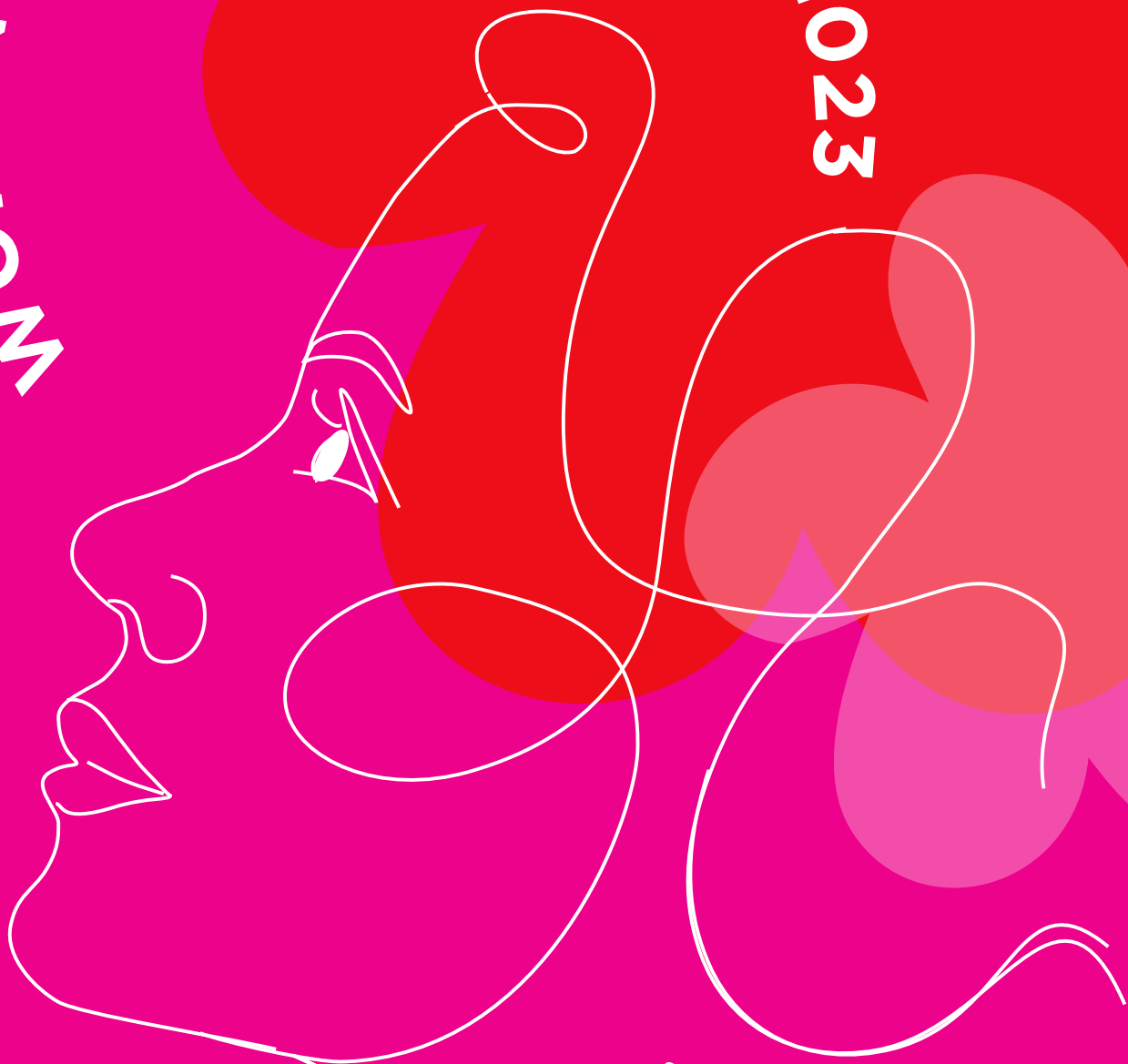


WOMEN'S QUIET TIME SERIES 2023



Seen and Heard

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Discipleship at work

2 Corinthians 1:12

Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, with integrity and godly sincerity. We have done so, relying not on worldly wisdom but on God's grace.

Reflections:

At the beginning of last year I started my first job and had a goal of being an ambassador of Christ at work and reaching out to 3 coworkers. This scripture I read during one of my QTs was one that really convicted me and helped me with this goal. Over the past year, it has definitely been challenging to stick to this as everyone else around me at work is living to the standards of worldly wisdom and I often feel pressured to follow them.

In the beginning, to fit in and build friendships in the office I found myself relying on worldly wisdom and trying to be a people pleaser. However, this scripture reminds me that gossiping with co-workers, staying silent when they talk about controversial topics like abortion or LGBTQ issues, and not sharing my truthful input when they ask for advice are just shortcuts and result in building shallow friendships. Paul calls us, as disciples of Jesus, to be willing to rely on God's wisdom even when the world might consider it absurd or unpopular.

When Paul was teaching in Corinth (1 Corinthians 2:1, 4-5) he "did not come with eloquence or human

wisdom". Despite this, he still made an impact.

Upon reflection, I realised these shallow friendships I built through pleasing people at work are temporary and can't help my colleagues seek God. God has provided me with a job I like and friendly colleagues, and I need to make the most of this opportunity and conduct myself according to God's grace. Rather than focusing on pleasing people and fitting in, focusing on God's grace made it easier to share how God has made an impact on my life with my colleagues.

Practical Challenge:

List out how you've seen God's grace in your life.

Questions:

Do you tend to rely on worldly wisdom at work, school, or even just interacting with others in general?

Put my house in order

Isaiah 32:9-13, Isaiah 38:1 & Isaiah 39:8

Reflections:

In Isaiah 32:9-13, God warns Israel about their complacency and this warning is directed to His daughters. The meaning of the word 'complacent' is "showing smug or uncritical satisfaction with oneself or one's achievements". This meaning is harsher than the words or synonyms that immediately come to my mind when I think about the word 'complacent'. Words such as 'comfortable', 'stalled' and 'not moving forward' are in deep contrast to the google definition of 'complacency' which basically describes pride. Further, the word 'smug' means showing an excessive pride in oneself or one's achievements.

In Isaiah 39:8 it reads "The word of the Lord that you have spoken is good," Hezekiah replied. For he thought, "There will be peace and security in my lifetime." When you first look at this verse without knowing the context behind it, it appears to be positive. However, digging a bit deeper there are huge alarm bells considering that the prophet Isaiah has just delivered to Hezekiah a heartbreaking prophecy that will be carried out regarding his descendants after his lifetime.

For the majority of Hezekiah's reign over Israel, he demonstrated a faith

in and obedience to God - he abolished idol worship that was the practice under his father's reign, reinstated the worship of God as the one and only God of Israel and despite opposition from other nations encouraged Israel to keep their eyes on God and to trust Him (see Isaiah 36, 37, 2 Kings 18, 19, 2 Kings 20, 2 Chronicles 29, 30 and 31).

In Isaiah 38 Hezekiah falls ill to the point of death and the prophet Isaiah instructs Hezekiah to put his "house in order" as he will die. Hezekiah prays to God reminding Him of how faithful Hezekiah has been to God with "whole hearted devotion" and that he has "done what is good" in God's eyes and weeps bitterly. God then shows mercy on Hezekiah and adds fifteen years to his life. Hezekiah prays a prayer exalting God after his illness and recovery. Following Hezekiah's prayer, the king of Babylon sends envoys to see Hezekiah and when the prophet Isaiah asks "What did the representatives of the king of Babylon see?" Hezekiah replies "There is nothing among my treasures that I did not show them." This implying that instead of focusing on listening to Isaiah's instructions and repenting by putting his house in order,

Isaiah 32:9-13, Isaiah 38:1 & Isaiah 39:8

he foolishly shows off all that he has to the representatives of the King of Babylon. Isaiah then prophesied to Hezekiah that “The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your predecessors have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the Lord. And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood who will be born to you, will be taken away”.

Hezekiah’s response to Isaiah’s unsettling prophecy is that the “word of the Lord that you have spoken is good,” for Hezekiah thought, “There will be peace and security in my lifetime”. This reveals that Hezekiah’s primary concern is only about himself and his comfort, even over listening to God’s instructions to put his house in order for the next generation. Putting our houses in order, planting and training to bear good fruit so that who will be around when we are no longer here takes a self-denial and self-sacrifice where we do not necessarily receive the benefit ourselves. There is no mention that Hezekiah obeyed this command and that his lack of response to this instruction demonstrates his ‘complacency’ in his walk with God as he thought that the extra time given to him meant that he could relax spiritually! In an article about Hezekiah it mentions that, fuelled by his repentance and desire to follow the instruction to ‘put his house in order’, he could have used the

fifteen years that God had given him to train his son to become a godly King however, the Bible mentions that Hezekiah’s son who takes over the reign of Israel after Hezekiah dies is an evil King who brings back practices that are detestable to God such as idol worship and child sacrifice. The same article notes that it also believed that Hezekiah’s son may possibly have been the one who murdered the prophet Isaiah. Think of how different the destiny of Hezekiah’s descendants would have been if Hezekiah had taken the command “to put his house in order” seriously.

Practical Challenge:

Reflect, journal/ get open to sisters/ other disciples about the ways that God is calling you to put your house in order.

Questions:

What are the ways that God is calling me to put my house in order now?

What are some steps that you can take to help train and leave behind a spiritual footprint for those that will still be here when you are no longer around?

Why do you do what you do?

Luke 3:1-20

Reflections:

I love the Gospel of Luke, it is full of historical details which appeals to my factual western mind. Luke begins the story of John with a timeline, showing us when these things took place in history. It was the 15th year of Tiberius' reign as Emperor of Rome (making it about AD 29), and it was also the year that Pontius Pilate was appointed governor of Judea. Herod, his brothers Phillip and Lysanias were in play as Tetrarchs and Caiaphas along with his father-in-law Annas were high priests. This is the historical framework which Luke gives us, a moment in time, long ago.

These times were ruled by corrupt and cruel people in Rome, but also Caiaphas the high priest and Annas his father in law, who were meant to care for the people of Israel, were more interested in power than serving God.

It was during these times that John began to preach a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. John's preaching was the beginning of change in history. He was the voice calling in the desert that Isaiah spoke of, Isaiah 40:3-5, preparing the way for the Messiah.

He was that moment in time that changed everything forever.

John did not preach nice fluffy words, but strong intentional words to shake people up and help them wake up from their slumber. He gave people hope that no matter what was happening around them, no matter who ruled, or who was in government, they could change their hearts, their attitude, and their lives by repentance. John's call to repentance was not one of feelings but of actions.

The idea behind repentance and forgiveness of sin is being liberated and delivered. Repentance is an action word, a call to change your heart and mind and therefore the way you do things, your behaviour, the way you live. Repentance is a change of direction in your life which liberates and delivers you from a life that oppresses and suffocates you.

When the crowd said "what should we do" in verse 10, John's answer was to share and care for each other, to be fair with others and not to be cruel or mean to others (verse 11-14). It is through doing the small acts that we see true repentance. Anyone can do a one-off big act of kindness but it is the continuous small acts that don't get noticed that show true repentance. John did not want the tax collectors to quit

Luke 3:1-20

their profession, but to be honest in it, he preached to the soldiers to not be cruel to people and he wanted us all to care for others and see each other's needs.

In our world of looking after self first, John's words seem very revolutionary but they were the forerunner to Jesus' words. Our kindness towards others, seeing the pain and loneliness of others, in the church and outside, and doing something about it fulfils the new command Jesus gave in John 13:34-35: "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Helping your sister not once or twice, but many times until they find their joy in Christ again. Befriending a sister whom you would not normally be friends with. Giving Christ's hope to others everyday forever with small acts shows that repentance that John spoke of, as you follow Christ.

John knocked the people out of their slumber by helping them change their lives, but he also pointed them to Christ, to the one that was so much greater than he.

Why do you do the things that you do? Things like reading your bible and praying, going to church, spending time with people and helping them know Christ. Why do you care for and love others, share your heart and life with them? It is because of Christ and his love for each one of us. It is not because we

are amazing people but because Christ is.

John preached and turned people's hearts and lives upside down, he became the lynch pin of history and he did it to serve God and point people to Christ.

Why do you do what you do?

Practical Challenge:

Go out of your way to spend time with someone you don't know, pray with them, encourage them, not once or twice but lots of times until you build a new friendship

See the needs in church and do something about it, don't turn a blind eye to the needs.

Write a card to encourage someone, sharing a verse that helps you.

Questions:

How can you use your life to point others to Christ?

Being comfortable with feeling uncomfortable

Hebrews 12:11 NLT & James 1:2-4 NLT

Reflections:

“Being comfortable with feeling uncomfortable” was a phrase I learned to grapple with 2 years ago during COVID. I had to teach my whole class of 31 students (Year 3) through online learning when most of them had not even heard of Google Classroom! I remember staying up past midnight every night trying to prepare for their lessons and give feedback on their work. I felt so uncomfortable because everything was new. Teaching online was new, looking after my students’ wellbeing when I couldn’t physically see them was new, and on top of that was navigating through those fearful COVID times with my Bible Talk and my own family...these were ALL very new things to me!

When things are new, change is required....and I hate change because change makes me feel uncomfortable! I hate being out of my comfort zone!

According to James 1:2-4, every change (discomfort) is an opportunity for growth. Life isn’t meant to be 100% comfortable, 100% of the time. But understand that these periods of discomfort are serving a purpose.

The purpose being - growth. We know that growth is good, but sometimes we put growth on hold. I realised that the older I get, the more I resent discomfort. Sometimes we decide that we’re too tired to be uncomfortable anymore, that we’ve grown in the past already, that we’re too old, that we’re too this and too that. We convince ourselves that we’ve earned the right to be comfortable. We remain stagnant, paralyzed with the fear of change. The fear of the unknown.

Based on what we see in the Bible, most of the people God chose to advance His kingdom didn’t actually aspire to greatness or want to stretch their comfort zone. In fact, many of them protested or made excuses—Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Gideon, Naomi, Rahab, Noah, Joseph, Joshua, Jeremiah, and Ruth. They faced obstacles that appeared impossible to overcome based on human perception and earthly resources, however, they simply remained willing and able to serve in whatever capacity God called them to serve. As a result, they ALL GREW exponentially!

It isn’t our first inclination to get uncomfortable.

Hebrews 12:11 NLT & James 1:2-4 NLT

It is in our instinct to survive and be comfortable in our lives. Nevertheless, discomfort almost always leads to growth. The path just isn't always straight and narrow, but that's okay! God has made us in His image.

Philippians 4:9 (AMP)

And my God will liberally supply (fill until full) your every need according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

I learned that life WILL make us feel uncomfortable, but we must not ever let it stop us from doing what we need to do. We must remember, it is a good thing to feel uncomfortable. When we feel uncomfortable, it means we are moving forward and exploring new territory. We are being stretched into a new area which will increase our effectiveness. We have to be comfortable with being uncomfortable.

If you're uncomfortable right now, embrace it. Follow it, and find out where the discomfort takes you.

Practical Challenge:

Discuss with your discipling partner what areas of 'discomfort' you may need to venture into and the practical action plans you can make together to stretch that discomfort.

Questions:

Why is remaining 'comfortable' not necessarily a good thing?

When was the last time you felt 'out of your comfort zone' but still embraced it and therefore experienced growth?

What areas of 'discomfort' do you think God is trying to inspire you to explore? What is stopping you from exploring it?

What is your natural response towards a situation or challenge that makes you feel uncomfortable? Why do you respond that way?

Ways of the heart

Proverbs 4:23 NLT

“Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.”

Reflections:

I get swayed by my heart very easily. So when my heart started to deeply miss certain things or people from my life before Christ, I struggled very hard to fight against it. A part of me really wanted to give in to what my heart was missing until I came across this verse. I realised two things; firstly that I didn't guard my heart very well & secondly recognising what course my life would have taken if I gave in.

Matthew 22:37 NLT

“Jesus replied, ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’”

For my heart to be missing parts of my old life, it meant that a part of my heart was still loving the world. Loving secular music was my biggest hurdle because music has the power to sway my heart the most. Another hurdle was the worldly friendships I had where I would join in on particular conversations because they were fun to have or I would feel left out if I didn't. Loving these parts of the world was leaving a trap for me to fall into so I had to overcome these hurdles. Although it was really hard to change my music taste & fight my introversion to build deeper

friendships with women who will bring me closer to God, my heart did begin to love God more and more.

When I first read this verse, I sat there & really thought about how my life would look if I did give into my heart. I know I would've gone back to my life before Christ where it was just dull & full of unnecessary struggles. It would be like a load of weight that was just taken off of my shoulders was being put back on and I would act like “Yeah nah I'm alright”. But this made me so thankful to the Lord for His spirit leading me to this verse and keeping me on this path with Him. It also reminds me of Psalm 37:23-24 ‘The Lord makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him. Though he may stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand.’

Practical Challenge:

Spend some time today just delighting in His word and presence.

Questions:

How are you guarding your heart against the world?

Do the things you allow to enter your heart bring you closer to God or further away from Him?

Overcoming feeling overwhelmed

Matthew 6:25-27,34

Reflections:

Overwhelmed. It's a word that people often use when they don't feel in control or when they're feeling stressed, anxious, or even defeated, especially when it feels like it's too much to bear. The word 'overwhelmed' could be used to describe how I felt during my bible studies initially. In the early stages of my bible studies, I was convicted when asked how God fits into my life. My time with God was limited to a few minutes a day in prayer and an hour of church every week.

At the time, I remember thinking, "But I have such a busy schedule, and it's so hard to find time or the energy to go to a devotional, have a quiet time, read my bible, pray and talk to other disciples. Surely God will understand". Yet it was so clear what the real issue was. I was basically saying that I didn't have time for God. I admit that even today when I am consumed with worry and feel overwhelmed about work, university, my social life and my mental health I often forget to just sit with God and talk to him.

One of the scriptures that really helped me was Matthew 6:24-34, "Do Not Worry".

When Jesus described how the "birds of the air" did not need to "sow or reap or store away in barns and yet [our] heavenly Father feeds

them", I was reminded to acknowledge the way God works. Jesus tells us here in verse 26 that we as humans are so "much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?". How powerful is that? If God takes care of the flowers and birds, how much more will he care for us, whom he views as more valuable? This gives me immense comfort.

There is more to life than worldly concerns. I am not saying we should stop caring about our work, studies or social life, but we shouldn't let it consume us to a point where we feel 'overwhelmed' or cannot stop worrying about these things. Jesus expects his followers to remember and fulfil their role in God's kingdom. We must strive to discern God's work in the world and act justly on God's behalf. Beyond that we must trust that everything else will be taken care of by God.

Matthew 6:25-27,34

Practical Challenge:

Try to bring God into your daily habits and routines more - especially when feeling overwhelmed. For example, if you usually take a walk listening to music, replace it with the audio bible or listen to one of the church's livestreams. Or consider journaling/recording your day and how God worked in it.

Questions:

What are you feeling overwhelmed about right now?

What aspects of your daily life do you need to work on fitting God more in?

How can you reach out to God and other disciples and turn to the Bible when you are feeling overwhelmed?

Do not fear, just trust in God

Matthew 10:29,31; Matthew 11:28-30 & Philippians 4:6-7

Reflections:

The past year has been a turbulent year for my family and I as we have been going through waves of trials. Almost every day we had to deal with all kinds of uncertainty and my heart was full of fear, anxiety, worry and every day ended in exhaustion. When I was struggling to find a solution and not being able to see a way forward, I had a lot of questions in my mind such as “Why did this happen to us? Did I do something wrong or was it someone else’s fault? Is God punishing me for my past sins?” I even doubted whether God loved me or not. I was battling depression and overthinking every day.

Fortunately, I have developed the habit to have a daily quiet time in recent years and it drew me closer to God through those hardships. I spent time with God every day and it became a source of strength for me to get through one challenge after another. In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus said His yoke is light, I should take His yoke and learn from Him, to be gentle and humble in heart and I will find rest for my soul. I often opened the bible with anxiety and anticipation, expecting God to speak to me so that I can find rest for my soul.

God’s words are full of strength. Sometimes it gave me the wisdom to solve problems, sometimes unexpected responses, sometimes it helped me look at things from a different angle and pulled me out of negative thoughts. Sometimes it was a warning and helped me not fall for Satan’s tricks and fall into sin. Most importantly, it reminded me that God loves me. When I look back at my life and see God’s grace and count the many miracles He has performed in my life it continually reassures me of God’s love for me. Jesus said that God knows all things, even the needs of sparrows. (Matthew 10:29,31) I am so much more valuable than those sparrows in God’s eyes. He even sent His only beloved son to bear my sins and die for me so that I could become His daughter. My sins have been forgiven. I should not doubt His love nor fear the trials because He is a loving father and a mighty God.

Everything is under God’s control. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. (Philippians 4:6) Again and again, I practised surrendering to God through prayers, not relying on my own knowledge and understanding.

Matthew 10:29,31; Matthew 11:28-30 & Philippians 4:6-7

I told Him my pain and weaknesses, prayed for his deliverance, help, guidance, healing, and the wisdom to overcome the difficulties, as well as the ability to forgive, to love and to persevere.

I practised fixing my eyes on God by looking at the great things He has done for the Israelites, for my family and I, as well as for the brothers and sisters around me, and holding on to who I am and His promises. Gradually, I have learned to let go of what I have been holding on to and simply trust God. I have found peace in my heart again. (Philippians 4:7)
Even though there will be challenges in my life, I believe these spiritual exercises will continue to strengthen my faith. The value of the real trials is that I can withstand the tribulations, tears, and challenges of life, which shows how valuable the faith that sustains me is.

Practical Challenge:

Pray that we will learn to let go of our burdens and trust God fully so that we can experience God's presence and His great love and our faith will grow through every situation.

Questions:

What are your burdens that you are holding on to?

Are you trusting God or relying on your own wisdom?

How can you practise focusing on God rather than the challenges you are facing?

What am I asking God for?

Psalm 27

Reflections:

Like most Psalms, David wrote this during a season of trials, yet this Psalm is a song of confidence and triumph. In the first verse we can see David's great confidence in God, personally describing God as his light, salvation and stronghold. This is an inspiring and comforting view of our God.

Recently I've found myself doing things out of duty, having lost the heart and the "why" behind my spiritual walk. I find myself just going along with the motions of Christianity and it isn't until I face challenges or get exhausted that I question where I'm drawing my strength from. Unlike David, I gain strength from my own experiences, relationships, knowledge and abilities. David knew a strength greater than all these and so too should we remember that God is our strength and is far better than anything else the world offers.

In verse 4 David's tone changes from celebration to contemplation. The experience of the goodness and greatness of God made David think about how wonderful it is to seek Him and experience His presence. David longs to "dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek Him in His temple."

This verse helps me reset my mind and my heart as I ask myself the same question: what do I ask of the Lord? With the best of my intentions I want to ask to dwell with God but deep down it's more things like wanting to do well in my career, have great friendships and family relationships and live an enjoyable life. But what David is asking for is so much more valuable and fulfilling.

We are so blessed to be able to spend time with God every day, have a personal relationship with Him, admire His magnificent creation, be part of an incredible church and help others have this same relationship and purpose. These are the things that bring us true fulfilment and joy. I need to be more like David, asking to experience more of God's presence for the rest of my life.

Practical Challenge:

Have a specific prayer this week that is just thanking and praising God.

Questions:

What do you find yourself leaning on for strength other than God?

Where do you usually enjoy God's presence? (Beside a body of water, walking, sunrise - these are my favourites)

Spiritual refinement: Through the darkness

1 Peter 1:6-7 NLT, Isaiah 48:10 NLT, 2 Corinthians 3:18 & Colossians 3:10

Reflections:

Two Words: Refinement HURTS, and old habits die hard. But this scripture gave me SO much hope. I clung to it. A year and a half ago, if at some point you spoke to me, everything probably would have seemed fine from your perspective. Truthfully though, inside was ugly, numb, and dark. I was paralysed. I was so out of touch with my emotions that I couldn't even give them names. My body felt as if it had been swallowed by sand, and only my face was above the surface. It didn't feel much like drowning, because at least in water you can move and there is space. Everything around me was hard, and because I was in that place for so long, so was I. Stuck and unable to move, ready to give up, but unwilling to let go. I finally asked for help. The last year and a half has been the largest period of intense spiritual refinement I have ever endured. Even on a daily basis I am experiencing it. I believe we are meant to. Refinement serves a spiritual purpose, but there is also no promise of it being pleasant. It inherits an outcome.

Spiritual refinement brings us closer to God. It makes us more like Him and this is our goal. The end result is a purified product, nil of any

imperfections. We become more like Him. We are changed into His glorious image. Embrace it. We should seek refinement out. Today my refinement looks a lot more like dealing with my pride and sense of entitlement. It is an everyday effort, as I reconnect with God and fall in love with His truth all over again. I feel free.

Practical Challenge:

If you're struggling to love God deeply, the practical I can give is: READ YOUR BIBLE. And ask any and every question (no matter how ridiculous it may sound to you) that comes to your mind to someone you spiritually look up to. They may just surprise you with a new perspective to bridge that connection and bring you closer to God. To help make you more like Him.

Questions:

Ask yourself: Do I need help?
What spiritual refinement have you been experiencing, or need to dive deeper into?
This is a gift from God.
How can you seek out spiritual refinement?

Unconditional forgiveness

Mark 11:25

“And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

Reflections:

Forgiveness is a large topic that we can commonly find in the Bible with the word appearing about 53 times. It is so serious and still people can often overlook it and think that it isn't important in discipling when in fact, it is probably one of the most common and significant concepts that are found in the Bible. This can be seen in Mark 11:25 where it emphasises the importance of not holding grudges against one another and forgiving one another just as God forgives us for our sins.

It's one of the hardest things to do in life (forgiving someone who has wronged you) and it can be especially difficult when the one who harmed you is a brother or sister in Christ. Yet God commands us to forgive, and especially to forgive one another. We forgive not because the person is perfect but because God loves us and forgave us first. God gave us a perfect example through Christ, where Jesus endured the cross on our behalf and forgave all our sins. Ephesians 4:32 sums this up perfectly in how Christ forgave us so therefore we should forgive as well.

Forgiveness is something that I have struggled with all my life.

Particularly during the past year, where all the trials that I went through really highlighted my desire to hold grudges against others and refuse to soften my heart towards forgiveness. Eventually, the grudges I held onto in my heart turned into bitterness, not only towards others but towards God, and blaming Him for the hardships in my life. One thing that a sister brought to my attention was that the bitterness in my heart caused my faith in God to stumble as I was not only not forgiving others but not placing my trust in God. A famous quote that I often reflect on is by Malachy McCourt which says “Resentment is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die.” This quote is so true in everyday life for us all because how often can we refuse to forgive someone and then hope that the past hurt will randomly disappear? The Bible has very clear standards on forgiveness and how it is a biblical standard that is non-negotiable. In Matthew 18:21-22 (“Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times”).

Mark 11:25

“And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

Jesus highlights how there is no limit to forgiveness and no matter how many times people may sin against us and hurt us, we are called as God’s people to forgive. A helpful mindset that allowed me to show forgiveness was that other people are a gift from God and I should be treating them accordingly.

Practical Challenge:

Memorise this verse:

Colossians 3:13

“Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”

Questions:

Is there someone you haven’t forgiven, especially a brother or sister in Christ?

What are some reasons that you have been withholding forgiveness?

How has holding grudges affected your relationship with God?

Waiting on God

Isaiah 40:31

But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”

Reflections:

No one likes delays and waiting for something. I find myself waiting for something everyday; waiting in line, waiting for something to finish cooking, waiting for something to work, and the natural human response is to get frustrated by the process, I know I do. This is the same for me when waiting on God. Sometimes we wait for a prayer to be answered, guidance from God, God to reveal something to us, or our dreams and hopes to be fulfilled. I have never been a patient person and I can miss the opportunity in the process of waiting on God by getting frustrated, doubtful and not trusting God's timing and process.

When we made the decision to move to Newcastle and go on the church planting, we excitedly started applying to houses and jobs and genuinely thought the process of moving to Newcastle would not take very long. We were wrong. We had to move out of our place in Sydney earlier than expected, but we felt eager to move and get stuck into the adventure. But the weeks rolled on by and so did the rejections from jobs and houses. We would take our young boys, travel an hour each

way to attend house viewings most weekends and during the week. The effort felt wasted and exhausting. We became more and more frustrated with God's timing and being stuck in limbo; especially when our intentions were to do something big and faithful. It took three months before we found a new home and job.

I felt abandoned by God and struggled to surrender complete trust to God through so many unforeseen circumstances. I was too quick to blame God. Instead, we learnt what it meant to surrender to God and trust that He will answer our specific prayers and plans; just maybe not on a timetable that seems efficient. Rather, He worked so we moved and James started his new job all at once, lining everything up perfectly. When I look back through this time there is no doubt that God was working and His timing was perfect. There are many lessons that I learnt throughout the process of moving, but above all I learnt to rely and trust in God when things were unclear in front of me. It wasn't until we got down on our knees to pray every night, praying specific prayers and really handing our plans over to God,

Isaiah 40:31

But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”

where I started to feel truly surrendered to God’s plans for us. As it says in Proverbs 3:5-6, we submitted everything to God and God made the path straight for us to move. It’s hard in the moment to rely on God’s timing and wait for Him. He never picks the easy option for us; rather using uncertain times to train us to be more faithful and reliant on Him.

When everything fell into place for our move, it really did feel like our strength was renewed, as it says in Isaiah. Of course God wanted us strong, ready to tackle the planting with zeal and faith. This strength wouldn’t have come from our own timing. Even moreso, Isaiah promises that we will run and not grow weary. I’m not sure I could trust in this promise if God didn’t use His timing to strengthen us first.

Practical Challenge:

If you feel like you are waiting on God for something now, I encourage you to pray on your knees to God for surrender and reliance (Mark 11:24) to read through God’s promises so you can rely on Him (Deuteronomy 31:8). Journal how you are feeling so you can look back and remember that God is working for your good (Jeremiah 29:11). There is power and so much to learn in the process and the wait.

Questions:

How do you react when waiting on God?

What is something in my life that I need to surrender to God and His perfect timing?

The Lord is good!

Psalm 100:1-5 & Psalm 103:1-6

Reflections:

Who is God and what is He like? Sometimes He is the God in whom I find rest and comfort when I feel weary and troubled and sometimes He is the God I thank for the good things that happen to me. Sometimes He is just God whereby miracles and stories happen within the Bible that seem so remote from the busyness and worries of the world that fill my mind every single day. There are just so many bad things happening around us! Natural disasters, sicknesses, wars, people suffering, my own sinful nature and weaknesses, etc. As I realised that so much of this “badness” is not within my control, and often doesn’t get better in the way I expect it to, life can suddenly become quite discouraging!

However, when I was reading these Psalms, I realised that these negative emotions and thoughts happen when I lose sight of God and His goodness. I often thought of God’s goodness in the form of the blessings and “good things” that He offers. But these scriptures (and many alike) remind me that true goodness lies within God’s identity and who He is:

Our maker and shepherd
(Psalm 100:3)
The light of the world (John 9:5)

that overcomes darkness (John 1:5)
Who forgives and heals
(Psalm 103:3)
A watcher and protector
(Psalm 121:5, Psalm 34:8)
A warrior (Psalms 118:14, Exodus 15:3, Psalm 24:8)
Mighty and powerful
(Job 36:5, Psalm 104:2-8)
Gracious, compassionate, patient and loving (Psalms 145:8)

There are so many more scriptures like these that leave me in awe of God’s goodness, and knowing this brings me endless joy and peace! Even when in suffering and challenges we are ‘subjected to frustration’ and ‘bondaged to decay’, God liberates and transforms our soul ‘in hope’ (Romans 8:20-21). In fact, it is in light of the world’s darkness and my weaknesses that I thank God even more for always being the good and perfect Lord He is, and for never changing or being shaken by anything in this world. How precious and wonderful is His goodness!

Psalm 100:1-5 & Psalm 103:1-6

Practical Challenge:

Intentionally meditate on God's everlasting goodness throughout the day (and everyday!) through prayers, journaling or your own way! Just be still and enjoy the moment of pure joy and peace that comes from knowing the Lord is good!

Questions:

- How do you view God's goodness in good times? What form does it take?
- How do you feel about God's goodness in difficult times? Does it still leave you in awe?
- How can you strengthen your faith in God's goodness regardless of the circumstances?

In good times I see God's goodness as awesome and so clear! I think maybe I also expect it and it's easy for me to remember how Great he is.

It's harder for me to trust in Him & his timing. I have to really remember and make effort to be in awe.

PRAYER: I think the more I pray about his goodness the easier I will remember it even when in hard circumstances.

Trusting God even when it's hard

1 Samuel 1:1-20

Reflections:

Hannah was one of Elkanah's wives, and in those days, a woman's value was determined by the number of male children she had. If a woman had no children, she was considered to be a failure. Peninnah, Elkanah's other wife, was fertile, but Hannah was infertile. Peninnah would irritate Hannah so severely that she would cry and refuse to eat each time they went to the house of the Lord to worship and offer the sacrifice (1 Sam 1:7).

Over the years, I've experienced some difficult times where I felt like nothing was working out for me. I felt like God didn't care about me, and as a result my first emotional reaction to God was one of bitterness, hopelessness, and despair. I became very impatient with God when I didn't see any changes in my situation, and I would ask God when was it going to be my turn. Looking around me, I would see God doing things in other people's lives, and oftentimes I would ask God what about me Lord? Have you forgotten me?

Hannah spent so much time in a state of sorrow and agony that it would have been easy for her to feel discouraged and hopeless. However, one of Hannah's admirable traits is that despite Peninnah's repeat-

ed mockery and provocation, and despite how long her unfavourable circumstances persisted, she did not give up. She also did not react indignantly, and did not become bitter toward God as I did. Instead, Hannah was gracious to her tormentors and persevered in her prayer and faith in God, praying patiently and persistently.

Although the default human tendency when triggered is to react negatively or try to fight for ourselves, Hannah would cry out to the Lord in prayer. When things got tougher, Hannah prayed even more! She put her faith in God and trusted Him to rescue her from her situation. Studying Hannah's life, I have also learnt not to take matters into my own hands whenever I face adversity but to cast all my burdens unto the Lord just like what Hannah did.

When I look back on my past experiences, I realise that my prayer life and faith would suffer whenever I encountered challenging circumstances. I would often wonder and look for other things to comfort and cheer me up instead of turning to God, but Hannah's story serves as a reminder to us of Hannah's great faith and trust in the Lord even in the midst of her desolation.

1 Samuel 1:1-20

Hannah fully depended on God because she knew there was no one else who could console her or bring her relief.

Even though it can be challenging to see and understand what God is doing and why some of our deepest desires seem to take so long to be fulfilled, we can have faith that He hears our prayers and is actively at work. Although His timing may seem off to us, He knows more than we do. He only asks that we put our faith in Him, just as Hannah did. He extends an invitation to come to Him with our heartaches, suffering, longings, and brokenness.

Hannah's story is a stirring one of courage, strength and steadfast devotion to prayer and seeking God. She continued to pray despite her difficulties, feelings of rejection, and abandonment. When she wasn't

sure if she would ever have children, she prayed, and when God blessed her with a son, she prayed. When we face difficult seasons, let us be encouraged by Hannah's commitment to trusting God.

Practical Challenge:

Prayer is a powerful tool that God wants us to use to fight through our circumstances and deepen our relationship with Him.

Questions:

- How do you respond to people who treat you harshly?
- What do you do when God takes a long time to answer your prayers?
- What are you like when you have to wait and how do you interact with the Lord while you are waiting?

Naturally would want to fight back. Be harsh back to them.

I get VERY impatient and try to take matters in my own hands.

I think I do pray alot but there is also lots of complaining and not a full surrender. I guess I dont trust God fully until he shows me the thing I've been waiting for?

- this sounds so silly after yesterday's sermon!

*Not of the world,
just simply passing by*

Romans 12:2, Proverbs 4:14-15 & Romans 8:5-7

Reflections:

As women, we can struggle with feeling peer pressured by the whole world. To be in the world but to be not of the world is a struggle, which is something I personally have struggled with a lot. The need to be liked by everyone was a clear stumbling block in my Bible studies as I would lie or tell half-truths, yet it was these scriptures that convicted me and compelled me to tell the whole truth. It was then I truly understood how I was transformed by God's unconditional love for me. I had the need to be seen as perfect and build up a perfect image, which I realised many women from all stages of life also experience.

For me, social media has been a large cause of this as it follows me around and I can see the highlights of everyone's life. So what is your stumbling block and do you feel the need to please people, not God? The scriptures make it very clear that if it isn't God that you are trying to please you are disobeying the one true God. "The mind governed by the flesh is death... The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so." Having a mind that is governed by the flesh and its desires is far too easy to

accidentally fall into when we aren't alert. Perhaps it's not pleasing people but instead pleasing yourself and indulging in the world of sin, making it increasingly difficult to deny yourself. Even some of the greatest people in the Bible were people-pleasers and needed a radical wake-up call that prompted them to repent. Peter had a fear of man when he denied Jesus three times (John 18:15-18, 25-27). Yet when he meditated on Jesus' words and kept his mind on the Spirit he had a radical repentance and experienced godly sorrow, and was reinstated by Jesus (John 21:15-19) and unashamedly preaches to over 3000 people (Acts 2:14-41). Like Peter, we too can have radical repentance by focusing on the character of God rather than ourselves and meditating on scriptures that illustrate this.

Practical Challenge:

Find another sister and share who you are trying to please then work together towards radical repentance and keep each other accountable.

Questions:

Whose approval do you seek the most? And why?
Do your desires match up with what the Spirit desires?

A string of pearls

James 4:17

“If anyone then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn’t do it, it is sin for them.”

Reflections:

Last year my theme scripture was James 4:17. This scripture had previously intimidated me as it is such a high calling, and I didn’t want to feel guilty about what I wasn’t doing. 2022 was a new outlook on this scripture. I decided to focus on doing the good I knew I ought to do. It was faith building to do this good, not for human praise but knowing that God sees me.

The scriptures promise that God will reward those who do their righteous acts in secret (Matthew 6: 1-4). A psychologist shared that life is like a string of pearls we need to decide to move from one pearl (good deed) and then transition to the next. We need to keep going to create this beautiful finished product. Many of us read Matthew 13:45 when we studied the bible. We need to continue to look for these fine pearls in our lives.

Another scripture that I meditated on was God’s promise in Gal 6:9-10. This scripture encouraged me not to become weary in doing good. It states a promise from God that at the proper time, I would reap a harvest. God is faithful to his promises. I feel blessed that 2022 was the year that my daughter made Jesus

Lord. What a blessing that last year God chose for his harvest to come from my own family.

Practical Challenge:

Do not become weary in doing good, as God promises you will reap a harvest if you do not give up.

Questions:

What is the good that you know you ought to do today? I encourage you to listen to the prompting by the Holy Spirit and follow through with faithful actions.

Which are three good things you have been neglecting but want to do this year?

*1. Sharing more as I go!
But now I'm working on this with the girls early.*

I think it's mostly just that at the moment

Love is obedience to God

2 John 1:5-9

Reflections:

We all know that we should love people, God and obey his commands as disciples. John says in verse 5 that he isn't writing a new command, but one we have always had - but always need to be reminded of LOVE.

Verse 6 is one of my favourite scriptures because it really convicts me to grow in a REAL love for God. So often I say and think that I am loving God, but really I am abusing his grace and acting on my selfishness. I can easily go by day after day, acting that I'm loving God but ignoring when his Spirit prompts me to obey a commandment I know I should do.

I love at the end of this verse where it says "his command is that you walk in love". Walking is an action word, therefore walking in love is taking action in obedience. We need to be walking in love everywhere we go, walking with his truth and putting his Word into practice in all areas of our life.

If you want to really love God as he calls us to, it is simply to obey his commands.

A loving obedience should come from a humble heart, one that remembers Jesus' sacrifice for us and one that compels us to obey

because we know that God only wants what's best for us!

Verse 8 - 9 warns us to be aware of where our heart is at and to not give up and lose the love and obedience we have for God. If you run ahead without God, taking control of your life, assuming that you're doing the righteous thing without even reading your Bible, you DO NOT have God.

Let's be women who are dedicated to the truth in his teachings, who love God with a loving obedience and WALK IN LOVE.

Practical Challenge:

What is an act of obedience for God that you can do today?

Questions:

According to what this scripture says (love is that we walk in obedience to his commands), do you really love God?

What stops you from obeying God's commands?

Where is your heart at today with having a loving obedience, not just an obedience of duty?

Good enough for God

Luke 13:6-9, 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 & 1 Samuel 13:13

Reflections:

I was very angry with a person in my life some time ago. I had been really hurt over many years and things had come to such a head that I felt I was at my absolute limit. Indeed I was so angry that I felt like I had every right to “cut” this person right out of my life.

Why should I forgive this person after years of behaviour that brought me so much pain?

Then Luke 13:6-9 burst into my thoughts just like God was speaking to me. I was confused by its appearance and confused about its meaning. As I pondered on it, a few things jumped out at me and have remained with me since.

Firstly, this unhealthy tree had been in this unfruitful state for more than 3 years... a long time. Nothing good was found on it. The owner wanted it gone, out of his vineyard, because it was taking up space. Then the caretaker pleaded with the owner to give it another year! He offered to fertilise it and dig around it. There was a lot of nurturing and care for this tree in the hope it would bear fruit. I was struck by this request.

More time! More love and grace! Seriously! Even after everything they have done.

I really felt like God asked me to hold off with condemnation and judgement of this person. I was to give them another year to change. To be honest, it all felt too generous to me. With tears and prayers I came to understand that God had given me more than “a year” to change many times over when I had been stuck in a sin or an unhealthy mindset. Generosity is a beautiful character of God.

Could I give this person a whole year to change? I could do it for God, if not for that person.

The second thing that struck me was the nurturing, work and care that God was willing to do on this person’s heart and life. God did all the digging, pruning and fertilising to get them healthy through the work of others in their life. I saw first hand all the people God had sent into this person’s life to love on them, to guide them, to help them and to pray with them.

After a year (I knew the exact date) this person was not struck down or chopped down (as I fully expected secretly). This person had changed their behaviour with all the love and care and was obviously healthier (good enough for God)

Luke 13:6-9, 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 & 1 Samuel 13:13

Interestingly God used this time to produce a life and heart change in me as well. It was a very humbling moment when I realised that my angry, judgemental heart would have cast that person out long ago. I have since come to trust God's judgement rather than my own. It is good not to listen to my own condemning heart but instead to rather look for God's work to be revealed, in His time.

I have a long way to go with this 'patience thing' even though it's the first virtue listed in the 'love is' verse in 1 Corinthians 13:4-6. LOVE IS PATIENT, LOVE IS KIND ETC. Impatience was the sin that brought down King Saul in 1 Sam 13:13 and it is where David excelled.

What a great lesson for me. Thank you God for your generous abundant grace.

Practical Challenge:

Write a list of the sins/negative mindsets where God has given you another year

List what has been pruned in your life and what fruit has become of it
Pray for those who are in peril of being chopped down and do something to help them change.

Questions:

Do I trust that God will, and is, working in my own life and in others lives, especially when there is so much hurt? *YES but some FEAR (forget)*

Am I willing to be patient with people while God works on helping them become healthier even though the process could take years?
Can I honestly say I am loving, if love is patient and I am not?

Wow! I've never really been in the situation where I've had to wait years for someone to change. I definitely would struggle with patience a lot. How the 1 Cor. scripture I'm definitely not being... or at least not all the time.

one thing that stands out the most is my impurity with Alex while dating. Gwael gave me a 2nd chance and was so patient with me.

Now we have an amazing marriage and look at Bible Talk!

Materialism

1 Samuel 16:7

But the Lord said to Samuel, "Don't judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The Lord doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

Reflections:

Being in high school I am constantly surrounded by materialistic people and they judge others based on their appearance, clothes and the latest technology or just anything materialistic.

I personally struggle with materialism and just feel like I'm constantly being judged by others just based on my outward appearance. A friend I was close to last year would gossip to me about others which led me to think everyone is like her and will judge me just by my appearance so I felt pressured and felt the need to always look nice. That slowly got more and more important. It got so important in my heart that thinking about what to wear became more essential to me than my quiet times. What does God care about? According to this Scripture, God only cares about your heart - nothing else.

As women we get pressured to always look great and presentable so we need to think to ourselves: 'Is this taking up more space in my heart than God?'

Practical Challenge:

Have your quiet time in the morning before you look in the mirror and worry about what you will wear.

Questions:

- 1 How intentional are you at keeping up your outward appearance?
- 2 How intentional are you at working on your heart?

I think I do care a bit about my appearance but not as much now than I used to.

It's definitely easier to work on my appearance than my heart. And I definitely think of it more often too.

→ My heart is selfish, work on being humble and loving to others!

↳ Pray for this to be on my mind / heart more + really go after this.

Be like a child

Matthew 18:3

Reflections:

I have gained a "Superpower" since I became a mum four years ago. I am able to hear the baby's cries travel from another room. I started waking up in the middle of the night no matter how deep I slept and how little the baby sound was. On the other hand, my dear husband who claims he is a light sleeper always sleeps through the baby's cries. I can't remember how many times I have to shake and wake him up when it is his turn to settle the little ones.

Do I hear any other noise during sleep? Usually not. When I fall asleep I barely hear any noise, not even thunderstorms. How come I became more sensitive to baby cries? Apart from the scientific fact that women's brains are designed to respond more to baby cries than men's brains. I believe I am also developing a stronger bond with my kids through taking care of them everyday. Listening to their needs and answering them. Eventually, these little noises become a trigger to make me attentive whenever and wherever. This special bond makes me reflect on my relationship with God. Unlike the little children who go straight up to express their feelings, I sometimes tried to hold up my little anxiety and worries in front of God and my trusted friends.

I thought they might be too little to be mentioned and tried to hide my vulnerability in the prayers. I underestimated Him and His love for us.

"And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered"

- Matthew 10:30

God knows us better than we know ourselves. We should talk to our God with full openness and reveal our vulnerability and trust Him just as a child trusts their parents. We should all believe that He will be there to help in every situation. Just as it is promised: "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." -Mark 11:24

Practical Challenge:

Spend quality time with God today. Pour your heart into the prayer and tell him more about your true feelings about someone or something that you usually don't talk about. Call one of your trusted friends, share your feelings and ask them to pray for you.

Questions:

What are the natural characteristics of a child you wish you could have? Is there any emotion or feeling you hold today and have not talked to God about it? *No?*

Do you ever doubt God's power and His promise? *Yes, when it's not in my timing and I get impatient. Or even if I feel like my sin is too big, even for Him! :-*

↳ Complete trust and reliance someone that waits to hear Gods "OK".

Living in unity

2 Corinthians 8:7, Matthew 5:44, Matthew 18:22 & Ephesians 6:12

Reflections:

Excel in everything (2 Cor 8:7) is my motto - I'm a high achiever which spans from being straight A-s as a uni student to vacuuming the floor at home a few times a day. I was EA of the Year Australia finalist a few years ago.

When a young Managing Director decided to put me on a performance improvement plan (not so long ago) aiming to get rid of me, I felt betrayed, hurt and hated. I had gone above and beyond in my role, I had connected his business to prospective clients from my former business network and did other extraordinary things for the business. All of a sudden I felt like I was enemy #1 and under attack. It was a very painful experience.

I struggled in tears, and in prayer, and God reminded me of Matthew 5:44. So what did it mean for me in that situation to love my boss, who in a sense was persecuting me? I needed to realise my enemy was Satan, not my boss. I decided to love my boss by buying him a good-bye gift and writing him a card in which I invited him and his family over for dinner with my family. I prayed for his salvation and was able to forgive him completely. God has blessed me with a more senior role in my profession. God blessed me with

the freedom of loving someone who hurt me.

I'm sure we all go through painful experiences in our relationships with others. Jesus calls us to forgive not 7 times but 77 times.

As Ephesians 6 says, we have to realise when others hurt us, it's not really about the person. Although my boss hurt me, it wasn't him in a sense, it was Satan's scheme. He wanted me to believe I needed to hate my boss, since he hated me. I had to decide whether to believe in Satan's lies or resist them. I had to choose love over hate. It was a conscious decision, not an emotional feel-good thing.

Questions:

Do you live in unity with people around you?

Can you say you are in complete unity with your brothers and sisters? Do you choose love when hurt?

Have you forgiven people 77 times? Have you forgiven others as Christ forgave you (Ephesians 4:32)?

Paul considered himself as the worst of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15).

Do you consider others or yourself as the worst of sinners?

Fix your eyes on Jesus

Matthew 14:22-33 & Proverbs 16:9

Reflections:

A balanced life, what does that mean to you? If you'd asked me what that meant some years ago when my six children were younger, ranging in age from one to seventeen, my answer was a little like this - being very organised, making sure I plan my days, prepping ahead, making sure everyone's needs were met and fitting in our weekly activities of work, school, church.

Yet I could not understand how despite every effort to make it work, I was still so completely overwhelmed and stressed, exhausted and unhappy. It wasn't until I studied in my bible God's plan for balance and read the book by Sheila Jones and sought advice from other amazing women in the church on Finding Balance, that I realised I had the concept of balance completely wrong.

As women, we are seeking the place of perfect balance that will help us across the challenging daily tasks of juggling life. The problem is, we try to obtain that balance all by ourselves. Those who follow Jesus find the equilibrium by fixing their eyes on and imitating Him, the only person who ever lived a perfectly balanced life.

God is not only our creator, but He

is also the source of truth, humanity's overall purpose, and the specific plan for our life. The decisions we make from day to day are most effective when they are based on His unquestionably good and purposeful will for us in all areas of our life. Focusing on following His principles will also help us stay within His will, avoiding unnecessary trials that can become major obstacles.

Read again Matthew 14:22-33. When we take our eyes off Jesus, we inherit problems. When we don't see him in what's happening around us, we lose focus and balance.

Practical Challenge:

Read your bible every day - You will discover how using the Bible to shape your day and plans opens the door to God's balance—and frees us from things like worry
Look up some of God's promises for you, write them out and put them where you can see them daily (the fridge, the mirror)
Put your phone and screens down, go somewhere quiet and completely focus on God and talk with Him.

Questions:

What is your idea of a balanced life?
What is distracting you today from keeping your eyes fixed on God?
Does everything seem to be unbalanced?

↳ Maybe the duties that I'm called to do. Thinking more about the tasks and not so much why.

Love always trusts

1 Corinthians 13:7

Reflections:

'I trust God, but I don't trust my boss.'... 'Why should I trust? I've been hurt over and over again!'
 ...'After that terrible time, I can never fully trust God or anyone.'

Trust. In this fallen world, we learn 'trust must be earned'. But is that from God? God understands and knows the whole story of human-kind, our lives are a tiny snapshot. After His childish arrogance, Joseph's incensed brothers landed him in slavery, then trying to do the right thing he landed in prison.. for a long time.. but in the end Joseph understood: 'You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.'(Genesis 50:20)

I became a disciple at 18 years old. I was invited to a bible discussion group in University 'O' Week. That was 37 years ago, and over the years, like Moses and the Israelites, I have truly seen Gods' Wonders! Whole families transformed, churches planted, graduations, weddings, births, faithful disciples going home to be with their Father in heaven. But my life tapestry, like all of us, also records the dark days. I daily put on my 'mental health joggers' to run the marathon that is clinical depression, I was crushed by suicide in my family, my heart has been

broken by dear brothers and sisters turning away from God. We are a fallen people.

Have you made mistakes? Have you let someone down? Have you said hurtful things and not even realised it, or lashed out because you were hurt? None of us is 'trust-worthy', because we all sin and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). God says love always trusts. He trusts us and He loves us. Even through all of the hard times and mistreatment we go through, we can trust that God has a plan 'to prosper us and not harm us' (Jeremiah 29:11). In great distress, Jesus decided to trust God all the way to the cross (Luke 22:42), childless, old Abraham trusted God would make his descendants as numerous as the stars (Hebrews 11:12), teenager Mary trusted God that becoming miraculously pregnant would turn out OK (Luke 1:38).

Practical Challenge:

Read the story of Joseph (Genesis 37-51). Pray about changing the lens that you have been looking at your trust issues with to look at them through Heaven's Eyes.

Questions:

Who don't you trust?
 How do you think God might be working in you and your problem person's lives for his Glory?

Perseverance

Hebrews 10:36

Reflections:

I wanted to look at perseverance as I feel like this is a big part of where I am at right now, and really needed. For me life is a little tough at the moment, and there are days when I need to persevere in my walk with God, for my husband, for my children, and for myself. I have 3 little ones: Lomani is 3, Namara is 2 and Luke is 12 weeks. They are amazing and beautiful children, but they do challenge me daily. My average day looks a little like this: wake up around 5am (after usually being up around 12pm and 3am), get myself ready, express milk, Quiet Time with God (and I try to get this in before they all wake up, but this is not always possible as they are early risers). Usually between 5:45am and 6:30am the girls are awake and ready for their day. Breakfast is next followed by play, and if the weather is ok, we head outside for a little bit before getting ready for preschool, or just getting ready for the day. The day consists of playdough, blocks, reading, drawing, painting, the shops, the park (anything that will tire them out as they are little firecrackers) sometimes swimming and Kindy gym, rest time, then lunch, express again, more playtime, cleaning up, dishes, floors, pack away, bath time, dinner time, daddy time, children into bed, express, clean up, and bed time. I always

look forward to daddy time and bedtime. I am usually exhausted by lunchtime.

Perseverance is a big part of life at the moment. There are times when I don't know what I am doing, if I am doing it right, times when I don't know what to say or what to do, when I don't have the energy for discipline, for bible talk, for mid-week, or church, or that play date, but perseverance is key. God has given me these 3 little blessings to take care of, and raise.

"Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him" (Psalm 127:3). I'm reminded that children are a gift and blessing from God, and I can turn to Him. There are so many references and instructions from God on parenting that remind me that this journey with Jesus is not just my own, but I am responsible for the beginning of my children's journey with Jesus. These scriptures help me to persevere.

"Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old, they will not turn from it."

Proverbs 22:6

I MUST show and point my children in the right direction.

Hebrews 10:36

“These commandments I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” **Deuteronomy 6:6-7**
I MUST teach my children the scriptures and commands.

“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; Instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” **Ephesians 6:4**
I MUST teach my children to Love and Live for Jesus.

“Discipline your children, and they will give you peace; they will bring you the delights you desire.” **Proverbs 29:17**

I MUST correct and discipline my children. This shows them love and teaches them right from wrong.

“Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially their own household, has denied the faith and is an unbeliever.” **1 Timothy 5:8**
I MUST take care of my children’s needs and provide for them.

“In everything, set them an example by doing what is good” **Titus 2:7**
I MUST lead by example. To put Jesus first and persevere for him. Live according to the bible.

“Children’s children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children” **Proverbs 17:6**
I MUST live in a way that makes my children look up to me.

In my moments of weakness, tiredness and struggles, I MUST persevere and attend that bible talk, that midweek, church on Sundays, do my Quiet Times with God, raise my children to the best of my ability, as I am instructed from the Lord. This is not only for me to be saved, but for my family to be on the right path too. It is so important for me to try and lead by example in my walk with God so my children can see God is first.

Practical Challenge:

Place these scriptures in areas of the house where you might need reminding of them (post it notes are great), or you can get fancy if you are creative.

Questions:

What are some struggles you might be dealing with in life that affect your walk with God?

What are some scriptures that remind you to keep going?

Staying at Jesus' feet

Luke 10:39, John 11:32 & John 12:3

Reflections:

Recently, I have been reading about the women who followed Jesus and came across two biblically famous sisters, Mary and Martha. I remember a memory verse I had as a kid, "Martha Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better (right), and it will not be taken away from her". My focus has always been on Martha and her worries but until now I hadn't looked at Mary and what Jesus considered "better".

In the first scripture, Luke 10:39, Mary sat at the Lord's feet listening to what He said. Martha was criticising Mary for just sitting there, but Jesus defended her. Mary was in the prime position to listen to Jesus teach. He was teaching His disciples in their family home and she took the opportunity to sit at His feet and learn all she could. Martha was serving physical food but Mary was getting fed spiritual food. While I would like Mary's heart, I often find myself not as eager to listen to God's Word or run after opportunities to be fed spiritually.

As I continued studying, I saw a pattern of Mary at Jesus' feet. Four days after her brother Lazarus had died, Jesus arrived back in Bethany. Mary heard that Jesus was calling

her and when she reached him "she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (Luke 11:32). At one of the saddest times in her life, she fell at Jesus' feet. At a time when her faith was being tested, she knew she needed to be at His feet. When she was weeping and heartbroken, she knew she had to be close to her Lord. In contrast, when I am feeling sad or struggling with deep hurts or tough circumstances, my typical reaction is to struggle alone, to be far from God or to feel like God doesn't understand. How amazing to see that when Jesus saw her weeping, He was deeply moved himself.

Lastly, we find another interaction between Mary and Jesus in John 12:3. She takes half a litre of pure perfume and pours it on Jesus' feet and wipes it with her hair. This time she is showing Jesus the extent of her love and gratitude. She is showing Him that He deserves everything she has and more. She witnessed Jesus raise her brother from the dead. She is listening first hand to His teachings and would have seen the fruit of it in her life and the lives of others. Her concern at that moment was to honour Jesus. Mary is also criticised for her act by one of Jesus' disciples but Jesus defends her again.

Luke 10:39, John 11:32 & John 12:3

In this moment, Mary is the disciple that Judas should have been. What convicted me about Mary of Bethany was that no matter what was going on in her life, she was always at Jesus' feet.

Practical Challenge:

Think of an area in your life that you haven't brought to the feet of Jesus. It could be an area that has been going really well or has been really challenging. Pray about it today and share it with another sister.

Questions:

What would it look like to sit at Jesus' feet today?

When are you tempted to flee from Jesus' feet?

What are you prepared to give for Jesus?

Adopted as children of God

Galatians 3:23 - 4:7

Reflections:

During days when I feel really confused about navigating through my own life, I often come back to this scripture to remind myself that I have a loving Father who looks out for me and provides me with instruction. He has chosen me as His child and provides hope for an eternal future.

I really like this passage where Paul explains to the believers that “So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith” (v 26). We are now considered under the responsibility of God as our loving father and ‘guardian’, not just looked after begrudgingly. As individual people, we still have the ability to make our own choices, but we’re under the careful eye of God who will teach us the right path for growth.

Galatians 4:3 points out that sometimes we can act like lost children enslaved by the priorities of the world. There are so many things in our everyday lives that can still work its influence on us today! Are we allowing the influences of the world to get under our skin and change our views and perspectives?

I love the concept of adoption to sonship. In the Greco-Roman history of ‘adoption’ (huiuotesia), it actually had a significant strength

to it. Roman elites usually adopted adult men in order to have an heir. They were freely chosen or desired for their potential in carrying on a family’s name. As a legal procedure, this adoption of sonship allowed the adopted individual to be equal to natural children in the eyes of the law and society, it passed Roman citizenship to the adopted person (and sometimes to their extended families) in order to ensure the continuation of their family name to the future generation. The individual is a permanent addition to the family, parents could not disown the person they adopted. Anyone, no matter what status, can be adopted as sons. This allowed people in lower positions (even slaves) to join elite families with higher social and political status. They were truly taken as heirs. These heirs also inherited their new rights, responsibilities, and shared completely with their father in the present day, not just inheriting after the loss of the previous generation. Using the term adopted, Paul was sharing the message that the believers (and us!) attain the status of sons of God, even if they used to be slaves, all because of Christ. We have a new identity in God’s family, our whole future is connected to God’s.

Galatians 3:23 - 4:7

Even in my darkest moments or through the joyful days in life, my value & worthiness in God's eyes are still as His child. We're loved and part of His family. I can come home to God's family and be considered a worthy child to share in His present inheritance. Being considered in Christ, no more divisions should exist when we consider that we're all equally children of God. To continue under the name of God and be given a citizenship - even when I look back and see that I come from a background of being a slave (to the world). To move up the ranks by many steps as "children of God through faith".

"Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father" (v6). Abba is such a personal word of closeness, like a little child calling out to their father who takes responsibility and care for their very existence. It signifies a safe & loving relationship with someone who cares for how they live. As sons (or daughters), we're pleasing to God, given the Holy Spirit, and can take comfort in being part of God's family. We're adopted by choice & God's desire.

I love the passage's implication of such strong ties of being part of God's family. If our ties are truly loving, we will be separate and free from social pressures & influences of the world and are able to give out of love and a purposeful heart. We will stay away from resentment, dragging along guilts of the past,

change behaviours that are not righteous, and we are able to love without limits.

Practical Challenge:

Take some time out today to experience something in nature (trees, sky, clouds, water, wind, birds) and pray to say thank you to being an heir of the great God who made the universe.

Questions:

Past: Now that I have Christ in my life, how have I changed from being under the spiritual forces/influences of the world?

Present: How am I doing when reflecting about my own personal life today? What is truly taking up time & space in my heart at the moment?

Future: How am I going to boast about my adoption & bearing God's family name? Especially when my status as God's child reflects the timeline of eternity; not losing sight of that connection, love, & acceptance as part of God's great family.

Be still

Psalm 46:10

“Be still, and know that I am God.”

Reflections:

Psalm 46 begins with the words: “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way. . . The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.” This means you and I can stop fighting in our own strength and rest in Him.

Psalm 46 ends with a charge to “Be still, and know that I am God.” What a comfort! Taking refuge in God, our fortress, means we can rest, be still, and know that He is God. During times of trouble, war, health concerns, emotional, and financial problems, we are called to be still, quiet and do nothing. This is the opposite reaction of being a human. When faced with uncertainty my default reaction is to worry about the future and the bad things I can anticipate happening. It can leave me feeling hopeless and stressed about the days ahead, exaggerating the scope of the problems. These last few days I have had trouble sleeping because of the worries of life.

Every new year brings us 365 days of uncertainty, every new day brings us 24 hours of uncertainty. But every second of every hour of every day, God’s presence and power in our lives is available to us. Whatever

the future holds, it doesn’t really matter because we have God as our stronghold to overcome every trial and difficulty that comes our way.

Practical Challenge:

Stop your fighting – “Be still”. We need to come away from the hustle and bustle of daily life and get alone with God. There are times when we need to lay down our arms with total surrender, and let His will be done in our life.

Take time to “Pause and Think” – When the mountains quake, the Lord is my refuge and strength... When nations are in uproar and kingdoms fall, the Lord almighty is with us... Whatever future holds God is with us, His Kingdom is forever! So, everyday, let’s reflect on Psalm 46:10.

Questions:

On a scale of 1 (very slow) and 10 (superfast), how would you rate the pace of your life?

Are you satisfied with it and why?

If you are not satisfied with the pace of your life, what changes would you like to make?

I'm not good enough, but God is!

Mark 10:18

Reflections:

Something that I've struggled with throughout my life is the feeling of not being good enough. I feel like I'll always be the second choice — the backup option that was never good enough to be picked as the first option. I wasn't as outgoing and likeable as my brother, I wasn't as talented or smart or well liked and relatable as my other friends, I wasn't seen as someone who had potential, I wasn't as pretty or interesting to guys, I wasn't as useful to God as other disciples were. The unending cycle of me comparing myself to the people around me would trigger my insecurity and constantly made me feel like I was not good enough and will never be good enough no matter what I did or how hard I tried to prove myself.

But what does it mean to be good enough? If I think that I'm not good enough, then I must think that other people are good because they are better than I am. I really had to fight to gain a conviction on what good means to God instead of what that means to me. Because the reality is "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23) and "there is no one righteous, not even one" (Romans 3:10). We are all sinners, and we are all not good or not good enough, that's why we need a saviour — Jesus. In Mark 10:18, Jesus

says, no one is good — except God alone, and that is so encouraging and convicting because it takes the focus off ourselves and puts it onto God and who He is. God is good, only He is good, and I'm not good, but because God is good, He chooses to use me for His good. "Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him." (Psalm 34:8) I don't have to be trapped in the vicious cycle of I'm not good enough comparisons anymore, but am free to live my life basking in God and His goodness, and how He chooses to use me for His good however He wants!

Practical Challenge:

Find scriptures that address negative self-talk (the ones listed here are a good place to start!). Memorise and recite them to yourself to help you fight your thoughts when they're attacking you. Confess those thoughts to friends so that they can pray for you and help you through it.

Questions:

In what ways can you let 'I'm not good enough' feelings hold you back? *↳ leadership stuff?*
 What is something that you can learn from others instead of comparing yourself to them?
 How can you reflect on God and His goodness this week?

↳ reflect on this in my prayer / have times where I just thank him and acknowledge his goodness.

Talent

Matthew 25:14-30 - The Parable of the Talents

Ephesians 3:20

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us”

Reflections:

Even though I have been a Christian for over 20 years, I always held the impression that pushing for bigger goals and being used by God was something that was more for ‘younger’ Christians. I generally see myself as not having much value or talent compared to other disciples. Therefore, I held the mentality that I would only be used by God if he thought I was capable, so I let myself be led by circumstances rather than making an extra effort to initiate action to grow. After listening to a spiritual podcast, I realised that I was actually ‘limiting’ myself and I was also limiting God’s ability to use me because I was not faithful enough to think deeper and trust God enough to use the talents he had already given to me. In a way it also meant that I was not trusting the brothers and sisters who could ‘see’ my talents.

The parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30 is the perfect encapsulation of taking risks. God has given each person a wide variety of gifts, and he expects us to employ those gifts in his service. The person who was given one talent became afraid, so he hid his talent in the ground. When the master

saw this, he said “You wicked, lazy servant...you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.” (Matthew 25:26-27). God was not pleased with the man who did not multiply his talent - even though he only had one, that was not a good enough excuse for God.

I need to learn to initiate growth by taking action, rather than being driven by circumstances. I also need to learn how to trust people around me and stop saying I don’t have any talent to offer. It is not acceptable to merely hide the gifts God gave me on a closet shelf and ignore them. 20 years have already passed but God has given me another chance so that I don’t have to become the one talent person - “wicked and lazy servant” - for the next 20 years and beyond. God wants me to take risks in faith. If I am able to make the most of what he has given me, God will provide me with even more. But, if I am scared and take no risks, then I am actually being unfaithful - and not acting in faith with what God has given to me.

MARCH 28

Sandra Lakeland, South Marrieds

Matthew 25:14-30 - The Parable of the Talents

Ephesians 3:20

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us"

Practical Challenge:

Dream big and have faith to think of what goals you can set to glorify God.

Questions:

What are the talents that God has given you or the talents that have been 'identified' by people around you?

Have you been using them to glorify God?

Struggle in submission

1 Peter 2:18 & Proverbs 3:5-6

Reflections:

When does the person in authority, say your leader or your boss, become difficult to accept or to yield with? Recently, I have found it really difficult to work wholeheartedly with my manager because of his temper and the past arguments that we have had. I thought that submitting myself to this person was a sign of weakness, so I tried to oppose him, ignored him, and treated him coldly just to let him know that I'm rebelling in silence. I even considered giving up and leaving the team because I thought he was being unreasonable in pointing out mistakes I had made, even though I was already giving my best.

Then this scripture hit me! My submission to authority is conditional - I find it is easy to submit to someone I adore or I agree with, but it is an enormous challenge when it comes to people that I don't agree with or I find unreasonable, even if the person is in authority over me.

Furthermore, my response in the situation just exposed my prideful character, and did not really help the situation. Besides, I realised that doing my best is not the same as doing what is right and expected. My best is defined by me, while the right outcome is based on my manager's expectations or the task

itself. I realised that it's hard for me to meet his expectations because I don't listen to him attentively. My unconscious bias that I have against him makes it more difficult for me to understand him and to submit. This sudden realisation humbled me and made me work hard to change my character towards him and to others.

One of the reasons we can't submit is because oftentimes we think we are better than the person in authority. We think we are more competent, more morally righteous, and a lot more deserving than the person in authority, not realising that God put these people in authority as part of his bigger plan for our lives. If you have faith that God is in control, then you should trust that the people over you, despite their flaws, will be used for your own good.

Practical Challenge:

Think of a way to strengthen your faith and trust in God's plan for your life, particularly in the people he has put in authority.

Questions:
 In what situation do you find yourself struggling to submit to the person in authority over you?
 What character traits are being exposed in the way you respond in that situation?

My pride is exposed and my arrogance & entitlements & lack of self control & self awareness.

When they're rude ... like that voting lady. When I think I know better than them, maybe I will submit but I will judge.

So that works of God might be displayed in Him

John 9:1-7 & Romans 8:28

Reflections:

Recently, when I was driving back home with my company car and waiting at the red traffic light, suddenly I heard a loud sound from the back and without time for me to find out what happened, my car was hit by the car behind. I tried to pull myself together, checked I was not injured, got out and found that one car had hit the car behind me, then the car behind me hit mine.

I was in shock and traumatised by the accident. I was also very afraid for the next few days whenever I stopped at a red traffic light or drove by the same spot. I prayed and asked God to let me know the reason it happened. I thought of the passage about the blind man in John 9, when Jesus told his disciples why the blind man was born blind.

Jesus said 'this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him' For the man born blind in a poor living situation, he could have chosen to be self-pitiful for his whole life. But he chose instead to listen to Jesus and washed his eyes, got his eyesight and became a tool to display God's work.

I was tempted to blame God for what happened. I have kept praying and I am grateful that Roman 8:28 reminds me God always works for the good of those he loves, according to his purpose - that means according to Him, not according to me. I can choose to trust God and have faith in His plan, and how I respond to trauma can show the work of God.

Practical Challenge:

Find a way in your challenge to display the work of God.

Questions:

What challenge(s) have you been facing?

What can you do differently to your challenge(s) to show the work of God?

- *Not be complaining!*
- *Remember that God is always working and working for my good.*

Live a life of love

2 John 1:6

Reflections:

Something I really want to work on this year is being more loving. There are several ways to grow in our love - loving the lost, loving those who are hard to love, showing love to your actual neighbour, whom you may or may not already know, and loving your enemies. Of course, you can't go past the two greatest commandments - "...Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:37-40).

And I want to focus specifically on loving the fellowship of Christ. Well, you might say, 'oh that's easy.' But that hasn't been my experience. I've trusted disciples with my heart, confessed sin and found out later that some of those conversations became the fuel for gossip (yes, this really happened, and a leader had called me to confirm what was said, and don't worry - there was lots of discipling, forgiveness and repentance).

After a while, I started finding reasons to pull away from the fellowship, and this became easier when Covid-19 forced us into lockdown a

few years back. I was working and studying at the time, but I always had reasons why I couldn't show up for church or bible discussion on Zoom, never mind meeting in person again.

Occasionally, I would 'venture' out into the fellowship and make some shallow effort to give, but it always felt awkward. Trying to befriend a stranger for the glory of God while evangelising was so much easier than making small talk with people I'd been going to church with for years. And the issue was trust. I've always struggled to trust (whether God or people), owing to my upbringing and my character, and I got older but not wiser in this regard. I asked a good friend once, 'I can forgive someone for hurting me, but I don't have to trust them, right?' And she said, 'the Bible says, love always trusts.'

I love how The Message says, "...no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love." (1 Corinthians 13:3b). The Bible also says, "If people say, 'I love God' but hate their brothers or sisters, they are liars. Those who do not love their brothers and sisters, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have never seen.

2 John 1:6

And God gave us this command: those who love God must also love their brothers and sisters.” (1 John 4: 19-21, NCV). I wouldn’t say that I don’t love God, but the Bible says that my attitude towards disciples because I chose not to trust is exactly that: not loving God.

To change it up, what would it look like for me to be more loving? There are lots of things that can be done but one thing I’m going to try is practicing hospitality by inviting people over for dinner. It’s something I loved doing in the past but these days, even inviting one person over for coffee stresses me out. The old fears of opening up and getting hurt again serve as a reminder for me to pray about those things, so that I don’t forget the bigger picture: “And love means living the way God commanded us to live. As you have heard from the beginning, His command is this: live a life of love.” (2 John 1:6, NCV).

Practical Challenge:

Organise an event (dinner, or a QT breakfast, etc.) with someone in fellowship that you would like to get to know better.

Questions:

Have you been in a situation that caused you to pull back and not love? How did you deal with that?

Since God wants us to live a life of love, in what ways do you challenge yourself to love more?

→ Wow. My reaction also is to forgive but to not trust again! that is not being loving. with Zoe, I need to pray to love her again because I definitely feel I have no trust but I'm willing to give her trust if God says so... he knows best and will look after me!

→ Yeah I think to just genuinely love people more, not a love of duty.