

Lent series 2019 - TVBF Cell studies

This too will pass - releasing the burdens we were never intended to bear

Closing prayer

Relentless, pursuing God, you have not given up on us. You will complete the work you have begun in us and one day all of our burdens and the shadow of those burdens, will be removed.

Give us grace to walk in your light and help us share the hope of your life. We worship and adore you the God of light, in whom there is no shadow of turning. Amen.

Introduction:

Lent is a time for us to make space to meet with Jesus. These studies are based around the theme of 'How we can see the light through the challenges we bear in life today'. My aim is that, no matter how challenging the burden we carry, God is closer than we think and will help us set the stuff down we are carrying, you don't need to carry it any further. Jesus said, 'Come to me, all who are weary and carry heavy burdens and I will give you rest.' *Matt 11:28*. We need to be authentic with God, to be honest and confront the burdens we bear and realise that God is stronger than we are.

We shall explore the words of Psalm 23 and the 'I am' sayings of Jesus in the gospel of John, taking time to allow God's word to soak into our life, live in us and produce life in us, with some reflections and prayers to help us.



Study 1: The burden of today

Read: Psalm 23:1 & John 10:11-16

Icebreaker

Take a blank piece of paper and write down 10-20 ways in which the Lord has provided for you, or protected you, in the last month. Don't repeat anything on the list. What is the impact of making this list on your thinking today?

Opening prayer

Father God, thank you that you are always present with us. Come close to us as we embark on this study and remind us just how much you love us and how willing you are to protect and provide for us. Help us lift our gaze to discover again the joy of your work in our lives. Amen

Discussion questions

1. When have you found it hard to trust God and what was it that caused you to wonder whether God was with you?
2. Do you find trusting God easy or hard? Why do you think that is?
3. Look again at the list you made in the icebreaker. How does remembering God's goodness in the past help you in the present?
4. How do you address the reality that there are Christians in the world at this moment who are hungry, without any shelter and are being persecuted? What could our church family do to help?
5. Do you know someone who is currently finding it hard to trust God? How could you or your Christian friends help them?
6. What do you think are some of the causes of a lack of trust in God's provision and how would you address those issues?
7. Look at Psalm 23:1. Is there an area in your life where you feel you are lacking in some way, or bearing a burden? Take a few moments in prayer to lay that specific issue before the Lord.
8. Look at John 10:11-16, if need be read it aloud. What specific truths can you find in the passage which speak to you?

Closing prayer

God my shepherd, I focus my eyes on you. I lift to you the concerns, burdens I carry today..... I lift to you the people for whom I carry a burden... Please help me to trust you anew, let me see your provision and nearness in new ways and remind me of your faithfulness and kindness. Amen.

Study 6: The burden of tomorrow

Read: Psalm 23:6 & John 8:12, 9:5 15:1,5

Icebreaker

Imagine you are looking down into a canyon where all your worries, burdens and anxieties are. Now imagine that instead of looking down, you look up and discover God holding you securely like a great eagle. How does the change of perspective make you feel? What lessons do you learn?

Opening prayer

Father thank you that you know tomorrow before it begins. You know the end from the beginning. Please bring to our attention those areas of our lives where we need to learn to trust you more and worry less. Thank you that you are more committed to us than we are to you. Thank you that you live in us by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Discussion questions

1. In what ways do you think we over-emphasise our pursuit of God and under-emphasise God's pursuit of us?
2. How does it make you feel to be reminded God is more committed to you than you are to Him?
3. Do you have any particular anxieties about the future? What are the burdens you carry? How does the assurance of God's goodness and peace help you to face those anxieties?
4. Looking back, are there past issues or burdens you have seen God minister into?
5. Are there issues or burdens in your life now that you need God to bring change to?
6. What things have you discovered about God that have brought you closer to Him?
Consider John 8:12; John 9:5; John 14:25-27; John 15:1,5; 2 Peter 1: 3-4; Ps 43:3; Ps 79:8; Col. 3: 15; 2 Thessalonians 3:16.
7. As you prepare for Holy Week, how can you allow space and time each day to remind yourself of Christ's love for you?
8. Look ahead to Easter Sunday, how can you celebrate that the light of the world conquered the darkness of the day and has lifted the burden you face tomorrow?

Study 5: The burden of a spiritual assault

Read: Psalm 23:5 & John 6:26-35, 41, 48, 51

Icebreaker

Have you been invited to a friend's house for a meal, or have invited someone to your home for a meal? What is it about sharing a meal with someone that is special? Why does it feel particularly helpful when you are going through a hard time?

Opening prayer.

Father, thank you for being our defender. In the midst of the burden of battles, please remind us of your strength, commitment and love for us. As we think about the areas of our lives where we need you most, we ask you to give us the grace to see things through your eyes. Help us to lean into your strength, remembering that it is always available for us. Amen

Discussion questions

1. What are the enemies you think threaten your identity in Christ?
2. What do you run to for security?
3. What do you most hunger for and how is that hunger evidenced in your life?
4. Many Christians believe God will not let them suffer but reality is that Christians do suffer. How does the reality that God is with us when we suffer, or face spiritual assault, help us to bear the burden of such an assault?
5. Have you ever sensed God's presence with you in the burden of dealing with a spiritual assault on you?
6. How does the presence of God help you deal with what you are facing? Consider *Psalm 16:5; Psalm 116:13; 1 John 2: 20,27*
7. Do you ever wonder where God is in the midst of a spiritual assault on you? What do you do when tempted to feel like this?
8. How can you be a support and help to someone else who needs to know God's love for them and His heart towards them, when they feel the burden of a spiritual assault on them?

Closing prayer

Bread of life we hunger for you, you alone can satisfy our deepest needs. You alone bring us security, forgive us when we run to the wrong things for protection and nourishment. As we come to you, give us faith to believe you are all we need. Sustain us moment by moment and continually anoint us with your presence. Amen.

Study 2: The burden of exhaustion

Read: Psalm 23:2-3 & John 10:7-10

Icebreaker

Make a list of the things you have done this past week. How many people have you seen and what things did you talk about, or achieve? Do you often feel tired by the end of the week?

Opening prayer

Father God, thank you that you promised to give rest and refreshment to your people. Draw near to us by the power of your Holy Spirit and remind us of your deep grace and unfailing love. Refresh and renew us as we spend time reflecting on your character and commitment to us, your people. Give us strength, faith and courage to serve you. Amen.

Discussion questions

1. Do you have a tendency to over-work? Where does it come from?
2. Some people think they can only get exhausted when doing more than God asks but do you think it is possible to become weary in God's service? Did Jesus or the leaders in the early church show signs of exhaustion? Consider the following as you answer?
Matthew 11:28-30; Psalm 62:1-2, 5-8; 1 Peter 5:10-11
3. Have you ever been exhausted? If you have, what were the causes of the exhaustion?
4. Jesus invites his followers to come to Him and experience rest, is that your experience as a Christian? If not, then what do you think is wrong with the way we do Christian service and community?
5. Have you tried different ways of making sure you are connected to Jesus? Which ways worked for you and which ways did not?
6. The Bible tells us God rested on the 7th day of creation. Why did God rest and what lessons can we learn from His example?
7. Jesus in Hebrews 4:1-13 is described as *better than a Sabbath rest, a day of restoration and renewal each week, for the people of God.* What do you think the writer to Hebrews means when he says this?
8. What practical changes can you incorporate into your routine to help you rest and enjoy God's restorative work in your life?

Closing prayer

God my restorer, root me deeply into you. Help me establish a pattern of drinking at your well daily. When I am weary, lift me up, help me find my satisfaction in you. Help me base the pattern of my life on the Lord, strengthen my body and restore my soul, renew me Lord. Amen.

Study 3: The burden of confusion

Read: Psalm 23:3 & John 14: 1-7.

Icebreaker

Select one person to walk from one side of the room to the other whilst blindfolded. One other person can guide them but only with their voice. Repeat the exercise with everyone else in the room making as much noise as possible. Discuss what this teaches you.

Opening prayer

Father God, thank you for your Word, your Spirit and your Son. Thank you that your Word brings light to our lives and your Spirit is always with us. Thank you that we see your purposes so beautifully revealed in the Lord Jesus. Please help us to discover afresh the depth of your commitment to guide us. Amen

Discussion questions

1. Do you find it easy or difficult to discern God's will? Explain why.
2. Has there ever been a time when you were conscious that you had stepped out of God's will? How did you know this and what lessons did you learn?
3. How do you think the will of God works? Do you find it a burden to discover God's will? Do you feel He has only one way for you to travel, or does He offer you a choice?
4. What do you think the psalmist means when we writes about being *guided along the paths of righteousness*? Are there specific areas in our society which you think can lead us away from the right path?
5. How do you go about discovering the will of God for your life? Is this a burden you carry?
6. Can you identify any specific areas of your life where you need God's guidance today?
7. How do you think we can allow the life, example and teaching of Jesus to be the centre of our own decision making? Consider the following as examples *Psalm 48:14, Exodus 15:13, John 6: 68, Psalm 139:7-10, Proverbs 3:5-6, Hebrews 12:1-3.*

Closing prayer

God of guidance, keep my heart set on you. Keep my spirit tuned to the music of heaven and please straighten my crooked lines of life. Help me seek your will and your kingdom only. Guard me from making decisions based on self-interest. Help me to do what you are blessing today and always, for the glory of your name. Amen

Study 4: The burden of despair

Read: Psalm 23: 4 & John 11: 21-26

Icebreaker

Find a candle or a torch. Make the room as dark as possible, then turn on the torch, or light the candle. Put your hands in front of the light to cast shadow or shapes on the wall. Where do the shadows come from?

Opening prayer

Father, thank you that you understand despair far more than we can. As we approach this subject, please walk gently with us. It is a heavy burden for some of us to bear. You know the depth of despair that touches our lives and how devastating it can be. Please open our eyes to see that you are always with us and that shadows only exist where light is. Comfort and strengthen us by your grace. Amen.

Discussion questions

1. What has been the impact on your faith, following the death of someone you loved or cared about?
2. In what ways have you experienced the comfort and presence of God in the midst of the burden of death and despair?
3. Psalm 86:4 describes walking through the valley of Baka, which means tears, making a spring there. Are there ways you discovered something new about God's character in times of despair or sadness?
4. Reflect on the story of the resurrection of Lazarus. *John 11:21-26* Why do you think Jesus wept at the graveside of Lazarus?
5. In what ways do you think Jesus redeems the burden of grief for us by letting Martha and Mary grieve? Do you think this was cruel?
6. Reflect on the idea we were not made for death and that is why we hate it. Do you think there is a difference between the fear of death and the fear of dying itself? Consider the following as you answer *1 Cor 15:54-58; Psalm 3:5-6; Psalm 27:1; 1 Peter 1: 3-6*
7. Pray for anyone who is currently dealing with the burden of grief?
8. How can our Church support those bearing the burden of grieving? Is there a way this group could help someone struggling with loss?

Closing prayer

Resurrected Lord, we were not made for death, help us not to be afraid of death. When we do not sense or see you, give us the assurance that you are there. A day is coming when death itself will be destroyed, give us grace and courage to trust you and help us live in the power of your resurrection. Amen.