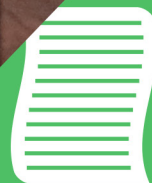


RECEIVE

EPIPHANY SEASON & LENT 2021
ST. MARK'S CHURCH



SECOND
READINGS



Dear Saint Markers,

While the Christian life truly centers on service and self-denial, it is fueled by a constant and nearly self-indulgent reception of God's abundance through Christ and through the Holy Spirit. Scripture says that these two members of the Trinity reside not simply near each believer, but within each believer. This spiritual reality is most clearly illustrated each week as we receive the Holy Eucharist and it is also the theme of this all-church study.

For a third consecutive year, Saint Mark's will journey together from Epiphany to Holy Week by connecting, through the lectionary readings, three vital environments for our parish:

- Weekly Eucharistic Services
- Cornerstone Groups
- 5-Minute Daily Devotions

I hope that during this 11-week study you will receive a new recognition of God's grace as your faith deepens and becomes more personal. And perhaps you have someone on your heart who would appreciate receiving an invitation to join us this season.

With anticipation of God's activity on our behalf,

Father Mark



THE RECEIVE EXPERIENCE

The Bible passages for this study come from the lectionary's Second Readings (the New Testament Epistles) which will also form the scriptural basis for Saint Mark's weekly preaching during this all-church experience. Throughout these 11-weeks, be ready to share whatever you receive from God, the miraculous or the mundane, with your Cornerstone Group. On one end of the spectrum, this might include a special revelation or a newly uncovered spiritual gifting. On the other, it might include a kind word or a simple gift. You can see this receive-share dynamic in the apostle Paul's transmission of the Easter story, which we will again receive and share this coming April.

For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. - 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 (NRSV).

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

- 1. Scripture:** The Second Reading passages in this study are printed for use during Eucharistic services, personal devotions, and Cornerstone Group meetings.
- 2. Sermon Notes:** If desired, bring this guide to Eucharistic services in order to record insights and questions that arise from the weekly teaching.
- 3. Five-Minute Daily Devotions:** Simple devotional practices are given for each day of the week to encourage further growth. Begin or continue a habit of spiritual discipline throughout this study. For some, five minutes each day will be a stretch. For others, five minutes is just stretching out. Cornerstone Group members who wish to encourage each other in these devotions can discuss their experiences at each meeting.
- 4. Background/Context:** To enhance understanding and aid personal and Cornerstone Group interpretation, scholarly perspective is offered for each passage by Associate Rector Rev. Dr. Amy Peeler.
- 5. Cornerstone Group Meeting:** Leaders and groups will find icebreakers, discussion questions, and optional group ideas for each meeting.

If you would like a PDF of this study, go to the Saint Mark's website at stmarks-geneva.org.

Notes for Cornerstone Group Leaders can be found at the end of this guide.

PREPARATION

(JANUARY 6-9)

FIVE-MINUTE DAILY DEVOTIONS

WEDNESDAY

Epiphany Reading: Read Ephesians 3:1-12. How would you summarize what Paul is trying to communicate in this passage? We have received “access to God” (verse 12). What do you think are the practical implications and applications of that access?

THURSDAY

Simplicity: How busy or stretched do you feel right now? Where can you remove something for the sake of simplicity and spiritual health during the course of this church-wide study? Review and address your calendar, if needed. Is anything interfering with your weekly worship experience (in person or online) or your Cornerstone Group participation? Bring any identified and needless complexity to God in prayer.

FRIDAY

Practice God’s Presence: The triune God is everywhere, and specifically present with and within his people (e.g. 2 Timothy 1:4). Pay attention to God’s presence during this brief devotional time. Focus inward, then focus on your surroundings. How might you also remind yourself of his presence in the next 24 hours?

SATURDAY

Prayer (Petition): Where do you desire to receive an epiphany, a revelation, or an insight from the Lord? Meditate on this, and then spend time in prayer asking God accordingly. Pray in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

WEEK 1: SOME DISCIPLES

(JANUARY 10-16)

SCRIPTURE: ACTS 19:1-7 (NRSV)

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. ² He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" They replied, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." ³ Then he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They answered, "Into John's baptism." ⁴ Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus." ⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied— ⁷ altogether there were about twelve of them.

SERMON NOTES

FIVE-MINUTE DAILY DEVOTIONS

SUNDAY

Silence: Spend your devotional time in silence. Be still. Keep your mind and body at rest. Actively listen for God or simply rest in His presence. Afterwards, note how easy or difficult this was for you. Was it refreshing or draining? How often is silence a part of your week?

MONDAY

Devotional Reading: Reread this week's passage. As you read, notice which word, phrase, or part of the story stands out to you. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you why this part of the Scripture captured your attention. Pray that your week ahead will be spiritually centered along the lines of these verses.

TUESDAY

Examen: The prayer of examen taught by Ignatious of Loyola is a spiritual reflection on the day's events. These steps are patterned accordingly.

1. Remind yourself of God's presence. Ask the Holy Spirit for the grace to see clearly and with spiritual insight.
2. In an attitude of thankfulness, recall notable experiences from the past 24 hours.
Pay particular attention to your emotions.
 - If the experience was positive, note how God may have been active and present.
 - If the experience was negative, ask for perspective, patience and humility.
3. Prayerfully reflect on the next 24 hour period. Prepare your heart and lighten your burden by asking for God's assistance where you anticipate any need.

WEDNESDAY

Write Your Own Prayer: What is on your mind and heart this January? Write out a prayer of any length along those lines. Choose each word carefully or write in a stream of consciousness style. Pray and reflect as you write. Then pray your written prayer back to God.

THURSDAY

From the Psalms: Read Psalm 29. What can you ascribe to the Lord today? Where do you need peace or strength? Pray as you feel led.

FRIDAY

Discernment: Use this time to consider and reflect on an upcoming decision. Is there any scripture that speaks into your situation? Who can provide wisdom and perspective for you? Do you need to pray for divine insight as you decide between two seemingly equal choices or for the courage to act? Listen carefully for God's voice in this time of discernment.

SATURDAY

Prayer (Worship): Spend time in prayer praising God for who He is. Focus on his character and virtues. Resist any urges to make personal requests. He knows what you want and need. God is glorified and you build spiritual depth as you bring your words of adoration to Him.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

This encounter indicates that early Christians too struggled with misunderstandings and incomplete beliefs and invites readers to refine their own understandings of key terms in Luke's writings.

Often, when one hears "disciple" the word conjures up a picture of one of the twelve men Jesus called to follow him. Here, however, it becomes clear that Luke can use "disciple" for anyone who commits to follow another. These men in Acts 19 seem to be disciples of John the Baptist, a group mentioned in Luke 5:33. In Luke 6:13 it becomes clear that "disciple" can encompass anyone interested in Jesus (and John's disciples would surely be interested in him) but "apostle" denotes the twelve chosen (Luke 6:13 and Acts 6:2).

Paul also refers to this group as "believers." In Acts, Luke frequently uses this designation to describe those who believe in Christ (2:44; 4:4, 32; 5:14; 11:21; 13:48; 14:1; 17:34). It seems they had done so, but not received the fullness of the good news, and therefore, had not embraced the practices that reflect this good news.

Finally, Luke notes that while they had been baptized only into John's baptism of repentance, now after Paul's teaching they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Mention of Jesus' name alone has caused confusion in light of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19) and church tradition where Christians are baptized into the triune name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Yet, this confusion is cleared up earlier in Acts. In Acts 8:16, believers in Samaria had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and so had not yet received the Holy Spirit. Because these men in Ephesus in Acts 19 do receive the Holy Spirit (19:6), they must have been baptized in the triune name. Many times throughout Luke's writings the "name" of Jesus indicates not just his own personal name, but the powerful divine name of the triune God that is his by being God (Luke 1:49; 9:48, 49; 10:17; 13:35; 19:38; Acts 2:21).

This community had to be instructed in the fullness of what it meant to be a disciple, a believer in Jesus, a fullness which included relationship with God his Father and the Holy Spirit.

CORNERSTONE GROUP MEETING

ICEBREAKER (CHOOSE ONE)

- Share your full name and something about its origin(s).
- Share a time when you received something unexpected.

SERMON REFLECTION

- What stood out to you from the sermon this past weekend?
- What questions did the sermon prompt in you?

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION

- What jumps out at you from this passage? Why?
- What do you think this passage teaches us about baptism?
- What do you think this passage teaches us about the Holy Spirit?
- What do you think this passage teaches us about how believers grow in their faith?

APPLICATION

- Share something you once believed but no longer do.
- Describe an important moment of growth in your own spiritual life.
- What, if anything, does baptism mean to you?
- Share something you are hoping to receive from or during this eleven-week study.

GROUP IDEAS FOR CG LEADERS

If this is your first meeting as a Cornerstone Group, discuss what expectations you have for each other, for the meeting, for the daily devotions, and for weekend service attendance (in person or online). Writing these expectations down can help with clarity and accountability. If your group is an established group, or you have a written covenant, revisit these group expectations and check in on any needed adjustments for this study.

As a group, read the account of John's baptism from Mark 1:4-11.

Particularly with the book of Acts, and passages like this, a healthy discussion of "prescription" (the Bible is teaching what should be normative for today's church) vs. "description" (the Bible is describing how it first happened) might yield fruit.

WEEK 2: THE BODY

(JANUARY 17-23)



SCRIPTURE: 1 CORINTHIANS 6:12-20 (NRSV)

"All things are lawful for me," but not all things are beneficial. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything. ¹³ "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food," and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴ And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. ¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, "The two shall be one flesh." ¹⁷ But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. ¹⁸ Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. ¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? ²⁰ For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

SERMON NOTES

FIVE-MINUTE DAILY DEVOTIONS

SUNDAY

Song: The Epiphany hymn "O Splendor of God's Glory Bright" was written by Ambrose of Milan in the fourth century and concludes with words of praise to the trinitarian God. Receive it as a prayer and reflect on its words and meaning.

O splendor of God's glory bright,
from light eternal bringing light,
O Light of light, the fountain spring,
O Day, all days illumining.

Come, very Sun of heaven's love,
in lasting radiance from above,
and pour the Holy Spirit's ray
on all we think or do today.

Teach us to love with all our might;
drive envy out, remove all spite;
turn to the good each troubling care,
and give us grace your name to bear.

All glory be to God Most High;
to God the Son let praises rise;
whom with the Spirit we adore
forever and forevermore.

MONDAY

Devotional Reading: Reread this week's passage. What words or phrases seem meaningful to you? Copy, highlight, or simply reflect on these. Is there a personal invitation from God to you somewhere in this scripture? Read it again, if helpful.

TUESDAY

Prayer (For Your Cornerstone Group): Pray for the individuals in your group. Pray that God will be especially present at the next group meeting. Pray for your group leader, service projects, outreach to newcomers or anything else that makes up the ministry of your group. Pray especially for your own participation and investment.

WEDNESDAY

Sabbath: *Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation. - Genesis 2:1-3 (NRSV)*

How will you emulate God this week in marking out a day for rest? What plans do you need to make or cancel? Examine your patterns in general and pray specifically for any needed adjustments this week.

THURSDAY

First Reading: Read 1 Samuel 3:1-10. To what extent do you feel verse 1 also characterizes the current times? In what ways have you recently been attentive to the Lord's voice? Listen quietly for a minute or two.

FRIDAY

Fasting: Voluntarily opt out of a meal or another earthly need or desire in order to focus on your spiritual needs and desires. What can you do without over the next day, week, or for the rest of this study for the purpose of prayer and spiritual formation? Pray for discipline, strength, and the invisible effect of your devotion.

SATURDAY

Prayer (Confession): Spend time in prayer remembering and acknowledging the ways you have recently participated in the sins of the world.

If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. - 1 John 1:9 (NRSV)

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

In no uncertain terms, Scripture here affirms the importance of the body. Ours is no Gnostic religion, a preference for the spirit resulting in a disregard for the material. Quite the opposite. Here Paul proclaims that the Holy Presence of God which dwelt in the inner sanctum of the Jewish temple has now taken up residence in the bodies of these Corinthian Christians. To encourage them to take their bodies seriously, he must unsettle some common and damaging assumptions present in the community.

First, he quotes a slogan uttered by the Corinthians and espoused by the Cynic philosophers of the day: "All things are lawful for me." Cynics were known for bucking conventions to invite people to consider their own imprisonment to culture. They would live as if no conventional rules applied to them. Following suit, the Corinthians may have misunderstood their freedom in Christ as a license for anarchy. Paul reminds them that they must always serve something, and serving Christ means considering what is beneficial not only for oneself, but for the whole community.

Second, he quotes them again; this time for a misapplication of a Christian teaching. Jesus had instructed his followers that the food that went into the body did not matter that much (Matthew 15:11). Corinthians were right to affirm that digestion did not matter that much now and would not continue in the future, but they were wrong to believe that anything one did with his or her body did not matter. Paul seeks to correct their tendency toward extremism. Just because the church no longer had to follow Jewish kosher laws did not mean that Christians had free reign to do anything with their bodies.

Hence he reminds them that how they treat themselves and others matters now because the Holy Spirit dwells within them.

CORNERSTONE GROUP MEETING

ICEBREAKER (CHOOSE ONE)

- What do you like to do with your free time?
- What food, if any, do you often crave?

SERMON REFLECTION

- What stood out to you from the sermon this past weekend?
- What questions did the sermon prompt in you?

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION

- What words or phrases in this scripture seem significant or surprising to you?
- What ideas do you think Paul is teaching against in this passage?
- What attitudes do you think Paul is teaching against in this passage?
- How do you think verse 17 relates to the rest of this passage?
- In your own words, how would you summarize Paul's teaching in this scripture?

APPLICATION

- If appropriate, share something that you do which you feel is "lawful", but has not proved itself to be beneficial.
- What are some ways you can "glorify God in your body" this coming week (verse 20)?

GROUP IDEAS FOR CG LEADERS

Having a special snack or food served during the meeting could be a tangible way to enter into the passage (if Covid appropriate).

If you lead an open group, your group prayer time can include or focus on inviting and welcoming others to the group. Pray specifically for those group members who have identified individuals to invite.

PASSAGE NOTE

Most scholars believe that the parenthetical phrases in verses 12 and 13 are sayings that Paul is quoting back to the Corinthians. See also the Background/Context above.

WEEK 3: TIME HAS GROWN SHORT

(JANUARY 24-30)



SCRIPTURE: 1 CORINTHIANS 7:29-31 (NRSV)

I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none,³⁰ and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions,³¹ and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

SERMON NOTES

FIVE-MINUTE DAILY DEVOTIONS

SUNDAY

Nicene Creed: Jesus' endless kingdom is referenced in the second part of the Nicene Creed. Read this creed aloud or silently to affirm and encourage your faith. What else do you notice? End your time with prayers of praise and thanksgiving.

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.

Through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down
from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius
Pilate; he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again

in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the
living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the
giver of life, who proceeds from the Father
and the Son.

With the Father and the Son he is worshiped
and glorified.

He has spoken through the Prophets.

**We believe in one holy catholic and
apostolic Church.**

We acknowledge one baptism for the
forgiveness of sins. We look for the
resurrection of the dead, and the life
of the world to come.

Amen.*

MONDAY

Devotional Reading: Reread this week's passage. This time enter into the scripture. What do you feel? Who do you relate to? What would you do similarly? Differently? Are there any related situations in your life? Reflect in prayerful conversation with God.

TUESDAY

Compassion: Consider those you have encountered in the past few days. Who may be in need of Christian compassion? How can the love of God become credible to them through your words or an act of service? Pray for that individual and your own courage to act. Pray also for your heart to become more like Christ's, as you serve in his name.

WEDNESDAY

The Lord's Prayer: From Matthew 6, Luke 11, or your memory. Pray and repeat as desired. What part of Jesus' model prayer is nearest to you today?

THURSDAY

Gospel Reading: Read Mark 1:14-20. How might Jesus have described the "good news of God"? What do you think Jesus means by the phrase "fish for people"? What in this passage resonates with you?

FRIDAY

Prayer (For Weekend Eucharistic Services): Ask God for his blessings on the upcoming weekend services at St. Mark's. Pray for the teaching team and for all who serve. For newcomers and long time members. Pray also for yourself, for your engagement in worship, in the hearing of Scripture, in generosity, fellowship, and joy.

SATURDAY

Prayer (Thanksgiving): How has God acted on your behalf in times past (recently as well as long ago)? Give him thanks. Remember how he has been merciful and generous. If desired, Psalm 100 or 124 can be your words of Thanksgiving.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

This passage of Corinthians completes a thought that begins in v. 17: "Let each of you lead the life that the Lord has assigned, to which God called you" repeated again in v. 20: "Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called." He enumerates the conditions of being circumcised or uncircumcised (v. 18-19), being a slave or being free (v. 21-23), being married or single (v. 25-29). Scholars familiar with Greco-Roman Stoicism notice a similarity between their ethical system and Paul's words. They too advocated against "rocking the boat." Whatever status into which one was born, one should remain. The divine principle that organized all things had slotted each person where they belonged. Instead of expending energy in regretting what had happened, the Stoics recommended that each person be at peace. Such a system works well, of course, for those who were born well. Those who would like to improve their social standing find it less compelling.

Paul, however, is not motivated by Stoic quietism, but by Christian eschatology, the belief that Jesus could return at any moment. He urged "staying where one was called" because the most important thing was to prepare oneself and invite others to be prepared for the coming of the Lord. Any energy spent on changing one's status was not worth the time lost.

The difference between the two systems becomes clear in Paul's last statement: "For the present form of this world is passing away (v. 31)." Whereas the Stoics had no hope for a righteous afterlife, Paul affirms that the form of the world in which some are slaves and some are free, and some are lonely for relationships and some are burdened by relationships will not last forever. God's restored world (see Romans 8) will in a relatively short amount of time arrive on the scene. Focusing on what will last, rather than what will pass away, should grab their primary attention.

CORNERSTONE GROUP MEETING

ICEBREAKER (CHOOSE ONE)

- Share a part of your life that you feel is nearing an end.
- Share something that is about to begin for you.

SERMON REFLECTION

- What stood out to you from the sermon this past weekend?
- What questions did the sermon prompt in you?

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION

- If Paul were here, what question would you ask him about this passage?
- What timeless truths do you think are being taught here?
- What do you think of Paul's applications or illustrations (i.e. wives, mourning, rejoicing, buying, and dealing)?

APPLICATION

- What part of your life, if any, could use a "time check"?
- Where do you need to hold onto something a bit more loosely?
- Where do you need to hold onto something a bit more tightly?

GROUP IDEAS FOR CG LEADERS

If anyone in your group is going through a significant transition - positive or negative - you can spend focused time in prayer for that person.

If desired, discuss ways in which your group meeting can effectively incorporate worship through music. Is someone in your group passionate about leading in this area? Does a group member play a suitable instrument? Would it be fitting for the group to sing together? Can recorded music be used effectively? Can a song-book be made available to your group? You may decide to have a trial run at one of your upcoming meetings.

WEEK 4: KNOWLEDGE

(JANUARY 31-FEBRUARY 6)



SCRIPTURE: 1 CORINTHIANS 8:1-13 (NRSV)

Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.² Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge;³ but anyone who loves God is known by him.

⁴ Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “no idol in the world really exists,” and that “there is no God but one.”⁵ Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords—⁶ yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

⁷ It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.⁸ “Food will not bring us close to God.” We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.⁹ But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.¹⁰ For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols?¹¹ So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed.¹² But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.¹³ Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.

SERMON NOTES

FIVE-MINUTE DAILY DEVOTIONS

SUNDAY

Simplicity: How successful were you at eliminating needless complexity this past week? What is one less thing you can do in this coming week? Revisit any commitments from the second devotion of this study or make new goals for the road ahead. Pray for the courage and discipline needed for a life of focus and depth.

MONDAY

Devotional Reading: Reread this week's passage. Read slowly enough to fully digest each sentence.

TUESDAY

Memorization: Practice memorizing verse 1b, "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up," or verses 2 and 3. Write and rewrite. Speak them out loud and in your mind. Place them in a location where you will see them regularly. Especially take note of how these scriptures direct you this week.

WEDNESDAY

Practice God's Presence: The triune God is everywhere, and specifically present with and for his people (e.g. 1 Corinthians 6:19). Pay attention to God's presence during this brief devotional time. Focus on your surroundings and then focus inwardly.

THURSDAY

From the Psalms: Read Psalm 111. Reread this Psalm slowly, with focus and reverence. Pray as you feel led.

FRIDAY

Self-Examination: To prompt self-examination, thoughtfully answer the following question: Over the past week, to what extent did the exercise of your own personal liberty become a "stumbling block" to others? See verse 9.

I don't know	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Considerably
0	1	2	3	4

Pray that God's Spirit would actively direct you in the coming week.

SATURDAY

Prayer (Petition): Spend time in prayer asking God to grant any specific requests currently on your mind. Are there any areas where you have unhelpfully substituted worry for prayer? He loves you and already knows what you want and need.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

As was true in Rome (as discussed in Romans 14), consumption of meat was a contentious issue in the early church of Corinth. Although Paul discusses a similar topic with them both, there are also important differences between these chapters. Romans 14 seems to be focused on the purchasing of meat, but 1 Corinthians 8 seems to locate the eating of meat in the temple of a false god.

Some in Corinth are arguing that since they know there is only one God, they can attend religious meals held in one of the many temples across the city. Surely this attendance would allow them to keep the social connections cultivated at such meals.

Others in the community, however, are seeing them present at the temples and partaking of the meals, and this is damaging their conscience. As newer converts, they may still be very tempted by eating the meal to fall back into devotion to the gods. Commentators suggest this has already happened, as indicated by Paul's intense word, "destroyed" (v.11). Some have left Christianity because of their confusion over seeing other Christians at these idolatrous meals.

For these Christians who are attending the meals, Paul denies neither their knowledge about God vs. the gods nor their liberty to eat, but urges restraint of that liberty for the sake of those who would be (or have been) damaged by it. No meal, no matter the quality or the social advantage it offers, is worth the soul of a Christian sibling.

CORNERSTONE GROUP MEETING

ICEBREAKER (CHOOSE ONE)

- What is a subject or topic about which you have more than passing knowledge?
- What is your favorite type of meat or vegetable, and how do you like it prepared?

SERMON REFLECTION

- What stood out to you from the sermon this past weekend?
- What questions did the sermon prompt in you?

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION

- What jumps out at you from this passage? Why?
- Why do you think knowledge “puffs up” (if you do)?
- What do you think Paul means by the term “destroyed” in verse 11?
- In your own words, how would you summarize Paul’s main argument in this passage?
- What values and priorities do you see in this passage?

APPLICATION

- Where, if anywhere, do you see yourself in this passage?
- Is there any liberty in your life that may be a stumbling block to others?

GROUP IDEA FOR CG LEADERS

Check in with your group on the devotions from this study. Have individuals share experiences, challenges, and benefits from these daily spiritual exercises.

PASSAGE NOTE

As with the Week #2 reading, most scholars believe that the parenthetical phrase in verses 1, 4, and 8 are sayings that Paul is quoting back to the Corinthians.

WEEK 5: ALL THINGS

(FEBRUARY 7-13)



SCRIPTURE: 1 CORINTHIANS 9:16-23 (NRSV)

If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!¹⁷ For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission.¹⁸ What then is my reward? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel.

¹⁹ For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. ²⁰ To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. ²¹ To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. ²³ I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

SERMON NOTES

FIVE-MINUTE DAILY DEVOTIONS

SUNDAY

Silence: Spend your devotional time in silence. Be still. Receive silence as a gift. Keep your mind and body at rest. Actively listen for God or simply rest in His presence.

MONDAY

Devotional Reading: Reread this week's passage. As you read, notice which word, phrase, or part of the story stands out to you. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you why this part of the Scripture captured your attention. Pray that your week ahead will be spiritually centered along the lines of these verses.

TUESDAY

Examen: The prayer of examen is a spiritual reflection on the day's events.

1. Remind yourself of God's presence. Ask the Holy Spirit for the grace to see clearly and with spiritual insight.
2. In an attitude of thankfulness, recall notable experiences from the past 24 hours.
Pay particular attention to your emotions.
 - If the experience was positive, note how God may have been active and present.
 - If the experience was negative, ask for perspective, patience and humility.
3. Prayerfully reflect on the next 24 hour period. Prepare your heart and lighten your burden by asking for God's assistance where you anticipate any need.

WEDNESDAY

Write Your Own Prayer: Write out a prayer of any length, focused on the shine of your light (v. 14-16). Choose each word carefully or write in a stream of consciousness style. Pray and reflect as you write. Then pray your written prayer back to God.

THURSDAY

First Reading: Read Isaiah 40:21-31. How would you personally answer the rhetorical questions in verse 21? In what way can God renew your strength right now, or in this coming week? Pray accordingly.

FRIDAY

Discernment: Use this time to consider and reflect on an upcoming decision. Is there any scripture that speaks into your situation? Or read James 1:5-6 and simply pray for wisdom.

SATURDAY

Prayer (Extemporaneous): First, ask for the Holy Spirit's guidance of your heart and mind. Then spend time praying as your heart and mind direct. Trust that God wants to lead you to topics and words which reflect his love and concern for you. Notice which topics consistently compete for your attention.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

How is it true that Paul became “all things to all people?”

Paul’s story in the Acts of the Apostles provides several examples. For the Jewish side of the equation (described here as simply “the Jews” and also “those under the law”), the best example is Paul’s practice of visiting Jewish groups first when he went to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ in a new city. He either goes to the synagogue (Acts 17:1-2) or finds a group of people familiar with and friendly to Jewish ideas and practices (Acts 16:13). He is living out the commitment articulated in Romans that the gospel has come to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles (Romans 1:16-17; 9-11). In addition, he has his traveling partner, Timothy, circumcised for the sake of the Jews (Acts 16:1-5). Timothy was the son of a Jewish mother, but his father was Gentile, and so he would have been raised to follow his father’s custom of non-circumcision. Finally, Acts 18:18 looks like Paul was keeping a vow of purity called a Nazarite vow as described in Numbers 6. Although readers are likely more familiar with Paul’s arguments against the Jewish law, these examples indicate that he did NOT abandon it. When he was with Jews, and maybe even for his own devotion, it was important to him to maintain God’s “holy, righteous, and good” law (Rom 7:12). He could also adapt to Gentile ways. In Athens, his speech shows understanding of their religious systems and he draws from them to share the gospel (Acts 17:22-34). Most prominently, he did not want Gentile believers to take on the Jewish law of circumcision if they believed that it would be a necessity for salvation. Here, he refers to the Gentiles as the weak because he has just been discussing strong and weak consciences of those deciding whether or not to visit a pagan temple and eat its meat. The Jewish believers might be able to do so because they have grown up knowing and worshipping only one God, but the Gentiles who came out of Greco-Roman religions would struggle more with a return to their previous religious life.

Paul is not a moral relativist, doing anything he pleases at any time. Instead, he sacrifices his freedom for whomever he is around, doing whatever is necessary so that his listeners can hear the gospel with the most clarity.

CORNERSTONE GROUP MEETING

ICEBREAKER (CHOOSE ONE)

- Describe an important obligation that you currently have.
- How did you first connect to Saint Mark's Church (or to this Cornerstone Group)?

SERMON REFLECTION

- What stood out to you from the sermon this past weekend?
- What questions did the sermon prompt in you?

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION

- What words or phrases in this passage seem significant or surprising to you?
- How would you describe Paul's attitudes here?
- Discuss the ways Paul uses the term "law" in this scripture.
- What do you think Paul means by "I became weak, so that I might win the weak" (verse 22)?
- What questions does this passage raise for you?

APPLICATION

- How might Paul's message in this passage go against our current culture?
- How might Paul's message in this passage line up with our current culture?
- How might you apply this passage in the near future?
- How might our group apply this passage in the near future?

GROUP IDEAS FOR CG LEADERS

Does your group have a mission or purpose that extends beyond itself? If so, this might be a good meeting to discuss how this mission or purpose is progressing. If not, consider discussing the potential for your group to add an external focus.

Discuss a change, commitment, or spiritual discipline your group would like to institute and share for Lent? What will make this Lent especially meaningful for your Cornerstone Group community.



Next week, Ash Wednesday services at Saint Mark's will be at 7:30am, noon, and 7:00pm. Discuss attending one of these as a group in order to begin the Lenten season in community.

WEEK 6: VEILS

(FEBRUARY 14-20)



SCRIPTURE: 2 CORINTHIANS 4:3-6 (NRSV)

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

SERMON NOTES

FIVE-MINUTE DAILY DEVOTIONS

SUNDAY

Collect: Examine and pray this week's collect (short structured prayer) from the Book of Common Prayer. Repeat if desired.

*O God, the strength of all who put their trust in you: Mercifully accept our prayers; and because in our weakness we can do nothing good without you, give us the help of your grace, that in keeping your commandments we may please you both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.**

MONDAY

Devotional Reading: Reread this week's passage. What words or phrases seem meaningful to you? Copy, highlight, or simply reflect on these. Is there a personal invitation from God to you somewhere in this scripture? Read it again, if helpful.

TUESDAY

Prayer (For Your Cornerstone Group): Pray for the individuals in your group. Pray that God will be especially present at the next group meeting. Pray for your group leader, service projects, outreach to newcomers or anything else that makes up the ministry of your group. Pray especially for your own participation and investment.

ASH WEDNESDAY

Lent: "Lent is a time for discipline, for confession, for honesty, not because God is mean or fault-finding or finger-pointing but because he wants us to know the joy of being cleaned out, ready for all the good things he now has in store." - N.T. Wright from *Lent for Everyone*.

Read Matthew 4:1-11. What temptation are you facing this week? How do you think Jesus' extended fast positively or negatively affected his experience of temptation?

How can you add a discipline (e.g. daily confession) or subtract a freedom (i.e. fasting) in order to make this Lent a blessed season of spiritual focus? Perhaps it may simply be rededicating yourself to these daily devotions.

THURSDAY

Gospel Reading: Read Mark 9:2-9. How do you think this experience affected Peter, James and John? In what ways do you proactively listen to Jesus? Listen for him right now in quiet meditation.

FRIDAY

Sabbath: *Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in*

*from The Book of Common Prayer. (1979). Church Publishing, Inc. Pg. 216.

your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.
- Exodus 20:8-11 (NRSV)

During the past few weeks, how has your weekly pattern of rest reflected God's pattern? What plans do you need to make or cancel for this upcoming weekend? Rest right now, if needed.

SATURDAY

Prayer (Confession): Pray this confession from the BCP Penitential Order: Rite One.

Almighty and most merciful father, we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep, we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts, we have offended against thy holy laws, we have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done.

*But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, spare thou those who confess their faults, restore thou those who are penitent, according to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord; and grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake, that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of thy holy Name. Amen.**

Meditate on any specific and personal faults which this prayer of confession brought to mind. Ask again for God's help to live a godly, righteous, and sober life.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

The creation story provides the backdrop for the ways Paul proclaims the gospel in this passage.

First, he refers to Christ as the image of God (4:4). He uses this language for Christ in Romans 8:29; 1 Corinthians 15:49, and Colossians 1:15. Paul's readers will be familiar with this concept from Genesis 1:26-27 where humans are made in the image of God. These connections have led to a fascinating doctrine: that because God knew the Son would become incarnate, his embodiment was the template for the first humans. Jesus Christ certainly reveals God and at the same time he reveals true humanity.

Second, Paul refers to Genesis 1:3 where God calls the light out of darkness. The same God who brought literal light has now sent spiritual light in the person of Jesus.

In drawing from this background, Paul wants the Corinthians to know that God's plan in sending Christ is not something reactionary or recently devised. As was respected in the ancient world, his coming had ancient roots, even back to creation itself. From that rootedness, Paul is calling them to live in the light, letting go of ways of life conducted under the cover of darkness (4:2) and living in ways that shine.

**from The Book of Common Prayer. (1979).
Church Publishing, Inc. Pg. 320-321.*

CORNERSTONE GROUP MEETING

ICEBREAKER (CHOOSE ONE)

- Describe a time when you had difficulty understanding something.
- Describe a time when you had to serve someone else.

SERMON REFLECTION

- What stood out to you from the sermon this past weekend?
- What questions did the sermon prompt in you?

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION

- If the apostle Paul were here, what question would you ask him about this scripture?
- What do you think Paul means in verse 3?
- Using your own words, explain what you think Paul means in verse 4.
- What might it have looked like for Paul to become a slave to the Corinthians? (verse 5)

APPLICATION

- Describe a time when you explained the Christian faith to someone else (if you have).
- How difficult or easy is it for you to serve someone else? Give an example.
- Where can you be a servant "for Jesus' sake" in the upcoming week?

GROUP IDEAS FOR CG LEADERS

For literary and theological context, your group may benefit from also reading together 2 Corinthians 3:7-18.

Now over halfway through RECIEVE, this would be a good point to check in with your group. Ask for feedback on what has been going well and what needs improvement. If needed, identify one or two practical changes. Let this discussion lead to a time of prayer marked by thankfulness and hope.

WEEK 7: MADE ALIVE

(FEBRUARY 21-27)



SCRIPTURE: 1 PETER 3:18-22 (NRSV)

For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit,¹⁹ in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison,²⁰ who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water.²¹ And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

SERMON NOTES

FIVE-MINUTE DAILY DEVOTIONS

SUNDAY

Creed of Chalcedon: Read this creed from the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451, Act V). Highlight words and phrases if any seem particularly important to you.

Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance (homoousios) with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer (Theotokos); one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the Fathers has handed down to us.*

MONDAY

Devotional Reading: Reread this week's passage. Enter into the story of Christ's transfiguration. What do you feel? What do you see? Hear? Who do you relate to? How might you have reacted? Reflect in prayerful conversation with God.

TUESDAY

Compassion: Consider those you have encountered in the past few days. Which of them might be in need of compassion? How can the love of God become credible through your words or an act of service? Pray for that individual and your own courage to act. Pray also for your heart to become more like Christ's, as you serve in his name.

WEDNESDAY

The Lord's Prayer: From Matthew 6, Luke 11, or your memory. Pray and repeat as desired. If you feel prompted by one of the words or phrases, go further in prayer along those lines.

THURSDAY

First Reading: Read Genesis 9:8-17. Why do you think God made this covenant? What do you think it means for God to "remember"? Pray, giving thanks to God for his faithfulness and protection.

*from *The Book of Common Prayer*. (1979).
Church Publishing, Inc. Pg. 864.

FRIDAY

Prayer (For Eucharistic Services): Ask God for his blessings on Saint Mark's Eucharistic services this coming weekend. Pray for the clergy and for all who serve; for newcomers and long time members. Pray also for yourself, for your engagement in worship, in the hearing of Scripture, in generosity, fellowship, and joy.

SATURDAY

Prayer (Thanks and Praise): How has God acted on your behalf in 2021? Remember, and give him thanks and praise. Remember how he has been patient and kind. If desired, Psalm 111 can be your prayer.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

Martin Luther called this passage more obscure than any other in the New Testament. Two issues demand historical and theological context to prevent misunderstanding.

First, who are the spirits in prison to whom Christ is making proclamation?

Many early interpreters read this as a description of the "harrowing of hell." On Holy Saturday, between his death and resurrection, Jesus went to preach to the humans who had already died. If that is the case, some have wondered why Peter specifies the time of Noah. Alternatively, others have suggested that this recounts not Jesus' preaching to humans but proclamation of victory to fallen angels, those spirits who encouraged humans to sin during the time of Noah (see Genesis 6). Debate about this passage continues, but based on other passages in Scripture readers can be assured that Jesus' death and resurrection did bring salvation to those humans who had lived and died before him (see Hebrews 11-12) and readers can be assured that all powers that war against God will be placed under Jesus' feet (see the frequent references to Psalm 110:1 throughout the New Testament).

The reference to Noah leads Peter to the second issue, baptism. Christians often ask, "Is baptism necessary for salvation?" Peter's answer would seem to be in the affirmative since he says, "And baptism. . . now saves you." (1 Peter 3:21)

It is vital, however, to see how he describes baptism. It is effective because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It cannot stand alone as a magical rite.

For the early church, however, it was inconceivable that someone could believe in Jesus and not be baptized (see Romans 6; Acts 8:36-40). Baptism was the public confession of joining a different religious community.

CORNERSTONE GROUP MEETING

ICEBREAKER (CHOOSE ONE)

- Share a pivotal moment or a pivotal change in your life.
- Describe a time when you went through pain or suffering (of any kind).

SERMON REFLECTION

- What stood out to you from the sermon this past weekend?
- What questions did the sermon prompt in you?

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION

- If Peter were here, what question would you ask him about this scripture?
- What do you think the phrase “alive in the spirit” means here (verse 18)?
- Describe in your own words the possible interpretations of verse 19 (see Background/Context above if helpful).
- In what way do you think baptism is “prefigured” in the previous verses?
- What conclusions can you draw about baptism from this passage?

APPLICATION

- How close have you felt to God in the past week?
- Where, if anywhere, do you need patience right now?

GROUP IDEAS FOR CG LEADERS

As suffering is a topic in this passage, and is also a topic in one of the icebreakers, consider focusing your time of prayer on those who are suffering. It might be helpful to intentionally separate your time of prayer into two sessions. First, after giving time to share, pray for those in the group who are currently suffering. Then, after that first time of prayer, pray for family, friends, and others who are suffering and might benefit from your group’s intercession.

And/or close your group with this collect:

*Almighty and everliving God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering, and also share in his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.**

*from The Book of Common Prayer. (1979).
Church Publishing, Inc. Pg. 219.

WEEK 8: RIGHTEOUSNESS

(FEBRUARY 28-MARCH 6)

SCRIPTURE: ROMANS 4:13-25 (NRSV)

For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴ If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵ For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

¹⁶ For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, ¹⁷ as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations")—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. ¹⁸ Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become "the father of many nations," according to what was said, "So numerous shall your descendants be." ¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. ²⁰ No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²² Therefore his faith "was reckoned to him as righteousness." ²³ Now the words, "it was reckoned to him," were written not for his sake alone, ²⁴ but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵ who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

SERMON NOTES

FIVE-MINUTE DAILY DEVOTIONS

SUNDAY

Simplicity: How successful were you at eliminating needless complexity this past week? What is one less thing you can do in this coming week? Revisit any commitments from the second devotion of this study or make new goals for the road ahead. Pray for the courage and discipline needed for a life of focus and depth.

MONDAY

Devotional Reading: Reread this week's passage. Read slowly enough to fully digest each sentence.

TUESDAY

Memorization: Practice memorizing verse 13. Write and rewrite. Speak it out loud and in your mind. Place in a location where you will see it regularly. Especially take note of how this passage directs and encourages your faith this week.

WEDNESDAY

Practice God's Presence: The triune God is everywhere, and specifically present with and in his people (e.g. 2 Timothy 1:14). Pay attention to the Holy Spirit's presence during this brief devotional time. Focus on your surroundings and then focus inwardly.

THURSDAY

From the Psalms: Read Psalm 22:23-31. What themes do you see here? What characteristics of God emerge? What feelings or thoughts does this passage evoke in you?

FRIDAY

Self-Examination: Spend time considering your own righteousness. To what extent do you trust in your own righteousness? What does this self-righteousness look like in you? To what extent do you trust in the righteousness that comes from God through faith (verse 13)? Thank God the Father for his righteousness and for sending his only Son for the sake of those who would believe.

SATURDAY

Prayer (Petition): Spend time in prayer asking the Father to grant any specific requests currently on your heart. Are there any areas where you have needlessly substituted work for prayer? God loves you and already knows what you want and need.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

Paul builds one of his key arguments for faith in the faithful God through the retelling of the story of Abraham.

Abraham was called by God in Genesis 12. There God promised him land, descendents, and blessing that would extend through him to all people. After a passage of some time during which he sojourns in Egypt and gets in the midst of some warring kings, by chapter 15 Abraham is still without an heir. How can God's promise come true if he has no children who can possess the land and spread the blessing? When Abraham brought the problem to God's attention, God only reiterated the promise. As Genesis 15:6 says, Abraham believed God and that trust rendered Abraham righteous before God. This is the righteousness of faith Paul mentions in Romans 4:13. Abraham still trusts two chapters later, in chapter 17, even when he is so old his body is as good as dead. For Paul, the entire story of God and Abraham shows that Abraham trusts in God as the One who can bring life from death.

If the readers of Romans want to have Abraham as their father and participate in the grand blessing promised to his descendents, namely, the inheritance of the world (4:13), then they are invited to have faith in the God who can raise the dead just like Abraham did.

CORNERSTONE GROUP MEETING

ICEBREAKER

- Describe a time when you broke a rule (of any kind).

SERMON REFLECTION

- What stood out to you from the sermon this past weekend?
- What questions did the sermon prompt in you?

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION

- What jumps out at you from this passage? Why?
- Why do you think Paul's observation in verse 13 is important to his argument?
- What do you think Paul means by verse 15?
- What can we learn about Abraham's character from this passage?
- What do you think the phrase "was reckoned to him as righteousness" means in this context? (verse 22)

APPLICATION

- What is something you are currently hoping (or even "hoping against hope") for?
- Share an area of your life where Abraham might serve as an encouraging example.

GROUP IDEAS FOR CG LEADERS

If someone shares a hope in the Application section that prompts group prayer you can do so in a way that fits your group setting. Lift up the individual and appeal to God on their behalf.

For Old Testament context, your group may benefit from also reading together Genesis 12:1-3 and 15:1-6.

WEEK 9: THE PHILOSOPHER

(MARCH 7-13)



SCRIPTURE: 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-25 (NRSV)

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written:

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."

²⁰ Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ²² Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

SERMON NOTES

FIVE-MINUTE DAILY DEVOTIONS

SUNDAY

Silence: Spend your devotional time in silence. Be still. Keep your mind and body at rest. Actively listen for God or simply rest in His presence. Afterwards, note how easy or difficult this was for you. Was it refreshing or draining? How often is silence a part of your week?

MONDAY

Devotional Reading: Reread this week's passage. As you read, notice which word, phrase, or part of the story stands out to you. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you why this part of the Scripture captured your attention. Pray that your week ahead will be spiritually centered along the lines of these verses.

TUESDAY

Examen: The prayer of examen is a spiritual reflection on the day's events.

1. Remind yourself of God's presence. Ask the Holy Spirit for the grace to see clearly and with spiritual insight.
2. In an attitude of thankfulness, recall notable experiences from the past 24 hours.
Pay particular attention to your emotions.
 - If the experience was positive, note how God may have been active and present.
 - If the experience was negative, ask for perspective, patience and humility.
3. Prayerfully reflect on the next 24 hour period. Prepare your heart and lighten your burden by asking for God's assistance where you anticipate any need.

WEDNESDAY

Write Your Own Prayer: What is on your mind and heart? Write out a prayer of any length along those lines. Choose each word carefully or write in a stream of consciousness style. Pray and reflect as you write. Then pray your written prayer back to God.

THURSDAY

Gospel Reading: Read John 2:13-22. What does this passage reveal about Jesus? What, if anything, has made the gospel of God credible to you? Reread this passage if desired.

FRIDAY

Discernment: Consider a decision you have recently made. How have things progressed since that decision? Do you need God's help to continue on this course? Alternatively, reflect on an upcoming decision that needs to be made. Listen carefully for God's voice in this time of discernment.

SATURDAY

Prayer (Worship): Spend time in prayer praising God for who He is. Focus on his character and virtues. Resist any urges to make personal requests. He knows what you want and need. God is glorified and you build spiritual depth as you bring your words of adoration to Him.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

The cultures which were most influential on the New Testament highly prized wisdom.

Several texts valued by the Jews extolled wisdom. This is true throughout Proverbs, but especially Proverbs 8, where wisdom was personified as an entity alongside God. God brings about the creation of the world through Wisdom. The Wisdom of Solomon, composed in Greek shortly before the era of the New Testament, was a popular collection extolling wisdom. It urged readers to honor wisdom so that they could reign forever (6:21). Philo, the Jewish philosopher of the first century, wished that all people would be “wholly occupied with a love of and desire for wisdom” (Creation 5).

The major schools of philosophy in the Greco-Roman world also valued wisdom. The goal of many of the schools was to possess it. They had different ways of pursuing it, including practicing self-control (the Stoics) and being examples of frank speech to the wider community (the Cynics). They agreed that eloquence and self-mastery provided evidence that one had progressed in wisdom.

For no first century group did crucifixion display wisdom, but that is exactly what Paul claims to be true for the Christian faith. Considering their context, it is not surprising that many tripped over or laughed at Christ before the Spirit helped them to see his life, death, and resurrection was the full revelation of God’s wisdom.

CORNERSTONE GROUP MEETING

ICEBREAKER (CHOOSE ONE)

- Describe an area of strength (of any sort).
- Describe a time when you did something foolish or silly in public.
- Who is the wisest person you know?

SERMON REFLECTION

- What stood out to you from the sermon this past weekend?
- What questions did the sermon prompt in you?

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION

- What words or phrases in this passage seem significant or surprising to you?
- In your own words, what is "the message of the cross"?
- How do you think "calling" makes a difference for both Jews and Gentiles in verse 22?
- What do you think verse 25 means?

APPLICATION

- In your spiritual journey, have you tended to "demand a sign" or "look for wisdom"?
- What has the call of God looked like in your own life? (Verse 24)
- Describe a time, if any, when you explained the "message of the cross" to someone and it was received as foolishness.
- Describe a time, if any, when you explained the "message of the cross" to someone and it was received as wisdom.
- In what way, if any, does this passage practically inform your sharing of the Gospel - individually or as a community?

GROUP IDEA FOR CG LEADERS

For a change of pace, bring an insightful children's picture book to your meeting and read aloud with your group. Discuss the wisdom contained therein with the question "What wisdom or truths did you see in this story?" Or brainstorm a similar question which fits your book and group.

A short list of suggested books:

- *Thank You Bear* by Greg Foley (Viking Books)
- *Little Blue Truck* by Alice Schertle (HMH Books)
- *Runaway Bunny* by Margaret Wise Brown (HarperFestival)
- *The Little Engine That Could* by Watty Piper (Grosset & Dunlap)
- *The Lorax* by Dr. Suess (Random House)

WEEK 10: TRESPASSES

(MARCH 14-20)



SCRIPTURE: EPHESIANS 2:1-10 (NRSV)

You were dead through the trespasses and sins ² in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. ³ All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. ⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵ even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— ⁹ not the result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

SERMON NOTES

FIVE-MINUTE DAILY DEVOTIONS

SUNDAY

Song: The Hymn “And Can It Be That I Should Gain”, written in 1738 by Charles Wesley, points to the mystery and mercy of Christ’s sacrifice and to the mercy offered to those who are in Christ by faith. Prayerfully consider the lyrics.

And can it be that I should gain
An int’reast in the Savior’s blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me?

Tis mystery all! Th’Immortal dies!
Who can explore His strange design?
In vain the firstborn seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine!
’Tis mercy all! let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no more. [Refrain]

He left His Father’s throne above,
So free, so infinite His grace;
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam’s helpless race;
’Tis mercy all, immense and free;
For, O my God, it found out me. [Refrain]

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature’s night;

Thine eye diffused a quick’ning ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free;
I rose, went forth and followed Thee. [Refrain]

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach th’eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.
[Refrain]
Through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down
from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius
Pilate; he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again

MONDAY

Devotional Reading: Reread this week’s passage. What words or phrases seem meaningful to you? Copy, highlight, or simply reflect on these. Is there a personal invitation from God to you somewhere in this scripture? Read it again, if helpful.

TUESDAY

Prayer (For all Saint Mark’s Cornerstone Groups): Pray for all 20+ Saint Mark’s Cornerstone Groups as we share this common study. Pray that God would be especially present at our next meetings and in our engagement with the scriptures and each other. Pray for CG Leaders and Co-Leaders, group members, any service projects, outreach, welcome, hospitality, and every expression of Christian community through Saint Mark’s CGs.

WEDNESDAY

Sabbath: Read Mark 2:23-28. Reflect on Jesus' words regarding the Sabbath? What do you think verse 27 means? How might you apply Jesus' teaching this week?

THURSDAY

First Reading: Read Numbers 21:4-9. What themes do you observe here? Read also John 3:14-15. Consider how the Old Testament informs and illustrates the New Testament. Which do you read more often?.

FRIDAY

Meditation: Consider John 3:14-21. Go over this passage in your mind. Ask the Holy Spirit for insight. What does it teach you about God? What does it tell you about yourself? What parts of your life are currently in the "dark"? What parts are currently in the "light"?

SATURDAY

Prayer (Healing): Spend time in prayer specifically interceding for those who are sick. Include yourself, if needed.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

Who is the ruler of the power of the air? This phrase appears only here in Paul's writings, but it fits into a larger pattern in which Paul describes God's enemy.

Later in Ephesians 6, Paul encourages his readers to stand against "the wiles of the devil" (6:11). He describes the forces of the devil with the same terms he uses in chapter 2, rulers and powers. The ruler of the power of the air holds sway over those who follow the course of the world, and in Ephesians 6 the powers are cosmic, part of the world. Here he says that these spiritual forces of evil are "in the heavenly places" (6:12). That is slightly different than air, but both convey the sense of being in the realm above and in the realm not visible to the human eye. Paul's good news is that now those who have received grace through Jesus Christ have escaped this authority.

The author of Hebrews has a similar idea about God's enemy. He writes that the devil is the one who has the power of death. Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, however, humans can be freed from this power and escape the imprisonment of the fear of death (Hebrews 2:14-15)

Such passages are reminders that early Christians were very comfortable with spiritual unseen realities, but did not cower before them because of the spiritual victory Christ won through his physical death and resurrection.

CORNERSTONE GROUP MEETING

ICEBREAKER (CHOOSE ONE)

- Describe a time when you helped someone else or served in a meaningful way.
- What is a positive change in the world that you'd like to work towards?

SERMON REFLECTION

- What stood out to you from the sermon this past weekend?
- What questions did the sermon prompt in you?

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION

- If Paul were here, what question would you ask him about this scripture?
- In what way, if any, is verse 3 true today? Why or why not?
- What characteristics of God do you see in this scripture?
- What gifts of God do you see believers receiving in this passage?
- In what ways are the terms "work" and "works" used in this scripture?
- What else in this passage seems significant to you?

APPLICATION

- What feelings does verse 10 spark in you?
- Describe a good work, if any, which you feel God might be preparing for you.

GROUP IDEAS FOR CG LEADERS

Lead a group discussion on next steps for when the RECEIVE study has been completed. Will you continue meeting after Easter? If so, what will you study? Will you invite newcomers? How can you expand the shared ownership of the group in the next season?

If a group member describes a good work which your Cornerstone Group might participate in, encourage, pray for, or resource, this can be an opportunity for group collaboration. Discuss it.

WEEK 11: ETERNAL SALVATION

(MARCH 21-27)

SCRIPTURE: HEBREWS 5:5-10 (NRSV)

So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him,

"You are my Son, today I have begotten you";

⁶ as he says also in another place,

"You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek."

⁷ In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. ⁸ Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; ⁹ and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, ¹⁰ having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

SERMON NOTES

FIVE-MINUTE DAILY DEVOTIONS

SUNDAY

Apostles' Creed: Read the Apostles' Creed silently or out loud to affirm and encourage your faith.

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth;

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.*

MONDAY

Devotional Reading: Reread this week's passage. This time enter into the scripture. What do you feel? Is there a uniquely personal encouragement or challenge? Reflect in prayerful conversation with God.

TUESDAY

Compassion: Consider those you have encountered in the past few days. Who may be in need of Christian compassion? How can the love of God become credible to them through your words or an act of service? Pray for that individual and your own courage to act. Pray also for your heart to become more like Christ's, as you serve in his name.

WEDNESDAY

The Lord's Prayer: From Matthew 6, Luke 11, or your memory. Pray and repeat as desired. What part of Jesus' model prayer is nearest to you today?

THURSDAY

From the Psalms: Read Psalm 51:1-12. What themes do you see here? What parts of this Psalm can you own for yourself? Let this Psalm lead you to a time of confession, request, or both.

FRIDAY

Prayer (For Holy Week): Ask God to bless your personal experience of the upcoming Holy Week as you remember the suffering and death of Christ on your behalf. Pray also for Saint Mark's and our services and our communal expressions of devotion and joy. What else will make this Holy Week particularly meaningful for you? Pray along those lines.

*from *The Book of Common Prayer*. (1979).
Church Publishing, Inc. Pg. 96.

SATURDAY

Review and Renew: Which of the devotional practices in this guide were most comfortable or natural for you? Which were the most difficult to engage in? What practices from this study will you want to continue? How will you engage spiritually over the upcoming Easter Season (Easter Sunday to Pentecost Sunday on May 31). Close this devotional experience with a time of prayer and thanksgiving.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

Hebrews is the only book of the New Testament to call Jesus a High Priest. The author grounds his innovation in the Old Testament.

The author first reminds his listeners of a verse he used in the first chapter (Hebrews 1:5). God said to Jesus, "You are my Son" (Psalm 2:7). He finds this applicable to Jesus because this Psalm is spoken to a descendent of David and Jesus qualifies (Hebrews 7:14).

Also in this passage, he adds another Psalm where God again speaks to the King (Psalm 110). He had already used this Psalm in chapter 1, where he focused on God's invitation to the King to sit at the right hand of the divine throne (Psalm 110:1 in Hebrews 1:13). Allusions to this Psalm appear in the Gospels, and the letters of Paul and Peter. It was a common text among early Christians.

The author of Hebrews reads past the first verse to the third one where God says to the same person: "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek" (Heb 5:6). The Psalm portrays the King as both God's ruler and God's leader of holy things.

For Jesus to take up this calling from God, he will have to suffer, even suffer death. This is an early indication (fully discussed in chapter 7) that being in the order of Melchizedek will look different than being any other High Priest.

CORNERSTONE GROUP MEETING

ICEBREAKER (CHOOSE ONE)

- Who is one of your favorite people from history? Why?
- Describe a time you learned something the hard way.

SERMON REFLECTION

- What stood out to you from the sermon this past weekend?
- What questions did the sermon prompt in you?

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION

- What jumps out at you from this passage? Why?
- In what ways do you think verses 5, 6 and 10 are related to verses 7-9?
- What might verse 7 teach us about prayer?
- In what ways might Jesus have learned obedience through suffering?
- How do you think obedience relates to the Christian life?

APPLICATION

- In what current area or circumstances might you need Jesus' example from this passage?
- Share something you have received from God over the course of this 11-week study.

GROUP IDEA FOR CG LEADERS

For historical and theological context, your group may benefit from also reading together Genesis 14:17-24.



Discuss how your Cornerstone Group might experience some part of Holy Week as a community. Attend Maundy Thursday service or Good Friday service together, gather for a meal, select a day to fast together, serve in the community or at a Eucharistic service together, etc. Holy Week services next week at Saint Mark's are as follows:

- Maundy Thursday: 7:00pm
- Good Friday: 7:30am, noon, and 7:00pm
- Easter: 8am, 9am, and 10:30am

Visit stmarks-geneva.org for additional details and updates.

NOTES FOR CORNERSTONE GROUP LEADERS

- The purpose of Cornerstone Groups is to provide a relational community where individuals can experience three aspects of St. Mark's ministry: Christian Community, Historic Teaching, and Christ's Mission. After each meeting, reflect on how effectively your group accomplished these purposes. What, if anything, needs to change for your next meeting?
- Your leadership is critical. However, be sure to help everyone to own the group by involving all participants as contributors in ways that make them indispensable to group success. Think of yourself as a conductor not a solo artist.
- The Cornerstone Group meeting questions and elements should be customized for your group. Some groups will use all of the questions and items while some groups will simply include the icebreaker or a single sermon reflection question as a tie to the weekend teaching. Add your own questions and adjust the given questions to tailor the study to your Cornerstone Group.
- While they are related, the weekly topics can stand alone. This allows Cornerstone Groups to start anytime this winter.
- If your group meets every other week, don't feel like you have to squeeze two weeks of content into one meeting. However, you may want to reserve some time to share anything learned or experienced during the prior week.
- The icebreaker for each Cornerstone Group meeting can be given before or after the group scripture reading. However, it will likely work best as the very first agenda item after the group begins.

SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT SUGGESTION: In order to increase your group's attention to the scripture passage, give five to ten minutes of silence for rereading and personal engagement after the initial group reading of the passage. It can be particularly helpful for discussion if individuals use pens and highlighters to record observations, identify meaningful parts of the passage, and to note any questions.

NOTES

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Christ's entire life must supply the norm for the Christian and for the life of the whole Church. One has to take every particular aspect of Christ's life straight from his baptism to his resurrection and show correspondence. What else does it mean to be a Christian?

- SØREN KIERKEGAARD



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