

# STRONG FOUNDATIONS

## DAILY DEVOTIONAL



LIVINGHOPE

# LIVING LIFE Contents

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# Preface

*Strong Foundations* is a 28 day booklet of daily devotional thoughts designed to encourage, challenge and strengthen your faith life as a follower of Jesus.

In order to get the most from these devotions it is recommended that you study the content of each day with your husband, wife or partner, your children, or with a friend.

- Try to meditate on each day's content by reading through more than once a day
  - Consider asking your children questions to ensure that they fully understand the principles within
  - Post thoughts on your life group WhatsApp page
  - Post thoughts on your Youth Group Facebook Group

The foundations are set out in weekly themes as follows:

**Week 1:** *Prayer*

**Week 2:** *Word*

**Week 3:** *Worship*

**Week 4:** *Fellowship*

It is not expected that you will pray without worshipping in week 1 or study the word in week 2 without praying. Each week simply emphasises a foundation of healthy discipleship and our hope is that as you study the course, you will experience a week by week increase in your personal intimacy with Jesus.

Each day concludes with a series of **ACTION STEPS**. These are simple application points that will help you to put into practice what you have studied. To gain the greatest benefit from "foundations" it is essential that you complete each day's step.

Some action steps should be repeated daily for the duration of each "foundation" week.

Have fun, be faithful and together, let's enjoy learning and growing in our pursuit of Jesus and His church.

## WEEK 1 - PRAYER

# Day 1 - Praise and Worship

Today's Reading : *Matthew 6: 9-15*

### KEY VERSES:

*"Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be Your name,"* Mt 6:9

*"For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise"* 1 Ch16:25

This week we will be focusing on prayer and what a great place to start! This passage in Matthew 6 contains the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray, sometimes called the Lord's prayer. Many of us recited this at school growing up and it may have become simply a string of words. It is so much more than that - when the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, He gave them (and us!) this beautiful pattern for prayer, and it all starts with praise!

Jesus started by worshipping God for who he is. As we declare who God is, we become filled with awe and wonder, we become overwhelmed at how powerful He is. He is the object of our love, our wonder, our worship, and dwelling on His awesome character makes us want to spend more and more time in His presence.

I don't know about you, but when I have spent time declaring who God is, my soul rejoices, and I feel like I can take on the world. I know that I no longer have to fight my battles on my own but I have the King of Kings and Lord of Lords fighting with me. The things that before seemed like huge obstacles, feel more manageable when they are viewed in comparison with the greatness of God.

*"With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible"*

Mat 19:26

### ACTION STEPS

- Look up some bible verses declaring who God is e.g. God is Faithful (1 Cor 10:13), God is Merciful (Eph 2:4), God is Holy and Perfect (Deut 32:4) Why not write these down or be creative as a couple or family and make a picture or collage with the attributes of God.
- Play some worship songs that declare who God is and worship Him together.

# WEEK 1 - PRAYER

## Day 2 - Intercession

Today's Reading : *Matthew 6: 9-15*

KEY VERSE:

*"Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"* Mt 6:10

After praising the name of God, Jesus encourages us to pray for His Kingdom to be established and his will to be done. Our desire as believers is to see the rule and reign of Jesus over the Earth – seeing people saved, healed, restored and set free. At the moment, the world is in chaos, many we know are being isolated, and may feel very alone. Many around the world are ill, some are dying because of this outbreak. The cry of our heart is ‘Lord, heal our nation’, not just physically but spiritually! ‘Lord send a revival!’ We see this amazing promise in God’s word – it’s an ‘if’ and ‘then’ promise!

*"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, **then** I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land"* 2 Ch 7:14

As we lay aside our agendas, purify ourselves and seek Gods heart for our nation then the Lord says He will hear from heaven, forgive our sin and heal our land. This is a beautiful scripture, but requires a response from us to look at how we live, to make sure we are living humble lives that honour God in all we do. Today let us bring before God the names and situations that we know about that need the intervention of God.

### ACTION STEPS

- Jar of Names – Write down names of those people you are praying for and place them in a jar. Each day draw a name from the jar (maybe even one each) to pray for. Maybe you could send a message of love and encouragement
- Pray for our Governments and those in authority over us and the health care providers at this time.
- Pray for our church leaders and their families
- Pray for all those ill, isolated, in financial difficulty or otherwise affected by this pandemic.

**WEEK 1 - PRAYER****Day 3 - Asking for Daily Needs**

Today's Reading : *Matthew 6: 9-15*

KEY VERSE:

*"Give us today our daily bread"*

Mt 6:11

Often when I ask "Have you prayed about it? I often hear the response "Oh but I can't ask God for things for myself, besides He already knows what I need". What an interesting perspective. Many of us find it easy to pray for others but more difficult or pray for our own needs.

When I think about my children, I usually already know about the needs they have, and could just fulfil them, however I love it when they come and ask me for things rather than assuming I will just sort it. Why is that? Because it builds relationship between me and my children, it shows me that they really want something and it's not just a whim, and it helps them to realise that sometimes they can't solve everything on their own and need to trust someone else. All of these things enhance my relationship with them, and it gives me great delight to provide what they need.

The same can be said of God, He is a good Father who loves to give good gifts to His children. He wants us to ask (Matt7:7) he wants to develop that intimate open relationship with us, rather than be a far-off benefactor.

*"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"*

Mt 7:11

**ACTION STEPS**

- Pray for a need within your family
- Pray for a personal need you have right now
- Continue to pray for the world around us at this time

**WEEK 1 - PRAYER****Day 4 - Repentance and Forgiveness**

Today's Reading : *Matthew 6: 9-15*

KEY VERSE:

*“and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”* Mt 6:12

This word ‘debts’ can be translated as ‘sin’ or ‘trespass’ but literally means ‘that which is owed’. In our modern culture of mortgages, loans and credit cards, sometimes debt doesn’t seem like a huge deal, but in first century Judea the penalty for debt was severe, often resulting in imprisonment. A few verses later, Jesus says:

*“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses”* Mt 6:14-15

Jesus is clearly talking about forgiveness and repentance, these are very sobering words, “if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your father forgive your trespasses” God’s debt-cancelling service is activated by the forgiveness of others.

Daily we need to examine our hearts not only for the things that we have done wrong, but also for the offenses or ‘debts’ we may be holding against others. We can’t approach the father asking for forgiveness if we aren’t prepared to forgive what others have done to us.

We have been forgiven so much by Jesus, there isn’t a day goes by when I don’t do something to that dishonours Him or grieves his heart, but daily I need to come before the cross and say I’m sorry. My sin sent Jesus to the cross, as the song says “it was my sin that held Him there”. When I grasp the consequences of my actions and that Jesus chose to forgive, then I cannot hold anything against another.

**ACTION STEPS**

- Let us examine our hearts for both the things we have done wrong and for the things we are holding against others and spend a time with God saying sorry.

**WEEK 1 - PRAYER****Day 5 - Gods Protection**

Today's Reading : *Matthew 6: 9-15*

KEY VERSE:

*“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”* Mt 6:13

As we walk through our day to day life, we often find we are faced with difficult circumstances or challenges, or sometimes even people that bring out the worst in us. We can find ourselves feeling attacked, beaten up and generally feeling quite rubbish about life. God's Word teaches us in Eph 6: 10-20 that the external battles we face are not against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces coming against us. The enemy loves to distract us or drag us away from the purpose that God has given us.

Even within ourselves it is clear that we are in a daily battle. Our flesh makes war against our spirit, offering us temptations towards personal comfort, prideful living, or self-gratification, but God's word calls us to resist, to crucify the flesh daily, to walk upright, pure and holy lives.

But we do also battle with an enemy who is a master of deception. He knows just when you are likely to be vulnerable, just when to put temptation across your path, while he whispers in your ear “did God really say....?” like he did to Eve in Genesis 3 – he loves to undermine God's word!

In our own strength we are powerless to resist many of the temptations that will come upon us. But as Christians, with the Holy Spirit inside us, we are not reliant on our own strength. God's Word gives us a clear strategy in how we are able to stand firm against these schemes in Ephesians 6.

*“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take*

*the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints ” Ef 6:10-18*

We are to put on the whole armour of God. Not just part of it but the whole armour. So, what does this look like?

**Stand Firm** – A warrior does not go into battle lying down, He stands his ground with his feet firmly planted. When we stand firmly on the Truth of God’s word we can recognise the lies, we can see how shallow the promises of temptation are and we can keep our eyes on the real prize, Jesus.

**Belt of Truth** – The Bible gives us Gods truth, as we immerse ourselves in the things God says, we can defeat the lies that the enemy will speak over us.

**Breastplate of righteousness** – The breastplate protects our hearts. Through the blood of Jesus, we have been forgiven and made righteous – no longer can the enemy use our past to accuse us.

**Shoes of the gospel of peace** – The good news of Jesus, a readiness to share this and a security in what Jesus did on the cross.

**Shield of faith** – When we are filled with faith, the arrows the enemy fires at us do not penetrate, soak yourself in scripture as “faith comes by hearing. And hearing by the word of God” (Rm 10:17)

**Helmet of salvation** – An assurance of our salvation and the work Jesus did on the cross, protects our minds from the lies the enemy would like us to believe, as we allow Jesus into every part of our life, he frees us from the strongholds that the enemy tries to use to enslave us.

**Sword of the spirit** – The word of God, scripture is our most powerful weapon, when Jesus was tempted in the wilderness (Mt 4:1-11). He countered everything the devil said with scripture.

**Praying at all times** – In hard times, when battles come against us, we need to have the Holy Spirit fighting our corner in the heavenlies. So keep praying!!

## ACTION STEPS

- Pray for Gods protection over our hearts and minds.
- Read faith building scriptures together (Eph 3:16-17, Mark 11:24)

## WEEK 1 - PRAYER

### Day 6 - Persistence in Prayer

Today's Reading : *Luke 18: 1-8*

KEY VERSE:

*“For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened” Lk 11:10*

Jesus tells us the parable of the persistent widow, she was so relentless in her petition to the judge that he gave in to her request, not because he feared God or respected man, but because it would stop her bothering him.

This echoes the story we read in Luke 11:5-10 when the friend knocks on the door at night constantly for bread. Again, it is his persistence that prompt the friend to give him what he requests.

Jesus then says *“For everyone who asks receives, and to the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened”*

I love this simple picture, when we are looking for something we keep looking until we find it, when we knock on a door we keep knocking until someone answers, and when we ask, we keep asking until we receive. It's so simple to do in the day to day things, but we often struggle when it comes to our prayer life. We feel we can't keep pestering God for the same things, but we see from the examples Jesus gives that this is clearly not the case. Sometimes when we pray, we see an immediate response, other times we have to keep asking over and over again.

Are we persistent in our prayer life? Asking God daily for the salvation of our friends and families? Or do we give up and move onto something else.

#### ACTION STEPS

- On Day 2, we started a family jar with notes in it of the people God has laid on our hearts to pray for. Let's add to this any circumstances or situations we have been praying for. Have a second jar ready to transfer the answered prayers to. It's a great faith builder as you see the answered jar start to fill with the amazing things God is doing.

**WEEK 1 - PRAYER****Day 7 - Mountain-moving Prayer**

Today's Reading : *Mark 11: 23-26*

KEY VERSE:

*“Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him.”* Mk 11:23

In every problem, there is a silver lining called “opportunity”. Every day our church family faces challenges of varying degrees. For some people, the problem is financial shortfall, for some, relationship failures, for others personal insecurity or inadequacy. Problems have a habit of presenting themselves as seemingly insurmountable obstacles, Jesus called them “mountains”. At the foot of every mountain a choice must be made, whether to turn back and leave the obstacle in our way, or to start climbing to gain a new perspective. Mountains always look larger in the foothills than they do when peering down from the summit!

Every day we have an opportunity to present our mountains to Jesus through prayer. He is our first port of call, our starting point not simply our rescuer when we find ourselves lost, having wandered off the beaten trail!

Prayer enables us to not only summit the insurmountable, but actually to move life's hindrances out of the way altogether, to tell our problematic mountains to relocate themselves into the sea!

Sadly, too many mountains remain firmly rooted as a result of the hard heartedness of human beings. Jesus has promised that if we pray, believing that what we ask for will be given to us (assuming it accords with His will), then we can assume it is already done! How wonderful that we can experience recovery from financial hardship, restoration from brokenness in relationships, as we pray with unswerving confidence in His power and ability to summit the unscalable.

There is however a qualifying criteria in verse 26! Effective, earth shaking, mountain moving prayer requires that our hearts hold no offences against anyone! The very flow of God's grace and forgiveness require that we learn to live grudge free lives!

### **ACTION STEPS**

- Ask the Holy Spirit to show you any obstacles that need to be relocated, overcome or even removed completely from your life
- Where a deep rooted offence hinders your prayer life, ask a friend to pray for you today. Share the burden. Some offences are almost impossible to release in human ability alone, we need to fight with the spiritual weapon of prayer.
- Pray for people who are wounded and need help to move mountains in their own lives

# Testimony

I have always struggled to get into God's Word.

I tended to take the attitude that I'd do it later, once I'd done all the many, many things that needed doing. Sometimes I managed to fit God in and there were also times when I didn't.

I found it much easier to incorporate prayer into my daily life, as I could have a conversation with God off and on throughout the day, without setting time aside specifically for God.

Writing that down makes me feel so sad - that I found it too difficult to set time aside for God after all that He has done for me.

At the beginning of 2019, God gave me my word for the year - which was "The Word". Well I asked Him to give me a different word because I didn't like "The Word", I knew that God was asking me to spend time with Him in His Word. But God didn't give me a different word - He wanted me to grow in His Word.

It hasn't been easy to establish a new routine, but I have. My alarm goes off in the morning an hour before I need to get up and I spend time in bible study. For me it works best with a study plan and even better if I'm doing it alongside others - that level of accountability helps to keep me on track.

It has made a difference to my daily walk with God, I feel as if I'm starting on the right foot and on the right path each morning. I would encourage everyone to set time aside in the morning to be with God, time when you are not striving, time to be still and to let God be God.

**WEEK 2 - WORD****Day 1 - Soul Medicine**

Today's Reading : *Proverbs 4: 20-22*

KEY VERSE:

*“My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. 21 Let them not escape from your sight, keep them within your heart. 22 For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh ” Pv 4:20-22*

Growing up as a child of the 70's, I was terrorised by prospect of childhood sickness. Being ill was bad enough, but what robbed my peace was the threat of supping the dreaded pink stuff, my Doctor called it antibiotic amoxicillin in pediatric liquid form, I called it, “liquid trauma”. Nuclear pink in colour, and carrying the odour of death, liquid trauma made me feel instantly better, if only to avoid it slipping down the back of my throat.

The main problem that troubled me was that one spoonful of liquid trauma benefited its victim, in no way whatsoever. My Mum used to be gleeful in telling me “You have to take the whole course Son”.

Very often, the doctor prescribes medicine that only achieves its purpose if it is consumed daily, at regular intervals and is consumed in its entirety.

God's word, is medicine for the soul. Solomon reminds us that it must be consumed daily, continually, with no particular end date. The words of God are “life to those who find them”, Solomon goes further and reminds us that actually, our broken flesh, so desperately in need of healing, requires soul medicine to make it well again.

Sadly, many contemporary followers of Jesus regard God's word, the bible, as I regarded liquid trauma.

It doesn't always go down easily, I don't always feel like taking it, it sometimes tastes sweet like honey, but often it burns as it addresses my broken flesh and wars against the infection of human philosophies and worldly ideologies.

God's word is a double edged sword, one edge tears down, the other builds up. God's word is a spirit level to my slanted thinking, a plumb line to my bias reasoning and it discerns my unconscious thoughts and hidden motives of my heart.

Without the word of God, I am a sick product of this fallen world, only when I am attentive to the words of God, open eared to His voice and committed to fixing my eyes on His sayings will I truly find healing for my soul, my body and my mind.

As we commence this week of family bible study, let's make sure we finish the course, measure out the word in daily, regular portions so that my being can be made whole.

There is an old adage that rings true to this day:

***“Seven days without God’s word makes one weak”***

## **ACTION STEPS**

- Commit to daily bible reading
- Discuss the reading more than once a day
- If you have children, test them on what they have heard to be sure it is buried in their hearts
- Send a scripture to a friend as an encouragement every day this week

**WEEK 2 - WORD****Day 2 - God Breathed**

Today's Reading : *2 Timothy 3: 14-17*

## KEY VERSE:

*“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” 2 Tm 3: 16-17*

Earlier in this chapter, Paul is warning Timothy about worldly ways of living, succumbing to pride, love of money and falling away from the Truth during times of persecution and deceit. But in the midst of this, he is telling us how we remain strong, how we remain true to God.

There are many places we can go to these days for answers, to gain perspective or for guidance on how to navigate the world around us: Facebook, the media, Google, the people around us. Everything we read, watch or listen to will have an influence on our views and values, impact the way we think of ourselves and those around us and sometimes even what we think of God. It can be a scary place to try and find ourselves, let alone to try and discern what is Truth and what is untruth.

But God in His wisdom has not left us drifting, lost in this murky sea of contradiction and lies. He has given us His Word. It is in the Word that we find His unchanging Truth.

- It is The Word that is our measuring stick for what is correct and what is not, for what paths lead to righteousness and what paths lead to destruction.
- It is in The Word that we will be sharpened, challenged, moulded into the people He has called us to be.
- It is in The Word that we are equipped for the good works He has prepared for us to walk in.
- It is in The Word that we find our identity, our purpose and Godly direction that keeps us walking straight.

**ACTION STEPS**

- Write out your favourite verse and stick it on the fridge. What does it tell you about God? About you? How does it encourage you or challenge you to love differently?

**WEEK 2 - WORD****Day 3 - Family Rules**

Today's Reading : *Psalms 119: 1-16*

KEY VERSE:

*"I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you."*

Ps 119: 11

I love reading this first part of the Psalm, as the writer describes how vital the Word of God is to living a righteous, upright and pure life.

We have a board on the wall in our kitchen titled "Family Rules". That sounds quite ominous, but actually the words written on it are phrases like "Be Kind," "Love One Another," "Count your Blessings" - all these 'rules' encourage the members of my family to treat each other well.

The Psalmist is pointing us to the Bible as our "Family Rules" a book so rich in teaching that as we study it and store up what it says in our hearts it enables us to live a life that honours God, that keeps our ways pure. It instructs us in all areas of our life, challenges us when we go off track and lovingly and gently shows us the precious love of a Father who gave His only son that we may have relationship restored with Him.

The Bible is too rich a resource to lay gathering dust on a shelf. So let's dust it off, and start reading it together. And don't just read it ... STORE IT UP!

**ACTION STEPS**

- Find a Bible study (maybe on something like the YouVersion bible app) and start studying Gods Word. Perhaps even find a friend who will study alongside you.
- Start storing God's word. Why not challenge yourself (and your family) to memorise a verse this week? You could start with Psalm 119:11. And then why not memorise a different verse next week, and the next ...

**WEEK 2 - WORD****Day 4 - Mirror Image**

Today's Reading : *James 1: 22-25*

KEY VERSE:

*"But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says."* Jms 1: 22

My little girl loves looking in the mirror but I confess that, as I get older, I'm less inclined to spend time studying my reflection, probably because I don't like what I see as much as my daughter does!

This passage in James tells us that reading the bible is like looking in a mirror. As we read, we start to see those blemishes and wrinkles come into focus! Now, I can't do too much about my wrinkles in the natural, but praise God – we can certainly be made beautiful in the spiritual, through the precious blood of Jesus!! But listen to what James is saying in verse 24 - imagine I look in the mirror and see that I have a massive smear of mud on my face, and then I look away and immediately forget all about it!! That would be like reading the bible and forgetting what it has shown me, and doing nothing about it!!

So if were to read on later in the book of James about the taming of the tongue, and in those verses I start to realise that I am guilty of using my tongue in a way that can hurt others, but I simply close my bible, forget what I've read and don't change anything about the way I use my words, then it would just be like leaving that big smear of mud on my face.

The bible is there to show us the things that, with God's help, we can change, whether it's our words, our behaviours, our fears. Jesus has cleansed us from our sin through his death on the cross, but every day through the Spirit and His word, we can grow to be more and more like Him.

**ACTION STEPS**

- Don't be like those who read the word and forget what it says. Why not start a journal to write down what God has been showing you as you read each day.
- Ask God to reveal any 'muddy smears' and for his help to live differently.

**WEEK 2 - WORD****Day 5 - Light the Way**

Today's Reading : *Psalms 119: 89-105*

KEY VERSE:

*"Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path."*

Ps 1: 22

Psalm 119 is the longest Psalm in the Bible, but as I've been reading over it I have been struck by the consistency that it proclaims the importance of studying the Bible. As we look through these verses today, over and over again the psalmist is declaring how he has been rescued from his circumstances by his knowledge of Gods teachings.

Today's verse talks about the word being a lamp to my feet and a light to my path, that doesn't mean when its dark we open the bible app to use it as a torch but that the Bible is full of direction and instructions for us to follow the path that God has laid out for us. Whatever circumstances we face, the Bible will offer us wisdom.

I remember as a child being given a Gideons new testament in school and at the back was a section titled, "where to go when you need help". It contained page after page of verses you could turn to in every situation imaginable. Whenever I felt anxious, or fearful, I would flick to the pages to see what God said on the subject. Filling my head with His thoughts left no room for my own doubts. These words are as relevant today as they were when they were written. Gods wisdom is more accessible now than it has ever been.

In these days of widespread fear and worry around the risk of illness and loss with many facing isolation and loneliness, What does God's word have to say?

**ACTION STEPS**

- What situation are you facing today that you need to get Gods perspective on? Search for scriptures that speak on that particular subject.
- What verse or verses could you send to someone who is struggling in some way today?

**WEEK 2 - WORD****Day 6 - You Are What You Eat**

Today's Reading : *Matthew 4: 1-4*

KEY VERSE:

*"...man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD"* Dt 8:3

They say 'you are what you eat' and that can certainly be evident in our lives physically! If we eat junk food we can become overweight and unhealthy, whereas if we eat a balanced diet, this is shown in our appearance and general wellbeing. Jesus references Deuteronomy 8:3 when he is tempted in the wilderness. Jesus knew his sustenance came not just from physical food but from 'every word that comes from the mouth of God'.

What are we feeding our minds and spirits with? In this world of the internet and social media we are constantly bombarded with worldly philosophies, people's opinions and fake news - it's like eating junk food. If we listen to these influences our minds become cluttered, we can become fearful and unable to recognise reality as it is. When Paul was talking to the Philippians he said:

*"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."* Php 4:8-9

These verses describe a healthy diet for our minds. It is so important to immerse ourselves in Truth, in the promises that God has spoken, in the reading of Scripture. When we think about the things that we read, or watch we need to measure them against the standard set before us in Phil 4:8 asking the question "what am I feeding myself on?"

**ACTION STEPS**

- What are you feeding yourself on? How much time do you spend reading the Bible? How much time do you spend on social media or news sites?
- Ask God to reawaken a hunger for His word, for reading the Bible.

**WEEK 2 - WORD****Day 7 - Rock Solid**

Today's Reading : *Matthew 7: 24-27*

## KEY VERSE:

*"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock."* Mt 7:24

I'm sure we have all known this story from our childhood, and probably the song that goes with it too!! The wise man built his house upon the rock ...

You may have heard about the massive Sampoong department store, in Seoul which collapsed in 1995 killing over 500 people. What a tragedy! When investigators looked into the cause, it turned out this huge building had been constructed on a landfill site. The foundations could not support the structure, and the building collapsed!

Jesus gives us the secrets of the building trade – you want your house to survive the storms, build on the right foundations. That's really what this 28-day devo is all about, getting strong foundations in place. Reading the word every day, spending time praying and worshipping, so that we are not only 'hearing' God's words, but putting them into practice.

One of the men in our congregation has been struggling with addiction for many years even since knowing Jesus, but in the last 12 months, something has changed – the desires have gone, there is no longer temptation, he is finally FREE. What changed? He started to read God's word every day, in fact he did the 'bible in one year' and is now going through it for a second time. He has been pouring concrete into his foundations and the structure has become much more secure.

**ACTION STEPS**

- When you read the word or do a family devo, don't just read the verses or bible story – discuss what can be learned or applied in every day life. Think of your favourite bible story eg David and Goliath; Daniel in the lion's den and discuss together what is it we learn about God? Ourselves? Are there any encouragements? Any challenges – now put it into practice!!

**WEEK 3 - WORSHIP****Day 1 - Spirit and Truth**

Today's Reading : *John 4: 21-24*

KEY VERSE:

*"...true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks."* Jn 4:23

I wonder if we think of 'worship' as being confined to the 20-30mins at the start of a service when we gather together and sing songs with our church family – that certainly is worship - but worship is so much more. As Jesus spoke to the woman at the well, she was fixated with the method and the location of 'worship' but he said that it wasn't about a particular mountain, or being in the temple but that true worshippers worship in 'Spirit and in truth'. What do you think that looks like?

Worshipping God 'in spirit' is beyond the physical, it is aligning our spirits with the Holy Spirit in thought, word and deed.

Worshipping God 'in truth' means that our worship is based on the truth of who God is, and what He has done and not on our feelings or circumstances.

The famous preacher A.W. Tozer once said, "It is my experience that the totality of our Christian lives, our entire attitude as persons, must be towards the worship of God! If you do not know the presence of God in your home , then God is not in the church you attend".

What can you do this week to 'know the presence of God in your home'?

**ACTION STEPS**

Why not this week ....

- Pray together every night as a couple, a family, or with friends
- Worship together by singing along with some worship music.
- Ask each other – how have you been worshipping God in Spirit and truth today.

**WEEK 3 - WORSHIP****Day 2 - A Living Sacrifice**

Today's Reading : *Romans 12: 1-2*

KEY VERSE:

*“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.”* Rm 12:1

As we saw yesterday, worship is more than just singing and praising. It’s even more than a ‘lifestyle’. It’s actually a condition of our hearts – what are we giving ourselves to?

In reality, we live in a constant state of worship. Sadly often that worship is directed at the wrong people / things. Celebrity worship is very common in our culture, maybe for you it’s ‘money’ or ‘material things’. We can even worship good things that God has given us like our families, putting them before God. The biggest idol is often ‘self-worship’ where I’m all that matters, looking out for No 1, my comfort, my success, my happiness.

What are you worshipping / giving your life to?

What would it look like to be a ‘living sacrifice’ in our day-to-day lives (this is what Romans 12 calls ‘true and proper worship’)?

Here’s how the message version puts it:

*“So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering.”* Rm 12:1

**ACTION STEPS**

- Sing a song of dedication to God eg. “Here’s my worship” (Philip Thomson); or “Simplicity” (Rend Collective). You can find these on YouTube.
- Discuss how can I live my life as an offering to God today?

**WEEK 3 - WORSHIP****Day 3 - With All I Am**

Today's Reading : *Psalms 150*

KEY VERSE:

*"Let everything that has breath praise the Lord."* Ps 150:6

So we have seen that worship is not just singing, but as we can see from today's reading, it also IS about singing – and dancing, and shouting and making music!! So when we come together to worship God, what does it look like?

The book of psalms, right in the middle of the bible, is packed full of exhortations, encouragements and pleas to come together and praise/worship God. Many different Hebrew words are used to describe ways to express the overflow of our worshipful hearts.

- **Halal** is the commonest word translated into English as praise (mentioned over 200 times in the bible). It's where the word hallelujah comes from. It literally means 'to celebrate, to shine, to boast about', It's an exuberant word.

- **Yadah** - to lift/extend hands in praise. Another word Nasa to reach our hands up to God.

*"I will praise you as long as I live, in your name I will lift up my hands."* Ps 63:4

- **Barak** or **Kara** - to kneel or bow down

*"Let us worship and bow down. Come let us kneel before our maker."* Ps 95:6

- **Shabach** (also Ranan and Shaon) - a shout of joy

*"Shout to the Lord with a voice of triumph."* Ps 47:1

- **Karar** or **Melchol** : to dance

*"Let us praise His name with dancing"* Ps 149:3

We could go on –there's 'taka' to clap; 'tehillah – to sing your own spontaneous song to God'; 'dagar' to raise a banner or flag.

**ACTION STEPS**

- TRY IT!! Where are you holding back? Why not put a praise song on loud right now and sing, dance, shout, lift your hands, bow down, celebrate!! And how about next time we can gather together at a service, doing something you have never done before as we worship our King together.

**WEEK 3 - WORSHIP****Day 4 - Going into Battle**

Today's Reading : **2 Chronicles 20: 1-30**

## KEY VERSE:

*“After consulting the people, the king appointed singers to walk ahead of the army, singing to the LORD and praising him for his holy splendour. This is what they sang: “Give thanks to the LORD; his faithful love endures forever!”* 2 Ch 20:21

What a fantastic story this is!! Imagine being on the worship team in Judah. Three enemy armies have surrounded the city lying in wait with swords and spears ready to attack, and the King says ‘Right singers – off you go and sing’. But that day, the singers praised God and He did the miraculous, the enemies were scattered, the soldiers of Judah didn’t even have to lift a single sword!

When the enemy attacks, when life gets tough, when you are going through battles that you feel no-one can understand, God would give you the same instructions. ‘Give thanks to the Lord and sing, praising Him for His Holy splendour.’ On those days when the last thing you feel like doing is worshipping God – guess what?? It’s the absolute BEST thing you can do.

What are the toughest things you are facing in your life right now?

Is God’s goodness, faithfulness, love or splendour dependant on how we feel or what we are going through? Remember our worship is based on WHO HE IS and not HOW WE FEEL!

Hebrews 13:15 tells us to bring a ‘sacrifice of praise’. What sacrifice is it, if we only praise when we feel like it?

**ACTION STEPS**

- Our challenge today is to PRAISE GOD IN EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE!! And wait ‘til you see how God responds!! Just like he did in the day of Jehoshaphat’s army, God will raise your spirits, strengthen you and drive the enemy back as you worship him wholeheartedly. Why not worship along to ‘Raise a Hallelujah’ (Bethel). You’ll find this on YouTube.

**WEEK 3 - WORSHIP****Day 5 - It's All About HIM**

Today's Reading : *Psalms 96: 1-6*

KEY VERSE:

*"For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise"* Ps 96:4

I wonder how often you have thought or said any of the following when we gather together to worship on a Sunday evening or at life group:

- I wasn't really feeling it today
- I'm not really in the mood to worship
- I couldn't really worship as I didn't know the songs

If you have ever said or felt like this or similar, then you have made worship about YOU and not God.

I love this quote by Eugene Peterson *"Worship is the strategy by which we interrupt our preoccupation with ourselves and attend to the presence of God."*

As we have seen, God often will do amazing things while we worship - fighting our battles, bringing breakthrough - but worship is primarily all about giving glory to God.

In this psalm we can see some reasons to praise God - what are they? What aspects of the character of God makes Him deserving of our praise - his love, his forgiveness, his power, his mercy, his faithfulness ....? Why not brainstorm by yourself, or as a couple or family, and write down as many words as you can that describe God's character.

**ACTION STEPS**

- Pray together thanking God for who He is - use your list!
- Repent of the times when you have made it about 'you' rather than about Him
- Sing along to a worship song about who God is eg. "Father to me"; "Goodness of God"

**WEEK 3 - WORSHIP****Day 6 - Extravagant Worship**

Today's Reading : *John 12: 1-7*

KEY VERSE:

*“Then Mary took a twelve-ounce jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard, and she anointed Jesus’ feet with it, wiping his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance.”* Jn 12:3

This story is one of the most beautiful examples of worship in the bible. What can we learn from Mary’s extravagant act of worship?

- **It was undignified** – can you imagine the state of her hair, all over the place wiping oil onto the feet of Jesus – not very ladylike, and the people watching on were so critical – but she didn’t care what she looked like or what other people thought of her. Are you concerned about your appearance or what people think or are you ready to be an undignified worshipper?

- **It was costly** – this was expensive perfume. She didn’t just pour a bit out on Jesus’ feet. In Mark’s version of this story (Mark 14) we are told she broke the jar – she used it all, she poured out everything. Do we hold back? Or do we pour out everything for Him?

- **It made an impact** – ‘The fragrance filled the whole house’ – when we worship extravagantly, we can change the atmosphere of our home, our church, our community and our nation.

**ACTION STEPS**

- Think about what holds you back as a worshipper? Is it the fear of man?
- What might extravagant worship look like for you – in the way you praise God when we come together at church, in the way you pour yourself out in giving your time, your finances, your gifts and talents?

**WEEK 3 - WORSHIP****Day 7 - Pass It On**

Today's Reading : *Psalms 78: 1-7*

KEY VERSE:

*"We will tell the next generation about the glorious deeds of the LORD, about his power and his mighty wonders."* Ps 78:4

Spurgeon, the great preacher of old, says that family worship should consist of 3 elements: prayer, bible reading and praising together. "They that pray in the family do well; they that pray and read the Scriptures do better; but they that pray, and read, and sing do best of all. There is a completeness in that kind of family worship which is much to be desired."

We are not only called to praise God for His greatness, we are called to exhort the next generation to do likewise! For those of us who are parents – are we worshipping God as a family? How are we encouraging our children to be praisers?

For those of us who are not parents, what can we do to encourage the next generation of praisers? Why not make an effort this week to encourage someone who is younger than you (either in age or in the faith) by texting, messaging or calling with an encouraging message, a bible verse, a prophetic word or a prayer.

Don't just praise God – pass it on!!

**ACTION STEPS**

- Families – make a regular time to read, pray and sing together each week going forward. Why not invite someone who is on their own to join you for a meal over the next week or two and pray and worship together!
- Everyone – get texting those messages of encouragement and, next time we come together as a church or life group, why not chat to someone of a different generation about the 'glorious deeds of the Lord'

## WEEK 4 - FELLOWSHIP

# Day 1 - Practice Hospitality

Today's Reading : *Psalms 78: 1-7*

KEY VERSES:

*"Practice hospitality."* Rm 12:13

*"Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling."* 1 Pt 4:9

One of the things I love seeing in our grown-up children is their love of hospitality. Jesus lived his life closely with his twelve disciples, but also the others who came with them. He didn't keep to his own home and occasionally go out to meet and preach to people ... he lived alongside them. In our western culture there is so much loneliness and anxiety, I think partly because we don't follow the Lords example of living an open life alongside each other.

How can we start that? We can 'practice hospitality' ... Romans 12:13

Asking my daughter why she now finds that easy, she answered me that she was always encouraged to invite her friends over; to play, have supper, sleepover, come on holiday...

Our house is never terribly tidy, there's random vegetables in the fridge, the kettle is usually on.... there's a good custom of putting it on as you come into our house, whether you live there or not. We have a lot of people in and out and we love it, despite the slight chaos! People seem to love being asked and then welcomed. It doesn't depend on your cooking skills, just on your smile. But it does take practice!!

### ACTION STEPS

- Ask Holy Spirit who he wants you to invite round... then do it.
- If you have children, ask a different friend to play/tea/sleepover.
- Ask someone for a coffee this week (sometimes easier to ask two if you are anxious what to chat about).
- Practice asking 'open' questions that require more than yes/no answers... even write some down, or ask someone for help if you find it difficult.

*Edit: This was written before the outbreak of COVID-19 so these actions may be difficult with self-isolation and social distancing, so why not make a list of those you will invite when doors are once again open and hugging is back on the agenda. Meanwhile be creative. Discuss ways of being 'virtually' hospitable and showing love especially to those who are isolated and vulnerable.*

**WEEK 4 - FELLOWSHIP****Day 2 - Anderson's Toilet Challenge**

Today's Reading : *Romans 12: 9-13*

## KEY VERSES:

*"Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus"*

1 Th 12:18

*"What does the Lord your God ask of you..."* Dt 10:12

Most of you will have been to our house, quite a few will have been to our downstairs toilet... guests are often amused at the verse we have on the wall

'Give thanks in all circumstances'

I was challenged several years ago by a Talmudic Jewish custom to bless the Lord for 100 things each day. Deuteronomy 10:12 says 'what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, walk in obedience to him...' In Hebrew the word 'what' (mah) is similar to the word for 'hundred' (meah), so this group of Jews choose to bless the Lord 100 times daily.

Every time I am in that little room I thank God for the miracle of my body; not choosing to see the bits I don't like so much, but marvelling at how it works, heals itself, grows, gets rid of what it doesn't need, learns and houses my mind, spirit, soul. But that is not where it stops...

There are so many things in my day to day life I can thank the Lord for – bless Him in, so I have tried to bless the Lord for 100 things a day like this for many years. Sometimes I write it down, sometimes I pray it, sometimes I count... but I try to make it my habit. I encourage our family to as well, I hope it has led to an attitude of gratitude and thankfulness.

Most of the time I do this in relation to the Lord, but it was also so helpful several years ago when I was cross with John on his birthday... I wasn't sure what to write in his card, Holy Spirit whispered to me 'write 100 things you are thankful for in John'. That changed everything, suddenly I had an attitude of thankfulness for the many things I love about John and forgot the one thing that was tricky between us.

**ACTION STEPS**

- Start thanking God each time you do a repetitive task (mine was going to the toilet...!)
- Write a list of 100 things you are thankful for today in your journal
- Start your prayers today with thankfulness

**WEEK 4 - FELLOWSHIP****Day 3 - Generosity**

Today's Reading : **Acts 4: 32-37**

KEY VERSE:

*“Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.” Ac 4:32*

We have a phrase amongst our church family “my fridge is your fridge”. It’s great! I know that if I turn up at my friend’s house and I am thirsty, I can raid his fridge for a glass of orange juice, and exercise my “fridge rights”, knowing that he will consider it a joy to share with me. And equally, “my fridge is your fridge” works the other way too. We share what God has given us, what we have is for the benefit of all not just me and mine.

There have been times that God has put it on our hearts to bless another household, to fill their fridge rather than deplete it. And I have turned up on a doorstep with a carrier bag of fridge supplies to be met with a “you shouldn’t have” or a “I can’t let you do that”. In that case I invoked my “fridge rights” in their house and filled their fridge.

I don’t say this for my own glory, I’d much rather have my treasure in heaven, but I have shared this here to show that there are two sides to living with everything in common. We need to be able to give freely as God leads, to bless and show love to one another, to meet needs where we see them and to follow the leading of the eldership in this where appropriate. But we also need to be gracious recipients as well, we need to allow people into our lives, accept gifts given with grace and humility; we need to allow people fridge rights, both to deplete and also to fill.

And this does not just apply to our fridges, we need to hold everything that God has given us lightly, share what God has given us with one another and be a blessing as we fellowship together. As we give and receive with grace and love, we demonstrate God’s power at work amongst us, and He will draw us together into one heart and one soul. In that place of unity and provision He will be glorified for all to see.

**ACTION STEPS**

- Why not bless someone this week with a meal, or take a bag of groceries for someone in isolation, or a financial blessing to someone who may have lost business during this Corona crisis?

**WEEK 4 - FELLOWSHIP****Day 4 - Made for One Another**

Today's Reading : *Hebrews 10: 23-25*

KEY VERSE:

*“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works”*

Heb 10:24

When God created the earth, each day he looked at his creation and said, “It is good.” One thing however he described as “not good” and that was that Adam was alone. And this principle holds fast right through the ages and is relevant to us today, for some in marriage, for some in their friendships as singles, parents, children. But for ALL of us it is relevant in that God created us for fellowship, He has given us to one another as brothers and sisters.

We are not created to be alone. We are created for one another, to encourage, to love each other, to hold each other to account, to keep our brothers on the straight and narrow, that we may walk in all the good works that God has planned for us.

Specifically mentioned in this passage is meeting together, the gathering of the saints, whether that's at a Sunday church service (even when we have to do it remotely at the moment ) or a home group during the week, it is vital for us, as we need it to sustain us, encourage us and keep us looking at Jesus.

And it's not just about what these meetings can do for us, each of us brings a gift to the body of believers, from gifts of encouragement, prophecy, or maybe even a gift of cake. All are vital for the church to honour Jesus fully. If we do not bring the gifts that God has placed into us for the benefit of the body, then the body goes short and the Church cannot function in everything that God has called her to.

May we encourage, love and stir one another to good work as we meet together on a Sunday, at life groups, Friday prayer, and each day as we share life with one another (even when it has to be 'virtual').

**ACTION STEPS**

- How might you stir up those around you to love and good works this week?

**WEEK 4 - FELLOWSHIP****Day 5 - Treasure Across Nations**

Today's Reading : *Hebrews 13: 1-6*

KEY VERSE:

*“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares”* Heb 13:1-2

Each year as the wonderful Four12 conference approaches there is a call put out across the church for hosting, for us to open our homes to strangers from across the nations, to give them a roof, good food, and a warm and loving welcome into our fellowship. For many of us it is a sacrifice, it costs us, it inconveniences us. And if I am honest, that “strangers” thing is sometimes just a little bit scary.

We have been brave and offered hosting for a few years now, and I would like to share something of our experience. We have had a beautifully rich variety of people come and stay with us. To my knowledge we have not yet entertained angels, but maybe we were, as it says in the Word “unawares”.

What I can say for certain is that God has put people in my home who have encouraged us and spoken rich blessing into our lives, prophesied over us powerfully as only a stranger can do. He has brought people from many parts of the world, from Africa, Europe, even Russia, people with rich and varied cultures, people with amazing testimonies of God's goodness.

Last year, he put a family across our path who were just a complete and total gift from God, both while they were here, in the way God melded our hearts together, and since as our relationship has flourished even across national borders. God's gift to us in these wonderful people has genuinely been one of the greatest treasures in my life, and God has used them to transform my family, right here on the Isle of Man, far and beyond anything I could have expected or imagined.

And this testimony that I share is by no means alone amongst our church family. Many of those who have opened up their homes have been blessed by their guests far and beyond anything that they would have expected, and all have their own testimonies of God's goodness to share.

True treasure is found in people, it's just the way God has created things. And if we invest in offering hospitality to amazing people who are foreigners and strangers in our land, we will gain treasure across nations.

**ACTION STEPS**

- There are opportunities all year round to host people who visit the island. If you have never hosted before, why not take the next opportunity to open your home to some 'treasures.'

**WEEK 4 - FELLOWSHIP****Day 6 - Pollution or Praise**

Today's Reading : *James 3: 2-12*

KEY VERSE:

*"The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body."* Jms 3:6

Have you ever been guilty of speaking 'careless words'? Often feeling like you have a split personality? One minute speaking words of wisdom and grace, the next speaking ungodly, emotive words that pollute & destroy. Have you heard yourself and wondered "where on earth did that come from?"

And have you noticed how far negative words can travel; how quickly they take hold, seeking to destroy the very person they are aimed at, be it ourselves or others?

Proverbs 12:18 says: *"There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing."*

Have you ever tried to 'fast' your words? Choosing to be quiet and listening to the Spirit within before opening your mouth. Trying not to be reckless with your words, but rather choosing your words more wisely?

Or are you more concerned about being understood rather than choosing to understand, and so lash out or gossip about someone in an effort to manipulate and control the situation, sometimes, just to be heard.

By choosing to understand rather than be understood, means we choose to be quiet and allow others to speak.

James 1:19 says: *"let every man be quick to hear and slow to speak."*

During a word fast, you become more sensitive to words and have a heightened awareness that enables repentance to come more quickly.

Matthew 12:36 tells us we give an account of every careless word.

This means we cannot allow our tongues to have a free for all, but rather, we must choose to give it boundaries.

Scripture tells us that we have the mind of Christ. It also says out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. Thus, our minds give our mouths the words we choose to speak and our hearts kick start the mouth. So we need to ensure our minds are filled with the Word of God and our hearts are kept pure

and guarded. We cannot do this alone; we must allow the Holy Spirit to guide us to speak in ways that glorify God.

It's not easy, but you will soon realise that when you speak from your spirit, in line with His Spirit, it sounds like the word of God, when you speak from your flesh it's usually emotive, demanding or with a victim mentality.

*“She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. Wise words are gentle, encouraging, gracious and spoken just at the right moment.”* Pr 31:26

Our tongues were actually created for praise:

- Praise brings glory to God;
- Praise builds faith;
- Praise takes our eyes off the circumstance and fixes them on Him;
- Praise elevates others;

the list goes on...

Let's encourage one another to choose to praise, rather than choosing to pollute when we open our mouths to speak today.

*“I will bless the Lord at all times, His praise shall continually be in my mouth.”*

Ps 34:1

### **ACTION STEPS**

- If your tongue has been out of control either as a habit or in a recent stressful situation, bring it before God today, ask him to forgive you.
- What effect do you think your words are having on you and those closest to you? Ask the Holy Spirit to show you where you most need correction and to keep those words out of your heart and mouth tomorrow.
- Write down something specific with which you can praise or encourage each of your immediate family members or closest friends. Share that encouragement with them today.

## WEEK 4 - FELLOWSHIP

### Day 7 - Breaking Bread

Today's Reading : *1 Corinthians 11: 23-26*

KEY VERSE:

*“And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”* Ac 2:42

Let's conclude our 28 day devotional by sharing fellowship in the most beautiful way - breaking bread together, sharing communion:

When Jesus had fellowship with his disciples at the last supper, he instigated the act of communion. He broke bread and shared it around those who were present, then passed a cup of wine around that everyone may partake. As he did this, he told his disciples to do this in remembrance of Him, the bread being symbolic of his body broken for us, and the wine being symbolic of his blood shed on the cross for all.

We often participate in communion as part of the church service, and we can also do this whenever we fellowship together at home. It is a serious thing remembering Jesus' death and should not be done irreverently, or when there is unforgiveness around the dining table. But if as a gathering, you are all Christians, united in your faith in Jesus, then take the opportunity to share communion together in your home. And do it often.

#### ACTION STEPS

- When you next sit round the dinner table with your spouse, family or Christian friends, find some bread and wine (or grape juice if appropriate). You can even do this via Skype with those in isolation.
- Read 1 Corinthians 11 together to remind one another of the significance of what Jesus did. Then share the bread and wine as Jesus did, remembering with grateful hearts the sacrifice that He made so that we could be forgiven.