



WOMEN'S MINISTRIES 2013

Walk Worthy

Leviticus 26:12 says, 'I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people'. God created us so that he could walk with us, walk among us. This is a promise that we can know for sure, that God walks our path with us.

During 2013, the shared theme of Women's Ministries throughout the world is *Walk Worthy*.

This series of 12 Bible studies helps us to explore our walk with God through titles such as 'The walk of faith', 'Get up and walk', 'A pilgrim's walk', and others which enable us to explore God's Word.

The studies follow a simple pattern that you can use in any setting. They are designed to be flexible, so that you can add material that is relevant to where you are.

Each study includes four sections which can be explored with your group, as follows:

What the Bible says – where you explore 'What does the text actually say?'

It is important that you read the Bible carefully and allow it to speak to you and guide the content of your study.

Our lives today – considers such questions as:

- What does the Bible reading tell you about your lives?
- Does it highlight any problems in society?
- What challenges are there for the way you live your life?

Discussion questions – depending upon where you are using the studies, you may choose to select one or two that seem most suitable for you, or ask different groups to discuss other aspects and possibly, if you have time, share what they have been speaking about.

A step further – this is designed to give you something to take away and do before you next meet. If appropriate, you could share how members of the group worked through their 'step further' the next time you meet.

As you 'walk worthy' through 2013, we pray that God will be very evident as you study his Word and share together.

Bible Study I

The walk of faith

Bible reading – Colossians 1:3-12

**‘...we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God’
(vv 9, 10 *New American Standard Bible*).**

Our lives

One of our children took a long time learning to walk. Crawling and climbing were so enjoyable that she would not let go and take those first steps. We began to worry. What was wrong with our precious child? Would she ever let go and launch out?

And then one day, it happened! As new parents we were thrilled. We watched her walk! We watched all day. Each step was a celebration. And once she took her first step she never looked back. One step led to another, and then to another.

When did you learn to walk? It seems like such a silly question. But, think about it. When did you learn to take those first steps? And why was it so important? It was important for your growth and development. It helped you to move on to other tasks.

What the Bible says

Paul tells the Colossian community that his deepest prayer is that they would be able to ‘walk’. But he did not mean simply the act of taking one step after another with our feet. No, he meant something much more. ‘Walk’ is Paul’s word for the entire course of our daily life. He is talking about the manner in which we live our lives. He wants us to walk worthy, to live worthy, to behave worthy of Jesus.

His prayer can also be our prayer. We can pray that every place our feet take us will be holy ground because we are living worthy of the One who walked before us and gave us the ‘hope laid up for us in Heaven’.

Discussion questions

Read Colossians 1:3-12

1. What two things had Paul and Timothy *heard* about the Colossians (v 4)?
2. In verses 5 and 6 what had the Colossians *heard* and who did they hear it from?
3. Verse 9 says 'For this reason...we have not ceased to pray for you'. This prayer should be true for all believers who have truly heard the gospel truth and are seeking to see it bear fruit and increase in their lives.
In this verse, what does Paul want them to be filled with?
4. Verses 9 and 10 say that this knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding will be given to us '*so that...*'.
'So that' what?
5. Paul goes on to tell us what it means to 'walk in a manner worthy of the Lord'. In verse 10 what does he describe will be the outcome of that worthy walk.
How do you want God to help you achieve these aspects of walking worthy?
 - Please him in all respects
 - Bear fruit in every good work
 - Increase in the knowledge of God
6. In what way do verses 11 and 12 tell us that we will be empowered to 'walk worthy'?

A step further

Trace your footprint on a piece of paper. Keep that traced outline with you for the next month. Use it to pray this prayer for yourself each day – 'Lord, may I walk in a manner worthy of you, and please you in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of you.'

Commissioner Sue Swanson

– who is blessed to walk with women's ministries' members around the world in her role as World President of Women's Ministries.

Bible Study 2

Get up and Walk

Bible reading – Matthew 9:1-8
‘Which is easier: to say, “Your sins are forgiven,”
or to say, “Get up and walk”?’ (v 5).

What the Bible says

The healing of a paralysed man happened just after Jesus had left the area of Gadarenes because he was unwanted. He had set two demon-possessed men free but, as the demons he cast out went into the pigs, people asked him to leave. The very presence of Jesus is ‘risky’ and it is not always appreciated that where he is, things are happening, things are moving. Jesus respected their wish and continued his ministry where it was desired.

In this healing miracle Jesus does two things for the paralysed man – he forgives his sin and gets him walking again. We may wonder if there is a relationship between the sin and the disease. We must not conclude that all physical illness is a result of sin, as we can see from Jesus’ words in John 9:2, 3. Perhaps Jesus perceived that here the two were connected, or that the man had more than one problem. The burden of guilt can make us depressed and less responsive to the natural God-given processes of healing (see James 5:14-16). We don’t know the background of this man, but Jesus knew all the secrets of his heart.

Jesus’ authority to heal the sick made him very popular, but by forgiving a man’s sin he evoked the anger of the religious leaders who considered it a serious blasphemy. It is true that only God can forgive sin (see Jeremiah 31:34). Education, good upbringing, wealth, hygiene, restitution, nor even religion can eradicate sin. So by offering forgiveness Jesus is, in fact, indicating that he is more than a miracle worker – he is the Son of God.

As human beings physical health is very important for us, but so is our spiritual health – the well-being of our soul. In the events recorded in this chapter Jesus shows himself as the healer of both body and soul, able to save to the uttermost.

Our lives today

What are the things that bring us to Christ today? It may be physical disease. Sometimes there is shame or stigma related to illness which makes it even more unbearable.

It may be other problems or difficulties in life that make us seek God’s help – even several problems coming together at the same time. Behind the visible problem there are often deep secrets and pains unknown to others, but known to God.

So a difficult situation, a crisis in life, may turn into a great blessing when a meeting with Christ transforms not only the problem but also the person's whole life.

At times we can be 'paralysed', not in the physical sense but in a more general sense. We are weak, inactive or less active than we used to be, but somehow unable to move forward and do the work God called us to do. A deep work of grace in our heart may be what is needed to get us going again. God can free us from that which is binding us, whether it be unforgiven sin, guilt-feelings, disappointments of the past, or worries for the future.

Discussion questions

1. How do you see the interrelation between physical and spiritual well-being?
2. The man walking away with his bed after he had met with Jesus was a great testimony to the crowds. What would have happened if Jesus had offered forgiveness without physical healing, or physical healing without forgiveness?
3. Not all Christians are physically healthy and many live in poverty. If that is the case for you, how does God's grace influence you and how can your life be a testimony to God's power in you?

A step further

This man was brought to Jesus by his friends as he was unable to get there on his own. Maybe he could not even speak for himself. We sometimes need to bring our friends to Jesus.

To consider:

1. Who in our family or circle of friends doesn't know the gospel and who will have difficulty finding Jesus by themselves? Are there certain ethnic groups? Certain social layers of the population? Certain age groups? Others?
2. How can we bring them to Christ – or bring Christ to them?

Commissioner Eva Marseille

– following the Lord has led her to ministry in Denmark, Holland, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Congo (Brazzaville) and Southern Africa.

Bible Study 3

A pilgrim's walk

Bible reading – Psalm 84:1-12
‘For the Lord God is a sun and shield;
the Lord bestows favour and honour.
No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly’
(v 11 *English Standard Version*).

What the Bible says

This psalm is the heart cry of a pilgrim on a journey – a special journey to the house of God where, at last, they will be in the presence of God.

Various opinions are held about when this song was composed. It could have been written during the days of Israel when the nation was at peace with its neighbours and crowds of Israelites were able to take the journey to the holy city, Jerusalem, to worship.

Or it could have been written during a time of exile when the Israelite people had been banished from their country, and the Temple and Jerusalem were a long way from their reach. If so, it was the powerful memories of a previous time that kept the singer going.

Pilgrimages, or journeys of spiritual significance, were very common and a great occasion for the Israelite people. Extended families would come together, pack their bags, gather up food supplies and travel as a group for several days to Jerusalem. As they went they would stop at little inns, wells or other places to refresh the group and during these stops other family groups would join them to form a large company of people travelling to the house of God. (This type of journey is mentioned in the story of Jesus and his family going to the Temple in Jerusalem in Luke 2:41-44).

The journey would involve them working together, pulling their horses and goods over the hills through swamps and valleys, finding strength in the unity of their faith and purpose, and encouraging each other by singing Scripture passages or psalms (as we know them), all the time knowing that God was their ‘sun and shield’ and the One who would not withhold anything ‘from those whose walk is blameless’ (v 11 *NIV 1984*).

Our lives today

Journeys are also part of our lives. They vary from travelling at hundreds of miles an hour high up in the sky, to the slow passage of taking one careful step after the other through mud or over rocks to reach our destination.

But one type of journey that we all experience is the journey of life towards Heaven – our final destination with God. As with all other journeys, it is important that we have adequate supplies, good support and good company.

The psalm reminds us that it is also important that:

- We have our 'Heart set on pilgrimage' (v 5), which is another way of saying that we have a clear focus for our life.
- Our journey brings about change around us – 'As they pass through the Valley of Baka [a dry, desolate place], they make it a place of springs' (v 6).
- We recognise our need to be in constant communion with God – 'Hear my prayer, Lord God Almighty; listen to me, God of Jacob' (v 8).

Discussion questions

1. What is the main focus or goal of the people in your town? What do they strive for and what type of journey does their life involve? If our hearts are 'set on pilgrimage', how does our journey differ from theirs?
2. If we are to travel in a way that is 'upright' or holy, what do we need to bring with us on our journey and what do we need to leave behind? (See Hebrews 12:1.)
3. Referring to Psalm 84:6, can you think of any changes that have occurred around you because of your journeying through life as a Christian?
4. On three occasions the psalmist speaks of the traveller being 'blessed' during his journey. Why is he blessed and how does this relate to your life with God?

A step further

Pilgrims travelled together towards Jerusalem. Who are your close travelling companions and how are you supporting each other on your journey with God?

'And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10:24, 25).

Is there anyone else you would like to join you on this walk?

Commissioner Astrid Herring

– her journey has taken her from New Zealand to Russia then on to England and work with people in the countries of the South Pacific and East Asia Zone.

Bible Study 4

Walk worthy: the Emmaus walk

Bible reading – Luke 24:13-35

**‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?’
(v 32).**

What the Bible says

The disciples had spent three years with Jesus, observing him, listening to him, travelling with him, sharing his daily life. They had witnessed his miracles and heard him speak. They believed he had come from God and dared to hope that he was the promised Messiah (v 21).

Then Jesus was arrested, tortured and crucified – dead and buried. How could this happen to him? Sure, some women had come with a story of angels, saying that Jesus was alive (v 23). But how could that be true? They had forgotten, or not understood, the often-repeated teaching of Jesus that he would be arrested, mocked, flogged, crucified and, on the third day, he would rise again (Luke 18:32, 33; Matthew 20:18-19).

Later that day two of his disciples made their way from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Overwhelmed by sadness, bewilderment and confusion, they failed to recognise Jesus when he joined them. Graciously, gently, clearly, he explained to them the Old Testament teachings they had heard from childhood and never really understood (v 27).

‘Their eyes were opened’ (v 31): they recognised the presence of Jesus and understood for the first time the Scriptures they had ‘known’ for so many years.

Our lives today

I read a book recently about a Jewish family who came to England to escape persecution in Russia. It was a fascinating story, but it saddened me. Their knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures was extensive, but they didn’t recognise Jesus as the fulfilment of all the promises and prophecies that were so familiar to them.

Then I was challenged: I have read the Bible and heard the stories since childhood, but do I really understand them? Do I allow the truths of the Bible to be fulfilled in my own life, day by day? We can each be challenged: are we ‘slow to believe’ for ourselves the promises God has made in his Word?

The disciples were so wrapped up in their sadness and confusion that they failed to recognise the presence of Jesus. We have the ultimate promise of Jesus which we know so well – ‘Surely I am with you always’ (Matthew 28:20) – but do we, too, fail to recognise his presence in the challenges of daily life?

Discussion questions

1. Are there any familiar passages of Scripture that you ‘knew’ without really understanding them and which then ‘came to life’ in a moment of revelation?
2. Choose two or three of the following well-known passages and share your understanding of their meaning for your life in today’s world:
 - Matthew 5:3-12
 - Matthew 5:13-16
 - John 14:1-6
 - Romans 8:35-39
 - Philippians 4:8-9
 - Psalm 8
 - Isaiah 9:2-7
 - Jeremiah 29:11-14
3. What prevents us from recognising the presence of Jesus in our daily lives?

A step further

He lives, he lives,
Christ Jesus lives today!
He walks with me and talks with me
Along life’s narrow way.
Alfred Henry Ackley (SASB 334 chorus)

Consider each day as an Emmaus walk. Make a conscious effort to acknowledge the presence of Jesus as you go about your daily activities. At the end of each day, try to identify those times when you have been conscious of Christ’s presence. How has he opened your eyes to his presence in the routine activities of everyday life?

Have there been ‘strangers on the road’ who have helped you to understand more of God’s will? In what ways?

Major Judith Nkounkou

– whose walk has taken her from the United Kingdom to the Republic of Congo, Belgium and Switzerland, and inspired in her a heart for Africa.

Bible Study 5

Avoid a worthless walk

Bible reading – Psalm 1
‘Blessed is the man who does not
walk in the counsel of the wicked...’
(v 1 NIV 1984).

What the Bible says

Psalm 1 opens the door into the Psalms with words of wisdom and direction. It was possibly a relatively late composition, but was placed at the beginning purposely setting the tone for the entire book. It reminds readers that there are only two ways to live. The choices are blessing or curse – the holiness and happiness of a godly person or the sinfulness and misery of the wicked.

Those who are blessed can be called so because they intentionally choose to turn away from people and situations that may distract them from pursuing the right path. They embrace and meditate on God’s Law, the Torah, both day and night (v 2). This brings them pleasure. They believe in it and know that even in their trials nothing else can compare to its direction.

The psalmists often use the imagery of trees to describe those who are obedient, righteous and prosperous – ‘...planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season’ (v 3); ‘The trees of the Lord are well watered, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted’ (Psalm 104:16); ‘The righteous will flourish like a palm tree’ (Psalm 92:12). These ‘trees’ or, in other words, people are ‘rooted and built up in him, strengthened’ (Colossians 2:7), and as they grow they flourish and bear fruit.

As we choose not to compromise with evil but to fill our hearts and minds with the truth of God’s Word, the evidence of our walk with Christ will be marked with fruitfulness. Just as the tree does not bear fruit and shade for itself, the lives of those who love the Law are to edify, nurture and serve those around them.

Not so the wicked! Notice how the actions in verse 1 gradually change as walking turns into standing and, finally, those who refuse to live by the covenant are sitting down surrounded by sin. Temptations can be subtle and blinding. We can be trapped if we are not constantly on guard and aware of the things in and around us that may lead us astray.

In contrast to the exuberance of the trees, the wicked are described as dusty, rootless chaff (v 4). Lacking life and substance, it has no place and brings no benefit to anyone. Outwardly the ways of the wicked may seem prosperous, but with time all sinfulness and misery are revealed.

Our lives today

Laws are established to bring order and to protect people’s general welfare. Turning against the law results in suffering, trial and punishment. Sometimes the Christian journey can be seen as a whole list of dos and don’ts. The Pharisees were so legalistic about what could and couldn’t be done that they practically missed out on the whole point of the message. Jesus was in their midst!

God's direction through his Word is a sign of his love to us. All he wants is to relate to us through it and guide us as we journey with him. He knows what's good for us and what hurts and harms us. He longs for us to reflect the truths revealed through his teachings.

Numerous other Psalms acknowledge and celebrate the Law and go deeper into what it means. In Psalm 19 we read about how it revives the soul (v 7), enlightens the eyes (v 8) and is desired more than gold (v 10). The 176 verses of Psalm 119, the longest chapter in the Bible, express a longing to remain true to God's Law.

Think about what the Bible means to you. Where would you be without it? What would your life be like if God's Word was your full delight?

Pray that your relationship with the truth God has revealed may be of longing and desire, resulting in a deep-rooted communion with him.

Discussion questions

1. Think about times when you have felt your walk has been 'worthless'. What happened?
2. What may be distracting you from pursuing the path of the blessed?
3. Why do you think the psalmist uses trees to describe the righteous?
4. How can you avoid walking 'in the counsel of the wicked'? How does that seem in your situation?
5. How can you make sure that the word of God is at the centre of your life, the life of your family and your church?
6. Based on the examples of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5 and the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12, can you see God's fruitfulness revealed in your life?

A step further

We probably know many people who are walking away from the truth. Their desire to find happiness leads them to substances that may cause addiction, to money and goods that do not satisfy and to become so wrapped up in themselves they do not see other people around them. Make a commitment to pray for someone you know who may be in need of a change of direction. Include their name in the appropriate places in Psalm 1. Pray it for your own life too.

Stephanie Parker Chagas

– her walk has led her from Brazil to England and back a few times. Following God's calling, she is currently in London helping Salvationists in their journeys by prioritising their relationship with God through prayer and spiritual growth.

Bible Study 6

Walk by the Spirit

Bible reading – Galatians 5:13-26 (*English Standard Version*)

**‘If we live by the Spirit,
let us also walk by the Spirit’ (v 25).**

What the Bible says

‘Walk worthy’ is all about how we conduct our lives. While there are rules for Christian conduct, this chapter is about freedom, as the opening words say: ‘For freedom Christ has set us free’ (v 1). This freedom is found when we live by the Spirit (v 25) and walk by the Spirit (v 16).

Paul was a highly educated lawyer and religious leader, a Pharisee who stood for religious legalism, a slave of the law. When he met Jesus he experienced something completely different: a life of freedom in Christ. He acknowledged the law as a useful tool given by God to guide sinners, but also recognised its limitations. The law can make us conscious of our sins but we can only be justified and freed from sin by the grace of God (see Romans 4:19-24).

Right from the beginning there were laws, but also provision, protection, blessing and salvation. The essence of the law is found in the great commandment to, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and...soul and...mind and...your neighbour as yourself’ (Mark 12:30, 31). Sin causes a breakdown of the relationship with God and salvation is restoring that relationship. Within a good relationship laws are a blessing, without it they are burdensome.

Freedom without love will lead to situations where people destroy each other (vv 13-15), therefore laws are necessary. But freedom by the Spirit will produce the fruit of the Spirit (v 22), all the good things flowing from God’s love. When you are filled by the Spirit, who is love, Christian conduct flows from within and fills you with joy.

Our lives today

Religious rules are sometimes used as an instrument to control people and make them behave in a certain way. If people are coerced from without to conduct their lives according to Christian standards instead of being set free from within, Christianity could end up as another dead religion.

To live the true authentic Christian life, we need the help of the Holy Spirit. We need a transformation from the inside out, so that we are freed from slavery to the law and freed to serve Christ. Our God-honouring moral conduct will arise from the Spirit of God within us as we let him govern all our actions.

Discussion questions

1. Is there a difference between the way we behave when nobody sees us and the way we behave when we are being observed as Christians or as uniformed Salvationists? If your response is yes, try to give examples and find reasons for such differences.
2. Who are the most important people in your life and what impact, positive or negative, have they had on your faith and choices in life?
3. How do you recognise God's Spirit in other people?
4. How do you experience the guiding of the Holy Spirit in your own life?

A step further

In this letter Paul blames the Galatian Christians for having lost their freedom in Christ and being persuaded by some Jews to adhere to certain customs of Judaism that have nothing to do with the gospel, for example circumcision (vv 2-12).

To consider:

1. Are there any aspects of your culture, family life, work or church (The Salvation Army) that are threatening to become more important to you than the demands of the gospel?
2. Do we sometimes focus more on human behaviour than on Jesus and his Spirit?

Commissioner Eva Marseille

– following the Lord has led her to ministry in Denmark, Holland, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Congo (Brazzaville) and Southern Africa.

Bible Study 7

Even through the valley of death

Bible reading – Psalm 23

**‘Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me’
(v 4 NIV 1984).**

What the Bible says

As a shepherd, the psalmist David knew how shepherds tended and cared for their sheep. They not only took them to the green pastures but also protected and rescued them from danger and gathered the weak ones in their arms. He recounts his experience of the kind things God had done for him as his Shepherd.

By describing God as his Shepherd, David infers that God only wants good for him – just as a shepherd wishes only good for his sheep. God provides not only food and rest for his people but also refreshment and pleasure. As the shepherd’s rod helps to protect sheep from their enemies, the rod of God (that is upon him) keeps him safe.

Therefore, David said ‘Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil’, meaning although I am in peril of death, although in the midst of dangers as deep as a valley, yet I am at ease.

Our lives today

We live and walk in the valley of danger, in the valley of killer diseases that are on the increase. Scientists work hard to invent medicines to cure diseases, but as soon as the new medicine has been discovered a new ‘incurable’ disease, never heard of before, emerges. ‘Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people?’ says the prophet Jeremiah (8:22).

We live and walk in the valley of danger, of kidnap, rape, murder and the like. We also walk in the valley of death, with threats from terrorism, and the valley of religious extremism, and so on. However, to a child of God there is no fear of evil in the valley of death; death cannot separate us from the love of God – it kills the body, but cannot touch the soul (see Romans 8:35, 36).

Referring to the sufferings of martyrs of the first century, the writer of Hebrews said: ‘They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated – the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground’ (Hebrews 11:37, 38).

Today the persecution of Christians is increasing. As Christians we truly walk in the valley of uncertainty of life and of death in the world. But in all these valleys God is leading his people beside quiet waters and in the paths of righteousness; they fear no evil, for their God is with them, his rod and his staff will comfort them.

Discussion questions

1. As it was for David, has feeding on the bounty of God's provision been your life experience?
2. Has there been a time when you felt you were walking in the valley of death and experienced the deep sense of the presence of God?
3. How can we be an agent of peace for God to the people who are in constant fear for their life?
4. When was the last time you experienced the Lord 'preparing a table' before you?
5. Is there anything you should do so that the goodness and love of God follow you all through your life?

A step further

Consider yourself to be walking in the valley of death. List what you think you need so that you would not be in fear of anything.

Do you have such things in your life right now? If not, kneel down before God and invite Jesus, who can provide all that you need, into your life.

Read and memorise verse four of Psalm 23 and repeat it as many times as you need, praying that the same Spirit that comforted David will give you peace.

Commissioner Lalhlimpuii

– Zonal Secretary for Women's Ministries, South Asia, has served in the India Eastern, India South Western and India Central territories.

Bible Study 8

Walking in the light

Bible reading – 1 John 1:5-10

**‘But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light,
we have fellowship with one another,
and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from every sin’ (v 7).**

What the Bible tells us

Walking in the light means fellowship with Christ, doing things that please Christ in our everyday lives and striving to live according to Jesus’ instructions given through his teachings. But if we claim to have fellowship with him yet live in darkness, the Bible tells us that we are liars (1 John 1:6). We cannot live in both the light and the darkness. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 6:14 says, ‘Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?’

Light has no fellowship with darkness. This means we have to decide whether to move away from darkness and walk in the light or remain in darkness forever, and face the consequences of that darkness.

When we walk in the dark it is difficult to see any danger in the road we are travelling on. When workmen are repairing a road they sometimes dig trenches to reach the water or gas pipe they need to fix. To ensure that the public are safe, they put a sign and direct people to a safer path. In the dark you are more likely to miss the sign and if that happens, you fall into the trench because there is no light.

Our lives today

Many things are happening in our world today that can influence our choices in life. Some people think that the Word of God is too oppressive and decide to live self-indulgently. They walk in the deepest darkest corners of this world presuming they are enjoying life. Other people live a life in contradiction to God’s plans. I met a lady who told me she did not believe in God and she felt offended when I said, ‘God bless you’ to her.

Yet the Bible says, ‘Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding’ (Proverbs 3:5). If you trust in God you will never walk in darkness.

As 1 John 1:5 reminds us: ‘This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.’

When you walk in the light you avoid dangers in your life. For you will be able to see clearly. By walking in the light there is assurance of fellowship with Christ as he himself is the light. Jesus says, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life' (John 8:12).

What a privilege to be able to walk in the light, in life!

Discussion questions

1. Have you ever walked in darkness? If so, what was your experience? How did you feel when the light came?
2. What does walking in the light mean to you?
3. What does walking in light mean to the Church?
4. Is it easy to walk in the light?
 - a. If yes, why do you think it is easy?
 - b. If not, what are the difficulties of walking in the light?

A step further

Take your light to the people in your area, where you feel they need light in their lives, by sharing the good news with them.

Major Juliet Nyakusamwa

– whose journey has taken her from Zimbabwe to the United Kingdom to serve at International Headquarters.

Bible Study 9

Walk in obedience

Bible reading – Genesis 22:1-19

‘Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love – Isaac – and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you”’ (v 2).

What the Bible says

This story is dramatic right from the beginning! God calls Abraham by name and gives him clear instructions to *take* his son, the one for whom he already waited so long and loved so dearly, and *go* to the region of Moriah and *offer* him as a sacrifice. Abraham’s reaction is not what we would expect. Maybe ‘Why?’ and ‘I can’t do that!’ would be possible answers! Instead, the only three words that come out of his mouth are, ‘Here am I’. The same words that accompanied him since the moment God told him to leave his country, his people and his father’s household and go to the land he would show him (Genesis 12:1).

How does he sleep that night? How can he look Sarah in the eye knowing what he’s about to do to their son? The story continues to build up the next morning as Abraham obediently prepares all he will need for this sacrificial pilgrimage. This huge task seems like the ultimate test and turns out to be one of Abraham’s final journeys and undoubtedly the hardest.

Even though the narration gives no detail of human emotion we can imagine what Abraham was thinking as he walked next to his son possibly for the last time. The reality of what is happening is intensified as Isaac notices the fire and the wood but no animal and questions, ‘Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?’ (v 7). While historically child sacrifice was common among the Canaanites, for Abraham the death of Isaac would mean his promised descendants would be put at risk. He hopefully and trustfully responds, ‘The Lord will provide’ (v 8).

The tension reaches its peak as Isaac is bound to the altar. As Abraham raises his arm, with knife in hand, the heavens call out his name. Once more his three-word response is proof of his genuine commitment to God, above everything and anything else. His faith and obedience in him has spared his son’s life. We can only imagine the joy Abraham and Isaac shared together as a ram was offered as a substitute for the young boy and the Lord’s promise to Abraham is reaffirmed. The God who tests, now graciously provides for his own.

For God has provided a Lamb
He was offered up in your place
What Abraham was asked to do he has done
He’s offered his only son.

(Michael Card)

Our lives today

Some journeys are difficult to make. In my family, history has repeated itself more than once when God has literally said, 'take what you have, go, cross the ocean and offer yourself in another country!' God asks us to live sacrificially and be obedient to his will wherever we find ourselves. Each one of us has our journey and challenges to face.

Sometimes all he wants is for us is to *take* a meal to someone, to *go* and make peace with a person we don't get on very well with or to *offer* our time and talents to others.

What is God asking of you today?

Discussion questions

1. Think of a difficult journey or situation you have had to face. How did you deal with it?
2. What was the outcome of Abraham's lifelong obedience? How does this relate to your walk with God?
3. In 1 Samuel 15:22 we read that obedience is better than sacrifice. Sometimes we may think we are doing the right thing (sacrificing to God) but it's not what the Lord truly desires from us. How can we be in tune with the will of God?
4. Which aspects of this story relate to and resemble Jesus' own journey and sacrificial death on the cross?
5. How is God's love represented in the life of Abraham?
6. What can you learn about God's love towards you, through Abraham's life, and through his own substitute for our sin, Jesus?

A step further

Are we attentive to God's voice and direction? Are we ready to say, 'Here am I' and obey until the end? Are we confident in his provision for the task at hand?

Take time to think and ask God where he wants the words 'take', 'go' and 'offer' to be true in your life.

How wonderful it is to walk with God
Along the road that holy men (and women) have trod;
How wonderful it is to hear him say:
Fear not, have faith, 'tis I who lead the way!

(Theodore Kitching, SASB 583 v 1)

Stephanie Parker Chagas

– her walk has led her from Brazil to England and back a few times. Following God's calling, she is currently in London helping Salvationists in their journeys by prioritising their relationship with God through prayer and spiritual growth.

Bible Study 10

Walk humbly

Bible reading – Micah 6:8

‘He has showed you, O mortal, what is good.

And what does the Lord require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.’

What the Bible says

The message of the book of Micah varies between prophecies of warning and judgement, and prophecies of hope and comfort.

There are three cycles of judgement and salvation/deliverance oracles in the book:

- Judgement and re-establishment of Israel and Judah (chapters 1, 2)
- Condemnation of Judah’s leaders, but imminent hope for God’s people (chapters 3-5)
- God’s charges against his people and the ultimate triumph of his Kingdom (chapters 6, 7)

Chapter six depicts a courtroom scene in which the Lord files a complaint against Israel. Majestic mountains are called in to listen as witnesses. The Lord presents his case reminding his people of his gracious acts on their behalf (v 3-5); bringing them out of Egypt, sending Moses, Aaron and Miriam as their leaders; thwarting an attempt by Balak and Baalam to destroy Israel (Numbers 22-24); safely leading them across the Jordan to the Promised Land in Gilgal (Joshua 4:19).

Israel responds, in verses 6 and 7, in an exasperated tone with their counter-argument. How, they ask, could they possibly make things right again with God? Israel biting suggests outlandish acts of reconciliation: sacrificing thousands of rams, offering rivers of olive oil (a precious commodity at the time), and lastly – and most sarcastically – sacrificing its firstborn children (a pagan practice, and strictly forbidden by law!).

Israel has obviously missed the point. It does not remember all the Lord has already done for it, and consequently, cannot know who its God is or what his character and will are. The extravagant offers of reconciliation make it clear that Israel has forgotten that God has already shown them what is required of them: to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with him.

Our lives today

Here are the requirements God has detailed for us:

Do justly – Justice is a concept that everyone agrees is important, but which few people usually act upon. Proverbs 21:3 says: ‘To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.’ Jesus was concerned about justice, and summed up the law and the prophets in Matthew 7:12: ‘So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you.’ Such an elementary thought, but monumental in its effects. We need to do *wrong* to none, but do *right* to all.

Love mercy – Showing and loving mercy is part of our calling. Some think it is enough to simply grow in our personal relationship with God, yet the encouragement to perform acts of mercy suggests an ‘outward’ focus to our faith. We should delight in showing mercy to others, as God delights in it. Jesus admonishes us to ‘be merciful, just as your Father is merciful’ (Luke 6:36). We must be glad for the opportunities to do good – and do it cheerfully!

Walk humbly with your God – To ‘walk with God’ means to live with God in constant communion, and to be intentional about cultivating our spiritual growth and on-going discipleship. The word ‘humbly’ here means more than just ‘modest’ or ‘lowly’, it actually means to be attentive to or watch. If we are mindful of this requirement, the other two (doing justly, loving mercy) will happen instinctively. So *walk humbly with God*, being attentive to him at all times. *Walk humbly with God*, choosing to live according his Word, and not your own. *Walk humbly with God*, desiring his will for you and not your own. *Walk humbly with God*, carefully listening for his leading, correction, and approval.

Discussion questions

1. What comes to mind when you think of walking humbly with God?
2. The world teaches us to depend only on ourselves, and to find the answers to life’s questions in ourselves. How does walking humbly with God counteract the advice of the world?
3. Why is humility critical to understanding and acting on issues of mercy and justice?
4. Are there any ways that you think you need to grow, change or be transformed to have a more humble walk with God and be of greater use in the work of his Kingdom, particularly related to issues of mercy and justice?
5. What can we learn from the major verbs (do, love, walk) in Micah 6:8?
6. The verbs used in these verses are action verbs – do they inspire you to actively make any changes to your lifestyle and habits? Are you motivated to go out and ‘do’ something?

A step further

Using the three themes of Micah 6:8, examine your current activities with respect to justice, mercy and walking humbly with God (or, discipleship) by brainstorming a list of activities that you take part in and categorise them into the theme(s) where they fit best (do this individually, in small groups, or as a whole group.)

With a partner or in a small group, reflect on your lists with the following questions:

1. Is one list longer or shorter than another? Does this say anything about your current activities/priorities?
2. Which area of ministry is the most personally satisfying to you? Why?
3. In which area do you personally feel the greatest need for growth?
4. Are there any areas you think you should give more attention to?

Annie Carter

– whose walk has taken her throughout the USA Southern Territory and across the Atlantic Ocean to London as an intern at the International Centre for Spiritual Life Development.

Bible Study I I

Walking in the fiery furnace

Bible reading – Daniel 3:19-30

‘He said, “Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods”” (v 25).

What the Bible says

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to bow down and worship the golden image which king Nebuchadnezzar made. They were called before the king and ordered to obey the royal decree or be thrown into the blazing furnace. But Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did not hide the fact that they were not going to worship or bow down before the statue. In anger the king commanded that the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than usual. Then they were thrown into the furnace.

When the king looked into it he was surprised to see four men walking around in the furnace. ‘He said, “Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods”” (Daniel 3:25).

Then he went to the furnace door and told the three men to come out. They came out – unharmed. Not even their hair was singed. The king then gave an order that no one should speak disrespectfully of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego’s God.

Our lives today

In life people walk in the ‘fiery furnace’ of many things. Some walk in the fiery furnace of poverty. Some dysfunctional marriages have become a ‘fiery furnace’. Badly behaved children cause disruption in families and there is no peace in the parent’s lives. There is family disunity, sickness and death which people find difficult to understand. But in all these trials we are not alone – God is always with us! If we put our trust in him, he will release us and set us free. These three men were true to God and their faith – to the point of sacrificing their own lives.

In trust David said, ‘Even if I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me’ (Psalm 23:4).

The devil is cunning. If he sees that we are faithful to God he will tempt us to try to make us fall from grace. The Book of Job tells us that the devil asked God for permission to test Job’s faith. ‘But

stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will curse you to your face.' The Lord said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger" (Job 1:11, 12). Despite all the trials sent to him, Job remained faithful to God.

In the first chapter of Daniel, the king wanted some handsome Israelite youths to serve in his household and ordered that they be given the king's delicacies and wine in preparation for the task ahead of them. But Daniel and his friends refused to eat the food.

They had faith that everything was possible with God. Verse 15 tells us that they looked healthier than those who ate and drank the king's delicacies and wine.

Let us remember that God is always with us in our problems and also in happy times, he will never leave us.

Discussion Questions

1. What have you learnt from this story about:
 - The consequences of Nebuchadnezzar's anger
 - The benefits of trusting God through Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego
 - Your personal experience of the consequences of anger
 - Your personal experience of the benefits of trusting God?
2. Is there any time in your life you have had to make a difficult decision? If so, what was your experience?
3. Can you remember a time when you thought you were walking in 'the fiery furnace' due to some circumstances in life?
4. Are there similar situations in which you find yourself today?

A step further

Go and find the verses of Scripture you feel could help you in times of temptations. For example when you are told not to preach the Word of God, this verse can be helpful: 'But Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges!"' (Acts 4:19).

Major Juliet Nyakusamwa

– whose journey has taken her from Zimbabwe to the United Kingdom to serve at International Headquarters.

Bible Study 12

Walk in strength

Bible reading – Isaiah 40:28-31

**‘Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;
but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint’ (vv 30, 31).**

What the Bible says

The Book of Isaiah exposes the full scope of God’s judgement and salvation. Written during a time marked by the growth of the Assyrian empire and the decline of Israel, the first 39 chapters of Isaiah convey themes of loss and the Lord’s righteous judgement of his rebellious people. The people of Israel have broken their covenant with the Lord (Deuteronomy 30:11-20). Exiled from their land, they feel utterly hopeless and alone. But chapter 40 is the pivotal chapter of the Book of Isaiah. While previous chapters communicate feelings of hopelessness and despair, it articulates hope.

The opening verses of Isaiah 40 immediately reveal a blatant contrast to the judgement in the earlier chapters. Verses 1–11 are tender, loving words of comfort to the Lord’s people. The next 15 verses (vv 12-26) emphasise the glory of God, and remind his people who they serve – the Creator of all, the God who reigns and is able to do all things. Coming to verse 27, Israel’s grievance is stated: ‘Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God”’?

In verse 28 Isaiah solicits Israel to recall what they already know about their God (‘Do you not know? Have you not heard?’). They already hold the truth: their God is everlasting, the Creator and untiring. God cares, understands and will never fail. *The Message* translation reads, ‘God doesn’t come and go. God lasts. He’s Creator of all you can see or imagine. He doesn’t get tired out, doesn’t pause to catch his breath. And he knows everything, inside and out.’ No problems are hidden from God – he possesses incomprehensible knowledge.

The final verses of this chapter are written to encourage the people of Israel who have grown tired and weary in their captivity. Isaiah reminds them that God does not keep his great power and strength to himself. No, he shares this strength with those who are weak and exhausted. Human strength is only temporary, but those who hope in the Lord are given a supernatural strength. Isaiah stresses the goodness of God after describing his majesty. God is able (and willing!) to deliver and restore his distressed people, if they trust in him.

Our lives today

Are you tired in your journey? Perhaps actually physically worn out? In today’s world, with our ‘go-go-go’ mentality, we try to fit in as many activities as we can into our day. It can be hard to find time to stop and breathe some days.

Feeling mentally exhausted? I was a primary school teacher for four years, and some days after my students left, I felt like I could barely form a sentence. My brain was on overload! There are times when we become so consumed in our work, responsibilities and commitments that it takes a toll on our mental state.

Maybe you're emotionally drained. Is there an issue you have been persistently pursuing in prayer, waiting for the Lord's answer and intervention, but not seeing any fruits of your prayers? Waiting and feeling like God is not listening or answering us can be taxing on our hearts and our faith. Are you ready to just give up and throw in the towel?

The people of Israel were tired in all of these ways. They had been taken as captives in Babylon, and believed that God was no longer willing or able to save them from their situation. But Isaiah appeals to them to put their hope in the Lord again, and reminds them that the Lord will give them the strength they need.

We tend to use the word 'hope' very casually today: 'I *hope* it doesn't rain this weekend,' or 'I *hope* I get the job.' But in the context of Isaiah, to 'hope' in the Lord means to have continued, steady trust in him and to look expectantly to him. To 'hope' for something is active – it is always on your mind. It requires a disciplined combination of patiently waiting for God to speak, and the joyful expectation that he *will* act on our behalf.

When we hope in the Lord, he renews our strength. What does that mean? He exchanges our weakness for his strength – the strength we're reminded of in verse 28. He doesn't get tired – physically, mentally or emotionally – ever! We can walk in that kind of strength too, if we put our hope in him. In fact, we will be given so much of the Lord's strength that we won't just walk in that strength. We'll run without growing weary, and even spread our wings and soar like the eagles. I long for that kind of endurance, don't you?

Discussion questions

1. In which part of your journey have you grown tired and weary? Where do you need the Lord to renew your strength?
2. How can you learn to 'hope in the Lord' – to actively and steadily trust in him with expectation?
3. Can you share about an experience when the Lord has renewed your strength or enabled you to soar on wings like eagles?
4. What difference does it make in your life to know that we serve a God who 'will not grow tired or weary' and whose 'understanding no one can fathom' (verse 28)?
5. How does God renew your strength from day to day?

A step further

This week, offer up prayers of thanksgiving and praise for the times God has renewed your strength in difficult situations. Then confess and repent of not always putting your hope and trust in him. Finally, lift up prayers of petition and intercession for his refreshing strength to bring you out of the tiresome situations you're walking through. Jehovah (you are the most high God).

Annie Carter



WOMEN'S MINISTRIES 2013

