# daily journal part one: march 10 - march 23, 2014





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They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, "The Lord is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him."

Psalm 92:12-15.



# They never stop producing fruit

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What an amazing description of a fruitful life over the long haul!

I don't know about you, but that's the sort of life I yearn for - a life that's marked by resilience, strength and fruitfulness. To experience that sort of life though, I need to be intentional.

The Psalm writer speaks of trees/people being 'planted'. To grow, I need to be planted in relationship with others and develop deep roots as God's Spirit takes God's Word and brings about transformation.

With this in mind we've developed this daily journal. It's an expression of the truths found in Psalm 92. It's not written by just one person. It's the expression of our family at NVBC – the people we're 'planted' with. In this journal you will find a rich diversity of perspectives and life experiences, which I trust will encourage and challenge you.

Equally this journal invites you each day to 'send down your roots' into the Word of God, and to ask the Spirit to take that Word and apply it to your life.

My hope is that this journal will help each person who calls NVBC home to develop a life of getting into God's Word on a daily basis.

Thank you to the many of our family who have contributed to this endeavour. I trust that you will be encouraged, challenged and inspired!

Every blessing,

Pastor Craig.

Senior Pastor

# Flourishing & Fruitful

Monday 10<sup>th</sup> March

Reading: Psalm 1

#### Reflection:

Last year I felt a very strong prompting at one point to pray over the Central Coast.

I started at the southern-most point (Hawkesbury River Bridge). On subsequent days I travelled east to Terrigal, west to Mangrove Dam, and finally north to Lake Macquarie.

At each of these locations I felt a great stirring in my spirit, but it was the western leg of my journey that I felt a nudge to pull over part-way there. I stopped off at a number of citrus orchards along the way to Mangrove Dam. At that time of year the fruit was also completely ripe and the bright orange colour of the fruit stood out from the deep green foliage as though someone had used a highlighter pen to colour each piece.

These trees were the very picture of health and vitality! Their roots were planted deeply in good soil and their leaves received great amounts of light (very important for citrus trees).

Driving away from the orchards I couldn't help but think "I want to be like those trees ... fruitful and flourishing!"

The writer of Psalm 1 holds out for us the prospect of a fruitful and flourishing life – yet that life doesn't just 'happen'. It's a life marked by a vital union with God who is revealed through His word. The flourishing person 'delights' in God's word. The flourishing person 'meditates' on God's word. Fruitfulness is a function of 'planted-ness' in the word of God.



How would you describe your attitude to God's word?

What do you want to say to God about His word?

How might you foster greater 'planted-ness' in God's word this year?

## A prayer to pray:

Father God, thank you so much for your word that reveals who you are to us. Please help me to be shaped and influenced by your word, not just the prevailing thoughts and trends of our society. Help me to live a fruitful and flourishing life. Amen.

# **Craig Corkill**

Senior Pastor

## Still

Tuesday 11th March

Reading: Psalm 46: 9-11

#### Reflection:

Last year I had the privilege of visiting Jerusalem, Israel and of standing on the Mount of Olives to the east of the city. This is the place from which Jesus ascended to heaven and also the place to which he will one day return. It was amazing to look across the Kidron Valley to the Temple Mount, where Jesus will soon walk across that valley and into the Temple, take up His rightful place on the throne of David, and at last establish His reign on the earth.

Psalm 46 anticipates this very event on God's time line. In a world that has totally lost its way, blinded by sinful rebellion, global conflict, prejudice and injustice, a senseless hatred of the nation of Israel and all that is dear to the heart of God, He will intervene in power and declare His sovereignty over the earth and say, "Stop! *I* am God!" He will declare Himself the Defender of Israel and affirm His supremacy over all the nations and over all the earth. Peace at last! What a day that will be!

Amazingly, this high and exalted God of all creation wants to know you and me and spend time with us one-on-one. He asks us to stop, and to know who He is. God calls us to a kind of Sabbath observance in which we can come aside from the traumas and contaminations that come from living in a sinful world, and be still, and be assured that He is bigger than it all. Here is a place in His presence where we can find safety, strength, and help in time of need where we can be assured that God loves us more than we could ever understand. To be still, is to recognize God's supreme and full control of the affairs of humanity and of the events of our own lives. Here, we affirm His kingship, grow in our relationship with Him and draw from Him the power to live as His royal subjects.



Distractions come easily. Is there an area of your life where you need to stop, be still and allow God His rightful place?

"The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress." What does that mean for you in your everyday life?

## A prayer to pray:

Father, I thank you that you are in control; that you are bigger than all the events of my life. Help me to know that whatever happens, you are God. In the Name of Jesus, Amen.

## **Leigh Orton**

Nurse & Musician

# Life to the full

Wednesday 12th March 2014

Reading: Luke 10:1-21

#### Reflection:

At the start of this year I was asked to lead Youth while Benj and Mel were away and I was honoured with the opportunity to be able to step up and look after a youth ministry I was so passionate about. At the outset of the term, there was much preparation and communication to do in terms of developing a run-sheet for each Friday night and finding out which leaders were available each week. This job was no easy one and I often wondered how a small team of leaders like ourselves would be able to reach such a huge amount of young people and be able to connect with them, invite them along to youth and provide them with an environment that was fun, inviting and embracing of everyone no matter who they were or the journey they were on. We had many leaders who were away, had other commitments or were unwell and each week. I found myself praying that God would provide us with exactly what we needed to get through.

Just like in Luke, before Jesus sends out the 72 disciples, he tells them; "the harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields". This is also true for youth; there are so many young people within a five minute walk of our church building who we have the opportunity to introduce to Jesus and rather than stressing over something I had no control over, I knew I needed to entrust it to God. Each week we had leaders and student leaders step up. Leaders arrived early to help, we had food to eat each week, we had new people coming every week and an atmosphere that was electric.

It was over these past three weeks that I was able to learn that in times of uncertainty all I need to focus on is working to my strengths, be an encouragement to those around me and leave the rest up to God. He is in control and all I need to do for him to work is to continue living my life and serving the best I can and trust him to look after the rest.



What is your first response when faced with a situation or a job that is too great for you to do alone? What can you do so that praying and entrusting it to Jesus becomes your first response?

When you finish something where there are people who come behind you ,do you rejoice because you beat them or do you thank Jesus for looking out for you and equipping you with what you needed to succeed?

## A prayer to pray:

Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for equipping me with giftings and passions that are unique to me. I pray that as you use me in the areas you've called me to, that you would continue to provide me with the tools I need to achieve them. Help me to trust your provision and the growing of the seeds that are planted and let me also remember to thank you for watching over me, protecting and working through me, rather than focusing on the successes or failings themselves.

#### **Nicole Welch**

High School Teacher/Youth Leader

# Keep On

Thursday 13th March 2014

Reading: Hebrews 12: 1-3

#### Reflection

'Long distance' lives, such as ours, are wonderful but we need the evidence of photographs, travel diaries and letters to keep our recollections accurate (and to save arguments). However, some memories are so vivid that they do not fade.

These are about special people. In a lovely way, although they have died, they keep us company today because they are part of God's 'crowd of witnesses' who encourage us to keep on.

We treasure the memories of our mothers, both immigrants, who knew the 'fires' of very little money, the death of infant children, and the demands of family and yet had servant hearts so wide and faith so steady that our homes were 'safe houses' for other young folk and our churches were blessed by their ministry of humble service.

Two teachers, J.A. Thompson & Gilbert Wright, one a brilliant scholar whose prayer-filled reflections moulded pastors, taught us how to use the psalms in the whole of life and to find joy in them.

Our hearts have been lost to Burmese Christians whose trust in God's guiding and protection enabled them to sing their faith at every opportunity and in perfect harmony!

There was a beautiful Enga leader, Pastor Sai, who knew the treacherous mountain tracks so well that barefoot he did not stumble. In faith practice, as in life, he was able to hold the learner upright so that they were able to keep on.

In the Message translation of today's passage we found the perfect 'race plan' so that we can have confidence that we will reach the finish line of our lives.

- 1. Keep your eyes on Jesus
- 2. Study how he 'ran the race'
- 3. Don't lose sight of where he was headed
- 4. When your 'faith is flagging' go over that story again, item by item.



Who are the people who have encouraged or are encouraging you in your faith?

Has the 'race plan' developed by the writer to the Hebrews inspired you to make it your own? (If so, perhaps you would consider recording it in something you use every day - iphone, ipad, computer, wallet, the margin of your bible, etc.)

## A prayer to pray:

Lord, with deep affection we remember those whom we love who have died. But most of all we remember your great love for us and your encouragement to us to run the race of life with determination.

## **Betty & John Helm**

Chaplains, Baptist World Aid Australia

# Our Defining Character (The 'Me' God Wants Me to Be)

Friday 14th March 2014

Reading: John 13: 34--35

#### Reflection:

I often feel like the 'me' I want to be doesn't match up with the 'me' I actually am. The 'me' I want to be has a month of meals pre-planned, an empty ironing basket, biscuits baking in the oven, a husband who knows how much he's adored, updated family photos framed, waxed legs, children who never argue, friends who feel appreciated, kind words flowing from my mouth, a house that looks like something from a 'Pinterest' page, emails replied to ... You get the picture!

The woman who glanced in the mirror last week, as she rushed out to work reflected: mascara forgotten, hair needing a wash, outfit not thoroughly thought through, hairy legs, tired eyes, grumpy words and a look of disappointment... disappointment at the 'me' I so desperately want to be but continually seem to fall short of.

I catch myself asking, is it even possible to be the loving wife, the mum, the teacher, the friend, the daughter, the sister and the missionary that I strive to be?

These questions lead me to remind myself that it's not about 'me'. My mission is not about trying to 'be' something or someone that I can never really live up to. When it all boils down, when I reflect on what my Heavenly Father has done for me, all I want is to be the 'me' God wants me to be.

All through the Gospels I read passages where Jesus is quoted saying, "Follow me." When I think about it though, to be a "follower" of Jesus means I actually have to follow, or copy, what Jesus did. It sounds so easy, right? Oh, but how hard it can often be! I love how simply John 13: 34-35 lays it out, "A new command I give you: 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."

One of my favourite quotes from Mother Teresa is "If you can't do great things, do little things with great love. If you can't do them with great love, do them with a little love. If you can't do them with a little love, do them anyway. Love grows when people serve."

I personally think that Jesus was the best example of what a loving, servant heart is meant to look like. And that God is the perfect example of what our character should reflect because of the love, mercy, grace, and justice He first showed us.



The 'me' I want to be can no longer be measured on how well-groomed or well-organised I am, how 'perfectly' I try to present myself in terms of my domestic abilities or my feeble attempts to appear like I have-it-all-together.

When I draw near to God, and let Him fill my heart with His perfect love. When I love and serve as Christ did, is to be the 'me' God wants.

#### Questions to consider:

What does godly character look like?

In what areas of your life is it hardest to display these characteristics?

How can you be the 'you' that God wants you to be?

What does that look like for your life this week?

## A prayer to pray:

Dear Heavenly Father, so often I find myself striving to be the person I think I should be. I am so grateful that You love me. Thank You for showing me every day what perfect love looks like. This week Father, let me focus my attention on loving others just like Jesus did. Help me to love others in words and deeds. Help me to find ways to serve others so that Your love will grow in my heart. Give me a heart that loves the unlovely so that they might see You Lord reflected in my life. Amen.

#### **Andrea Cross**

Missionary in Northern Thailand - ZOE Foundation Australia

## Armour of God

Saturday 15th March

Reading: Ephesians 6:10-18

## Reflection:

I like to have my quiet time while I sit in my kids' doorways and wait for them to settle at night time (as a Mum, I do sometimes struggle finding that quiet time...and usually this time of night I am able to grab a bit of time to pray and reflect on God's word).

I sometimes quietly pray out loud... one time my daughter (4) asked what I was praying.

I told her that I was praying for the armour of God to protect me. This got my daughter curious, so I began to explain to her what the armour of God was and why it was such an important prayer to remember. It made me realise that some prayers need to be said with my kids as it would impact them just as much as it would for me.

We (as a family) found it a very special and important prayer, and we now all pray for the armour of God during our evening family prayer time. My daughter now knows the whole passage off by heart, my son (2) is not too far behind her. My daughter prays for it when she is afraid and incorporates it within her own prayers that she initiates herself.

When you pray for the armour of God, it can be easy to imagine 17th century armour that a knight would have worn such as full plate armour, but as you read each article of armour described by Paul think of a Roman Soldier. Their armour, while defensive, was designed to face the enemy. The chest plate, the belt buckle, and the shield are all designed to stand side by side with fellow soldiers facing the enemy. It wasn't made to protect your back while running away and it wasn't designed to for one to one combat, but side by side in rank and file.



How is praying for the armour of God impacting your life in the present?

When sin threatens to enter your life, or maybe a really tough circumstance, how do you react? Do you run and hide (or ask God to deal with it while you hide) or do you stand and face it, and if you do, are you fighting alone? Do you involve your growth group or a close circle of brothers and sisters and ask them to face it with you?

**Special family activity:** Get your kids to lie down on some paper - big enough for their whole body to lie on, or lie down outside on concrete that can have pavement chalk. Trace an outline around their body. Encourage them to draw their idea of what God's armour looks like on them.

Family discussion: Why do we need the armour of God? How do you feel when you put it on?

## A prayer to pray -

Lord,

We pray that you will bless Your armour, as we place it upon ourselves. We pray that we will wear it proudly every day.

We pray for the helmet of salvation to be placed on our heads, the breastplate of righteousness to be placed firmly on our chest, the belt of truth to be placed securely around our waist, the feet of peace fitted firmly on our feet, the shield of faith grasped tightly and the sword of the spirit ready.

#### **Hollie and Jacob Ross**

**Parents** 



## All His benefits

Sunday 16th March

Reading: Psalm 103

#### Reflection

For five generations the 103rd psalm has been read at my family's birthdays, dedications, marriages and even funerals. It was first adopted as the family benediction at the birth of my ancestor (Emily Young) in the early part of the 19th century, and this psalm of rejoicing has been a key feature at get togethers ever since.

There is nothing very formal about how it is read, or by whom, and whilst occasionally its reading will enjoy a reverential silence, it is more commonly read over the background noise of the kids playing with their cousins. Despite this lack of formality, one constant I've noticed, regardless of who's reading it, are the phrases that seem to attract particular emphasis.

"and forget not all his benefits" is one such example that always seems to be read slightly louder and is followed by a respectful pause. This is no doubt in part because of how the poetry of the psalm flows, but also because it is such a clear and direct command to think on the Lords blessings in your life.

"...all his benefits" is an ideal set up for the rest of the passage which goes on to give one of scriptures most comprehensive and yet succinct reminders of our Heavenly Fathers boundless goodness. Verse after verse is packed with profound life changing revelations of how the Lord has blessed us, to the extent that it demands at least a second read through.

It's a tradition that we'll joyfully carry on with our own kids but it's the message of God's Grace and Goodness that I hope they take on in their own lives, and that I hope blesses you as you meditate on it.



Can you think of a time when you were stretched or facing challenges and you felt Gods renewal? (verse 5)

As with verse 17, what is your prayer for your children's children, or for those that come after you?

## A prayer to pray:

Father God, we thank you that you are compassionate and Gracious, we thank you that your love is with us, and as we face challenges or times of great joy, remind us in all things to give you Praise, and Praise from our souls. Burn the message of your Grace upon our hearts and minds so that we will not forget all your benefits.

#### **Charlie Hercus**

Husband and Father

## **Be Careful What You Love**

Monday 17th March

Reading: 1 John 2:15-17

#### Reflection:

As a mother of two young girls I'm constantly hearing "I want that", "...but everyone's got one" and "how can I get enough pocket money to buy what I want?" I guess the same can be true for us as adults. Daily we are bombarded with attractive people telling us that we can't be happy unless we own the product that they are selling or adopt the lifestyle that they are pursuing. We thumb through magazines that lure us with beautiful homes, new cars, luxury items, or expensive vacations that all can be ours, if we just get enough money or go into enough debt.

In this passage, John is saying to us to love the world is to still be seeking for something out there, apart from God, which is going to give us our meaning, purpose, security and identity. He is not speaking here of enjoying the earth and the beauty of God's creation. He is not speaking against music and art that can be enjoyed and reflected upon.

John wants to uncover for us what is really going on when we love the things of this world and indulge ourselves with them. We cannot receive God's life when we are looking for life somewhere else. We cannot live in His love and peace. In fact, what the world offers is, as John put it earlier in this chapter, darkness. It twists and breaks us. John ends this section by telling us "And the world passes away, and the lust of it." These other things we are tempted to pursue to give us life, security, power and identity, John says, have no lasting substance; they will pass away. It is not like there really are two places to find life - God and the world. The world will pass away. It is a shadow, an empty promise that cannot fulfill itself. Real life, life that lasts, is in God alone.

Worldliness is, at its core, is a matter of the heart. If your heart is captured by the world, you will love the things of the world. If your heart is captured by the love of God, you will be drawn to Him and to the things of God. The only way that our hearts can be transformed so that we love God is by being born again.



What's first and foremost on your mind, thoughts of worldly things, or is your heart captured by efforts to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord?

Where lies your confidence - in the money you have in your bank account or investments, or in the living and faithful God, who has promised to supply all your needs?

## A prayer to pray:

Help me today Lord, to have a heart that is captured by only you and your ways. May I not get sucked in to the lure of this world, but look to you for my meaning, purpose, security and identity.

## **Bronwyn Threlfo**

Wife and Mum

# Wisdom?!

Tuesday 18th March

Reading: James 1:2-8

#### Reflection:

One of my favourite movies is "Evan Almighty" about a man on the edge of politics who "wants to change the world". He becomes a Senator, moves his family to a new area, and before his first day at his new job gets down on his knees and asks God to "help him change the world". God takes him at his word and asks him to build an ARK. It seems Evan is going crazy and his wife is on the point of leaving him when God (Morgan Freeman) reminds her that she prayed that they would become closer as a family. God, in the form of a waiter at the place they stop for lunch, asks her, 'If someone asks to grow closer as a family, do you think God will give them lots of happy times or will He give them lots of opportunities to work together and grow closer?' She returns to help her husband complete what he believes God is telling him to do, even though she doesn't completely understand.

It seems asking for wisdom is a bit like this – If we ask God for wisdom we are likely to be put in positions where we have to act and make decisions that help us GROW in wisdom. Asking ourselves in these times, "What would God have me do?" or "What do I think Jesus would do if he was in this situation right now?" are good questions. Ultimately though, we learn and grow in wisdom as we reflect on the decisions we make and the outcomes and influence of those decision. So growing in wisdom is a process.

Interestingly James says we should not doubt and that he who doubts that God will answer his or her prayer for wisdom, should expect nothing because he/she is double minded! .....WOW!! But perhaps we need to react differently and realize the beginning of wisdom is believing that God will do as He says. If He says He will give to us what we ask and give it generously then the beginning of wisdom is to believe just that and not doubt Him.



What trials have you faced recently? Are you still in the midst of a trial? Has your faith been tested during this trial? Have you allowed God to change you?

As you look back from where you are, can you see that you have GROWN from this experience? The chances are GOD still has more to do to help you to become "mature and complete, lacking nothing", ... But Oh! What a goal.

## A prayer to pray:

Father God, as I undergo trials please help me to understand that you are GROWING me in perseverance and endurance and ultimately in WISDOM. When I ache for deliverance help me to submit to your teaching and to be willing to allow the trial to take as long as is needed to help me become "mature and complete, lacking nothing". As Jesus said – "Not my will but Thine be done!!"

## David & Robyn Wolski

Followers of Jesus, Parents and soon -to-be Grandparents

# Keeping the faith

Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> March

Reading: Hebrews 11:6

#### Reflection:

Faith is such an interesting concept. People can have faith in people, in money, in stuff... yet without it I wouldn't believe in God. I still remember when I questioned my faith. I sat quietly one morning in Africa thinking of my friend who passed away from AIDS, the children she had left orphaned and the community who was being torn apart.

I still remember hearing the screams of the women mourning and holding the hand of her youngest daughter for three hours in silence. I had witnessed many sad and confronting things in the preceding two months and was with people who constantly challenged me about why I would have faith in a god that would allow these things to happen.

I started to question God and ask him where he was in all of what was happening. I thought, I can do this on my own. As I continued to explore this when I got home, I realised the more I lessened my faith in God the more I became angry and twisted at the world. The only time I felt at peace was in church.

From this I have realised that faith not only helps me believe, faith is what grows me, strengthens me and allows my relationship with God to thrive. If I have faith in him I am rewarded because I am closer and more connected to my creator.



How close is your relationship with God at the moment?

What are some practical things you can do to strengthen your faith?

If you feel lost, like I was, is there someone in your life you can talk to about where you are at?

## A prayer to pray:

Thank you Jesus, that you are my strength and my creator. Lord, I pray that I continue to be open with you and share both my worries and joy. At times, I can become angry and frustrated and lask that you soften my heart. I pray that this week I will focus on you and that I will build a strong, healthy, thriving relationship with you.

#### **Monica Pallas**

High School Teacher/Young Adults Ministry

# God's Provision

Thursday 20th March

Reading: Romans 8:21-39

#### Reflection:

"Father God as I have read these verses many times recently I recognise how privileged and blessed I am to be called a child of God. To know that through the death & resurrection of your son I have been saved and been given right standing and glorified with Him who sits at your right hand. To know that through your Holy Spirit as our intercessor our prayers, thoughts and life's many challenges are conveyed to you and receive your counsel."

What a privilege it is to be called a child of God; to know we are deeply loved and to have the complete hope and confidence that whilst we endure trials and suffer weakness we are never ever alone. That's God's provision that wherever we go, whatever we do, we are never alone and, to top it all off, we have the knowledge in our hearts that "nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus Our Lord" (v.39).

Our journey into eternal life is not a leisurely walk in the park, although at times it can be. However, know with hope and confidence that it is one we don't walk alone.

Rogers & Hammerstein wrote the lyrics to a profound song titled "You'll Never Walk Alone ". Ponder the chorus:

Walk on walk on with hope in your heart

And you'll never walk alone

You'll never walk alone



Have you stopped lately to be still, know and feel the presence of God and experience the love he has for you?

We know that life is a journey of ups and downs. Have you shared yours in a conversation with God lately? Remember whilst God knows, He is your Heavenly Father and he still wants to personally hear from.

## A prayer to pray:

Heavenly Father, thank you for all that you do and will do in my life. Help me to recognise your hand at work and to willingly surrender all to you so that, as your child, I will share my life with those who don't know you and to help them through your spirit's leading experience the true love and life you offer us all. Amen.

#### Michael Burdon

Elder

# The Power of Hanging in There

Friday 21st March

Reading: 1 Corinthians 9:6-7

#### Reflection:

In this passage Paul argues for his right to sustain himself from the rewards of the spiritual seeds he has sown. Although he argues his right, Paul later in verses 12 to 15 states that he has not used any of these rights so as to avoid hindering the gospel of Christ. Nevertheless he argues that he is entitled to the produce of his hard work and labour.

In his argument he poses a series of rhetorical questions and in verse 7 asks, 'who works hard for nothing?' The man who plants a vineyard obviously plants it to reap its fruits and is entitled to do so. He goes on to say in verse 10 that the ploughman should plough in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. In the same way as the ploughman and thresher we should all work hard in the hope of sharing the rewards we will receive and are entitled to.

Paul uses that point to justify his right to share in the reward of his work, but to those who have not yet received their reward, we must continue to work hard with the knowledge that we will be entitled to share in the 'crop' or rewards of our effort.

Therefore we must hang in there with strength and persistence regardless of how hopeless the situation feels currently. We must trust in God's plans for us and constantly remind ourselves of the entitlement to his blessings and rewards that he will surely give us for our hard work.



Have there been situations in your life where you had constantly been working hard for a long period of time without any outcomes? How did you overcome it?

In what ways can you give your life or situation to God and trust that in time you will be entitled to the blessings and rewards he will provide?

## A prayer to pray:

Dear God, I pray that you would give me hope and strength to persevere through the tough times. I ask that you would remind me of all the previous situations where I have been blessed from the commitment and hard work and use it to motivate me to continue to persevere in my current circumstances.

## **Matthew Kelly-Ng**

Youth

# Running the race

Saturday 22nd March

Reading: 1Corinthians 9:24-27

#### Reflection:

We have been watching the winter Olympics as a family and been taken by the fact that so much effort and preparation is put into training in order to participate in each event. Athletes had to endure pain, persevere through challenges, be intentional about their training and approach, seek encouragement where they could, and display the best that they were able to on the day of their event. The spectators were there to spur and support the athletes, alongside their families and coaches, as they competed. And so, regardless of their results, each athlete was respected for their efforts. Some athletes achieved encouragement verbally and others by achieving PBs (personal bests) and others by winning a medal to take home with them.

The Christian life is similar in these facets of value as these athletes' journeys. We all need encouragement to stay focused on Jesus, require intentionality in the way we develop spiritually, engage persistence at various times, and receive support from others as we grow in faith and service. Community experiences like attending church and/or relationally focused groups; alongside, undertaking spiritual exercises, like prayer, bible reading, being mentored, giving, fasting, using your gifts and skills, and so on, all fertilise our spiritual growth and keep us in the race and being effective.

But it is worth noting that some athletes did receive medals at the Olympics for their efforts. However, have you ever wondered where those medals eventually ended up? Perhaps on a shelf or cabinet to gather dust, placed in a box and forgotten, or sold for money. These athletes competed for a prize that does not last but ,as Christians, our 1 Corinthians bible passage reminds us that we participate in faith for a greater eternal prize that will never fade or lose its value. Essentially, we are all in the race of life seeking after good results but it is those who focus on eternal things that will be truly satisfied in their lives.



#### **Questions:**

In longer distance races some people take some time out to recover or regain their strength. This could be called a pit stop. However, some never return to the race after their pit stop. What are some excuses that Christians give for not continuing their race of faith after so-called pit stops? What could you do to encourage people who have not returned after a pit stop back into the race? What are some things we need to put into our families to limit the time at pit stops?

## **Special Family Activities:**

Read the story of the tortoise and the hare and talk about the aspects of the race and its values and compare these to the bible passage.

#### Games:

Have a variety of races ensuring that each family member experiences the joy of winning. Talk about how our words encourage each other and spur us on to keep racing next time.

## Prayer:

Lord Jesus we recognise that we are in the race of life and need you to assist us to keep going. We ask that you will provide the encouragement and resources for us to keep moving forward towards the eternal prize that awaits us. Amen.

#### **Keith & Ruth Mitchell**



# Let light awaken you

Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> March

Reading: Ephesians 5:14

#### Reflection:

Since moving to London, I've noticed the most common thing people here mention is the weather. Rightfully so. It's not only the most changeable thing but I've noticed it can also be a powerful thing, changing the complete atmosphere and mood of the city.

The most powerful change is on a sunny day, which many know is a rare occurrence here in London! When the sun comes out the atmosphere completely changes, parks are filled with people, everyone has a smile, conversation seems more positive, compliments are more frequent and I'd even go to the point of saying a sense of joy fills the air. It's almost as if the city is awakened!

The sun and light brings a sense of joy to the people in a city that is often dull, dark and gloomy. This analogy can be used in our lives. When we are exposed to the light (God's goodness, character, grace, love, forgiveness and peace), we tend to feel more positive and encouraged in our faith. Alternatively, if we are constantly keeping ourselves in the dark, harbouring negative thoughts, covering over our sin, not forgiving those who have wronged us, then these can build up over time and bring a 'darkness', 'gloom' or 'sleep' to our faith.

Just like a plant needs sunshine in order to grow, we as Christians need to be exposed to God's light to grow, by exposing our failures, sin and hardships to God and allowing his light to rejuvenate and refresh us. Jesus came so we no longer have to live in darkness but through his grace, love and forgiveness we can now live and walk in the light.

I now have a deeper revelation of why Paul encourages us in Ephesians 5 to 'live in the light'. Verse 14 reminds us that living in the light is an action. We need to 'wake up' and 'arise from the dead' by exposing ourselves to God and allowing his light to shine upon us. Each day we should remind ourselves that we can choose to live in his light. And ultimately, just as the sunshine can awaken London, we too can be beacon of light to see our city awakened!



What things do you need to expose to God? (You could do this in personal prayer, asking people to pray with you, telling someone about it)

What ways could you 'waken yourself' more each day?

# A prayer to pray:

Jesus, thank you that you are our light, that you give us grace, love and peace. I pray that you would awaken us each day to all you are doing in and through our lives and how we can be your beacon of light to others. Amen.

## Elissa Flindell

**Event Manager**