

PREPARE THE WAY
(a series on Lent)

How to Use This Series

If a cell group or small group meeting can be divided into four sections—Welcome, Worship, Word, and Work—then this pamphlet only helps leaders on the Word and Work aspects. This will enable leaders to be creative in how they want to open their meetings.

Each lesson will have an introduction, points to talk about, and suggested questions for discussions. In each point in the lesson, the leader can choose from among the provided questions what to ask to the group for discussion. Because the Word section is geared toward being finished in 45 minutes, I suggest that only one question per point is dealt with. But of course, if there is enough time, the leader has the prerogative to ask more questions for discussion.

The monthly attendance sheet at the end will help the leaders monitor their small group/s. This will also help the leaders keep track of who are in need of encouragement and prayer.

This series is written by Dick O. Eugenio © 2016.

Lesson 1

Fasting

Bible reading:

Matthew 4:1-2; Joel 1:10-14; Isaiah 58:3-7

Objective:

At the end of this lesson, members should be able to understand the nature and importance of fasting as a spiritual discipline.

Introduction

Lent is a solemn season in the Christian calendar. Although many evangelical Christians do not observe this season, for fear of Roman Catholic overtones, it is actually observed by many Protestant groups. A quick Google search indicates that many Nazarene churches all around the world observe this holy season. Lent is basically the forty days (excluding Sunday) before Easter. It is observed as a preparation for the celebration of the Holy Week and Easter. And because it intentionally prepares us for Holy Week and Easter, it is a solemn occasion for prayer and fasting, repentance of sins, sacrifice, self-denial, and self-reflection.

This year, 2016, Lent started on February 10. What can we do as Christians as we prepare ourselves for Holy Week and Easter?

Because the Holy Week is an annual celebration, it can be taken for granted. But this year, how can we make it special?

I. Fasting (Matt 4:1-2)

One of the most important tradition and practice during Lent is fasting. For forty days (excluding Sundays), Christians engage in fasting from something. This is modelled on Jesus Christ, who fasted for forty days before He started His earthly ministry. Jesus did not only fast from food. Because He was in the wilderness, He also abstained from all the pleasures in life, including entertainment, social interaction, and the other usual things that He would have enjoyed when He was at home. For us, we can fast during Lent because we are expecting great things from God as we approach the Holy Week.

The basic principle of fasting is self-denial, which is a major theme throughout Lent. In the same way that Jesus denied Himself of everything (Phil 2:5-8), we are summoned to deny ourselves of something we truly enjoy in life (Matt 16:24; Luke 9:23). Fasting is only meaningful when we abstain from the things that we need (like food and water) and from the things that are so dear to us (like social media, movie-watching, chocolates, etc). To fast from something that does not really hurt us is not genuine fasting. To paraphrase Bob Michaels: “I will not fast from anything that costs me nothing / I’ll sacrifice nothing less than my favorite best / ‘Coz If I’m called to sacrifice / It will be worthy of my Christ / I will not fast from anything that costs me nothing.”

- *What are the things (e.g., food and hobbies) that are very important to us? Among these things, what is one thing that is most difficult to fast from?*
- *What are your spiritual expectations for the coming Holy Week? Or are you even expecting anything during Holy Week this year?*
- *How can we put the principles of fasting enumerated in Matthew 6:16-18 as we fast this Lenten season?*

II. Faith (Joel 1:13-14)

To fast is to engage in transcending the logical. This is evident in Joel 1:10-14. The situation of the Israelites was serious. An invading army was coming, which would destroy their farms and ruin their lives (1:10-12). As a response to this impending doom, what was God's advice? He asked them to humble themselves and fast (1:13-14). Logically, this does not make sense, because to fast during these times was actually counterproductive. The logical advice was to prepare for war. The call to abstain from food did not make sense, because it would just make them even physically weaker when enemies reach their towns.

So why was God's call to fast? Quite simply, God was asking His people to have faith in Him. All human preparations mean nothing if God was not with them, no matter how much they might prepare for war. This is also true for us today. What we do as we prepare ourselves for Holy Week or for anything

religious are essentially less important than trusting God alone. We may prepare an elaborate plan with timetables and such, but when we forget to pray and fast, we have really relied on ourselves rather than on God. God alone can make the way, so we are asked to have faith in Him and trust Him alone: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight” (Prov 3:5-6).

- *How does prayer and fasting prepare us for anything we do in life?*
- *How is fasting a test of faith?*
- *What are the things that your faith in God is challenging you to do these days? How can fasting help you trust Him in whatever decision you make?*

III. Freedom (Isa 58:3-7)

To engage in fasting is actually to be set free. In relation to faith, to fast is to be freed from self-reliance. But also, fasting involves two kinds of freedom: freedom from the self and freedom for selfishness. Therefore, there is something deeper going on in fasting. In Isaiah 58:3-7, God says that He does not like outward fasting only. What God is interested in is something deeper.

Firstly, God is interested in our freedom from our selves. The fasting that God desires involves things like: “to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke; to set the

oppressed free and break every yoke” (58:6). In short, outward fasting should lead to our freedom from anything that enslave or oppress us. It can be an addiction to pornography, vices, Internet, games, and other strongholds that are not so easily broken. Fasting can be the means to remove these yokes pressing heavily on our shoulders. On our own, we cannot set ourselves free from these addictions, but when we fast from them for a time, it might pave the way for total deliverance.

Secondly, fasting can lead to freedom from our inherent selfishness. Isaiah 58:7 narrates that true fasting involves sharing our food with the hungry, providing the poor with shelter, and clothing the naked. True fasting is not just inward-looking, but must also lead to an awareness of the need of others and making sacrifices to meet these needs. This is ultimate expression of true fasting. Like Jesus, He abandoned His glory and life for the sake of others. His ultimate fast (when He gave His life for many) teaches us that to fast is to make sacrifices for the sake of others (2 Cor 8:9).

- *What are our current addictions that we need to be set free? If we are freed from these addictions, how much more can we read the Word and serve Him?*
- *What are you willing to fast from in order to be able to help other people who are in greater need?*
- *What is the principle we can learn from Luke 16:10?*

Application

Fasting is an extremely important Christian discipline. If we cannot deny ourselves from little things in the present, how can we even think of denying ourselves in obedience to a greater demand from God someday? For instance, how can we say Yes to God if He calls us to something with less economic support, if we can't even give our full tithe today? How can we say Yes to God if He calls us to full-time ministry, if we are not willing to give up some things momentarily? How can we truly surrender ourselves to God completely, if we do not know how to surrender a few things in our lives? If we try our best to avoid suffering today, we will always avoid suffering, even at the cost of disobeying God.

What are you willing to fast from this year?

Lesson 2

Facing Our Demons

Bible reading:

Matthew 4:1-11; 1 John 2:16

Objective:

At the end of this lesson, members should be able to understand the nature of temptations, and how we may overcome them like Christ did.

Introduction

We observe fasting during Lent as a commemoration of the forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness in fasting. But it must be remembered that Jesus did not only fast in the wilderness. He was tempted there too. Right in the very moments of His physical weakness, He was assaulted by the devil with very appealing temptations. This Lenten season, we must also step back and do an honest self-study about the temptations that we face in our lives. What are the temptations that constantly come our way? Why are we being tempted in this way? Are you seeing a cycle?

Interestingly, the writer of Hebrews says that because Jesus was “fully human in every way” (2:17), He also “has been tempted in every way, just as we are” (4:15). The NT says that Jesus experienced the temptations we are facing today, which

is why He is able to empathize with us (Heb 4:15). So how was Jesus tempted? What are the natures of temptation in the light of the temptations He faced?

I. Lust of the Flesh (1 John 2:16)

The first temptation Jesus faced in the wilderness at the hands of Satan was to turn stones into bread (Matt 4:3). The temptation was very simple, and at first sight, there seems to be nothing wrong with it. Jesus' first miracle was turning water to wine (John 2:1-11), so what was the difference between turning water to wine from turning stones to bread? One of the essential differences is that the wine miracle was for the benefit of others while the bread temptation was for the benefit of Jesus alone.

The temptation to satisfy our own flesh is labeled by John as "lust of the flesh." These are temptations that are aimed to fulfil our human appetites. In the case of Jesus, Satan's temptation appealed to a very basic human need: to satisfy one's hunger. Satan can ground his temptations using our physical, social, emotional, and even sexual needs. Going back to Jesus, there was nothing wrong with satisfying one's hunger. The rightness or wrongness is measured in how we satisfy the hunger. In relation to Jesus' temptation, the question was this: Was it God's will that Jesus' hunger is satisfied using a miracle for His own sake? Will His current physical need become the reason to not follow God's purposes or to follow His own desires?

- *Take a step back and reflect on the temptations you are receiving in your life. What human needs (physical, emotional, social, sexual, etc.) does Satan usually appeal to in order to tempt you?*
- *It is normal to satisfy our basic human needs, but what are the indications that we have crossed the boundary for what is proper and godly?*
- *How can we overcome temptations related to our human needs? Will fasting help?*

II. Pride of Life (1 John 2:16)

Satan's second temptation to Jesus was for Him to jump from the highest point of the temple because angels would supposedly come to make sure He would not be hurt (Matt 4:5-6). Again, the temptation was a bit tricky because what was requested from Him was still within His capability. He would just display a power He already possesses. So why did Jesus not do it? What was wrong with Satan's proposal?

Basically, the second temptation is about the pride of life. It is the temptation to show off. He was dared by Satan to jump from the roof in order for Jesus to prove that He was the Son of God by a flashy display of power. We must remember that Jesus came to earth in order to live like one of us with all the limitations attached to being human (Heb 2:17; 4:15). Paul even says that Jesus emptied Himself of divine powers and privileges, even though He can use them for His own advantage

(Phil 2:5-6). So the temptation of Satan was for Jesus to prove Himself as the true Son of God by displaying a miraculous act. At a time that Jesus was weak from fasting while being bullied by Satan, the temptation was for Jesus to reveal His glory. The same temptations come to us. When we are oppressed, underestimated, or looked down upon by others, we are tempted to show off and reveal who we truly are in our capabilities, learning, and even economic status.

- *What temptations do we face that asks us to abandon humility and self-emptying in order to show off to people?*
- *What did Paul mean when he said that we should imitate Christ's humility in Philippians 2:5-6?*
- *What are the things about ourselves that we treasure so much, which can be avenues for temptations to show off?*

III. Lust of the Eyes (1 John 2:16)

Satan's third temptation is related to possessions and acquiring properties. Satan promised to give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if Jesus would bow down to him (Matt 4:8-9). It was a very tempting offer. Eve was not able to overcome the serpent's temptation because she saw that what was offered to her was "pleasing to the eye" (Gen 3:6). In the same way, Jesus was tempted by Satan using what the eyes can see. Although we cannot take gold and gems with us when we die, their glitter is still very enticing. This is the temptation related to the lust of the eyes.

Basically, lust of the eyes refers to the desire to have what we see as appealing. It is the temptation to possess everything we see as desirable. It is the temptation towards materialism. But is it wrong to possess things? No. It is part of God's will for us to own things (Ecc 5:18-19). The problem is that we may be tempted to gain money and property using short cuts. It is becoming rich by cheating. This is the temptation faced by Jesus Christ. He would have all the kingdoms of the world anyway, but this will happen only after He dies at the hands of sinners (Matt 28:18; Phil 2:9-11). The temptation given to Him was for Him to gain them soon, without having to suffer.

- *What is the importance of 1 Timothy 6:9-10 in our daily Christian life in relation to the desire to have more?*
- *What materials possessions are so tempting for us to have? What materials things are so tempting for our eyes?*
- *What are the indications that we are slowly succumbing to the lust of our eyes? How do people fall into this temptation?*

Application

We face a lot of temptations every day. The bad news is that we will continue to face them until our last breath. Even the Son of God was tempted. For sure, Satan was hoping for Jesus to come to the dark side. We who are also sons and daughters of God will be tempted because Satan wants us to re-join his ranks. These temptations can be very tricky, subtle, and sugar-

coated. They are usually presented to us in a way that is appealing to our present needs, rights, and wants.

It will be good if you have one person you can send an SOS message to if you are being tempted. You can be accountability partners.

Lesson 3

Life is Short

Bible reading:

Psalm 90:1-12

Objective:

At the end of this lesson, members should be able to understand the nature of human life on earth, and live in accordance with the knowledge of its short-ness.

Introduction

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, when ashes are marked on foreheads in the sign of the cross. The use of ashes is a symbolic reminder of our own life, telling us in the most vivid way that from dust we came, to dust we shall return (Gen 3:19; Ecc 3:20). Thus, *the path of Lent is the path of death*. This is patterned after the life of Jesus Christ. Jesus was aware that His entire life and ministry were leading to death. He journeyed from Galilee to Jerusalem with the knowledge that when He arrives in Jerusalem, He would die at the hands of the religious leaders. Our life on earth is also like the journey of Jesus from Bethlehem to Calvary. Whether we like it or not, we are going to climb up our very own Golgothas.

I. Numbering Our Days (Ps 90:12a)

We like measuring things. Laboratories are filled with instruments that measure things by milliliters and milligrams, but it is easy to neglect measuring our life span on earth. What does it mean to number our days? It means recognizing that life is short. The Bible speaks about this very clearly: “we all shrivel up like a leaf” (Isa 64:6); “you have made my days a mere handbreadth” (Ps 39:5); and “you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes” (James 4:14).

Life is short and time runs fast. We do not need rocket science and complicated calculations to notice that our days on earth are fleeting. Although we do not notice it, because we are busy living our lives, time burns fast. It runs its course without our permission and observation. Lent is a reminder that our lives on earth can pass by quickly.

- *How many days have you lived on earth already? Can you say that you have lived all of them in fullness?*
- *What is the importance of the realization that we have a very short life on earth?*

II. A Heart of Wisdom (Ps 90:12b)

According to Moses (who wrote Psalm 90), we need to be reminded about the shortness of our lives on earth so that we might gain a heart of wisdom. In short, there is wisdom gained in the awareness of our human situation. In the same way as knowing our sickness enables us to know which medicines to

take, knowing the nature of our human lives enables us to either reform our mindset, plans, and even commitments in life.

- *What wisdom can be found in the awareness of our fleeting existence?*
- *What changes in life would you make if you learned that you are going to die in five years?*

A. Wisdom not to Offend God

One of the backgrounds of Psalm 90 is that Moses witnessed the hasty death of his fellow Israelites because they have continuously disobeyed God. All throughout Moses' leadership, he facilitated the burial of approximately half a million Jews. The number of males when the Israelites left Egypt to the time they were about to cross the Jordan river was about the same: 600,000 males (Num 11:21; 26:51). This is because God decided that those who grumbled against Him or disobeyed Him while they were in the wilderness would not be able to enter the promise land (Num 14:21-23).

This is why Psalm 90 is very wary about God's wrath. Verse 7 says, "we are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation" (see also vv. 8-9, 11). Life is already short, but when we disobey God, we are in danger of receiving His punishment of death (Rom 6:23), much like what the Israelites experienced (Exo 32:28, 35; Num 16:49; 21:6; 25:9). What Moses is saying is that it is foolishness to spend our short days in offending God and in disobedience. Since our life on earth is short, we should

spend it in pleasing God and obeying His commands. We cannot be arrogant before God, continuously inviting His wrath because of our grumblings, murmurings, and disobedience. Since we owe God every minute of our existence, we should spend it in worship.

- *How can we be ungrateful to God for His gift of life for us?*
- *The Israelites were killed by God because they were grumbling and complaining, so why is grumbling and complaining not good?*
- *What does this mean: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of all wisdom” (Ps 111:10; Prov 1:7; 9:10; Job 28:28)? Notice that this command is repeated several times, so it must be very important.*

B. Wisdom to Store Heavenly Treasures

Matthew 6:19-20 says that instead of storing treasures on earth, which can be destroyed, we should store up for ourselves treasures in heaven, which cannot be destroyed or stolen. John Bunyan once said that spending our days trying to accumulate wealth is like ***“raking a little bit of dust into a pile: a little bit of money, a little bit of property, and little bit of this and that.”*** We are reminded of the parable of the rich fool who planned to build more barns to store His wealth (Luke 12:13-20), with the mentality: “Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry” (13:19). But God said to him: “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?” (13:20). There are many who are fools,

although they are not rich. Jesus said, “What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?” (Mark 8:36). If we are to make an investment, it should not be for this world, but for eternity. We must use our short life on earth to store up treasures in heaven.

- *What does it mean to store up treasures in heaven? How do we do this?*
- *What investments do we currently have? Where are we investing our time, money, effort and resources? How do we know that our investments are for heavenly purposes?*

C. Wisdom to Make the Most of Opportunities

Paul admonishes believers to “make the most of every opportunity in these evil days” (Eph 5:16). What does this mean? Let us look at the life of Christ. Jesus knew that His days on earth were very few. When He started walking towards Jerusalem, He knew that His life would end there. He knew that His walk to Jerusalem was a very short journey. So how did He use His remaining days on earth? He used each day seeking the lost, serving the needy, proclaiming the kingdom, healing the sick, fellowshiping with the outcast, teaching the gospel, and forgiving sinners. This is what it means to make the most of every opportunity. Since our life on earth is short, it must be spent in serving God and others.

- *So far, what difference have our lives made to our family, our neighbors, and our church?*

- *If you are to die in five years, what opportunities would you be praying for? What would you wish to accomplish?*

Application

Lent is a commemoration of the short life of Jesus Christ before His death. Like Christ, we are all in this journey. The question is: “How are we living our days on earth? Are we pursuing a life full of wisdom or foolishness? Are we using our days like Christ in obedience to the Father and in service to other people, or are we using them to gratify our self with pleasure and indulgence?”

Lesson 4

Crucified High Priest

Bible reading:
Hebrews 4:14-15;

Objective:

At the end of this lesson, members should be able to imitate the attitude of Jesus Christ towards God and others even in the midst of suffering.

Introduction

Anyone who has seen Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion of the Christ* will have witnessed the horrors of the crucifixion. It is a revolting portrayal of the atrocities of humanity against God. Maybe you will resonate with me, but I always have mixed feelings watching it. I feel anger every time I see the smiles of those who were torturing Jesus, as if they are enjoying the violence they are doing against their Maker (Col 1:16). I feel confused at how humanity can be so cruel. I feel sorrowful and unworthy when I see the sufferings that Christ had to endure for me.

How can one man endure so much suffering at the hands of the very people He came to save? Have we ever wondered what was Jesus thinking while He was on the cross, seeing all the people around Him? In this lesson, we are going to look at Jesus

Christ, human like us, suffering on the cross, and how He responded to His situation.

I. The Human Christ

When Jesus cried, “*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachtani,*” or “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” (Mark 15:34) and when He said, “I thirst” (John 19:28), Jesus is portrayed as a genuine human being who felt both emotional and physical pains. The writer of Hebrews is right: Jesus was “like us in every respect” (Heb 2:17), able to feel agony and sorrow. This is one of the emphases of *The Passion of the Christ*, where the sheer humanity of Christ is portrayed. He bleeds like every one of us. He groans when He feels pain. He falls down when He is drained of strength. He thirsts when He is tired. Christ truly suffered (1 Pet 2:21). His suffering was not fake or just a drama.

Because He is truly human like us, He felt every pain inflicted upon Him. The problem is: the sufferings of Jesus Christ were at the hands of humans. Even if the people did not recognize the divinity of Jesus, they were still conscious that they were inflicting pain upon their fellow human being. This is why the cross is the best portrayal of human opposition to God and human atrocity.

- *Have you ever experienced the same treatment as that received by Jesus Christ (see Mark 10:33-34)? If yes, what did you feel?*

- *Read Isaiah 53:3-12. Discuss how the passage points to Jesus Christ, and how he experienced all of the things mentioned in the passage.*
- *If we put ourselves in the place of Jesus Christ when He was suffering, do you think it is possible not to commit sin or not retaliate?*

II. Loving Concern of Others (Luke 23:34)

What were Jesus' responses to suffering? Firstly, even in the midst of suffering at the hands of human beings, He prayed for them: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). This is not common human response to suffering and to oppressors. Usually, when people suffer, they often feel that they are granted license to be angry, grumpy. They even become quite self-centered because they want all the attention, sympathy, and help directed to them. (This is easily noticed in the hospital, when suffering patients are very impatient.) The disciples actually exemplified that people who suffer easily retaliate. In Luke 9:52-54, they came to Samaria, and "the people did not receive him... When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" (9:54).

But Jesus, in the midst of his suffering, still placed others above his own needs. He prayed: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). This is the love of Jesus for humanity: even though He suffers at their hands, He still wants to be their servant and intercessor. Jesus, while

suffering did not want to become the recipient of mercy; he wanted to be the giver of mercy. He thought of the needs of others before His very own present needs. Instead of being wrapped up about His own sufferings, He was thinking of you and me.

- *Have you ever asked for excuses from serving others because you have your own problems? If yes, share why did you think it was OK to do it.*
- *Like Jesus, how can we serve other people even when we are suffering?*
- *In the same way that Jesus was thinking of others first, how can we do the same in every situation in our life, whether good or bad?*

III. Loving Commitment to God (Luke 23:46)

Jesus did not only prioritize others when He was suffering; He also prioritized giving glory to the Father. Even though death was staring at Him in the face, He was still able to give glory to His Father when He prayed “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46; quoting Psalm 31:5). We can still give glory to God in the midst of suffering!

On the night before He was crucified, Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. When He arrived at garden, He said to His disciples: “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me” (Matt 26:38). He was already sorrowful, but His disciples did not really help. But

even in His situation, He was still able to pray “not as I will, but as you will” (Matt 26:39, 42, 44). His prayer at the cross is the same: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” – or “Father, I submit to Your will. Be in-charge of my life!”

The only person I know with such a tenacity to give God glory even in the midst of suffering is Job. In just one day, he lost his possession, his family, and everything he had. He was not an emotionless robot. We read that he “tore his robe and shaved his head” when he heard the news about his children’s death (Job 1:20). But interestingly, he also “fell to the ground in worship” (Job 1:20). When we suffer, we can be like Job’s wife who asked him to “Curse God and die!” (Job 2:9); OR we can be like Job, who responded to her: ““You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?’ In all this, Job did not sin in what he said” (Job 2:10).

- *How can we learn to think of God first even in the midst of suffering? How can we be like Jesus who prioritized worshipping God (rather than complaining to God) even in the midst of suffering?*
- *How can we learn to say “I surrender all to you, Lord” in all circumstances in life?*

Application

This Holy Week, we remember that Jesus Christ died on the cross. We see that on the cross, even in the midst of suffering, He was thinking of us and was unshakeable in His desire to

glorify the Father. We may not experience being crucified, but we all experience hardships in life. Like Jesus, we experience suffering at the hands of others. But when these happen, how do we respond? Do we lose our temper, or are we able to utter words of forgiveness to others, in the same way that we are forgiven? Are we able to commit ourselves to God and trust in His will and plans even when we do not see the logic of our situation?

Lesson 5

Easter

Bible reading:

1 Corinthians 15:12-34; John 20:

Objective:

At the end of this lesson, members should be able to understand the importance of the resurrection of Christ and how it should affect our lives.

Introduction

When Jesus Christ died, the disciples were the ones who first took the hit. They have followed Him for three years, invested their time, effort, and allegiance to the One they thought was the expected Messiah. And then He was rejected by the Jews and brutally killed by the Romans. The Messiah came, died, and was gone without having accomplished anything that they expected. To them, as followers, His death meant the end of their journey. In a sense, they died when Jesus died. There was nothing left for them to do. They were like sheep without a shepherd (Ezek 34:5; Matt 26:31; Mark 14:27).

But when Jesus revealed Himself to them, alive and well, they were overjoyed. The resurrection changed their demeanor and even outlook in life overnight. So what are the good news of the resurrection?

I. Hope

Have you ever experienced hoping so much in something--like staking everything in this thing--but it did not happen? This was what happened to the disciples. All of their hopes for Israel were pinned on Jesus Christ. They followed Him because they believed in Him. So when He died, they were totally depressed. The good news is that their depression only lasted for three days. When Jesus revealed Himself to them as live and well, their hopes were re-kindled. In fact, that Jesus came back from the dead even gave them greater assurance and confidence.

But why did Jesus have to reveal Himself to them? Yes. The disciples were at the edge of their hopelessness. Jesus knew that the solution to their downcast spirit is for Him to appear to them. It is only His presence that can bring a ray of light in their gloomy world. This was precisely what Jesus did, and true enough, when the disciples saw Jesus, they were overjoyed (John 20:20).

- *Have you ever gone through an experience in life where you were super disappointed, but then you were wrong about things, and things actually went for a better situation? Share your story, because this was precisely what the disciples experienced.*
- *What hope does the resurrection give to you?*
- *What are the things you are hoping for in life that are God-related?*

II. Peace

In John 20:19-23, we see that the first words of Jesus to His disciples when He appeared to them were: “Peace be with you.” It seems, therefore, that peace is one of the gifts of the resurrection. Now we can ask: Why peace? Was it peace that the disciples needed? The answer is yes. The disciples were feeling guilty and ashamed because of their actions after Jesus was arrested. All of them deserted Him (Mark 14:50), Peter denied Him (John 18:13-27), and only John followed Jesus closely at the cross (John 19:25). Of course they were feeling guilty and ashamed of themselves. Thus, they did not have peace. Their last experiences with their friend and master were too shameful.

When Jesus came and said to the disciples, “Peace be with you,” He was making peace with them. He wanted to establish the relationship back. He wanted to remove their feeling of shame, their feeling of guilt. He wanted them to experience the peace that they once had when Jesus was with them. He wanted those heavy burdens accusing them of their sins to be gone. He wanted to give them the peace of having relationship with Him. *He came to restore them!* He came to let them know that amidst their shortcomings, He still considers them as His disciples. When He talked about forgiving others’ sins in John 20:23, He was referring to that the fact they should also forgive one another and themselves, because He already forgave them.

- *As we celebrate Jesus' resurrection, what is the peace that you need the most these days?*
- *How can the peace that Jesus gives be applied to our relationship with other people, and to ourselves?*

III. Life

The Old Testament does not have robust understanding of the afterlife. Job asked, “If someone dies, will they live again?” (14:14) and he did not have an answer. In fact, the Sadducees even did not believe in the resurrection (The Sadducees were the elite religious teachers of the Jewish people during the time of Jesus; the high priest is chosen from the Sadducees). In the minds of the Jews, when one dies, one literally ceases to exist. This life on earth is all there is, and when we return to dust, we are gone forever (Gen 3:19; Ecc 3:20; 12:7). This is why Enoch (Gen 5:24; Heb 11:5) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:11) were considered fortunate because they did not die but were taken up to heaven.

This lack of understanding of life after death was one the major reasons why Solomon pronounced that at the end of life, everything is meaningless (Ecc 1:12-18; 2:1-11, 17-23; 4:13-16; 5:8-17; 9:13-18). He even said: “I commend the enjoyment of life, because there is nothing better for a person under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad” (Ecc 8:15). This is true. If life on earth is all there is, then as Paul also said, let us “eat and drink for tomorrow we die” (1 Cor 15:32). If there is no resurrection from the dead, then we must really enjoy our life on earth to

the fullest because our time is really short (Ps 39:4-5; 90:12). But because we believe in the resurrection, we put an emphasis on the importance of the afterlife. This is why we follow Jesus' words that we must store for ourselves treasures in heaven, instead of treasures on earth (Matt 6:19-21). Jesus' resurrection confirms that there is life after death.

- *If life on earth is all there is, how would people generally live their lives: in godliness or in pleasure? Discuss.*
- *How do live a life on earth with the resurrection in mind? How does the resurrection affect our way of life?*
- *It is interesting how our view of the afterlife affects our view of this life. How do we prepare for the afterlife in this life?*

Application

The resurrection of Jesus Christ brings hope to the hopeless, peace to the guilty, and awareness of eternal life for those living in the world. Let us ask ourselves: Are we living in the resurrection hope, in the resurrection peace, and in the resurrection life? If not yet, and we want to experience all these things, we can ask God for them.

Monthly Attendance

Leader: _____

Month: _____

Members	Dates				
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
6.					
7.					
8.					
9.					
10.					
11.					
12.					
Visitors/Guests					
1.					
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