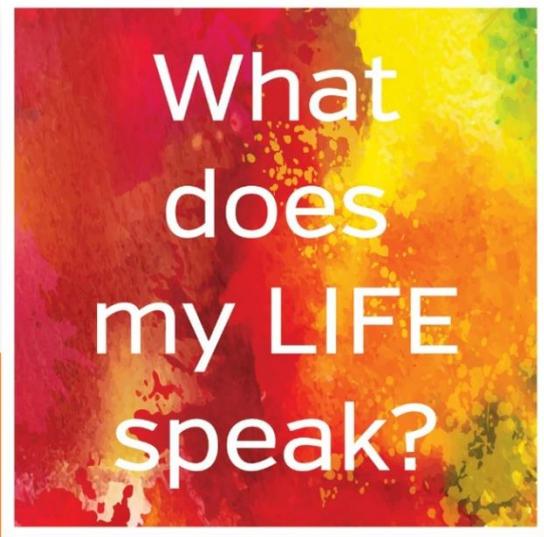


2017

Learning to
live & love
like Jesus



What
does
my LIFE
speak?

Small Group
Discussion Guide

Thank you for taking one of the booklets and being willing to engage with our series '*What does my life speak?*' This booklet is designed to be the perfect companion to our series and a helpful way of being personally impacted by the series.

In this booklet you will find:

Weekly Bible Readings

There are six weekly bible readings to read Monday to Saturday that flow from the Sunday messages. There are not here to quickly glance at and "tick the box" that you have done them. They are here to read slowly and to allow the truths of Scripture to take up residence in your heart. Pray after reading the verses and allow God's Holy Spirit to guide you into what those verses personally and practically mean for you.

If you find the discipline of reading the bible and praying difficult or new, why not try to do this with a friend? You could each commit to doing the readings and then encourage each other through text messages or emails each day to share what stood out to you from the verses. Or if there is someone you see most days, you could do the readings at the same time or read them aloud together.

Discussion Questions

Hopefully you belong to a small group or temporary small group that will be working through these questions. The questions are designed to encourage discussion, self-reflection and to help make us each understand how we can be living this out in our everyday lives. The questions do get personal at times, and we encourage vulnerable honesty where comfortable and appropriate.

If you were unable to join one of our small groups for the series, it would be very worthwhile to work through these questions with someone else.

Soul Training Exercises

These pages set a soul training exercise for the coming week that are designed to help us put into practice the teachings of Jesus in tangible ways. We are learning to live in these ways of Jesus, so some of the exercises might feel outside your comfort zone or you may feel that you aren't doing them as well as you'd like to yet. That's okay, the most important thing is to give them a go and be open to how God might use these exercises in your life.

What does my life speak?

Week 1: Learning to live peacefully

Week 2: Learning to live purely

Week 3: Learning to live mercifully

Week 4: Learning to live humbly

Week 5: Learning to live contently

Week 6: Learning to live trustingly

Passages to Meditate on
August 7 - 12.

*Spend (at least) 10minutes + 10minutes in reading and prayer.
Allow the Spirit to inspire, challenge and empower you to
increasingly let your life speak of Jesus and what it means to belong to His Kingdom.*

Matthew 5:13-26

Romans 12:9-21

James 1:19-25

Galatians 5:22-26

Ephesians 4:25-32

Philippians 4:6-9 & Colossians 3:12-17

Welcome to the first small group discussion for the series. This week we look at how, as Kingdom people, we want our lives to speak of peace and peacefulness.

Get thinking

Some of us are more prone to reacting angrily than others, yet for all of us there are things that can trigger an angry reaction within us. Anything can be a trigger for anger: a waiting line that was too long, a disappointing movie, someone's thoughtless words or annoying actions, or frustration with where we are in life.

- Are you more easily angered by situations, people, or life circumstances?

Recognising within ourselves: frustration & anger

Many people excuse their anger through the *false narrative* that anger is caused by things external to us (the things that trigger our angry response). Yet:

- Have you ever experienced the exact same thing as someone else (like getting stuck in traffic, or having a friend not show up to a social occasion) where one reacted angrily when the other didn't?
- Why do you think you each reacted so differently to the same thing?

To truly live peacefully within ourselves and with others, we need to deal with the heart issues that cause us to respond angrily. Many avoid this, choosing to operate out of a *false narrative* that feeling angry is more satisfying than acknowledging and dealing with the painful feelings beneath the anger.

- How might feelings of fear, hurt, insecurity, vulnerability, jealousy, threat or a lack of control be the real reason behind experiencing anger?
- How has anger been a safer, go-to emotion for you in the past?

Read together Matthew 5:21-24. Jesus makes a big deal of anger here and reminds us that anger is a matter of the heart.

- Do you recognise anger towards another as sin in your life? Why/why not?
- Are there people in your life who come to mind when you read verse 23-24? If so, what is stopping you from going and being reconciled to them?

Learning to live and love like Jesus: peacefully

As those who live as part of the Kingdom of God, we are learning what it means to live in light of the Greatness of God and have our hearts shaped by Him. Galatians 5 specifically mentions that 'peace' should be part of this shaping; peace being a 'fruit' (a natural by-product) of our relationship with God.

- What is it about our God, and our relationship with him that causes us to be peace-filled and peaceful people?

Romans 14:13 reminds us that the Kingdom of God is a matter of 'righteousness, *peace* and joy in the Holy Spirit'. As Kingdom people one reason we should be 'slow to become angry' is 'because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires' (James 1:19-20, cf Psalm 37:8).

- What has been the most difficult aspect for you in controlling your anger?

Often it is easy to identify the event, circumstance or person that triggered our anger. Yet it can be harder (and certainly more confronting) to identify the emotional-trigger to our anger. Think of a recent experience of feeling angry.

- God asked Cain "why are you so angry?" in Genesis 4:6. Ask yourself: what was really going on for you beneath/behind that anger response?
- What would it have meant to experience Christ's peace in that example?

In the well-known verse of Philippians 4:6-7, Paul writes that '*the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*' when we pray.

- Share a time when you experienced this supernatural peace of God. How and why did you experience it do you think?
- When you find yourself frustrated, angry, hurt or fearful how long does it normally take you to turn to God in prayer?
- How could you develop a quicker "prayer-reflex" in response to things that trigger a lack of peace with others or within yourself?

Close by praying 2 Thessalonians 3:16 over one another.

Soul Training Exercise: Sabbath

Learning to live peacefully.

As Australians, we like to describe ourselves as 'laid-back', not taking ourselves too seriously and always being ready for some fun and recreation. The reality however is very different. The word most often used to describe our state of being is 'angst'. We have high levels of anxiety over relationships, money, work and housing. This expresses itself in anger and the need to feel in control.

The Challenge

This week, the soul training exercise is very simple - to Sabbath.

Set aside a full day where you are not seeking to provide for yourself or to control your life. Rest. Trust God to provide. Don't open your emails or social media. Surrender control.

Sabbath is not only a matter of refraining from activity, it is also about finding that which brings about joy and delight. So give thought to what you might include in your day (without reverting back to control!). These might include:

- * A meal with family or friends
- * Play, exercise
- * Find a place of beauty to simply enjoy
- * Read scripture or a book that enriches your soul
- * Journal what you sense God has been doing in your life
- * Pray
- * Write down or speak out a list of blessings in your life
- * Sleep!

Reflection

- Were you able to experience a connection between Sabbath and anger? If so, how were they related for you?

- What did you learn about God or yourself through your Sabbath rest?

Passages to Meditate on

August 14 - 19.

Spend (at least) 10minutes + 10minutes in reading and prayer.

*Allow the Spirit to inspire, challenge and empower you to
increasingly let your life speak of Jesus and what it means to belong to His Kingdom.*

Matthew 5:27-30

1 Peter 2:11-12 & 2 Timothy 2:21-22

Romans 13:8-14

Ephesians 5:1-5

1 Thessalonians 4:1-18

As a reminder that Scripture describes the beauty of sexual desire in its proper context:

Song of Solomon 7:1-13

Welcome to week two of 'What does my life speak?' This week we look at how, as Kingdom people, we want our lives to speak of a counter-cultural purity.

Get thinking

This feels like a very personal and private topic that many are uncomfortable discussing. Which then makes it difficult to talk about it, hold each other accountable, share our struggles and get support from other believers.

- Why do you think we shy away from talking openly about this with each other as Christians?

Recognising within ourselves: lust

We are exposed to all manner of narratives surrounding sex and sexuality growing up. For some the *false narrative* that all sexual desire is sinful is deeply embedded (perhaps from being in churches where sex and sexuality were never mentioned, or only mentioned in the context of what not to do). For many others the opposite *false narrative* that all sexual desire is good is fully embraced and acted upon (perhaps from adopting the strong teaching of our culture).

- Do you resonate more strongly with one of those two narratives?
- Growing up, who were your primary influencers when it came to discussing and learning about sexuality?

Read Matthew 5:27-28. Jesus is teaching on the difference between inner and outer righteousness, and on becoming a new kind of person in the kingdom of God. Jesus is most concerned with the heart, and a good heart is free from lust.

- What are some of the heart issues that might fuel lustful thoughts and behaviours in a person?

The Greek word translated into our English word 'lustfully' in v27 is *epithumia*. *Epithumia* does not refer to ordinary sexual attraction, but to intentionally objectifying another person for one's own gratification.

- How do you define the difference between sexual attraction and lust?
- At what point does sexual attraction become lustful or sinful?

Learning to live and love like Jesus: purely

As those who live as part of the Kingdom of God, we are learning what it means to be fully satisfied in God, to love our neighbour as ourselves and to live holy lives. It makes sense then, that the instructions in Romans 13:12-14, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 and 1 John 2:15-17 about sexual sin are so strong.

- Discuss what strikes you as you read those passages.
- Part of our transformation in learning to live as people of God's Kingdom is to believe and embrace truth. What truths of living as part of God's Kingdom would be helpful in affecting genuine heart change in this area?

1 Corinthians 6 calls us to *flee* from sexual immorality, reminding us that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. In 2 Timothy 2:22 Paul urges Timothy to *flee* the evil desires (also translated lusts) of youth and to pursue righteousness instead. In Ephesians 5:3 the bar is set even higher that among God's people '*there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality or any kind of impurity*'.

- Most people don't set out to become a lustful person, or become addicted to pornography or sexual activity outside of marriage. How can believers practically live this wisdom (to flee from) in their everyday lives?
- If comfortable, share part of your own struggles and triumphs with this. How have you lived this out in the past, and in the present?

We read that Job 'made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a young woman' (Job 31:1). Similarly the psalmist in Psalm 101:3 declared 'I will not look with approval on anything that is vile'.

- Given the amount of sexualised content in advertising, television, social media and movies, how have you purposed to navigate these as a Christian?

If you could go back in time to give your younger self some guidance and advice on navigating sexual desire in a God-honouring way, what would you say to your younger self?

How might your advice still be relevant to you today?

Soul Training Exercise: Media Fast

Learning to live purely.

Most of us don't need to be convinced that our culture is sexually saturated. We are constantly bombarded by sexual innuendos and sexualised images through all forms of media; be that print media (newspapers and magazines), radio (presenters and song lyrics), television (programs and advertisements), or online (social media, ads on websites and many website's content).

The Challenge

This week's soul training exercise is to fast from all media for a continuous 48 hour period. So we're talking no Internet (other than work-necessary), no social media (you'll need to turn off 'push notifications' on your smartphone), no television, no newspapers or magazines, no radio or iPods or mp3 players, and no video games.

We assure you that no one has died or suffered health complications from a media fast.

What will you do with all that time? Similar to last week, find activities that will enrich your soul, such as: praying, connecting (face to face!) with friends, gardening, reading the Bible, or exercising.

Fasting from all media won't be easy for some of us, and we might be surprised by how addicted we are to being 'in the loop' 24/7. But being able to say 'no' and not living under the dominion of anything, including media, is an important aspect of learning to live freely and creating space for the Holy Spirit to renew our minds.

Reflection

- Were you able to experience a connection between the media fast and lust? If so, how were they related for you?
- What did you learn about God or yourself through your media fast?

Passages to Meditate on

August 21 - 26.

Spend (at least) 10minutes + 10minutes in reading and prayer.

Allow the Spirit to inspire, challenge and empower you to increasingly let your life speak of Jesus and what it means to belong to His Kingdom.

Matthew 5:38-48

Romans 5:1-8

1 John 4:7-21

Luke 10:25-37

Matthew 18:21-35

Micah 6:8 & Matthew 22:34-40

Welcome to week three. This week we look at how, as Kingdom people, we want our lives to speak of the mercy we have received in the way we are then merciful to others.

Get thinking

Imagine this scenario: there is a promotion you want coming up at work, but a work colleague who also wants it deliberately sabotages and spreads untrue rumours about you, which is enough for them to get the promotion ahead of you. *(Or if you prefer: a friend shares a clearly confidential, very personal and embarrassing thing you told them with multiple others.)*

- What does society say is an appropriate way for you to respond?
- If it wasn't for what you know you "should do", how would you normally desire to respond?
- What would you normally actually do in response?

Recognising within: the desire to retaliate or withhold blessing

Social commentators often lament how our western society is becoming increasingly individualistic and self-serving. We grow up hearing things like "don't get mad, get even" and "make sure to take care of number one".

- Beyond our culturally ingrained narratives - at a heart level what is it within us that desires to get even? Or desires to retaliate? Or to see those who hurt us fail?
- At a heart level, what is it causes us to withhold blessing from another person when we have the ability to (whether that be practical or financial help, hospitality, prayer or an encouraging word)?

Read together Matthew 5:38-48.

We can get bogged down in discussing hypothetical situations after reading this passage (*"what about in this scenario...or this example?"*). However, the overall principle of Jesus' teaching is clear: we respond to others (even those who do us wrong, or to those we don't like) with the priority of selfless love.

- What do you find the hardest part of Jesus' teaching here?
- What fears do you have about putting Jesus' teaching here into practice? (What might that reveal about some of your inner narratives?)

Learning to live and love like Jesus: mercifully

As those who live as part of the Kingdom of God, we are learning what it means to let the example and presence of Jesus influence the way we see and interact with others.

- What might shift if you adopted '*let the example and presence of Jesus be my guiding influence*' as your purpose in all interactions with others?
- Over the time you've spent following Jesus, how have you seen His presence influence and transform the way you see and treat others?

Charles Spurgeon once preached "*God's mercy is so great that you may sooner drain the sea of its water, or deprive the sun of its light, or make space too narrow, than diminish the great mercy of God.*" Read together: Psalm 103:1-12, Micah 7:18 and Titus 3:4-7.

- How does understanding God's mercy help us embrace a lifestyle of mercy as a normative part of what it means to belong to His Kingdom?
- When was the last time you felt genuinely moved by God's mercy? Describe the affect it had on you.

Agape (translated 'love') as used by Jesus here means consistently desiring the good of another; basing our attitude and behaviour on our will (not our feelings).

- Can you think of individuals in your life that you don't necessarily *feel* love towards, but for whom you could make the choice to consistently will their good?
- How would choosing to love (ie: consistently will their good) change your attitude and behaviour towards them?

James Bryan Smith on this passage writes that embracing a Kingdom *identity* and Kingdom *awareness* is the key to doing what Jesus calls us to do.

The Kingdom-centred person has embraced the truths that God is with us (*so our need to retaliate is diminished*); that God has an endless supply of resources (*so our need to hang on to possession decreases*); that God is looking out for our needs (*so we can take the time to go the extra mile*); and that God is the real owner of all we have (*so our need to hoard and protect it diminishes*).

Close by praying for a renewed sense a Kingdom identity and awareness.

Soul Training Exercise: Praying for enemies

Learning to live mercifully.

Instead of retaliating or wishing someone harm, Jesus asks us to love our enemies. The word used for love means to desire good for those who are against us. As a starting point Jesus encourages us to pray for them.

The Challenge

While many of us would not use the word 'enemy' to describe people in our lives, there are still plenty of people in our lives for whom we need to put Jesus' teaching on mercy into practice for.

This week, start by identifying:

- Someone who you know is actively competing with you or seeking your demise;
- Someone whose success in some way diminishes yours;
- Someone who gets under your skin and causes you problems; or
- Someone who has hurt a person close to you and so now you harbour negative thoughts towards them.

This week, pray for a couple of minutes *every day* for the person that you identified. Ask the Lord to show you how He sees and feels about them. Pray that the Lord would bless them with good things from Himself.

If you feel an inner tension doing this exercise then pray about that too. Talk to the Lord about your feelings and seek His help to be obedient even if your feelings about the person doesn't align with the things that you are praying for them.

Reflection

- How did praying for them change anything within you, or change your interactions with them?
- What did you learn about God or yourself through praying for them?

Passages to Meditate on
August 28 – September 2.

*Spend (at least) 10minutes + 10minutes in reading and prayer.
Allow the Spirit to inspire, challenge and empower you to
increasingly let your life speak of Jesus and what it means to belong to His Kingdom.*

Matthew 6:1-13

Jeremiah 17:5-10

1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

James 3:13-18

Luke 18:9-14

Philippians 2:1-11

Welcome to week four of 'What does my life speak?' This week we look at how, as Kingdom people, we want our lives to speak of humility.

Get thinking

It is often recognised that social media is predominantly used to project a positive image; a filtered "highlight reel" of a person's life. The same can be true of school reunions, conversations with friends, and even church community.

- In what ways have you seen this among your own friendship circles?

Recognising within ourselves: vainglory

In this world our worth is all too often measured on the basis of our appearance, production and performance. So we acutely feel the need to be appreciated, respected, applauded and affirmed for what we do. Then (and sometimes only then) do we feel good about ourselves. This is a powerful false narrative: that *my value* is determined by *your assessment* of me.

- What are some ways you allow your value to be dependent on the opinions of others? Why is that?
- At a heart level - why do you think it hurts us when others don't see or recognise our achievements, our abilities or the good in our character?

Living out of this false narrative can lead to what the early church called 'vainglory'. Vainglory is a mix of excessive vanity (caring about our image) and the tendency to self-promote, hide weaknesses and inflate our achievements.

- Is there a person or group of people that you particularly feel the need to be thought well of by?
- Is there a part of your life or your faith that you especially want others to recognise as good? How does it make you feel when it is recognised?

Read together Matthew 6:1-18.

Here Jesus gives three examples of doing genuinely good things but with the wrong intention. To be praised by others was the real motive behind the action.

- Alms giving, fasting and public praying were highly regarded spiritual practices in Jesus day – what might be our modern day equivalents?
- What does Jesus reveal about the way heaven sees these acts without proper motives?

Learning to live and love like Jesus: humbly

As those who live as part of the Kingdom of God, we are learning what it means to see ourselves as God sees us and to rest in our true identity as children of God.

- Share some of your own journey of learning to embrace the truths about your identity as a child of God.
- How has that journey so far shaped your sense of inner-security? Has it changed anything about your need for the affirmation of others?
- How does praying through the Lord's Prayer help shape our inner life towards humility?

Over the years of learning to live and love like Jesus, we should expect to see some progress – like becoming more generous, living more peacefully, knowing more of the Scriptures etc. The temptation then becomes to take excessive pride in our own progress and holiness. Read Jesus' story from Luke 18:9-14.

- How have you learned to humble yourself before God? Do you find this helps safeguard you against vainglory, boasting or arrogance?

With the example of Jesus as our guide, the standard set for us in Philippians 2:3-4 *'do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others.'*

Break off into smaller groups and finish by sharing how you feel the Holy Spirit leading you to apply this in the coming week to your:

- *Words (face to face, electronically or on social media)*
- *Interactions with others*
- *Activities or acts of service (perhaps things you might have felt were "beneath you" in the past)*

Soul Training Exercise: Quietly serving others

Learning to live humbly.

It seems that part of being human means that we desire to be affirmed and recognised for when we do something that is good (even if it's just by one or two others). Naturally then, one of the ways that we grow in humility is by serving others without requiring any recognition or thanks for what we have done. It requires us to genuinely be "others centred", and to allow the act of serving another to be our full reward.

The Challenge

This week the soul training exercise is to quietly serve others. Start by asking the Lord who he would have you serve. Aim for at least 3 people who you would not normally serve in a week.

Prayerfully consider what would encourage them, help them, lighten their burden, elevate them or bless them. You could:

- Offer meaningful praise or encouragement to someone that you would normally take for granted,
- Do something that you would consider to be someone else's job or perhaps beneath you,
- Give someone your undivided attention, really listening to them without turning the conversation back to yourself, or
- Make a meal, mow a lawn or do some other unexpected act of kindness.

(and do all of these without sharing with others that you've done them)

Reflection

- What was the impact in you as you did these acts of quiet service? How did you feel *after* they were done?

- What did you learn about God or yourself through quietly serving?

Passages to Meditate on
September 4 - 9.

*Spend (at least) 10minutes + 10minutes in reading and prayer.
Allow the Spirit to inspire, challenge and empower you to
increasingly let your life speak of Jesus and what it means to belong to His Kingdom.*

Matthew 6:19-24

Ecclesiastes 5:10-15 & Philippians 4:11-13

Luke 12:13-21

Proverbs 30:7-9 & Matthew 6:9-13

Hebrews 13:5-6 & 1 Timothy 6:6-10

1 Timothy 6:17-19

Welcome to week five of 'What does my life speak?' This week we look at how, as Kingdom people, we want our lives to speak of contentedness in what God has given us.

Get thinking

Thinking about what we would do if we won or were given a large sum of money is a fun game to play. More than just a fun thought though, it can also reveal a lot about ourselves and our attitudes towards material things.

- If you suddenly received a million dollars, what would you do with it?

Recognising within: unhealthy view of money and possessions

As with most narratives, our experiences growing up are deeply formative in how we view and handle money and wealth.

- Was there a particular experience or something someone close to you said that has significantly shaped your view of material wealth?

Within our culture there is a deeply engrained narrative that is constantly being reinforced. It is the *false narrative* that money and/or possessions will make me feel secure, powerful, successful and happy.

- When you think of your own experiences of wanting more material wealth (to either save or spend), is it more about security, power, success or happiness for you? Share why that is.

Read Matthew 6:19-24.

Jesus compares and contrasts two life goals, two visions and two masters (with their associated attitudes and behaviours). Once again Jesus is tackling a heart issue; Jesus contrasts God and money because they compete for our hearts.

- What is the state of your heart in this area right now?

Learning to live and love like Jesus: contently

As those who live as part of the Kingdom of God, we are learning what it means to be fully satisfied in God; trusting God completely as we live with hearts full of Kingdom values. Read together Ecclesiastes 5:10-15 and Hebrews 13:5.

- How does the love of material wealth undermine our delight in Kingdom values?

- Being content with what we have is a truly blessed state of being that eludes many. Over the years of following Jesus, how have you learned to embrace the freedom of simplicity and the joy of contentment in your life?

1 Timothy 6 is a key biblical passage on material wealth and our attitudes towards it. Read together 1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19.

- What evidence from your life do you have that the desire to be materially wealthy leads to temptation?
- How is 1 Timothy 6:17-19 a picture of us (who are rich in this present world) putting Jesus' words in practice?

When it comes to making a decision about what to spend, save or give we think in terms of "can I afford it?", "is it wise?", or "what will other people think?"

- What would happen if you shifted the question to "will it bring me Kingdom joy?"

Our prayer is that you, like Paul, would learn the secret of being content in any and every situation - a deep and genuine contentment which comes from the presence of Jesus within your life (Philippians 4:11-13).

Close by breaking into pairs. Answer the questions below and then pray for each other.

What part of the false narrative do you need to let go of in order to embrace living contently? (is it the security, comfort, approval from others or happiness you think material wealth will bring?)

What truths of living as a child of God do you need to embrace?

What could you do practically this week to help realign your heart?

Soul Training Exercise: Generosity

Learning to live contently.

Perhaps all too often we know what it is to feel discontent with what we currently have. Then our discontentment fuels our desire for newer, greater or just more, more, more. Whatever the case for you, such discontentment can highlight the unhealthy power that the things of this world have over our hearts.

The Challenge

This week's soul training exercise is to be generous in three specific ways:

1) Generous with money

One of the most effective ways to loosen the hold money has over us is to give it away.

Sit before the Lord and ask yourself: *what would be a generous amount to give away this pay cycle beyond my normal giving?* Then think and pray about a person in need or a worthy cause that you could give that money to... and then do it!

2) Generous with possessions

This week *give away* at least 3 possessions (which are in good shape) that would be a blessing to others (avoiding the temptation to give things which you'll then replace with newer/better).

3) Generous with thankfulness

Contentment and gratitude seem to go hand in hand. This week, be generous in your thankfulness to God for what you already have. Then also go out of your way to thank those who have contributed to what you currently have (through their support, advice, gifts, prayers, example, opportunities they given you etc).

Reflection

- Were you able to experience a connection between being generous and experiencing contentment? If so, how were they related for you?
- What did you learn about God or yourself through the acts of generosity?

Passages to Meditate on
September 11 - 16.

*Spend (at least) 10minutes + 10minutes in reading and prayer.
Allow the Spirit to inspire, challenge and empower you to
increasingly let your life speak of Jesus and what it means to belong to His Kingdom.*

Matthew 6:25-34

Hebrews 10:19-39

Jeremiah 17:5-8 & Proverbs 3:5-6

Psalms 23

Romans 8:28-39

Revelation 21:1-5

Welcome to final week of 'What does my life speak?' This week we look at how, as Kingdom people, we want our lives to speak of our trust in God.

Get thinking

Chances are you know someone who is a real worrier by nature. Chances also are that you know someone who seems completely carefree (even careless).

- Where would you place yourself on a scale between these two people?

Recognising within ourselves: worry

Obviously there are things in our lives that we are naturally and healthily concerned about. Things which require us to be careful, prepared or to take precautions (like studying, heating healthily or wearing our seatbelts in the car).

- What are some things in this category which you place a high value on? What do you do in response to these legitimate concerns?
- At what point do you think a healthy concern turns into worry?

Worry goes beyond healthy responses to genuine concerns, as worry is still present *after* we have planned, prepared and acted properly. Worry, as James Bryan Smith defines it is '*a disproportionate level of concern based on an inappropriate measure of fear*'.

- Has worry ever prevented you from doing something? Or from enjoying what you were doing because you were so worried about something else?
- Why do you think that was? What was the fear behind your worry?

Read Matthew 6:25-34. Jesus here highlights the futility of worry (v27) while offering Kingdom antidotes to worry (v26, 30, 33, 34).

- We can do nothing better with worry than without it. So why do we worry? What are we hoping to achieve by worrying?

Learning to live and love like Jesus: trustingly

As those who live as part of the Kingdom of God, we are learning what it means to deeply believe that God knows and cares about us, and to live in light of this. One of Jesus' answers to the worries of everyday life is to consider how valuable we are to God. Read Romans 8:35-39 and 1 Peter 5:6-7.

- Describe a time when you deeply realised the fullness of the love and care God has towards you.
- What did that realisation do to any fears, insecurities or worries you were struggling with at the time?
- What shifts for you when you think of worry as a form of unbelief?

The Psalmists frequently expressed their trust in God, often among circumstances that would cause most of us to worry. See some examples in Psalm 20:7; 23:4; 56:3-4; 84:10-12.

- Thinking on your life with God, what are some of your past experiences of trusting God that give you reason to trust Him in the future?

Jesus calls us to seek first His Kingdom (which means making the reality and principles of God's kingdom our first and primary concern).

It is quite a shift from worrying – worrying tends to focus us on our limited resources, our desired outcome and is an attempt to give us a sense of control (instead of focusing on God's infinite resources, His good purposes for our lives and being dependent upon Him).

- What does it mean to you to seek first God's Kingdom?
- How do you keep your mind and heart set on God's Kingdom while being physically present in the kingdom of this world?

As we close, let's get specific in the ways this applies to our lives:

- What are you currently most tempted to worry about instead of trusting God with?
- What would it look like to live trusting in God as you seek first His Kingdom in this?

Soul Training Exercise: Turning worries into prayers

Learning to live trustingly.

For many of us, worrying can be a frustratingly regular companion in our everyday lives. We wake in the morning and it is not long until we experience our first worry of the day. Sometimes we can be so worried about something that we wake up with that worry already on our mind!

Thankfully the promise of Philippians 4:6-8 is that the peace of God which transcends all understanding will help guard our hearts and minds when we pray.

The Challenge

This week's soul training exercise is to turn our worries into prayers. To do this, set aside 10-15 minutes each morning to:

- Write down in a journal all of the things you are (or will be) worried about during the day.
- Think about what is in your power to do in response to these worries.
- Make a note to do the things you can do help ease these worries.
(eg: if you are worried about what your neighbours think of your overgrown lawn, you could always mow it...or schedule a time to mow it.)
- Then turn everything else over to God in prayer.
- Write a specific prayer for each worry, praying with a 'seek first the Kingdom of God' mindset. Trust that God has heard your prayers.
- If you find yourself worrying again during the day, remember your morning prayer and pray anew - claiming Philippians 4:6-8 over your heart and mind.

Reflection

- Were you able to experience a lessening of worry and an increase of trust in God by turning your worries into prayers?
- Did you see any specific answers to pray this week?
- What did you learn about God or yourself through this exercise?

Thank you for being a part of our series 'What does my life speak?'

We pray that you have been inspired, challenged and empowered to increasingly let your life speak of Jesus and what it means to belong to His Kingdom.

Join us for the final series, beginning 5th November.



Parramatta
baptist church

