. And yet it always serves as a great reminder of the love God the Father and God the Son have for me. And my heart is filled with gratitude and praise.

**Pray:** thanking God for Jesus.

**Reflect:** am I grateful for Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for my sin?

*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations. (v.19)*

A familiar legend tells of a conversation between Jesus and the angel Gabriel after the Lord ascended into heaven. They talked of what had happened down here - of Christ's birth, His life and ministry, His death, and His resurrection. Then Gabriel asked, "And how will the people of the world hear about all of this?" Jesus replied, "Well, I have a little company of friends there whom I have asked to publish it." "But what if, for any reason, they let you down and fail to do it?" To which the Lord answered, "I have no other plan."

God's plan is for us to go and share the gospel message. And Jesus has given us the commission to go and do it. Matthew 28 brings the great news that Jesus has risen from the dead. He has now accomplished all he set out to – he died paying the price for our sins, and has conquered death and hell and evil by rising to life once more. He is aware that the world needs to hear this good news. He gathers his disciples around him and tells them that all authority has been given to him. With the full authority of heaven he now tells them to go and make disciples. This is his mandate to his followers. And it is his mandate to us as well.

They have a mission to fulfil and a message to share. We often get this verse confused and think we are to go overseas to share the gospel. And that is true. But the word translated as go literally means as you are going. And so as we are going about our daily lives and business we are to be making disciples. We do that at home and overseas. Everyone needs to hear. We are called to share the gospel message with them, to teach them to obey everything Jesus commanded them, and to baptise them.

And I think it is worth noting that we have a mentor to help us as well. Jesus promises to be with us always as we take up this mandate and fulfil the mission of sharing the message of the gospel. The Holy Spirit is our constant guide and help. What are you waiting for? Go and make disciples.

**Pray:** thanking Jesus that he is with us always.

**Reflect:** am I making disciples?

*Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. (v.35)*

Irish flutist James Galway is a classical music superstar. But as he neared the age of 50, he looked closely at his life and decided he was not going to fall into the trap of “getting old and famous and playing bad concerts.” So he started practicing for several hours every day. He began his personal overhaul by playing scales. He said it was the biggest shock of his life to discover how out of shape he was. “I could play concertos and repertory pieces. But the scales were stiff, and they were inconsistent from key to key.” James Galway - master of the flute - playing scales! He went back to basics.

Jesus never forgot the basics in life either. Time alone with God is vital for life. Time praying in the quiet at the start of the day is essential for healthy living. Jesus ministry has just begun. He had a busy day teaching in the synagogue and then he healed a demon possessed man. As he sat relaxing after sunset all the sick and demon possessed came to him to be healed and he took the time to do it. He must have been tired and worn out. And yet we read that early the next morning he got up and went to pray. He knew he had another busy day ahead. He was going out to preach and teach. But before he did any of that he wanted to spend time alone with his Father. He wanted to pray. He relied on God to walk with him, lead him and guide him.

And this is a great model for our life. Life can be busy and our days demanding, but we must make time to pray. We often say I’ll make time later but then the day is crowded by so many things that we do not have the time. Best to get up that few minutes earlier and go into a room on our own and pray. Ask for God’s leading and guiding. Ask for his presence with you by his Spirit. Rely on him for all that you will face today.

Get back to basics – spend time each time in prayer.

**Pray:** thanking God for the privilege of prayer.

**Reflect:** do I begin each day alone with God in prayer and devotion?

*Son, your sins are forgiven. (v.5)*

Social worker Margaret Sangster told her colleagues about seeing a young boy in an urban ghetto who appeared little more than a bit of twisted human flesh. He had been struck by a car several months earlier and had not received proper medical attention.

Although he was not a part of her caseload, she took the boy to an orthopaedist, who performed surgery on his legs. Two years later the boy walked into Sangster's office without crutches. His recovery was complete. Margaret recalled that as the two embraced, she thought, 'If I accomplish nothing else in my life, I have made a real difference with at least this one!'

Sangster then told her colleagues, "This was all several years ago now. Where do you think that boy is today?" They suggested that he might be a teacher, a physician, or a social worker. With deep emotion, she responded, "No, he's in the penitentiary for one of the foulest crimes a human can commit." Then she said, "I was instrumental in teaching him how to walk again, but there was no one to teach him where to walk."

This woman was close enough to care...but her care only extended to the boy's health. In our passage today we see a situation where Jesus is close enough to care and we see him forgive a man's sin (his biggest problem, his spiritual need) and also allow him to walk again (his physical need). In our dealings with people we have to be close enough to care and then show that care as we help them physically and also spiritually. This man's friend showed their care too by bringing him to Jesus. Do we bring our friends to Jesus?

Our mission is to point people to Jesus. Only through Him can those with broken bodies, broken dreams, broken homes, and broken hearts experience wholeness of life.

**Pray:** for someone you know who needs to come to the Saviour.

**Reflect:** do I point people to Jesus?

*He appointed twelve – designating them apostles – that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive our demons. (v.14)*

When the United States launched its space program in 1958, seven men were chosen to become the first astronauts. Imagine the excitement of Scott Carpenter, Gordon Cooper, John Glenn, Gus Grissom, Walter Schirra, Alan Shepard, and Deke Slayton. They were selected to go where no one had ever gone before. Yet, as astronauts they knew they would face unforeseen dangers, challenges, and trials. Each of them realised that the thrill of being chosen was tempered with the fear of the unknown future.

Imagine another set of men who were chosen for an important mission: the twelve apostles Jesus chose one day on a mountainside near the Sea of Galilee. These men left behind their occupations and families to dedicate themselves to this radical new teacher. They didn't know what kind of political, religious, or financial challenges they would face. Yet they followed Jesus. They left behind everything that was familiar and safe in order to follow Jesus and then take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

I'm always encouraged when I look at the disciples because they are an ordinary bunch of people. They are weak and flawed. These men lacked spiritual understanding. They lacked humility. They lacked faith. They lacked commitment. They lacked power. These men were always getting into trouble; missing the point of Christ's teachings; lashing out at people who were different; saying the wrong thing; walking away from their commitment to Jesus; among other failures and problems. In spite of their weaknesses, the Lord used these men to turn the world upside down for His glory. If He can use them, surely He can use us too! That gives me hope today!

Jesus comes looking for us today. He calls us to leave behind all that is familiar and safe in order to follow him and serve him. Are you up for the challenge?

**Pray:** committing to follow Jesus and to serve him.

**Reflect:** am I serving Jesus or sitting on the sidelines?

*Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead don't you put it on its stand? (v.21)*

Nee Yung Fa was a Ningbo Cotton Dealer, and he was converted through the ministry of Hudson Taylor. He had also been a leader in what was a reformed Buddhist sect, which would have nothing to do with idolatry, didn't worship things, and that was genuinely searching for truth - but in all the wrong places. At the end of one of Hudson Taylor's sermons, Nee Yung Fa stood in Hudson Taylor's place, and turned to address the audience and said these words: "I have long searched for the truth as my father did before me, and I have travelled far but I haven't found it. I found no rest in Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, but I do find rest in what I heard tonight. From now on I believe in Jesus".

Nee took Hudson Taylor to a meeting of the Buddhist sect he was a leader of, and he allowed Hudson Taylor to explain the reason for the change of life that was in him. Then eventually Nee spoke and Taylor was impressed with the clarity and the power with which he spoke - and another member of the group was converted that very night, and both Nee and he were baptised. Then came the question: "How long has the gospel been known in England?" Nee asked Hudson Taylor. "For several hundred years", replied an embarrassed Taylor, vaguely. "What! And you have only now come to preach to us? My father sought after the truth for more than 20 years and died without finding it! Why didn't you come sooner!"

In speaking to the people in Mark 4:21 and following Jesus challenges them to consider what they do with a lamp. They don't hide the light that comes out but rather they let it shine so that all can see. And he calls for us to do the same with the light of the gospel. Far too often though we hide our faith and we don't speak out for Jesus. Many in the world around are stumbling around in the darkness surrounded by sin. We can light their way for them and show them the Saviour. What's stopping you?

**Pray:** asking for God's forgiveness for the times we have hidden the light of the gospel instead of revealing Jesus to others.

**Reflect:** do I let my light shine for Jesus or do I hide it away?

*Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you. (v.19)*

A young woman, excited about her salvation, wanted to share the gospel with others, so she asked her pastor where she might go to serve most effectively. He told her to come back the next day and he would have an answer ready for her. When she returned to his office at the specified time, the pastor handed her a folded slip of paper. "I'm suggesting someone who needs you right now more than anyone else in all the world," he said.

The young woman quickly left the pastor's study, eager to read where her mission field might be. When she opened the note, she saw that the pastor had written two words: "Your father." She had been so enthusiastic about reaching the lost in distant lands that she had neglected someone close to home. Convicted of her negligence, she acted on the pastor's advice. She visited her dad regularly, ministered to his physical needs, showered her love upon him, and witnessed to him.

It is amazing sometimes how we do exactly the same and forget those close to us. We are so busy wanting to go out to the ends of the earth that we miss the need right in front of our eyes. Here in Mark 5:1-20 we have the dramatic account of Jesus setting a violent, self-destructive man free from the powerful demons that possessed him. When the restored man begged to stay with Jesus as He travelled, the Lord told him, '*Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.*'

And the man stayed and shared his story with those close to him and we read that the people were amazed by what they heard. Our call is to share our faith with others. We can do that at home just as well as we can overseas. And people at home know us, and so they will see and identify with the change in our lives.

**Pray:** for opportunities to share your faith with those close to you.

**Reflect:** do I share my faith with my family?



*Come with by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest. (v.31)*

According to tradition, when the apostle John was overseer in Ephesus, his hobby was raising pigeons. It is said that on one occasion another elder passed his house as he returned from hunting and saw John playing with one of his birds. The man gently chided him for spending his time so frivolously.

John looked at the hunter's bow and remarked that the string was loose. "Yes," said the elder, "I always loosen the string of my bow when it's not in use. If it stayed tight, it would lose its resilience and fail me in the hunt."

John responded, "And I am now relaxing the bow of my mind so that I may be better able to shoot the arrows of divine truth."

We cannot do our best work with nerves taut or frayed from constant pressure. Life is busy and frantic. We rush through it at hundred miles and hour and rarely pause for breath. Much is expected of us often in the workplace. Even in church life it can be very hectic. We all need time to stop and rest though. And whether that be holiday at various points during the year or hobby on a regular basis during the week, it is good for us to pause and relax.

Jesus knew that. God his Father had begun the practice at creation. God worked for six days in creation then rested on the seventh and admired his work. Sabbath rest is vital to healthy living. Jesus knew his disciples had been busy serving him and he saw people keep coming so they could not even eat, so he took them away to a quiet spot to rest. He encouraged them to slow down and to recharge the batteries.

Let's make sure we take time to stop during each day and week so that we do not burn out.

**Pray:** thanking God for the pattern of work and rest.

**Reflect:** do I take time out to rest and relax?

*She went home and found her child lying on the bed and the demon gone.  
(v.30)*

How do you handle things that initially discourage you? Do you call it quits or push on?

Two frogs fell into a can of cream - or so I've heard it told.  
The sides of the can were shiny and steep, the cream was deep and cold,  
"Oh, what's the use?" said No. 1, "tis fate - no help's around -  
Good-bye, my friend! Good-bye, sad world!" And weeping still, he  
drowned.

But No. 2 of sterner stuff, dog paddled in surprise,  
The while he wiped his creamy face and dried his creamy eyes.  
"I'll swim awhile, at least," he said - or so it has been said -  
"It wouldn't really help the world if one more frog was dead."  
An hour or two he kicked and swam - not once he stopped to mutter,  
But kicked and swam, and swam and kicked, then hopped out, via butter.

Persistence pays off sometimes. And that is what the Syrophenician woman discovered. In this strange little story a Gentile woman comes begging Jesus to help her daughter. Her daughter is possessed by a demon. Jesus speaks a seemingly random phrase about letting the children eat their fill before their bread is thrown to the dogs. It seems he is saying that the Jews are to hear of the good news first and to receive the miracles Jesus brings before the gospel will go to the Gentiles.

The woman is persistent though and does not give up. She pleads with Jesus saying that even the dogs get the crumbs that fall from the table. And with that Jesus heals her daughter.

We should persist in life and not give up. Just because we do not see a ready answer to prayer does not mean we should stop. We should PUSH – pray until something happens.

**Pray:** asking God to meet a need in your life.

**Reflect:** do I persist in prayer?

*For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. (v.35)*

Shortly after the Civil War ended, General William T. Sherman's victorious army was scheduled to march in a triumphal parade in a large city. On the night before, Sherman called General Oliver O. Howard to his room and said, "General, you were at the head of one of the divisions that marched with me through Georgia, and you ought rightfully to ride at the head of your division in the parade tomorrow. But I've been asked to let the general who preceded you in command represent the division. I don't know what to do." General Howard replied, "I think I am entitled to represent my division, since I led them to victory." "Yes, you are," said Sherman, "but I believe you are a Christian, and I was wondering if Christian considerations might lead you to yield your rights for the sake of peace." "In that case," said Howard, "of course I'll yield." "All right," said General Sherman, "I will go arrange it, and will you please report to me in the morning at 9? You will be riding with me at the head of the army." General Howard's willingness to submit to his commander and deny himself his rightful place led to the position of greatest honour.

Jesus speaks something of that here in Mark 8 34 and following. He speaks of his own life and his willingness to take up the cross in order to save us. When Jesus was mocked and opposed and then beaten and whipped, he did not insist on his rights but willingly went to the cross. Peter speaks of that in 1 Peter 2:23 *'When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.'*

Jesus then encourages his followers that those who want to save their lives will lose it but whoever loses their life for him and the gospel will save theirs. If we try and do all we can humanly speaking to help ourselves and save ourselves we will fail at it. However, if we lay down our life and our rights, and trust in Jesus we will be saved. There is only one way we can be saved – and that is through the atoning death of Jesus.

**Pray:** thanking God for Jesus' atoning death for us.

**Reflect:** am I willing to lay down my life for Jesus?

*'If you can,' said Jesus. 'Everything is possible for him who believes.'*  
(v.23)

Doctors and nurses in the Intensive Care unit of a hospital thought they had a problem. Patients always died in the same bed at the same time on the same day. It was always on Sunday morning at about 11a.m., regardless of the patient's illness or medical condition. This puzzled the doctors and some even thought that it had something to do with the supernatural. No one could solve the mystery as to why the deaths occurred around 11 a.m. on Sundays. The hospital assembled a worldwide team of experts to investigate the cause of the incidents. The next Sunday morning, a few minutes before 11 a.m., all the doctors and nurses nervously gathered outside the unit waiting anxiously to see if the esteemed panel of experts could determine what the terrible phenomenon was all about. Some were holding wooden crosses, prayer books and other holy objects to ward off the evil spirits. Just when the clock struck 11a.m., a part time janitor entered the unit and calmly unplugged the life support system of the first bed so he could plug in the vacuum cleaner.

People will let us down. Jesus won't. Just because we as disciples fail at some things doesn't mean that Jesus is a failure. We come to the story of the man who brought his son who was possessed by an evil spirit to Jesus. He says in verse 18 that he had asked Jesus' disciples but they couldn't do anything about it. Remember that back in Mark 6:7 Jesus sent his disciples out in twos to heal people. There is a problem here. Jesus speaks of the unbelieving people among them. And then the man has the audacity to say *'if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.'*

If? Imagine asking Jesus if he can do something. He is all powerful. He can do all things. Later we learn that nothing is impossible for God. We would do well to remember that we can ask God for anything because he can do all things. We shouldn't put our trust in men but in God alone.

**Pray:** asking God to help you in whatever situation you face today.

**Reflect:** do I trust in God alone or do I still try to do things on my own?

*Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. (v.14)*

Many years ago, missionary Robert Moffat learned the importance of not overlooking children. Only a few people had come to one of his meetings because of bad weather. Although disheartened, he preached his message, not noticing a small boy who was operating the bellows of the organ. He had been brought to church by his parents. Before Moffat was finished, that boy had decided to become a missionary. His name was David Livingstone, who grew up to become God's pioneering servant in Africa.

We as parents, school teachers, church workers, and neighbours and friends must never overlook the children whom God puts into our lives. Remember, the kingdom of God is for children too. And we have a responsibility to be bringing our children to Jesus. Here in Mark 10 we find people bringing their children to Jesus so he will touch them. Parents and grandparents, friends and neighbours brought their own children and the little children of their neighbourhood to Jesus. They wanted Jesus to bless them and pray for them. This was common place in the day for the people would bring their children to the Rabbi to have him pray for the children and bless them.

His disciples tell the people off. Now we don't know why they did this - were they protecting Jesus because he was busy and needed a rest, or did they simply think children were not important, or maybe there was some other reason. In any case they rebuked the people.

Jesus recognises the importance of children. Jesus is busy. Crowds are around him as they always are but Jesus stops and picks up the children. He speaks to them and he blesses them. Just because our children are little does not mean we should ignore them. Just because our children are little does not mean that we should not care for them. Spend time with them. The encouragement is for us to always welcome children in Jesus' name.

**Pray:** for each of the children who are part of the church family.

**Reflect:** do I take time to encourage the children in the church?

*Have faith in God. (v.22)*

John Patten was a Scottish missionary in the 1800's. He once travelled to a group of islands in the South-West Pacific called the New Hebrides. He wanted to tell the tribal people there about Jesus and his great love for them. Patten was in constant danger of losing his life as these people were cannibals. Patten worked on translating John's gospel into their language but could find no word of theirs for 'belief' or 'trust'. Nobody on the islands trusted anyone else.

Patten eventually thought of a way to get a word. One day when his native servant came in, Patten raised both his feet off the floor and sat back in his chair. He asked the servant what he was doing. The servant replied using a word which meant 'to lean your whole weight upon.' This was the expression that Patten then used. Faith is leaning our whole weight on Jesus and what he has done for us on the cross.

When Jesus says 'have faith in God' to the disciples he is meaning to be constantly trusting God; to be living in an attitude of dependence on Him. So often in life we simply have faith in our chair or some other object around us. We trust it will hold us up or support us. We need more than that for life though. We need the help and support of the God who made us and knows us and loves us. So our faith and trust need to be in him alone.

In Mark 11:12-24, Jesus taught His disciples the importance of having the right object of faith. It began when they overheard Jesus curse a fig tree (v.14). The next morning, Peter exclaimed, '*Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered*' (v.21). Jesus replied, '*Have faith in God*' (v.22). Having declared God as the object of faith, Jesus assured them that they too could pray for and receive amazing results through God-centred faith. And so may we. Have faith in God.

**Pray:** that God would increase your faith.

**Reflect:** is my faith in God alone?

*I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. (v.43)*

Guest speaker John De Vries challenged the congregation to give to missions. As the people filled out pledge cards, he noticed a young boy write something and show it to his parents, who smiled approvingly. A minute later he saw him whisper something into his dad's ear. His father was obviously amused.

After the service the father told John that the youngster had pledged his entire weekly allowance, but then had whispered, "Dad, I guess you know that I'll be needing a raise." No wonder he was so amused. In spite of the boy's attempt to cover his loss, his parents were pleased with the willing generosity of his gift.

Jesus sat in the temple one day near the treasury and watched as people walked by and deposited their gifts for the temple (v.41). Some made a show of it, perhaps so others could see how much they had given. Just then a poor woman came by and threw in two "mites."

A mite was the least valuable coin in circulation. Thus the widow's gift was very small, amounting to nothing in most folk's eyes. But our Lord saw what others did not see. She had given '*all she had*' (v.44). The widow wasn't trying to draw attention to herself. She was simply doing what she was able to do. And Jesus noticed!

Jesus pointed this out to his disciples to teach them an amazing truth about giving willingly of what you have to the Lord. He didn't do it to say that we are to give all our money away. Rather, He was saying that we must give from a heart that is totally devoted to the Lord and willing to trust Him fully. That's the kind of giving that pleases God.

**Pray:** thanking God for all the good gifts that he has given to us.

**Reflect:** do I recognise that all I have is from the Lord?

*Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. (v.33)*

One of the most memorable games from my childhood days is the game of hide and seek. On many occasions throughout the year, the family would gather at my grandparent's farm. The children would usually start a game of hide and seek. When the game started, someone was chosen to be "it". A spot was chosen to be "base". Whoever was "it" would stand at "base", close their eyes and count to 100. The other players ran and hid. Then it was "its" job to find them before they could return to "base". The game ended when everyone made it back to "base", or when "it" found someone who was hiding. In the next game, the person who was caught became "it".

The part of that game that still echoes in my mind is what "it" would say before he or she came looking for those who were hiding. "It" would always say, "Ready or not, here I come." When "it" said that, you had better be ready, or you were going to be in trouble.

When I read these verses, that old childhood game came back to my memory. Jesus is telling His followers that there will be a day when He will come again. That day will arrive whether people are ready or not. This chapter began with the disciples asking Jesus about the end of time and about the signs accompanying that time period, v.3-4. The rest of this chapter is spent answering their questions.

Jesus says there will be signs to see – he mentions wars, earthquakes and famines, as well as persecution for believers. We are to watch for them and be ready for his return. These are signs though. We do not know the exact time because that has been hidden from us. He tells us the exact day or hour is only known by God. We are to get ready. That means living for Christ each and every day. And it also means telling others so that they too have the opportunity to respond in faith. This is not a game...it will happen. Be alert. Watch.

**Pray:** thanking God for the hope of heaven that we have.

**Reflect:** am I looking for Christ's return?



*She has done a beautiful thing to me. (v.6)*

One day while walking with some children and palace attendants, Queen Mary was caught in a sudden thunderstorm. The queen quickly took shelter on the porch of a home. To avoid attracting a crowd, she disguised her appearance by putting on a hat that partly covered her face and a plain coat she borrowed from one of her attendants. The queen then knocked at the door and asked to borrow an umbrella. "I'll send it back tomorrow," she told the unfriendly woman who answered the door. Despite the assurances about returning her umbrella, the woman did not want to lend her best umbrella. So she retrieved an old umbrella stored in the attic. One rib was broken, and there were several holes in it. With a haughty attitude and scornful words, she handed it to the unrecognised monarch.

The next day the woman had another visitor - a man with gold braid on his uniform and an envelope in his hand. "The queen sent me with this letter," he said, "and also asked me to thank you personally for the loan of your umbrella." The woman was stunned, and then broken-hearted. She burst into tears. "This is just horrible - I missed an opportunity to give my queen my very best!" she sobbed. "And my attitude was shameful," she added.

As we begin Mark 14 and the final days of Jesus' life we find Jesus' reclining at a table in the company of others. A woman comes in with a jar filled with very expensive perfume. This may well have been the family inheritance and all she had of worth, yet she brought it, broke it open and poured the perfume on Jesus' head. She was willing to bring her best to worship Jesus.

Those around Jesus moaned about the money wasted that could have been put to better use. Jesus knows what she has done and the significance of it for the days ahead – she has anointed his body for burial. He commends her saying '*she has done a beautiful thing to me.*' What do we give to Jesus? Our best or the shabby leftovers?

**Pray:** repenting for the times we give God second best.

**Reflect:** do I give my best to God at all times?

*“Crucify him!” they shouted. (v.13)*

Once an African chief happened to visit a mission station. Hanging outside the missionary’s hut on a tree was a little mirror. The chief happened to look into the mirror and saw his reflection, complete with terrifying paint and threatening features. He gazed at his own frightening countenance and started back in horror, exclaiming, “Who is that horrible-looking person inside that tree?” “Oh,” the missionary said, “it is not in the tree. The glass is reflecting your own face.” The African would not believe it until he held the mirror in his hand. He said, “I must have the glass. How much will you sell it for?” “Oh,” said the missionary, “I don’t want to sell it.” But the chief begged until he capitulated, thinking it might be best to sell it to avoid trouble. So he named a price and he took the mirror. Exclaiming, “I will never have it making faces at me again,” he threw it down and broke it to pieces.

There is a real sense to which Jesus is a mirror into our lives and when we look we do not like what we see. We see sin in all its ugliness. We see our guilt and shame. And we turn away in disgust. In the opening verses of Mark 15 we see three groups of people who reject Jesus because they cannot cope with who he is, what he taught, and what he revealed about them. The priests are the first to reject Jesus. They have struggled with him from the beginning. He challenges their comfortable lifestyle and their manmade rules. Then there is Pilate who to be fair tries to let Jesus go but capitulates and gives in to the cries of the crowd. And then of course there are the people, the crowd who shout ‘*Crucify him!*’

The King came to Israel just like the prophets said He would. He fulfilled every prophecy. He accomplished everything God said the Messiah would accomplish. Jesus was exactly Who He claimed to be. This King came to His people and He was rejected by them. Let us not reject him. Let us see ourselves as we are (sinners) and wee him for who he is (our Saviour).

**Pray:** thanking God for his gift of a Saviour.

**Reflect:** ask God to examine your heart and reveal your sin – then confess it before a forgiving God.

*Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. (v.15)*

Fritz Kreisler (1875-1962), the world-famous violinist, earned a fortune with his concerts and compositions, but he generously gave most of it away. So, when he discovered an exquisite violin on one of his trips, he wasn't able to buy it.

Later, having raised enough money to meet the asking price, he returned to the seller, hoping to purchase that beautiful instrument. But to his great dismay it had been sold to a collector. Kreisler made his way to the new owner's home and offered to buy the violin. The collector said it had become his prized possession and he would not sell it. Keenly disappointed, Kreisler was about to leave when he had an idea. "Could I play the instrument once more before it is consigned to silence?" he asked. Permission was granted, and the great virtuoso filled the room with such heart-moving music that the collector's emotions were deeply stirred. "I have no right to keep that to myself," he exclaimed. "It's yours, Mr. Kreisler. Take it into the world, and let people hear it."

To us as sinners saved by grace, the gospel is like the rapturous harmonies of heaven. We have no right to keep it to ourselves. Indeed after his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples and he gave them a command to go and share the good news with others. He called them to go into all the world and to preach the good news to all creation.

When something good happens to you, you do not generally want to keep it to yourself – you want to share it. A new job, a new wife, a new child, whatever the good news we cannot but speak of it to others. Why then do we struggle with the gospel? It is the greatest news for us as sinners – Jesus died to save us from our sin, he has been raised to life conquering death and hell and evil, and he ascended to glory to prepare a place for all who will put their faith in him. Let's get out there and share the good news with other sinners.

**Pray:** thanking God for our salvation.

**Reflect:** who can I share the good news with this week?

*For the Mighty One has done great things for me. (v.49)*

I read about a young couple whose business had failed, and they had little money to spend at Christmas. They were going to have to move out of their house after the New Year. But they didn't want their holiday season to be spoiled because of it. So they decided to throw a party. When the guests arrived, they saw a cedar tree decorated with one string of lights and small rolled-up pieces of paper tied to the limbs with ribbon.

“Welcome to our ‘blessing tree!’” they said, beaming. “In spite of hard times, God has blessed us in so many ways that we decided to dedicate our tree to Him. Each piece of paper describes a blessing He has given us this year.”

This couple has faced more trials since then, but they have chosen to stay focused on the Lord. They often remark that the Christmas with the “blessing tree” was one of their most beautiful, because they could testify as Mary did: *‘My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour...the Mighty One has done great things for me.’* (v.47-49).

It can be so hard to focus on the Lord during hard times but Zechariah and Elizabeth did. In the opening verses of Luke's gospel we encounter this couple who are childless and who apparently have been praying for a child despite their old age. I think it is fair to assume they have prayed this for many years. Despite the heartache and pain of barrenness, they still remained focused on God, obeying him and serving him (v.6 & 8). We don't always understand why difficulties like this come to faithful people, yet God always has a plan. We have to simply trust in him.

The challenge for us in difficult times is to keep looking to God and trusting him as well. And to take time as Mary does in her magnificent song (v.46-55) to consider his many blessings and give him thanks and praise for those. It is amazing how in those moments our spirits are lifted.

**Pray:** thanking God for all his many blessings.

**Reflect:** make a list of the ways God has blessed you this past week.

*Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. (v.11)*

Today when we can make international mobile-phone calls, send worldwide e-mail, and download images from space on our computers, it's difficult to imagine the impact of one small satellite the size of a basketball. But on October 4, 1957, the Soviet Union's launching of Sputnik I, the world's first artificial satellite, ushered in the modern Space Age and changed the course of history. Nations rushed to catch up, technological development accelerated, and fear alternated with hope about the meaning of it all for humanity.

But events that alter the present and the future sometimes occur in obscurity. That was true of the birth of Jesus - just one baby, born to an ordinary couple in a small town. But it changed the course of history. The words of an angel spoken to shepherds began to spread: *'Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord'* (v.11). Nineteen centuries later, Phillips Brooks wrote of Bethlehem, "The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight."

The birth of Jesus was the biggest event in human history. God was breaking into the world in human flesh. Jesus, the babe born in the manger, would grow to die a sinner's death on the cross in order to save the world from sin. Yet he was not born into a palace with Hello magazine on hand to show the first photos. No, Mary and Joseph had travelled to Bethlehem to register for a census and could find no where to sleep. They ended up in stable attached to the inn.

The first visitors were not family and friends with balloons and gifts; they were ordinary shepherds still dirty and smelly from looking after their sheep out on the hills. But they grasped the significance of this. An angel had told them after all. Let's marvel again at this wonderful story and praise the God who sent his own son into the world to save us.

**Pray:** thanking God for the gift of Jesus.

**Reflect:** on the hope you have because of Jesus.

*Don't collect any more than you are required to. (v.13)*

A man is walking down the beach and comes across an old bottle. He picks it up, pulls out the cork and out pops a genie. The genie says, "Thank you for freeing me from the bottle. In return I will grant you three wishes." The man says "Great! I always dreamed of this and I know exactly what I want. First, I want one billion pounds in a Swiss bank account." Poof! There is a flash of light and a piece of paper with account numbers appears in his hand. He continues, "Next, I want a brand new red Ferrari right here." Poof! There is a flash of light and a bright red brand-new Ferrari appears right next to him. He continues, "Finally, I want to be irresistible to women." Poof! There is a flash of light and he turns into a box of chocolates.

We always want more than we have and that can lead us to be greedy as well as unsatisfied with life if we don't get it. We look for our pleasure and satisfaction in the things of the world rather than in the giver of all good things. The world of John's day was no different. John the Baptist was the forerunner to the Lord Jesus and he preached 'a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.' He lived in times when roads were crooked rather than smooth. People did what they wanted. They looked out for number one at all costs. They craved more and didn't worry how they got it.

As John challenged the people about the sin in their lives they began to ask what they should do. The tax collectors came and asked and John replied by saying '*Don't collect any more than you are required to.*' We know that in those days tax collectors became very rich collecting more than they ought. They collected for Caesar and then added some more on top for themselves. They were not happy though, because their sin led them to be isolated and unloved.

Sin does the same in our lives. It starts out promising the world but ends up leaving us alone and destitute. Let's not look for more than we need. And let's look to the one who will satisfy our lives fully – the Lord.

**Pray:** thanking God for being the giver of life in all its fullness.

**Reflect:** where do I look for pleasure and meaning in life?

*Jesus answered "It is written..." (v.4)*

A three-year-old entered the kitchen when his mother was busy elsewhere in the house. He pulled a kitchen chair over to the counter and climbed up on it. Then he took the lid off the cookie jar and had just gotten the cookie to his mouth when his mother entered the room and demanded to know what he was doing. The three-year-old looked at her with big, innocent eyes and said, "I just climbed up here to smell the cookies, and my tooth got caught on one of them."

We laugh at the child's innocence and forgive him for his fib. But temptations in little things only lead in later life to temptations in big things. The pattern of lies and deceptions we tell others and ourselves only becomes more elaborate in adulthood. And temptations are big things for us as they occur often in our daily lives.

Jesus showed us how to deal with temptation though. Here in Luke 4 we learn that straight after his baptism Jesus was led into the desert to be tested. It is interesting that the Spirit leads him in to be tested. Sometimes God brings a period of testing in our lives in order to strengthen our faith and reliance on him. At other times the testing comes from the devil – he is keen to tempt us in order to drag us away from following God.

Jesus was tempted in the desert by Satan. And he is tempted with the ordinary things in life we are – lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Each time Jesus rejects the temptation and answers the devil with words of Scripture. Jesus has prepared well by memorising God's Word.

When we are tempted the best thing to do is pray quickly for strength and protection from God, and then to recall Scripture and use it to defend ourselves. We can overcome temptation – but only if we rely on God and keep our focus on him.

**Pray:** asking God to protect us from the devil's snares.

**Reflect:** do I memorise Scripture and use it to resist temptation?

*It is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. (v.31-32)*

It was a particular Friday afternoon in downtown Chicago. There was a poorly dressed man with two dollars in his pocket? A wino? No, this man was a minister from Mississippi. As a way of identifying with human need, he and a number of others had been dropped off in various localities to fend for themselves the best they could for a whole weekend.

After wandering around on the Sunday he came to a large downtown church holding an evening service. After the service was over, he stood on the front steps and waited. No one spoke to him. Then he went across the street where a group of real winos were passing a bottle one to the other. Immediately they called him ‘brother’, offered him a drink, and asked if he had a ‘pad’ for the night. One even tried to give him his last thirty-seven cents. This minister partied with the winos who treated him like their own while the church ignored him altogether.

Jesus had no problem partying with sinners but the religious elite of the day did. Jesus always sought to be with ordinary people. It didn’t matter to him who people were or from what background they came – in the end he knew they all needed saved. Here in Luke 5 Jesus calls a tax collector to follow him and Levi leaves everything it tells us in verse 28 and followed him. Levi does a great thing next – he has just come to follow Jesus and the first thing he does is invite all his friends round to meet him too. He wants them to see Jesus too. Are we as quick to bring our friends to Jesus? Are we as free and willing and eager to tell them about our faith?

As Jesus is eating with these folks, the religious elite come mumbling about Jesus eating with sinners. And Jesus gives them the reason for his coming to earth - *‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.’* We need to remember our call to share the good news with all the world. We need to be around sinners, sharing the good news of the gospel with them.

**Pray:** asking God for opportunities to share your faith today.

**Reflect:** am I too comfortable in my cosy holy huddle?