

FEARLESS

CHURCHWIDE
6 SESSION STUDY GUIDE

ISLAND ECC

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God said it to Abram in Genesis.

Moses said it to the people in Exodus.

God repeated the phrase to Joshua.

Ruth heard it.

Elijah said it.

Isaiah heard it from God and said it to the people.

And the New Testament keeps the theme going.

Zacharias, Mary, Paul, and Peter all heard the same two-word command.

Fear not.

Evidently we need to hear these words, too. More than any other command throughout scripture, we are told to abandon our fear, and live lives of courage.

Can you imagine how free you could be if fear wasn't a part of your life?

No anxiety, no fear of others' opinions, bosses' evaluations, disappointments in relationships?


Fear is a common enemy. Whether it comes in the form of daily survival, or high-stakes gambles, whether it's clothed in financial anxiety or relational rejection, fear is real. It visits all of us, in a variety of ways. If it really grabs hold, we call it a phobia and take medication to deal with it.

If it's more minor, we secretly deal with it in hopes that nobody notices.

This 6-week study is about **fearless** living. Finding courage to overcome your obvious, and your subtle bouts with fear.



Brett Hilliard, Senior Pastor



FEARLESS BEING

THERE IS NO FEAR IN LOVE,
BUT PERFECT LOVE DRIVES OUT FEAR.

1 JOHN 4:18

INTRODUCTION

Our identities are shaped by many things and Hong Kong is jam-packed with its own set of influences on our being. Race, age, education, and experiences all shape us. Then there are our social circles, families, work responsibilities and even societal expectations that influence who we are and who we become, but it doesn't stop there. Ads and apps alike inundate us with messages from the moment we wake to the moment we go to sleep. It's easy to get lost in the hubbub of opinions on what to wear, where to go, and how to think. It's hard to have a fearless being when confronted with so much.

WARM UP QUESTIONS

- ◆ What is one of the most troubling influencers in the world or Hong Kong currently?
- ◆ What is something in the past that has influenced your identity, for good or for bad?
- ◆ What is one specific influencer that you are anxious might be more powerful in your life than it should be?

MAIN STUDY

In the gospel of John, chapter 4, we have the longest one-on-one conversation between Jesus and another person in the New Testament. The story around this is all about Jesus connecting personally with a nameless woman at a well. It is a fascinating story, full of truths that apply to us today.

The background for the story is important. Years before, Assyria took the northern kingdom of Israel captive, leaving some of the poorest Jews in the land and sending people from other places to live there. Some of these intermarried, and other religious thoughts combined with Jewish beliefs over time. These people lived in an area called Samaria. Because their religion mixed Judaism with other elements, committed Jews despised these Samaritans.

The shortest route between Jerusalem in the south and Galilee in the north required walking through Samaria, and Jesus is taking that journey.

³Jesus left Judea and departed again for Galilee. ⁴And He had to pass through Samaria. ⁵So He came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as He was from His journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. John 4:3-6

It was high noon on a hot day, and Jesus, worn-out from travelling, finds a good place to stop at Jacob's well. We sometimes forget that Jesus was limited by His humanness. He understands long days, stress, body aches, and exhaustion. He knows what it means to feel weary and thirsty.

◆ What aspect of Jesus' humanity is most interesting or important to you?

◆ How weary are you in your personal journey this week?

⁷A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."⁸(For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) ⁹The Samaritan woman said to Him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) ¹⁰Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you,

'Give me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."¹¹The woman said to Him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹²Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." John 4:7-12

As Jesus waits for His disciples who are off getting needed food, an unnamed Samaritan woman comes along and Jesus makes a simple request for a drink. She is likely shocked that a Jewish man is talking to her, never mind, making a request for help from her. She knew that Jews didn't speak to Samaritans, and that men weren't permitted to address women when they were alone.

◆ Does the omission of the Samaritan woman's name make the story more or less powerful to you? Why?

◆ What are some examples of "Samaritans" in our world, those that normal or religious people would have nothing to do with?

Jesus had started a conversation that demonstrated that God loves everyone. He gave an invitation to friendship. But He doesn't stop there. He moves right along to introduce talking about God and "living water." The woman, who is aware of the practicalities of life, forthrightly notes to Jesus that He doesn't even have means to draw regular water! She also demonstrates that she is religiously astute and curious about how His comment related to Jewish history and the importance of Jacob.

◆ How do you find ways to move conversations and friendships along to talk about God? Is this easy or difficult for you?

◆ This woman has moved into an honest conversation with Jesus about her genuine confusion about things relating to culture and God? How easy or difficult do you find it to do this with Jesus?

¹³Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” ¹⁵The woman said to Him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.” John 4:13-15

Notice that Jesus doesn’t answer her questions directly. Instead, sensing that she is a genuine seeker of truth, Jesus gets to the point. He introduces Himself properly! He offers her “springs of living water” and eternal life. She has likely known a life of striving, stress, anxiety, and unmet desires. She is ready for this gift of not being needy again.

- ◆ What are some areas of life where people yearn for living water?
- ◆ When in your life have you experienced “springs of living water welling up to eternal life?”
- ◆ For what are you spiritually thirsty? What can you do to allow the living water to flow more fully in your life?

¹⁶Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” ¹⁷The woman answered Him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.” ¹⁹The woman said to Him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.” John 4:16-20

Jesus demonstrates that He really **knew** her. He clearly shows her that His knowledge of her was divine. Without denials or explanations of her life, past or present, she acknowledges His special character and then shares her confusion about worship.

Like today, this culture was a complex one. We don’t know the exact nature of this woman’s situation, but the five marriages didn’t make her automatically a promiscuous person. Due to disease, famine, injuries, and wars, men did not live as long as today!

- ◆ What are your views of this woman’s situation?
- ◆ How hard is it for people to move beyond hard situations or get past bad habits?
- ◆ What are some of the confusions people have today about places or types of worship?

²¹Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²²You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship Him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” ²⁵The woman said to Him, “I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ). When He comes, he will tell us all things.” ²⁶Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am He.” John 4:21-26

Again, Jesus doesn’t answer her question directly but moves even deeper into His revealing of Himself to her by talking about true worship of God. This moves to the heart of her understanding, that one day Christ will come and explain all such matters. Jesus says, “That’s Me, and I have been talking to **you** and guiding this conversation because I care for you!”

- ◆ What do you think were some of the things that this woman felt when Jesus revealed Himself to her as the Christ?
- ◆ What does to worship “in spirit and truth” look like in our modern world?
- ◆ What kinds of things can block a person or group from worshipping in spirit and truth?



²⁸So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, ²⁹“Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” They went out of the town and were coming to Him ... ³⁹Many Samaritans from that town believed in Him because of the woman's testimony, “He told me all that I ever did.” ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to Him, they asked Him to stay with them, and He stayed there two days. ⁴¹And many more believed because of His word. ⁴²They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world.” John 4:28-30, 39-42

This woman has her priorities in the right place. She drops her water jar and goes to her town to share the good news she has heard. And she had good enough relationships established that they listened to her. Many of these Samaritans came to know Jesus as Saviour over the full two days Jesus stayed around having more one-on-one conversations not recorded here.

- ◆ Personal sharing of our testimony about Jesus is one of the most useful tools in leading others to believe in Christ. Who are the “townspeople” in your life with whom you can share your testimony?
- ◆ What have you seen and heard about Jesus that you're ready to share with others?

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

John's account is fascinating in a myriad of ways, one of which is the back-story of the nameless woman who brought the knowledge of Christ to her town. The following paragraph on two different interpretations about this woman makes for thoughtful reflection:

For most early church and medieval interpreters, the Samaritan woman was thought to be a thoughtful, polite seeker after truth – a sinner who, once illumined, actively witnessed her new faith to others. However, in the Reformation, she became a symbol of promiscuity. The early church fathers believed that this account was primarily about Jesus revealing Himself to her. The reformers suggested that this is more about Jesus revealing herself to her so that she could recognise her sin and repent. [Note that Jesus does not label her as a sinful woman.]

PERSONAL APPLICATION

The story of the woman at the well teaches us that God loves us in spite of our background or problems. God values us enough to actively seek us and invite us to find life-giving hope as we worship the one true God in Christ Jesus. Jesus took the time on one hot day to reveal Himself as a caring man and as the redeeming Christ to a Samaritan woman. Through this encounter with Jesus at a well, she found “fearless being,” that is, a courageous new identity that allowed her to influence others and spread good news of living, hopeful, eternal water.

- ◆ While likely not at a well, where did you find such grace, that is, where did Jesus find you?
- ◆ What fears or anxieties that you may still have do you think Jesus would like you to move beyond?

NOTES



Rick Bates has served as the Executive Pastor of Island ECC for 7 years. He and his wife Jane have lived in Hong Kong for 15 years and love dim sum. They have three adult children, two who live in Hong Kong. The third lives across the ocean in the U.S. and has brought them the joy of two granddaughters.

II FEARLESS SOWING

AS EACH HAS RECEIVED A GIFT,
USE IT TO SERVE ONE ANOTHER,
AS GOOD STEWARDS OF
GOD'S VARIED GRACE.

1 PETER 4:10

INTRODUCTION

Sowing: an act of scattering seeds on a field, with the expectation of seeing the seeds germinate and produce a desired crop in the future.

ROI (return on investment) is the guiding principle whenever we invest our asset. We hope that what we reap in the future will be of greater value than what we sow now. To expect otherwise would be considered unwise, to say the least.

Sowing is, however, not necessarily a selfish thing. Many people sow sacrificially, desiring nothing but that other people reap the fruits. They sow generously, not getting anything in return, but their life is full of joy and meaning.

In this session, we will explore principles that will lead us to sow fearlessly.

WARM UP QUESTIONS

It is more blessed to give than to receive. Acts 20:35

This is a saying by Jesus, quoted by the Apostle Paul, but virtually believed by people of all faiths. However, this saying actually goes against our human nature. Secular theories say that human beings will maximize their own gain, and sometimes at the expense of others.

- ◆ Do you believe in this saying by Jesus? Why?
- ◆ Share about a time when you experienced this teaching of Jesus.

MAIN STUDY

To understand the biblical idea of fearless sowing, we need to take a step back and explore a deeper issue first. We do not begin with what we do, but who we are. The following four principles will guide us step by step in this journey.

I. The Principle of Blessing

The people of Israel always trace back their unique identity to Abraham, the father of faith. God initiated a “covenant” with Abraham which forms the foundation of a new relationship between God and the human race. In Genesis 12:2, the Bible says, *“I [God] will make of you [Abraham] a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.”*

- ◆ What is the “content” of God’s blessing to Abraham? Why is this significant?
- ◆ Is God’s blessing to Abraham for Abraham and his offspring alone? What is the ultimate purpose of God’s blessing to Abraham?
- ◆ We all are endowed with many “blessings” from God: our education, talents, earning power, assets, time, network ... you name it. Why do you think God would bless you with so many blessings?

II. The Principle of Ownership

There are two common misconceptions. Firstly, many people believe that “I deserve all that I have, and more.” The second one is more subtle, and is usually assumed. Many people believe that “All that I have belongs to me. I am the rightful owner.” As a result of such belief, they believe that it is totally up to them to deploy things that they own for their own enjoyment.

The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. Psalm 24:1

- ◆ What does Psalm 24:1 say about “ownership,” and what does this “ownership” entail?

- ◆ How would you respond to this objection: “I am a self made person. I work hard day and night. I use my labour, knowledge, and skill to rightfully earn what I have. How can God take the credit and say that He owns everything?”

Ask a member to read Deuteronomy 8:17-18.

- ◆ How does this passage speak into the previous question?

III. The Principle of Stewardship

In a biblical sense, a “steward” is a man entrusted with his master’s asset and manages it on the master’s behalf. A steward does not own the asset. However, he has real responsibility in managing it well. In the end, he is accountable to his master.

In Matthew 25:14-30, Jesus tells the famous “Parable of the Talents.” In this story, one “talent” is equivalent to about 20 years’ worth of wages of a day’s labour. That is a lot of money!

Pick a member to read the whole story in one setting.

- ◆ What’s the difference between the first two servants and the third one? Is it about the ROI or something else?
- ◆ What do you think the master is looking for in his servants?

IV. The Principle of Fearless Sowing

God has given us a lot of blessings: wealth, time, and talents. He also gives us freedom to decide how to handle them. We can choose to spend them on our own comfort and enjoyment. But we can also invest them in other people’s lives and make a difference in this world.

There are many stories in Island ECC in which people go overseas for a mission trip, or stay in Hong Kong to serve the poor, only to find out that they are infected with a passion to right some wrongs that they see, or to meet a need that breaks their hearts.

These people roll up their sleeves, get their hands dirty, invest their own resources and become a blessing to so many people. Some commit their time week after week, some invest their money, some contribute their talents. None of them ask for anything other than a chance to help. In the end however, they all speak in one voice, when they try to be a blessing to others, they are the one blessed most.

- ◆ Share an experience in which you made some sacrifices to serve those in need. How did you feel after you did that?

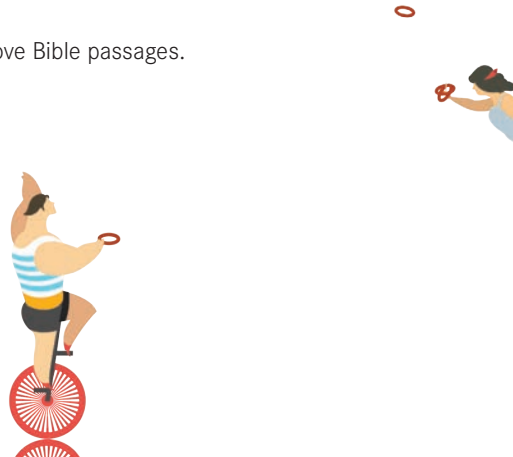
Consider the following sayings by King David, Jesus, and Apostle Paul:

King David said, "I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God that cost me nothing."
2 Samuel 24:24

Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." John 12:24-25

Apostle Paul said, "The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." 2 Corinthians 9:6

- ◆ Why do you think that people make sacrifices for others but in the end feel a sense of joy? What do they "get" out of it?
- ◆ What do the above Bible passages say about the attitude of serving God and serving others?
- ◆ Share one principle that you derive from the above Bible passages.



ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

An important principle of sowing is to know who we are working for, so to speak. We sow generously not to make us feel good (though this is a great by-product). We do this because this is the right thing to do, and it honours God. Here is a great Bible passage to remind ourselves when we sow fearlessly.

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Colossians 3:17

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Deep down in our heart, we all long for meaning and making a difference in the world. We want to make the world a better place. We know that God likes it when we serve Him by serving others.

- ◆ What are some of the injustices/needs you see that break your heart? Share an example about how you might address that need?
- ◆ Where can you sow your seeds (your time, money, and talent)?
- ◆ We know that there is a time gap between sowing and reaping. What are some ways you can prevent yourself from getting discouraged prematurely?



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III FEARLESS BATTLING

PUT ON THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD, THAT
YOU MAY BE ABLE TO STAND AGAINST
THE SCHEMES OF THE DEVIL.

1 PETER 4:10

INTRODUCTION

War is scary. Sadly, our world has seen many wars and entire countries and cultures have been changed because of them. Stories coming from the battlefield are gruesome.

In war, the ultimate goal of any military is to be successful. To win. And to do that, they employ many strategies to defeat their enemy. From air, sea, and land, the force of militaries will use all means necessary to be victorious.

While armies tend to use the element of surprise to outsmart their opponent, there is one role in the military that is extremely surprising ... and effective. The sniper.

Snipers are hidden with their rifles perched, sometimes waiting days to take their shot. These snipers could be anywhere, near or far. The longest sniper kill ever recorded was 2.475km! That's from 633 Kings Road to Victoria Park in Causeway Bay!

Satan is a lot like a sniper. Hidden. Waiting patiently to take his shot. Waiting to deceive and attack our faith. That's why we must be aware at all times. Because we are in a war every day of our lives. A spiritual war. And Satan is the most cunning of enemies.

War is scary. But God does not leave us hanging. He knows that this battle is raging and He gives us tools so we can live a **fearless** life.

WARM UP QUESTIONS

- ◆ What games have you played that involve strategy or being sneaky? How does it feel to outwit your opponent?
- ◆ Have you ever been deceived by someone? Maybe it was an email scam or an internet attack? How did it feel? How did you respond?

MAIN STUDY

To begin talking about spiritual warfare, it must be acknowledged that we are at war. Although we usually don't necessarily see this war happening around us, we know it's there.

Paul explains in the letter to the Ephesians that this is happening.

¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. ¹¹Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹²For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Ephesians 6:10-12

- ◆ Do you acknowledge that there is a spiritual war in our lives? What are some ways you've seen evidence of spiritual warfare in your own life?

- ◆ What are some "schemes" of the devil?

- ◆ How does Paul say we can be strong? In what ways do you see the Lord's power in your life?

It is important to note that not every single issue we struggle with is coming from the spiritual realm. If there's sin in our lives, it doesn't necessarily mean that a demon needs to be cast out. But, on the other hand, it's important to be aware that attacks do come when we are least expecting them. And sometimes these attacks from the devil are hidden from plain sight.

Some examples of what could be spiritual warfare might look like:

- Doubting God and His goodness
- Loss of spiritual zeal
- Not praying or spending time with God
- Feeling lost/uncertain in life
- Lack of peace
- Drawn to bondage
- Unusual amount of stress/illness centred around a certain event.

- ◆ Have you ever experienced any of these issues? What would you normally attribute these to, if not spiritual warfare? What are some of the fears you have?

- ◆ If you're comfortable, share any experiences you may have encountered during a time where you felt you were in spiritual warfare. You never know, your story could help someone else.

It's important to note that many Christians have encountered these attacks. You are not alone if you have come face to face with these struggles. This is what small groups are for - to encourage one another through the tough times (and celebrate the fun times). Take some time during this study to pray for anyone who may be in this zone. It's OK. You are not alone.

Since so many of these issues could be classified as something else or something to ignore, we are reminded to stay aware of what's really going on:

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 1 Peter 5:8

And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

2 Corinthians 2:10-11

Now that we are aware that these things are happening, it's important to stay on guard; to be watchful and to protect ourselves from what is coming towards us. Paul goes into the classic instruction about how we are to guard against these schemes and attacks by giving us a heavenly wardrobe:

¹³Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. Ephesians 6:13-18

God gives us a way out. We are in this battle and we will continue to be in battle, but God gives us protection and weapons to fight with.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

Let's take a deeper look at this armour Paul instructs us to wear:



Belt of Truth: Understanding that Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44), it's important for us to be prepared with the truth. With so many ways of being deceived in our world (Genesis 3:4-5), we should be completely aware of the truth of God so we can be prepared against any false teaching (2 Peter 2:1-3). It's important to know the truth, because the truth will set us free (John 8:32).

My soul is weary with sorrow; strengthen me according to your word. Psalm 119:28

- ◆ Truth is like an anchor in a storm. How do you know the truth? Are you actively pursuing truth?



Breastplate of Righteousness: In war, a breastplate fits over our chest and protects our vital organs. Righteousness is given to us by God. Finding comfort in the strong protection of our Creator should remind us that we are secure because of the righteousness we have from God. How we trust in His protection will help us be **fearless** in battle.

We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but He who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him. 1 John 5:18

- ◆ God is the one who declares us righteous. If God is unshakable, why do we sometimes fear that we are not protected by Him? How can we always be assured of our righteousness?



Feet Ready with the Gospel of Peace: In war, we should have two strategies. Defense **and** offense. While Satan is hurling his attacks at us, we trust that we are protected. But also, we're given the strength and motivation to spread God's love among the people. Jesus tells us to **go** and make disciples. And our feet should be ready.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them ... and teaching them ... And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Matthew 28:19-20

- ◆ How do we go and make disciples? As ambassadors for Christ, what are some ways we can be a light to our friends, family, coworkers, and neighbours?



Shield of Faith: Any attack from Satan can be blocked by our faith. Continued faith in God will keep us focused and ready to take on anything that comes against us. Shields deflect anything thrown at them. And faith in God will continue to give us strength.

And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God...whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." Mark 11:22-24

- ◆ Sometimes our faith can be strong and sometimes it can be weak. Knowing that our faith is what protects us, what are some ways that we can strengthen our faith? Read 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. What does Paul say makes us stronger?



Helmet of Salvation: A helmet protects our brain. We are to continue to be renewed by God and our minds are a key element. Our salvation should never be forgotten and we should be reminded how we received this salvation, freely given by God ... because Satan is always attempting to lead our minds astray (2 Corinthians 11:3).

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:2

- ◆ Not only is there a battle for our souls, but a battle for our minds. What are some ways (in today's world) that you're seeing the battle raging for our minds? Do you sense that your mind is protected? Read Philippians 4:8. How are we to tune our minds?



Sword of the Spirit: A sword is used both offensively and defensively. And in this case, the sword Paul is speaking of is God's word. Not only does God's word illuminate the path in front of us (Psalm 119:105), but it can pierce any deception or untruth that comes against us. Continue to use God's word and commit it to memory so you can be prepared for anything that comes against you.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Hebrews 4:12

◆ Read 2 Timothy 3:16. How is scripture useful for us? How can we use this in battle?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

- ◆ When you encounter a spiritual battle, what are practical ways that you can guard against attack?
- ◆ How can you become more aware of the schemes of the devil in your own life? What are the warning signs?
- ◆ We are most susceptible to the attacks of Satan when we are distant from God. How can you grow closer to God this week or month? What are some steps you can take to have a better relationship with God?
- ◆ Are you learning how to use the Sword of the Spirit? What are some ways to help you grow in God's word? What are some habits that you can put in place to help you study the Bible?



NOTES



Tim LaTour has been on staff at Island ECC for almost 13 years. Tim is married to Cindy and they have three awesome kids together.

IV FEARLESS LIVING

WHO KNOWS WHETHER YOU HAVE
NOT COME TO THE KINGDOM
FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS?

ESTHER 4:14



INTRODUCTION

God's treasured possession. A Kingdom of Priests. A Holy Nation. These are the names of the Jewish people. "A People with a Purpose" might be another way to put it. In making a covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3, God chose the nation of Israel to reveal His power, mercy, glory and other attributes. Their purpose was to point other people to God.

At many times throughout history, being God's chosen people has seemed to be more a curse than blessing as the Jews have suffered and endured centuries of persecution, hatred, extermination and exile, purely because of their identity. (Jewish humour is laced with this bitter-sweetness. A prisoner in a concentration camp looks up at the sky and says, "Lord, I know we are your chosen people, but once in a while couldn't you choose someone else?")

Yet through this, Jews have survived, miraculously, some would say. Leo Tolstoy wrote: "... the nation, which neither slaughter nor torture could exterminate ... the nation which first proclaimed the word of the Lord, the nation which preserved the prophecy for so long and passed it on to the rest of humanity, such a nation cannot vanish."

The story of Esther is one where we see this unfold: the persecution and genocidal plans against the Jews, and God's miraculous intervention to protect and save His people.

Esther's story shows us that God has a purpose for His people, both collectively and individually. And like Esther, God also wants you to live free from fear and to remember that He has a purpose for your life.

WARM UP QUESTIONS

- ◆ Which movie's events are closest in time to the events in the book of Esther? (Answer below)
 - A. Noah (starring Russell Crowe) B. Exodus: Gods and Kings (starring Christian Bale)
 - C. 300 (starring Gerard Butler) D. Ben-Hur (starring Jack Huston)
- ◆ How many stars would you give each of these movies? (Based on personal enjoyment, not biblical or historical accuracy!)
- ◆ What is your favourite Bible movie?

MAIN STUDY

Read about Esther in Esther 2:1-9. What do we know about her appearance, her history and her identity?

After Esther was “discovered” in the search for a new queen, she was brought into the royal palace and into Xerxes’ harem. But this was not the easy life it may sound like. List some reasons why Esther would have been living in fear.

Esther 1:19-22

Esther 2:10

Esther 4:10-11

- ◆ “Favour” is one of the strongest themes throughout the story of Esther. Using the English Standard Version(ESV) of the Bible, find the 8 times that the word “favour” appears in the book of Esther. (Look at chapters 2, 4, 5, 7 and 8)

In Hebrew, favour is “hesed” or “cheched.” It’s commonly translated as loving-kindness, steadfast love, merciful love or loyalty but it is difficult to translate to English and none of these capture the entirety of the word. “Hesed” is used only when there is some kind of tie between two parties and therefore describes God’s covenant love with His people.

- ◆ What circumstances would you consider more than just “lucky,” in which you see God’s favour to Esther, and to the Jews?
- ◆ What was God’s purpose for the Jews and the nation of Israel? Read Exodus 18:1-2, 10-11; 19:4-6.

The word ‘holiness’ comes from the Hebrew “qadosh,” which means set apart, purified, consecrated (also otherness, transcendent, unlike any other).

- ◆ Read Esther 3:8. Were the Jews living in a way that was “set apart”? What does this separateness show?
- ◆ How is God’s purpose for His chosen people made clear in the events in Esther’s life?
- ◆ Ephesians 3:6 says, *This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.* What is the significance for non-Jews in the light of God’s covenant love?

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

The Jewish holiday of Purim is celebrated on the 14th and 15th day of the twelfth month (Adar) of the Jewish calendar, which is usually around March. The name comes from the “pur,” which were dice that were used for superstitious guidance on assigning dates for events. Haman threw these dice and believed that randomness or some kinds of spirits would select the month in which to carry out his plan for the extermination of the Jews (Esther 3:7). By contrast, Mordecai believed that God had a divine plan for everything that was happening, and a purpose for why Esther was chosen to be queen.

Purim is a boisterous holiday of eating and drinking (alcohol is permitted for this festival). The story of Esther is read in the synagogue and the congregation boos and hisses and uses noise-makers (like New Year’s Eve rattlers) whenever Haman’s name is mentioned. It is also a bit like Halloween in that children dress up in costumes, to mirror the way that Esther hid her identity.

- ◆ What do you think about this quote by Albert Einstein: “God does not play dice with the universe.”

PERSONAL APPLICATION

How many times is God's name mentioned in this book? None! Amazingly, Esther is the only book of the Bible where God is never mentioned by name. Does this mean that God was absent from this story? Was He out of control of the events? Hopefully after this study, you know the answer is a resounding 'No!'

- ◆ What personal meaning could this have for you, i.e. that God was firmly in control even though there wasn't explicit reference to Him?

- ◆ How could this apply to times in your life when God does not appear to be there?

- ◆ What is one situation in the past or present where you might have been positioned "for such a time as this?"

- ◆ In their adherence to God's laws, the Jews lived a noticeably different lifestyle from those around them. Can you share one way you are living and making choices that let other people know you're a Christian?



NOTES



Sherman Chau, his wife Becky and their three children have been back in Hong Kong since 2011. He enjoys lazy weekend afternoons and family outings with their dog, Tibia (so named because her leg bone was broken when she was rescued.)

FEARLESS TRUSTING

AND HOPE DOES NOT DISAPPOINT,
BECAUSE THE LOVE OF GOD HAS BEEN
POURED OUT WITHIN OUR HEARTS
THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT
WHO WAS GIVEN TO US.

ROMANS 5:5



INTRODUCTION

How do we face up to the reality of suffering in this world? News reports bombard us day by day with stories of suffering and tragedy. We can become desensitized to it all. Yet nothing seems to prepare us for the shock of tragedy when it strikes close to home. The Bible actually has a lot to say about suffering, and most if not all biblical heroes experienced suffering in their lives, yet found a richer and deeper experience of God through their suffering.

Have you ever wondered what part suffering can play in the plan of God? Or where is God in the midst of suffering? This study will help you deal with these questions.

WARM UP QUESTIONS

- ◆ What news stories have moved or affected you most in recent times?
- ◆ Have you had a difficult experience that brought you closer to God? If you feel comfortable, share something about this story.

MAIN STUDY

In this study we will be taking a close look at Psalm 22. Like many other psalms, this one is written by David, who walked closely with God and yet he also wondered where God was during times of trouble. We will explore how he kept his faith in God through it all.

In Psalm 22, David cries out to God for hope and deliverance.

Have you ever felt like God is silent when you cry out to Him? Have you ever felt like ‘God is so far from saving me?’ That is how David felt when he wrote Psalm 22. It is one of many ‘psalms of lament’ that David wrote to express feelings of pain, frustration, longing and hope to God when he faced life and death situations. It also serves as a model for us to pray to God when facing difficult circumstances.

Read Psalm 22:1-5

- ◆ What emotions is David experiencing in verses 1-2? Have you ever spoken words like this to God? If not, would you?

- ◆ What things does David remind himself of in verses 3-5? How does reflecting on these help David to reorient his vision?

When we fall on hard times our vision is often cast downward, and we only see ourselves and our circumstances. It’s helpful to widen our perspective so we can remember that God is still in control, and recall His faithfulness to previous generations who put their trust in Him.

You may have heard some stories of people who trusted in God through tough times. How do these stories encourage you to put your faith in God in difficult circumstances?

Read Psalm 22:6-10

- ◆ In these verses David comes back down to earth as he surveys his situation. How is his confidence shaken by hurtful words spoken by others?

- ◆ Have you ever had your confidence in God shaken by the words of others? How did you respond, internally or externally?

- ◆ What is David reminded of in verses 9-10 and how does this restore his confidence?

In Psalm 22:11-21, David paints a vivid picture of his dire circumstances and asks God for deliverance. This psalm could be written in response to the events of 2 Samuel 16. This part of the Bible describes how David’s son Absalom conducted a military coup, took over the throne temporarily, and forced David to flee for his life. At this low point David had lost his son, his palace, his kingdom, his honour, and was in danger of losing his life.

- ◆ What are some words you would use to describe David’s feelings at this time?

- ◆ How does David ask God to intervene in his situation?

In the final part of the Psalm David looks ahead in faith and hope. He is actually looking forward to a time **after** God has delivered him, even though that deliverance had not yet occurred.

Read Psalm 22:22-31

- ◆ What is David looking forward to in these verses?

- ◆ How is David’s faith and reliance on God expressed in these verses, and how does he seek to honour God in his suffering?

David looks forward to the hope of glory that will be restored by God one day. We also look forward to a time when God will restore the hope of glory to this world.

Read Romans 5:1-5

- ◆ What does 'peace with God' mean to you?
- ◆ How does God use our sufferings to add to our glory?
- ◆ How does this hope help us to persevere through suffering?



PERSONAL APPLICATION

The Psalms reflect the many human emotions and circumstances that we all face in our lifetimes. They encourage us to take our cries and longings to God in prayer, to ask for deliverance, and to trust Him with the outcome of our prayers. They are a great way for us to respond to difficult circumstances in our lives as prayers. Spend some time reflecting on this psalm as a prayer to God now either by yourself or in groups.

- ◆ What favourite Psalm have you personally found beneficial to read as a prayer when going through tough times?
- ◆ What are some ways that your trust in God been strengthened after reading from Psalms?
- ◆ Discuss some practical ways your group can help each other and strengthen one another in difficult times.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

This psalm found its fulfillment in the suffering of Jesus. When Jesus was on the cross He quoted from Psalm 22, *'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'* (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34). The Gospels tell us that Jesus fulfilled this Psalm in other ways too (John 19:23-24).

The end of the Psalm anticipates the glory and honour that will come as a result of Jesus' suffering, pointing to Jesus' resurrection and ascension. This psalm finds its ultimate fulfillment not just in the suffering and deliverance of King David, but in the life of Jesus, the true King, who suffered on this earth but was sustained by God, whose suffering won eternal glory. And this is the glory that we also share in as God's children.

On the cross Jesus wasn't just quoting the first verse but recalling the entirety of the psalm and the hope it contains for God's salvation. Read v.4 of Psalm 22 again.

- ◆ How does this verse help us to understand the hope that Jesus had as He endured the cross?

NOTES



Alistair Chiu has been a pastor at Island ECC for one year and he likes meeting people, teaching from the Bible, spending time with his fiancée Emily, and enjoying the beautiful outdoors that Hong Kong has to offer.



VI
**FEARLESS
 SURRENDERING**

FOR THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS
 IS FOOLISHNESS TO THOSE
 WHO DON'T BELIEVE BUT TO
 US WHO ARE BEING SAVED IT IS
 THE POWER OF GOD.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:18

INTRODUCTION

It was over a hundred years ago that the noted historian Baron John Acton first coined the phrase, “Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely”.

Said another way, “power is powerful”. Its intoxicating nature can bring about undesired internal changes and relational deficiencies. A recent study (Dr. Ian Robertson, 2012) claims that the rush brought on by holding power is similar to that of cocaine use. Tested in baboons, the study found similar increases in dopamine levels in the brain when given cocaine as compared to higher levels of dominance hierarchy among other baboons.

Even biology is confirming what we have known for so long – power can be addictive.

But power is not intrinsically a bad thing. In fact, Proverbs 24:15 tells us that the “wise prevail through power”^(NIV). So power, even with its potentially addictive aspect, can be used in wise ways to influence others for good.

The key is being aware of its subtle and idolatrous lull, and to leverage your power, or influence, for the purposes of God, not yourself.

WARM UP QUESTIONS

- ◆ From Batman to Wonder Woman, there is almost always a superhero movie showing at the theatres. What is your favourite superhero movie?
- ◆ Who is the most powerful person you have ever met?
- ◆ What teacher influenced you the most as a kid?

MAIN STUDY

One of the most succinct passages of scripture that speaks of Jesus' incarnation is found in Philippians 2. It's sometimes referred to as the "kenosis" passage, because that is the Greek word for "emptying" that is used to describe what happened to Christ when He left the comforts of heaven to descend to earth in the form of a man.

Misunderstandings of this passage have led to numerous heretical views: that Christ lost His divinity being the most severe. But orthodox Christians have held to the strong view that this teaching does not mean Christ was less than God by emptying Himself, but rather maintained full divinity, and full humanity at the same time.

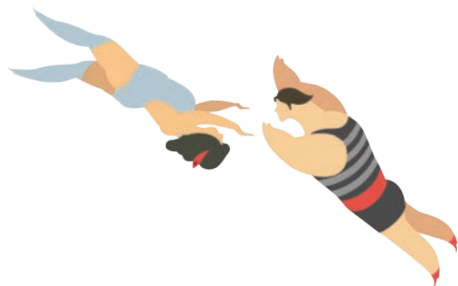
Let's have a look at Philippians 2:1-11, beginning with verses 1-4:

¹So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ²complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Paul uses the simple word "if", but not in a pure conditional sense. He is not alluding to mere possibility ("If you arrive early, you may get a seat"), but instead pointing to the obvious link between two concepts. We may better understand this to be read, "since there is encouragement, etc."

◆ What are the motivations that Paul speaks about in v.1?

◆ After Paul lines up for us a godly motivation, what behaviours does he then lay out for us in verses 2-3?



⁵Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

◆ What can we learn about Jesus' perspective toward God the Father in v.6?

◆ What are the two things that Christ did to "Himself" in verses 7 and 8?

◆ How are these two things different? How would you re-write in common language verses 7 and 8?

◆ What makes this Christ-like attitude difficult in our culture today?

⁹Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

You can see from this that Jesus emptied and humbled Himself, and God later exalted Him. In a similar way, we are told that if we "humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, He will lift us up in the due time" (1 Peter 5:7).

◆ How does the promise of God to "lift you up in due time" help you in your efforts to be humble now?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

When we speak of power, you may not immediately think of yourself as a powerful person. However, even if your business card or your place on an organisational chart does not ooze with power, you are in fact powerful. You have influence. You have leverage.

- ◆ In what ways can it be possible to be both humble and ambitious?
- ◆ What are the secrets to maintaining a balance of both?
- ◆ How can fellow Christians encourage one another in this area?



ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

The book of Proverbs provides some helpful insight into how to manage power in our lives:

Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act. Proverbs 3:27

Counsel and sound judgement are mine; I have insight, I have power. Proverbs 8:14

Hopes placed in mortals die with them; all the promise of their power comes to nothing.

Proverbs 11:17

The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit. Proverbs 18:21

The wise prevail through great power, and those who have knowledge muster their strength.

Proverbs 24:5

- ◆ What can you learn about power from each of these proverbs?

John Stott states: “The authority by which the Christian leader leads is not power but love, not force but example, not coercion but reasoned persuasion. Leaders have power, but power is safe only in the hands of those who humble themselves to serve.”

- ◆ What do you think about his quote?

NOTES



Brett Hilliard and his wife Shannon have lived in Hong Kong since 2001. They have four kids, living on three separate continents, and two French bulldogs.

**FEAR NOT
FOR I AM WITH YOU
BE NOT DISMAYED
FOR I AM YOUR GOD
I WILL STRENGTHEN YOU
I WILL HELP YOU
I WILL UPHOLD YOU
WITH MY RIGHTEOUS
RIGHT HAND**

ISAIAH 41:10



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