



GROUP GUIDE

During the Advent celebrations of December, we sing “*O come, O come, Emmanuel*”. In many ways, this is a summary of the Old Testament hope and the longing of every person’s heart who has come to understand that hope. It is a song that makes us think about Israel in exile, ruled by unjust kingdoms (Assyria, Babylon, Persia and Rome), longing for the Messiah and the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God. It is a song that makes us think about our future hope, the return of the Messiah and the final consummation when God the Father will ultimately answer, “*Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*” (Matt. 6:10).

At the heart of the song is “*Emmanuel*”, God with us, King Jesus. Yet, what is the significance of the arrival of Jesus? How does Jesus fulfil the longing of that cry, “*O come, O come, Emmanuel*”? What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus? This is what Matthew’s Gospel is about. For the next couple of years (interspersed with smaller books and topical studies), we will be following Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel, discovering who Emmanuel is, our hope in Him and what it means to be His disciple.

In our Advent Series we started our journey in Matthew 1-3. We will do a brief overview study of this in study 1. Most of our time in the next six months will be spent in Jesus’ first block of teaching: the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7). We will see what it means to be a citizen of God’s Kingdom, following Jesus as our King.

It is our prayer that as we journey in Matthew’s Gospel, we would not only see who King Jesus is, but also that we would be transformed to become the people we are called to be and so glorify God in everything we do.

In Christ,
Carel Pienaar
Phil. 1:21

The Signs of the King

STUDY 1

1. We've just come through another Christmas. What are some of the things the average person in the Deep South might say about the Christmas story?

Investigating

Read Matthew 1:1-17...

1. What claim does Matthew make about Jesus in v. 1?
2. What is surprising about Jesus' genealogy, when you look at vv. 3, 5-6, 16? Why would Matthew include this?

In chapters 1:18-4:11, Matthew will give us multiple signs to show that Jesus is the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham, David and God's people in exile...

First Sign: The boy is born of the virgin Mary and should be called Jesus (1:18-25)	Why the name Jesus/Joshua? (v. 21) What is the significance of His miraculous birth? (v. 23)
Second Sign: The Magi (Persian priests - gentile) realize who Jesus is and pay homage to Him at Bethlehem (2:1-12)	Why Bethlehem? What is the significance of the gentiles being the first to realize who Jesus is? (what did God promise to Abraham in Gen. 12:3?)
Third Sign: Jesus is taken to Egypt and later returns from Egypt (like Israel and Moses). Herod acts like Pharaoh and murders the babies of Bethlehem (2:13-18)	The prophet Hosea laments that Israel rebelled against God who rescued them (Hos. 11:1-2). How is Jesus like Moses and Israel, yet different? What is the significance of citing Jeremiah's passage? What did God promise to do for Rachel weeping? (cf. Jer. 31:31-35)



Thinking & Living

1. Why is the “Christmas story” Good News? What do those events tell us about Jesus (who He is and what He has come to do)?
2. How has this study helped you understand how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament Scriptures?
3. How does the Christmas story help us not to despair? What is our hope?
4. The LIFE series is around the corner. Have you ever considered inviting someone to come and learn about Jesus? How do these passages encourage you to share, tell and invite?
5. Turn your thoughts to praise. Read/sing this hymn and reflect further on what we have just learned...

*O come, O come, Immanuel,
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.*

*Refrain:
Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.*

*O come, O Wisdom from on high,
who ordered all things mightily;
to us the path of knowledge show
and teach us in its ways to go. (Refrain)*

*O come, O come, great Lord of might,
who to your tribes on Sinai's height
in ancient times did give the law
in cloud and majesty and awe. (Refrain)*

*O come, O Branch of Jesse's stem,
unto your own and rescue them!
From depths of hell your people save,
and give them victory o'er the grave. (Refrain)*

*O come, O Key of David, come
and open wide our heavenly home.
Make safe for us the heavenward road
and bar the way to death's abode. (Refrain)*

*O come, O Bright and Morning Star,
and bring us comfort from afar!
Dispel the shadows of the night
and turn our darkness into light. (Refrain)*

*O come, O King of nations, bind
in one the hearts of all mankind.
Bid all our sad divisions cease
and be yourself our King of Peace. (Refrain)*

"O Come, O Come, Immanuel" was originally written in Latin during the 8th and 9th Centuries, being a Benedictine Gregorian chant sung during Christmas time (and did not quite resemble the hymn as we know it today). Each verse begins with a Messianic title, and in Latin, the first letter of each title spelt the acronym, "SARCORE", which read backwards is "*Ero Cras*", which means "*I will tomorrow*". The chant was originally written to make the hearer reflect on Israel's deep longing for the Messiah at His first coming and identify with that longing as we await the Messiah's second coming.

Keep in mind, that the 8th-9th Centuries were a tumultuous period in European history. This was the time of the Islamic invasions. Islam, through a series of military campaigns, conquered Persia, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, North Africa, Spain and pushed deep into Frankish territory. This expansion only halted at the Battle of Tours in 732, when Charles Martel and the Franks made a final defence. As the kingdoms of this world rise and fall, we are reminded where our true hope is found: the Kingdom of God which is found in Christ Jesus.

Even so, the form of the hymn as we have it developed over the centuries. It was only translated into English in the 19th Century. The tune (as we know it) was composed by Thomas Helmore in 1851. Yet, it captures the mood of longing that the hymn tries to convey. In John Piper's words, the hymn "*doubles as a prayer for the first and second coming of Christ. It takes us into the mind of old Israel, longing for the first coming of the Messiah. And it goes beyond that longing by voicing the yearning of the church of Christ for the Messiah, Jesus Christ, to consummate the history of redemption.*"

Points to Pray...

(now and during the week)

1. Reflect on one aspect of the Christmas story (as revealed by Matthew) and praise God for it
2. Pray for the LIFE series...
 - a) For boldness in those who are inviting and going (not fearing rejection or opposition)
 - b) A good response from those who are invited
 - c) That people will see that Jesus is *"Immanuel"* who has come to rescue us from our sins, trust and follow Him
 - d) Pray for everyone involved (the table discussion leaders, the logistics, the talks, catering team)
3. Pray for all the Fellowship Group Leaders who are preparing and leading our Fellowship Groups in the Gospel of Matthew
4. Pray for all our Friday Night and Sunday children & youth ministries; that we would mirror Jesus' invitation, *"Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven"* (Matt. 19:14)
5. Pray for Ubabalo neThemba Church and Ithemba School, as they witness to the Good News of Jesus in Masiphumalele
6. Pray for our gap-years and internships (Joe Lyons, Carla Stephenson, Stephan van Rooy and James Carter) as they serve at St. Peters Church. Pray that they would be rooted and established in love (Eph. 3:17) and equipped *"for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up..."* (Eph. 4:12-13)
7. Pray for one another. Pray that in our struggles God would grant us a greater vision of the hope we have in Jesus (as we saw in this study)



Matthew 3:13-4:11

The King Revealed

STUDY 2

1. How would you answer the following questions?
 - a) Who is Jesus?
 - b) How do you know this is true?
 - c) Why is this important?



Investigating

Read Matthew 3:1-12... John the Baptist

Notice that Matthew draws our attention to Isaiah 40:3 in Matt. 3:3 and Malachi 3:1 & 4:5 in Matthew 11:9-15 in reference to John the Baptist...

1. Who is John the Baptist? (vv. 1-4; read **Matt. 11:9-15**)
2. What does John the Baptist's arrival say about Jesus? (who is the messenger preparing the way for in Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1 & 4:5?) (vv. 11-12)
3. Rabbis usually baptized Gentile proselytes to become part of Israel. Yet, John is baptizing Jews! What does John's encounter with the Pharisees and Sadducees tell us about the Jews? (vv. 7-10)

Read Matthew 3:13-17... The Baptism of Jesus

1. What is John's objection? (v. 14)
2. Why does Jesus want to be baptized? (v. 15)
3. List the things that happen after Jesus' baptism (vv. 16-17)

4. What does this say about who Jesus is and what He has come to do? Read these Old Testament verses to learn more about the significance of what is happening here...

<p>Baptism (Matt. 8:17 links Jesus to Isaiah 53)</p>	<p>The Spirit</p>	<p>The Father's Voice</p>
<p>“Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors...” (Isaiah 53:11-12 – The Suffering Servant)</p> <p>Baptism is for sinners. Why would Jesus be identifying with sinners by being baptized? What does it say about Him?</p>	<p>“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord... In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples – of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious. In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people... He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth” (Isaiah 11:1-12)</p>	<p>“As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.’ I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.’” (Psalm 2:6-8)</p>

Read Matthew 4:1-11... The Wilderness

Israel is described as God's son in Exodus 4:22-23 and God gave them the purpose to be God's priests/servants among the nations (Ex. 19:5-6). Yet, as they were tested in the wilderness, Israel failed dismally. Israel grumbled for bread (Ex. 16:2). Israel tested the Lord, doubting His ability to provide (Ex. 17:2-7; Num. 20:1-13). Israel worshipped idols in the form of the golden calf (Ex. 32:1ff) and Baal (Num. 25:1fF). Matthew has claimed in Matt. 2:15 that Jesus is the true Son of God (the true Israel). The Father has declared that Jesus is "*my Son*" (Matt. 4:17)...

1. How does Jesus' wilderness journey mirror Israel's journey?
2. What does Jesus do to counter each of Satan's temptations?
3. How does Jesus succeed where Israel has failed? What does this say about Jesus?



Thinking & Living

1. How has this study helped you answer the following three questions?
 - a) Who is Jesus?
 - b) How do you know this is true?
 - c) Why is this important?
2. If the arrival of Jesus meant the beginning of the ingathering of God's people (Jews and Gentiles), what role do we have to play in this at St. Peters? (cf. **Matt. 28:18-20**)
3. How is John the Baptist's warning to the Pharisees and Sadducees a warning to anyone who thinks they are part of God's people by default?

Points to Pray...

(now and during the week)

- 1.** Praise God for the arrival of Jesus (the fulfilment of the Old Testament Hope). Never forget the incredible privilege you have to see and know the fulfilment of God's promises in Jesus (1 Pet. 1:10-12)
- 2.** Pray that God would give us a greater understanding of who Jesus is as we explore Matthew's Gospel, but also equip each of us personally to witness for Him
- 3.** Pray for the LIFE series, that those who don't know Jesus would come to see who He is and place their trust in Him. Pray for the table discussion leaders as they facilitate these conversations (Talk 2: "*The Bible, is it a reliable record?*")
- 4.** Pray for Joining-In (which is part of our commission to gather in God's people). Pray that everyone who comes would be grounded in their faith and find connection, community and care at St. Peters.
- 5.** Pray for our Missions Partners who seek to share this wonderful news about Jesus in South Africa, Africa and beyond. Pray that they would be faithful to Jesus' commission (Matt. 28:18-20) and for God's provision in their needs as they seek His Kingdom (Matt. 6:33).
- 6.** Recharge Weekend-Away. Pray for a good response from the St. Peters Church family. Pray for the speaker (Kyle Johnstone) as he prepares. Pray for the team involved in organizing the weekend.
- 7.** Pray for one another. Pray that God would encourage us in our suffering with the hope we have in Jesus who is our King, the Suffering-Servant and the one in whom we become part of God's people (the true Israel).



The Mission of the King

STUDY 3

1. What was Jesus' priority in His earthly ministry?



Investigating

In Matthew 1:1-4:11 we have seen who Jesus is. We have also seen John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus' arrival, describing his own ministry as an imitation of Jesus' ministry that will be the reality (Matt. 3:11-12). Now John the Baptist is arrested (Matt. 4:12) and the ministry and mission of Jesus begins ...

Read Matthew 4:12-25...

1. Read Isaiah 8:19-22 & 9:1-2, 6-7 (block) What is the significance of Jesus' ministry beginning in the original Northern Kingdom? (Matt. 4:12-16)
2. What is Jesus' basic message in His preaching (Matt. 4:17; cf. 3:2)?
3. What does this mean? According to Isaiah, why can Jesus say that this is the case?
4. What is the significance of calling Peter, Andrew, James and John (vv. 18-22)? What does He call them to do?
5. What does Matthew emphasize about their response?
6. According to vv. 23-25, how can people know that the Kingdom really has arrived and that light has really "dawned" on people "living in the land of the shadow of death"?

“And when they say to you, ‘Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter,’ should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living? To the teaching and to the testimony! **If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn...** And they will look to the earth, but behold, **distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness.**” (Isaiah 8:19-22) (what the Gentiles [Assyria] brought into Israel)

“But **there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish.** In the former time he brought into contempt the **land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali**, but in the latter time he has made glorious **the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.**”

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a **land of deep darkness (the shadow of death)**, on them has light shone...

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.” (Isaiah 9:1-2, 6-7)



Thinking & Living

1. Our world and our lives often seem to be shrouded in darkness. What “good news” does this passage remind us of? How do we know this is true?
2. What response does Jesus call for in relation to this news?
3. Have you repented?
4. How does Jesus’ calling of the disciples extend to us today?
5. What is the role of the miracles, in relation to Jesus’ main preaching message?
6. So how does the priority of Jesus’ earthly mission continue today?

Points to Pray...

(now and during the week)

- 1.** Praise God that in Jesus we have been liberated from darkness and the shadow of death. We have hope!
- 2.** Ubabalo neThemba Church & Ithemba School. Pray for Pastor Bheki and the church family as they seek to be “light” in Masiphumalele. Pray for Janet Webb and her team as they seek to bring hope to the children of Masiphumalele.
- 3.** LIFE Series. It is week 3 and the topic is on sin, “When God meets man”. Pray that people will see themselves from God’s perspective and not from man’s perspective (comparing their concept of “goodness” to other people and not to God)
- 4.** Missions Partner: Greg and Carol Phillips serve at Mukhanyo. Pray for their students who are being equipped to be witnesses to the Kingdom; that they would be faithful and fruitful in their ministries.
- 5.** Missions Partner: Angela McClarty and Cricket Meyer involved in “Ana a Yesu” in Malawi. Pray that the children in this ministry would experience the light and love of Jesus and be transformed to be light themselves.
- 6.** Pray for one another. That we would be bold and unashamed of the “light” of Jesus among our friends, family and our surrounding community. Also pray that God would apply the light of the Gospel to the aspects of our lives where we are struggling.



“Blessed” (Part 1)

STUDY 4

1. When will you call someone “blessed”? What are some of the things you think someone needs to have in order to be “blessed”?



Investigating

Read Phil. 4:4... Rejoice in the Lord (always!)

Phil. 4:1-9 is a series of commands that do not necessarily interrelate with one another, but rather with the entire letter (conclusions on the discourse that started in chapter 1 and closes in chapter 4). The command we will be focusing on is, *“Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again: Rejoice!”*

1. What is happening with Paul and the church when this letter was written? Look up the passages below and discuss...

How does Jesus describe a disciple?	How does Jesus embody this?	What will they receive?
V. 3	How does Jesus embody this? “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart , and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:29)	
V. 4	“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together , as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing” (Matt. 23:37-39; cf. Luke 19:41-44)	

V. 5	<p>“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:29; cf. Matt. 21:1-5)</p>	
V. 6	<p>“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matt. 6:33; cf. Matt. 3:15)</p>	
V. 7	<p>“On hearing this, Jesus said, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Matthew 9:12-13)</p>	
V. 8	<p>“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Matt. 26:39 – Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane)</p>	
V.9	<p>“For he himself is our peace... His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.” (Ephesians 2:14-16) (cf. Matt. 5:21-26, 43-48)</p>	



Thinking & Living

“The beatitudes set forth the balanced and variegated character of Christian people... the beatitudes are Christ’s own specification of what every Christian ought to be”

(John Stott)

1. So, in the Beatitudes, is Jesus describing how we become a disciple or who we should be as His disciples?
2. When you look at the “blessed” sayings...
 - a) Which of these descriptions fit you as a follower of Jesus?
 - b) Which of these descriptions do not fit you?
3. How have these sayings changed your view of what it means to be “blessed”?
4. We are called to “Follow Jesus” who embodies all these “blessed” sayings. How does Jesus’ example help you see how you need to live as a disciple?

Points to Pray...

(now and during the week)

- 1.** Each person in the Fellowship Group pick a beatitude...
 - a)** Praise God for the promise we have in Christ tied to that beatitude
 - b)** Pray for one another that we would begin to live in accordance with what we are in Jesus (as described by the beatitude)
 - c)** Pray for St. Peters Church, that we would be a community of believers who are characterized by these beatitudes

- 2.** Pray for the Recharge Weekend Away (6-8 March)...
 - a)** Logistics in planning (Accommodation, Program, Children and Youth work, catering etc.)
 - b)** Safety (for those traveling and while at Tulbagh)
 - c)** The Speaker (as he prepares)
 - d)** For those going (adults and children): A time of rest, fun, connection and deep spiritual growth as we spend time together in God's Word

- 3.** LIFE Series. Consistency from those who come (that they would come for all 6 weeks), be convinced and convicted by who Jesus is and what He has come to do. The talk is "*Why is Jesus executed?*", which looks at the Cross.

- 4.** Joining-In: that Newcomers would be connected to the St. Peters Church family, become part of the community and be cared for. "I believe"

- 5.** Pray for those in your group who are struggling. Use the promises of Matthew 5:3-9 as a guide in what you pray for one another.



Blessed are the Humble Souls That See...

*Blest are the humble souls that see
their emptiness and poverty;
treasures of grace to them are giv'n,
and crowns of joy laid up in heav'n.*

*Blest are the men of broken heart,
who mourn for sin with inward smart;
the blood of Christ divinely flows,
a healing balm for all their woes.*

*Blest are the meek, who stand afar
from rage and passion, noise and war;
God will secure their happy state,
and plead their cause against the great.*

*Blest are the souls that thirst for grace,
hunger and long for righteousness;
they shall be well supplied and fed,
with living streams and living bread.*

*Blest are the men whose hearts do move
and melt with sympathy and love;
from Christ the Lord shall they obtain
like sympathy and love again.*

*Blest are the pure, whose hearts are clean
from the defiling pow'rs of sin;
with endless pleasure they shall see
a God of spotless purity.*

*Blest are the men of peaceful life,
who quench the coals of growing strife;
they shall be called the heirs of bliss,
the sons of God, the God of peace.*

*Blest are the suff'ers who partake
of pain and shame for Jesus' sake;
their souls shall triumph in the Lord,
glory and joy are their reward.*

(Written by Isaac Watts - 1674-1748)

“Blessed” (Part 2)

STUDY 5

“It is unnatural for Christianity to be popular” (Billy Graham)

1. Why do you think Billy Graham would say this? What do you think?



Investigating

Read Matthew 5:10-12... Blessed are the Persecuted

Whereas vv. 3-9 is focused on the character of a follower of Jesus, vv. 10-12 is focused on what followers of Jesus might experience when they live in accordance with vv. 3-9. Jesus says, *“Blessed are those who are persecuted”* (v. 10) or *“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you”* (v. 11).

1. What kinds of persecution does Jesus describe in these verses?
2. When is persecution blessed? (vv. 10, 11)
3. What are we called to do when we are persecuted? Why?
4. How were the prophets and Jesus treated? Discuss the table below...

Elijah	Jeremiah	Jesus
<p><i>“He replied, ‘I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.’”</i> (1 Kings 19:10)</p>	<p><i>“‘They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you,’ declares the Lord.”</i> (Jer. 1:19)</p>	<p><i>“Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and they schemed to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him.”</i> (Matt. 26:3-4)</p>



Thinking & Living

“Never expect to find this world anything better than a wilderness”

(Jonathan Edwards)

1. How do the Apostles' writings echo what Jesus is saying here?

2 Timothy 3:12	1 Peter 2:20-21
<i>“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”</i>	<i>“But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.”</i>

2. How do Jesus' final beatitudes help us understand why Jesus describes the Christian path as taking up a “cross”?
(cf. Matt. 10:38; 16:24)
3. People get persecuted for all sorts of reasons. Is all persecution “blessed”? When should being persecuted not be viewed as “blessed”? Should we look for persecution?
4. What is the danger if we desire to be “popular” as Christians? How does Jesus' teaching safeguard us against this?
5. Re-read v. 11 and share with your group any examples of how you have been persecuted in these ways (even if it is just a mild form of it).
6. How have you been encouraged to rejoice (yes, rejoice!) when you might experience persecution?

Points to Pray...

(now and during the week)



“Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is therefore not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer. In fact, it is a joy and a token of His grace”
(Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

- 1.** Pray for our children and youth. Whether at school or university, children and youth are bombarded with different views, lifestyles and beliefs. In many ways, you stand out much more for being a Christian. This is an incredible opportunity to witness. Pray that our children who believe and follow Jesus would be burning lights in spite of the resistance they might experience.
- 2.** Missions Partner: Dawn and Jinx Reyneke (Mozambique). Pray for them as they serve in a region devastated by Cyclone Idai in 2019.
- 3.** Pray for the Persecuted Church in North Africa, Middle-East, Asia and parts of Latin America. For many, following Jesus might mean literally embracing what the Cross stands for (false accusation, rejection, condemnation and death). Pray for faithfulness.
- 4.** Pray for our church family. Being a Christian is not “popular”. Pray that God would help us remain true to His Word in Jesus, not buckling under the pressure we might experience from the world.
- 5.** Pray for the Recharge Weekend Away happening this weekend!
- 6.** LIFE Series is in week 5. The talk is “*What happens after life?*”, which looks at the resurrection of Jesus. Pray that people will respond in faith and not opposition.
- 7.** Pray for one another, keeping in mind that our hope is the “kingdom of heaven” and our “reward in heaven”.

When Martin Luther nailed the 95 Thesis (challenging indulgences) on the Wittenberg door, little did he know what chain of events would spark from this act. Believing that a person is justified by faith in Christ alone, at the Diet of Worms (1521), Luther was condemned a heretic for this position. The Emperor of Germany declared Luther an outlaw, which meant that it was a criminal offence to give Luther food or shelter. It also implied that anyone could murder Martin Luther without legal consequence (a sentence Luther lived with for his entire life). Throughout Luther's life, he faced civil and ecclesiastical opposition (witnessing the death or execution of many who stood for the same beliefs). Yet, the message of justification by faith continued to spread. In many ways, Luther's hymn, “*A mighty Fortress is our God*” is a testimony to God's faithfulness to spread His Word, in spite of the opposition of the world and the prince of this world (Satan).

A mighty Fortress is our God

*A mighty Fortress is our God,
A Bulwark never failing;
Our Helper He amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing:
For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great,
And, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.*

*Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing;
Were not the right Man on our side,
The Man of God's own choosing:
Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is He;
Lord Sabaoth His Name,
From age to age the same,
And He must win the battle*

*And though this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us:
The Prince of Darkness grim,
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo! his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.*

*That word above all earthly powers,
No thanks to them, abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours
Through Him who with us sideth:
Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also;
The body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still,
His Kingdom is forever.*

(Written by Martin Luther, 1483-1546)

Salt and Light

STUDY 6

In 1993, a group of Christians started to meet on a Sunday evening at Bay Primary School in Fish Hoek. This small community has grown into the church family we now know as St. Peters church. Even so...

1. Why has God put St. Peters Church here in Fish Hoek? What is our primary reason for being here?



Investigating

Read Matthew 5:13-16... Salt and Light

When Jesus started His ministry, He was described as “*a great light*” shining on “*people living in darkness*” (Matt. 5:12-17). Yet, now Jesus turns to His disciples and says something remarkable about them...

1. What does Jesus call those who follow Him? (vv. 13, 14)
2. Why would Jesus describe His followers as “salt”? Look at the table below and discuss...

Salt is used in sacrifices in worship of God: “ <i>Season all your grain offerings with salt. Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings; add salt to all your offerings</i> ” (Lev. 2:13).	Jews and Romans used salt as a preservative (in meat) and also as a purifying/cleaning agent.	Paul commands Christian conversation to be “ <i>seasoned with salt</i> ” (Col. 4:6)
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3. It is unnatural for salt to lose its saltiness (v. 13) and light to be hidden in darkness (v. 15). What does this say about how disciples should live? (v. 16)
4. Living for righteousness and Jesus will mean persecution (vv. 10-12), but what other response should we expect as well? (v. 16)



Thinking & Living

1. How do the Apostles echo Jesus' teaching here?

Ephesians 5:8-9	1 Peter 2:12
“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.”	“Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”

2. What is the difference between Matt. 5:16 and 6:1-2? Is our Christian Faith something private or public?

3. Why did God put St. Peters Church here in the Valley? What should be our mission?

4. How do the following church ministries fit into this passage?

- Sunday Services: Welcoming, stewarding, serving in the Kitchen Team, music team, children’s ministries, teaching/preaching etc. (8am, 10am, 6pm)
- LIFE series
- uBabalo neThemba Church in Masiphumalele
- Ithemba School
- Mercy Ministries: Soup Kitchen, Love line, Love Meals etc.
- Communion Services in Retirement Villages
- Children and Youth Ministries (Fridays and Sundays)
- Mission Support: Identifying, sending and supporting missionaries

5. How can you be salt and light at home, at work, among family, friends and work colleagues?

6. What hinders you from being “salt” and “light”? How can Jesus’ words in vv. 10, 12 and 16 help you overcome your fear?

Points to Pray...

(now and during the week)

- 1.** Pray for our mercy ministries, that they would truly be salt and light in our community...
 - Arise (support with donating clothing, shoes and children's toys)
 - False Bay Soup Kitchen (serving patients at False Bay Hospital)
 - Loaves and Fishes (providing food parcels for people in need in our church family)
 - Loveline (knitting baby clothes for newborns at Retreat Maternity Hospital)
 - Love Meals (providing regular meals for people in crisis - bereavement, hospitalization, relational crises, illness etc.)
 - Ithemba School (providing education, discipleship and care for 60 children from under-privileged backgrounds - hoping to grow into a primary school)

- 2.** Pray for one another, that we would be salt and light in the following areas...
 - In our own homes
 - In our workplace
 - At School/University

- 3.** Pray for our Sunday Services and uBabalo neThemba Church, that we would witness to the Gospel of Jesus through our actions and words on a Sunday

- 4.** Pray for LIFE series. It is the final week. The talk is "What is a Christian?" Pray for a good response from those who don't know Jesus, that they would want to come to More-to-Life and know Him through the Gospel of Mark.



The King, the Law & the Prophets

STUDY 7

When people think about the relationship between the Old Testament and Jesus, “Some even go so far as to argue that the Old Testament God is a different God from the New Testament God – a shadowy God with a bad temper, a kind of demonic deity whose blazing wrath is beneath the dignity of the New Testament God of love” (R.C. Sproul, Holiness of God)

1. What do you think is the relationship between Jesus and the Old Testament?

Investigating

In Deuteronomy 18:9-22, Moses told Israel to expect a prophet who will be like him and who will speak God’s words. In Matthew 1-4, we see that Jesus mirrored everything Moses did. Jesus’ birth (Ex. 1:15-22; Matt. 2:16-18), flight from the king Herod (Ex. 2:15; Matt. 2:13-14), return (Ex. 4:20; Matt. 2:19-20), 40 day wilderness temptation (Matt. 4:2) and teaching His people on a mountain (Matt. 5:1-2) mirrors Moses’ own journey.

Read Matthew 5:17-20...

1. How does Jesus describe Himself in relation to the Law (v. 17)?
2. How does Jesus fulfil the Law and the Prophets? Look at the table below and discuss...

The Hope of the Law	The Heart of the Law	The Intent of the Law
For example, “All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel’” (Matt. 1:22-23; citing Isaiah 7:14)	Moses and the prophets looked forward to the day when God’s law would be written on the hearts of God’s people (cf. Deut. 10:12-22; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezk. 36:25-27 - in your own time). Where does Jesus focus His teaching? (cf. Matt. 5:21-30; 7:16-20)	Look at Matthew 5:21-30. How does Jesus surpass the Law?

3. How does Jesus describe the permanence of the Law – for His followers? (v. 18)
4. How does Jesus describe the consequences of breaking the law? (vv. 19-20)

How Jesus' disciples need to be different from the Pharisees will be explored in Matthew 5:21 onwards...



Thinking & Living

“If anyone, therefore, reads the Scriptures with attention, he will find in them an account of Christ, and a foreshadowing of the new calling. For Christ is the treasure which was hid in the field, that is, in this world; but the treasure hid in the Scriptures is Christ, since He was pointed out by means of types and parables” (Irenaeus, Against Heresies, 4:26:1)

1. How does Matthew 5:17-20 challenge the following views...
 - a) The God of the Old Testament is completely different from Jesus who is revealed in the New Testament.
 - b) The Old Testament was for the Jews and has no relevance to the Christian. We should only focus on reading and understanding the New Testament. Jesus has come to put away the Old Testament.
 - c) To be a really spiritual Christian, you need to follow the Jewish rituals, customs and celebrations as described in the Old Testament (so celebrate the Passover, don't eat pork etc.)

- 2.** How does vv. 17-18 change how we read and apply the Old Testament?
- What is wrong with applying the Old Testament directly to ourselves (I read and apply as I see it there)?
 - What is wrong with only reading the New Testament? What do we lose if we ignore the Old Testament?
 - In your own time, read the little article after the study
- 3.** We live in a period in history where the Bible is incredibly accessible (through physical copies or smartphone applications etc.) ...
- Do you read your Bible regularly? Share with the group how you do it and how that has helped you in following Jesus
 - Are you using any reading plan like the “Readscripture” app? Share with the group how your reading plan has helped you
- 4.** Is Jesus promoting a salvation by works of the law (i.e.: our obedience of the Old Testament laws determines whether we enter God’s Kingdom) in vv. 19-20? Who is Jesus talking to (Matt. 5:1-2) and how does that help us understand vv. 19-20?

*“Only he who believes is obedient;
only he who is obedient believes”*

(Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Points to Pray...

(now and during the week)

- 1.** Praise God that He has given us His Word (Old and New Testament). Pray that we would *“hunger and thirst”* for the joy of reading, hearing, knowing, believing and following God through His Word in Jesus.
- 2.** Pray for all the “Word” ministries at St. Peters & Ubabalo neThemba Church (Children & Youth Work; Fellowship Groups, Sunday preaching etc.). Pray that we would be faithful to what we have learned in Matthew 5:17-20.
- 3.** “I believe” group: that they would be grounded in the Gospel as we journey through the fundamentals of the Faith.
- 4.** Missions Partners: Pray for Explore (Nevil Carrington). This 8-module course aims at equipping Christians in understanding God’s Word, with Jesus at the centre. Pray for the team as they seek to expand the course into North Africa.
- 5.** More-to-Life: Pray that those who have been at LIFE would desire to continue the journey of knowing Jesus at More-to-Life (where they explore the Gospel of Mark). Pray for a good response.
- 6.** Continue to pray for one another. Take the opportunity to share your struggles and to lift them to our Father (Matt. 6:5-13)



How is Jesus the fulfilment?

Exploring the Old Testament and Jesus...

In Matthew 5:17-20, Jesus makes the incredible claim that He has come to “fulfil” the “*Law and the Prophets*”. Even so, we might struggle to understand how this is the case. For example, how does Jesus fulfil the Sinai experience in Exodus and Leviticus and the Wilderness journeys in Numbers? There is so much going on in these Old Testament books. How is it possible that Jesus fulfils all of the promises? Moreover, does Jesus fulfil a prophecy only at one specific moment (like the crucifixion) or at multiple points? In many ways, understanding (at least in principle) how Jesus relates to the Old Testament (and vice versa) will deeply enrich our experience of reading the Old Testament. So here are a number of things to consider when you read the Old Testament and begin to relate it to Jesus as its fulfilment...

1. First principle: Multiple-Fulfilments (the three eras of Jesus’ ministry)

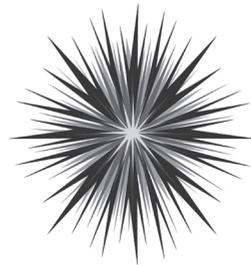
When you go to the New Testament, every Old Testament book can be applied in three chronological spheres that relate to Jesus’ ministry. There is: 1) the inauguration of Jesus’ ministry (**the Gospels**); 2) the continuation of Jesus’ ministry (**the Last Days and the Church as the body of Christ**) and 3) the Consummation of Jesus’ ministry (**The Return of Jesus**). The picture below illustrates this...



Inauguration



Continuation



Consummation

To demonstrate this, let us take Israel’s Wilderness Journey in Numbers as an example. In the wilderness, Yahweh is leading His people from Mount Sinai to the Promised Land (Numbers 1-10). Nevertheless, things quickly go wrong. Israelites rebel/grumble against God, refuse to enter the Promised Land (trusting God’s promises) and ultimately begin to worship the Baals (Num. 11:1-3; 14:1ff; Numbers 25:1ff). In response to their unbelief, idolatry and rebellion, God judges Israel and the first generation never enters the Promised Land.

At the inauguration of Jesus’ ministry (Gospels), we see how Jesus’ journey mirrors the Israelites’ wilderness journey in Matthew 4:1-11. Yet, unlike Israel, Jesus trusts in God’s Word and remains resolute and faithful. Where Israel failed as God’s son (Ex. 4:22-23), Jesus succeeded as the true son of God (Matt. 3:17). So, here we see fulfilment. Yet, this is not the only place where we see application being made regarding the Wilderness journeys of Israel.

In 1 Corinthians 10:1-13, Paul looks at the Wilderness journey and explains that, *“These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come”* (v. 11). The Corinthian church was busy dabbling with idolatry (cf. 1 Cor. 8-9; 10), just as the Israelites were with the golden calf in Exodus and the Baals in Numbers. Paul is saying that these accounts are there to warn us *“if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!”* (v. 12). In a similar way, Hebrews 1-12 continually uses the Wilderness journey as a warning to remain resolute in our Faith. So even here, we see fulfilment in the body of Christ.

Finally, we see ultimate fulfilment as well, when Jesus returns to usher in the New Heavens and Earth and like Joshua, brings His people into the Promised Land through conquest (cf. Rev. 19-22). Only those who remained steadfast in their faith in Christ would enter this Promised Land (cf. Rev. 21:7-8). Notice, all three of these examples (past, present and future) relate to Jesus, His people and the Wilderness journey to the Promised Land. All three spheres are examples of fulfilment and legitimate points of application of Israel’s Wilderness journey.

Yet, to see this, you need to apply the second principle to your Bible reading...

2. Second Principle: Signposts

There are at least four ways in which you can make legitimate connections between the Old Testament and Jesus. These are the four signposts you should be looking for...

- a) Fulfilment language:** like Jesus reading Isaiah 61:1-2 and saying, *“Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing”* (Lk. 4:21). Jesus is saying that He is the fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy about the Herald proclaiming Good News. The rest of Luke and Isaiah 61 will flesh that out for you. But when you read Isaiah 61, you are not reading it properly if you do not relate it (in some way) to Jesus.

- b) Typology:** An event, ritual or person is a copy/shadow of the reality that is Jesus. For example, the earthly temple where earthly sacrifices were made was a *“type”* of the real Heavenly Throne room where Jesus will make atonement on the Cross: *“They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, ‘See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.’”* (Hebrews 8:5ff)

c) Contrast or comparison (linked with typology): Whereas a person (who should be something) failed in the Old Testament, Jesus fulfills what that person should have been. For example, the contrasts made between Adam and Jesus are numerous, *“For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive”*. (1 Corinthians 15:21-22)

d) Echoes: Often the authors of the Bible (inspired by the Holy Spirit) connect various events together through themes that get echoed in the various stories. For example, Adam and Eve got “exiled” or banished from the Garden of Eden due to sin (Gen. 3:24), being refused entry by the cherubim. The Tabernacle/Temple is filled with echoes of the Garden of Eden (pomegranates, palm trees, cherubim). Like Eden, access to God’s holy presence is barred.

Joshua enters the Promised Land on the east side (crossing the Jordan) and is met by an angelic figure with a drawn sword (Joshua 5:13-15). This event echoes what we have seen in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3:24. This echo also informs us how we should view the Promised Land (The restoration of Eden).

We see Israel being exiled from the Promised Land in Kings and Chronicles, banished from the Land (another echo). Matthew’s Gospel intentionally starts with mentioning the Exile (Matt. 1:1-17) and why the boy must be called “Jesus/Joshua” (Matt. 1:20-21). These echoes link Matthew’s Gospel to a theme that started way back in Genesis 3. Jesus’ arrival marks the beginning of the conclusion of that theme.

Ultimately, this journey of seeing how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament and the Old Testament points to Jesus is a lifelong endeavour of continually reading, studying and meditating on the Scriptures. We never graduate from the school of knowing Jesus in the Bible; rather it is a journey that begins in this life and continues in eternity.

2nd Century Church Father Irenaeus puts it this way: *“If anyone, therefore, reads the Scriptures with attention, he will find in them an account of Christ, and a foreshadowing of the new calling. For Christ is the treasure which was hid in the field, that is, in this world; but the treasure hid in the Scriptures is Christ, since He was pointed out by means of types and parables”* (Adversus Haereses 4:26:1)

Anger

STUDY 8

1. Can you think of a situation (past or present) in which you have been angry with someone? How did you respond to your own anger?



Investigating

The Law and the Prophets looked forward to the day when God's Word would be written on the hearts of His people, and so they would love God and one another from the heart (cf. Deut. 6:5, 12, 16; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezk. 26-27). In Matthew 5:17-20, Jesus claims to be the fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets; the One who will bring about the New Covenant where God's Word will be written on the hearts of God's people. In Matthew 5:21ff, Jesus will show us what heartfelt obedience looks like...

Read Matthew 5:21-26... Anger vs. Reconciliation

1. What command does Jesus cite? (v. 21)
2. How does Jesus draw this command to the heart? (v. 22)
3. "*Raca*" means "*idiot/empty headed*", while "*fool*" describes someone's character as being worthless... When we remain angry towards someone, how does that change our view of them?
4. Instead of giving into anger, how should we live? (vv. 23-26)



Thinking & Living

“If you are suffering from a bad man’s injustice, forgive him lest there be two bad men”

(Augustine, 5th Century)

1. How do the following passages reflect what we have just learned?

Ephesians 4:31-32	1 John 3:14-16
<i>“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”</i>	<i>“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”</i>

Regarding anger, Jesus is describing an inner-thought and feeling pattern that ultimately leads to the act of murder. In our anger, we begin to dehumanize the person we are angry with, justifying our anger towards them. Viewing a person as a worthless idiot not deserving of life is a small step away from murder...

“Anger and malice differ but in age” (John Trapp)

- 1.** Have you found yourself caught in this cycle of anger?
How has it impacted...
 - You personally?
 - Your relationship with that particular person?
 - What you think of that person?
 - How you act towards that person?

The way of Jesus’ followers is forgiveness and reconciliation. This is the only path that breaks the cycle of anger, hatred and destruction...

- 2.** What has hindered you from pursuing the path Jesus has laid before us?
- 3.** How can Jesus’ warnings in this passage motivate you to start pursuing reconciliation?
- 4.** How can Jesus’ example empower you to start walking the path of forgiveness and reconciliation?
- 5.** What practical steps can you take to begin the journey of reconciliation?

Keep in mind that Jesus is giving us the basic principle, but the journey of reconciliation can be long, hard and sometimes impossible (due to the person you are trying to reconcile with). Please read the article on forgiveness and reconciliation in the Group Guide booklet as you wrestle through this issue.

Points to Pray...

(now and during the week)

- 1.** Pray for one another, that God would enable us to see His act of love in forgiving us in Jesus and that He would fill our hearts with that same love and desire to pursue reconciliation.
- 2.** Pray for our country. That our government, our churches and each individual citizen would pursue the path of reconciliation and forgiveness.
- 3.** More-to-Life: Pray for the group as they continue their journey in Mark's Gospel; looking at the topic of the forgiveness of sins.
- 4.** Easter series. As we are reminded of God's love on the cross, that we would be transformed to show that same cross-shaped love towards one another and our community. Pray for those who have visited, that they would be moved by the Good News of Jesus' death and resurrection.
- 5.** Our interns and gap-years (Carla Stephenson, Joe Lyons, Stephan van Rooy and James Carter). Pray that they would be encouraged and grow in their personal faith and life as they serve at St. Peters Church.
- 6.** "I believe" group: that each person who has come at the beginning of the series would continue to come, grow in his/her understanding of the Gospel and be assured of our commitment to the Gospel as a church family.
- 7.** Pray for one another, especially in the light of what we have learned in Matthew 5:21-26. Pursuing reconciliation is difficult and each situation is unique. Pray for wisdom as each of us seeks to be faithful, personally applying this passage.



Understanding Forgiveness...

- **What is Forgiveness?**

It is quite striking that Jesus describes sins or offences as “debts” in His prayer (Matt. 6:12; cf. Lk. 7:41-43) and in this parable (Matt. 18:21-35). Even the term “forgive” can also be translated as “release” or to take leave of a debt (Nolland 2005:290). The parable makes this vivid in the king cancelling the debt (at his own expense). The language and imagery are reminiscent of the Year of Jubilee, when all debts were to be cancelled on the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev. 25:8-54).

Considering this, we should see that forgiveness implies cancelling a debt that someone owes you (whether spiritual or material). God has released us from an impossible burden of making full restitution for the wrong we have done against Him. We are called to “release” and “cancel” debts owed to one another for the wrong we have done against one another. Yet, this is costly, since it implies that you will need to absorb the debt. Sin remains a debt and restitution can only be made if someone actually “pays” for it or absorbs the cost. To forgive means to absorb the debt yourself, at your own expense.

This is painful, yet the power to forgive (take this pain) is found by...

- **Looking to the Cross**

Ultimately, we need to see that sin demands restitution, in particular the penalty of death (cf. Gen. 2:17; Rom. 6:23). It is only if a life is given for a life that restitution for sin can be made (symbolised by blood, cf. Lev. 17:11). God’s promise to forgive Israel (and us) and restore His relationship with them in the new covenant will come at a cost. The cost of His Son embracing/absorbing the debt of our sin (eternal death) (Matt. 26:28). This is what the Cross is: God absorbing our debt of sin (releasing us from the impossible debt we owe) at the painful cost of Himself (the Son embracing our death-hell on the Cross).

- **Being Wise in the pursuit**

In our pursuit of “sinners and tax collectors”, Jesus also taught us that our mission is dangerous: “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (Matt. 10:16). You do not approach a wolf recklessly or foolhardily, because you expect that you might be bitten. Consequently, although we pursue reconciliation and offer forgiveness, we should also be wise in how we pursue.

For example, you might have suffered abuse (in whatever form) from someone, and you do not know how to approach the situation (in particular when the person is considered “dangerous”). Although we are called to forgive, that does not imply a reckless and foolhardy approach to the offender. The person might be unrepentant and would continue in their abusive behaviour, with the same depraved motives. It would be foolish to expect a wolf to act like a sheep when there are no signs of God’s transforming power in its life.

Consequently, here are some things to keep in mind in such a situation...

- a) Remember that forgiveness is a gift given by the offended person, not something that can be demanded. It is utterly crass to demand forgiveness as some form of compensation (owed to the offender), when it is a gift freely given at the cost of the offended person. Grace is freely given, not demanded or coerced.
- b) Approach the person, but on your own terms. They cannot call the “playing field” for when and where you meet. For example, if the person is known to be violent, it is best not to allow the person to meet or see you at your home. You can meet in a public space (like a coffee shop), removed from a space where you could be in danger. Furthermore, you set the tone regarding when you meet. This might be once a week, once a month, once a term or even once a year (depending on the person and situation).
- c) Take your time. Rome wasn’t built in a day and the same applies to trusting someone. Trust cannot be demanded (especially being vulnerable to someone who formerly abused your vulnerability). Consequently, it will take time for you and this particular person to build any form of trust. There is no rush.
- d) Keep pursuing. Although this takes time (weeks, months, or years), and you pursue the person on your own terms... keep pursuing. Don’t give up, especially if the person is still willing to meet. What will motivate you to keep pursuing is the fact that God pursued you patiently, tirelessly, and lovingly.

Even so, there are situations, when we are pursuing the “lost sheep”, “tax collector and sinner” that the person shuts the door on us. Like the Pharisees and Sadducees did with Jesus. Like Jerusalem did. As Jesus cried, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing” (Matt. 23:37). Their rejection was so final that they crucified Him (Matt. 27:15-23).

Realise, in those moments (when you are rejected), that Jesus went through the same. God was faithful to His covenant promises to forgive, yet sadly many rejected His gift of forgiveness. Many rejected the message of reconciliation and shut the door on Him. We have a Saviour who understands and has experienced the same rejection and suffering (cf. Heb. 2:18; 4:15; 5:8).

