

**WEEK 1: Jesus had one day left on earth and He...washed feet**



I recently received a *WhatsApp* message on a Sunday school group that I belong to – our youth worker likes to send encouraging snippets or food for thought, to us group mentors on a weekly basis. This particular message was a quote which read: “Sometimes I joke about what I’d do if I had one day left to live. Eat whatever I want to, do something crazy, etc. Today it hit me: Jesus knew. ...and He washed feet”.

Being sceptical about such quotes, I immediately did some research online, just to confirm the details for myself...and yes, Jesus indeed washed the feet of His disciples the night before the day of his trials and crucifixion – at the last

supper (John 13: 1-12). To me it’s amazing to think that Jesus, amidst the anxiety and turmoil in His heart knowing what lay ahead of Him, chose to serve His disciples in such an intimate way. But, the washing of their feet wasn’t enough for Jesus, after this He withdrew to a quiet place and prayed for His disciples (John 17: 1-26). It becomes clear that Jesus REALLY cared for His disciples and that His ministry legacy REALLY mattered to Him.

The following questions come to mind: Do I REALLY love my neighbour? Does my legacy REALLY matter to me? To what extent am I willing to serve my neighbour, even in my hour of turmoil?

In the coming weeks, I’ll spend some time on the theme: LOVE, and why it matters. A key scripture for me on love is Matt 22: 37-39 where Jesus says, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself.”

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## WEEK 2: Follow after brotherly love

1 Cor 14:1 *“Follow after charity [Greek – brotherly love], and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy.” (KJV)*

I believe this brotherly love takes shape within the context of interpersonal relationships. But why should we love? The Bible provides us with three reasons why we should love:

- 1) *Matt 22: 37-39 “Jesus said unto him, ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.’”*



I don't think anyone can love someone else outside of some sort of relationship. It becomes clear from interpreting the text that Jesus values relationships, because He knows that relationship is the vehicle for love. What makes this statement by Jesus so significant is that He quotes Scripture from Deuteronomy 6: 5. Why did God give this commandment so pertinently? My interpretation is that God gave the Israelites the primary *goal* to love God first, then love others. 'Love' is clearly central – and the order is important, because in putting God first, our lives become rightly orientated, and loving others becomes an easier prospect – even when they're not lovable.

- 2) *1 Cor 13: 1 “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not love, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.”*

I never thought of it this way, but recently someone made me aware that what this verse is saying, is that if my life is without love, people won't take me seriously, my words won't make a difference in society. Wow! Is love that powerful that it gives meaning and credibility to my words...? This reminds me that love should be my *purpose* in whatever I say, to whomever, whenever.

- 1 Cor 13: 2 *“Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing.”*

Have you ever looked really closely at this text? Have you noticed that it implies that if my life is void of love, everything I am, know and believe is of no value? I don't know about you, but this realisation drives me towards introspection...is love at the core of what *defines* me as an intellectual and spiritual being?

- 1 Cor 13: 3 *“Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and I have no love, it profits me nothing.”*

What I understand from this text is that charity without love is fruitless. This not only begs the question of what I give but also, why do I give and how do I give? Is love my motive for giving?

- 3) *1 Cor 13: 13 “And now abides faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”*

If everything else is stripped away, love stands. For me, this means that love is the greatest power. No wonder 1 John 4: 7 - 8 proclaims that God is love and whoever loves, is born of God and knows God. Love for God puts us in the right relationship with Him. Loving others gives shape to love in our lives.

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### **WEEK 3: Patient endurance...for the sake of the Gospel**

*1 Cor 13: 4 "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud."*



How far are you willing to go for the Gospel of Christ? Is your focus on yourself, or on what God is busy doing with, and through you, for the sake of the spread of the Gospel?

If I may generalise for a moment – I think very few people like hardship. As humans, we simply prefer ease to suffering. What is Paul then trying to say in Romans 5: 3-5, when he says that we “glory in tribulation”? Maybe he means that tribulation is the starting point of a glorious journey towards kindness? Indeed, I believe it is!

Paul continues to say that “tribulation worketh patience” (King James Version). Have you ever been in a tough spot and hoped that it would simply pass? Is it not in that exact moment of trouble and testing that we are urged to persevere in faith in Jesus Christ, knowing that He carries us through? In my experience, patience has a way of softening our hearts as we surrender to the Holy Spirit’s encouragement and help during trying times. Is it not through the realisation of our own vulnerabilities and weaknesses that we develop empathy towards our neighbour? Do you recall Galatians 5:22 saying that *“the fruit of the Spirit is...longsuffering...”*? The Greek word *makrothumia* translates into words like ‘patience’, ‘endurance’, ‘constancy’, ‘steadfastness’, and ‘perseverance’. I don’t know about you, but I certainly want to be known for displaying such virtues in my life.

Is God a passive bystander in our suffering? Is persecution out of God’s hands? Earlier this week I was led by the Holy Spirit to a verse in Philippians 1:16 where Paul states, *“Those who preach Christ out of loyal spirit and goodwill, proclaim Christ out of love, because they recognise and know that I (Paul) am [providentially] put here (in prison) for the defence of the Gospel.”* (Amplified Bible). Paul had a deep understanding that God was actively involved in the events that caused his imprisonment. Why would God allow someone to be imprisoned? The Scripture gives the answer...for the defence of the Gospel. Wow! Is your focus on defending the Gospel? How far are you willing to go for the Gospel of Christ?

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## **WEEK 4: Love keeps no accounts of evil**

*1 Cor 13:5 “does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil [keeps no accounts of evil]”*

It's easy to remember the wrong others have done to us. Sometimes we even find ourselves revelling in our thoughts about how we'll get that person back in the most unceremonious way. It's not easy to forgive. Nor is it easy to surrender to the Lord in such moments of anger.

What happens if we don't forgive? Do we spite the other party? Definitely not. We end up hurting ourselves with the resentment we carry in our hearts. Paul encourages us in *Romans 12: 19* to *“not avenge ourselves, give place to wrath...for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.”*



Jesus teaches His disciples in Matthew 6: 12 to pray for forgiveness with the words, “...forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” The second part of the verse sounds like a given... “as we forgive our debtors”, but I understand it as an indirect assignment from Jesus Himself. In the same indirect way, 1 Cor 13: 5 teaches us to forgive if we see ourselves as loving followers of Christ. If the Bible teaches us to leave vengeance to the Lord and to forgive our debtors, then my understanding is that resentment and revenge are evil. Maybe that is why the original King James Version of 1 Cor 13: 5 says “love thinketh no evil”, with reference to evil thoughts such as resentment and revenge. Romans 16:19 comes to mind where Paul expresses his hope for the Roman church to *“be wise in what is good, and innocent concerning evil.”*

I want to share with you three reasons to forgive. Firstly, forgive because God has forgiven you. Secondly, resentment and bitterness leaves you deeply unhappy. Thirdly, sometime, somewhere on your lifepath, you would want someone to forgive you (Col 3: 13, NKJV). Jesus answers Peter's question about how many times he should forgive his brother who has sinned against him, by saying *“...up to seventy times seven.”* Is it really about the number? I don't think so. I believe Jesus wanted to teach Peter the principle of persevering in forgiveness (Matt 18: 21-22, NKJV).

In conclusion, I don't think forgiveness should be cheap. If someone really hurt us or we them, then a reciprocal forgiveness is necessary. Conflict should be resolved in open and honest discussion. Feelings of anger and hurt should be made known in a safe space, to avoid habitual destructive behaviour. Is there someone you need to forgive today?

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## WEEK 5: Love does not seek its own

1 Cor 13:5 “[Love] does not behave rudely, **does not seek its own**, is not provoked, thinks no evil”



Have you thought about this statement really closely? It is possible for us to not seek our own, but is that enough? If I don't seek my own right/vengeance/benefit, but just choose to be neutral (and not get involved in some situations), am I doing what God expects of me? Jesus wasn't neutral, He always stood out. What made Jesus stand out? Generosity!

More than once in the Gospels, the authors imply that Jesus was tired, yet it is said that He consciously chose to serve whoever came across His path. Mike Burnard (founder of *INcontext*) makes mention of the following quote concerning 'generosity': "Giving a person what he/she needs is charity; giving

what you need, is generosity". Think about this for a minute. Have you given someone your undivided attention when you needed to rest? Have you given your only meal for the day to a hungry friend? Have you let someone make a phone call using the last of your airtime? Have you prayed for someone while craving prayer yourself? The list goes on...

Jesus' generosity took many forms: He healed the sick, redeemed people from spiritual bondage, multiplied food to feed thousands, quietened the storm. Wow! Just review those verbs again: 'healed', 'redeemed', 'multiplied', 'quietened'. Those are tall orders for ordinary humans like you and me, or are they? Can we do it if Jesus did it? Now I'm pushing it, aren't I? Think about it...if Jesus was generous in those ways, and He had perfect faith in God, does that maybe mean that we also need faith to be generous? I think so. If I give away my only meal for the day, I must know in faith that God will provide for me, otherwise I'll keep it to myself, right? The same applies for any other example of generosity.

So, how strong is your faith? Is your generosity on par with your faith in God?

Image: Deepak Tolange - <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/photocontest/detail/people/children-sharing-food-on-the-street-in-kathmandu-nepal/>

## WEEK 6: Love bears all things

1 Cor 13:7 “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” (NKJV)

When I read this verse in preparation for writing this devotion, I couldn't help but think that this verse makes love sound a bit like a sponge that just soaks up everything from everybody around it. Does it feel like that to you too? I decided to look deeper into the Greek words for 'bear', 'believe', 'hope' and 'endure', in the context of this verse. Here's what I found.

The word 'bear' here comes from the Greek word *stego*, which means to “cover or protect”, almost like the roof of a house, that provides quiet, strong protection. Interestingly, the Amplified Bible translates this into love bearing up under something. What to make of these varying translations? I believe we need to search these translations for a description of God's character, as He is Love, after all. In my experience God certainly protects us against evil and also bears us up in difficult times. Therefore, I think, let's rejoice in these truths that the text shares with us about Jehovah-shammah, our God that protects us.



The word 'believe' comes from the Greek word *pisteuo*, which has different meanings in different contexts. It can mean “to have confidence”, or “to confide in someone”; “to be persuaded of the truth”; “to have an inner conviction”; “to trust in Jesus Christ who can aid us in anything”; and “to entrust someone with something”. If we add the rest of the phrase, “all things” to this, then it becomes tricky. The Amplified Bible helps us with the translation: “it believes the best of every person”, which makes sense. Maybe it could also mean that, in love, we entrust all things to Jesus Christ, or even that in all things, we have confidence in and confide in Jesus Christ. I think that this verse implies of God's character that He is trustworthy, but also that He wants to trust us. Now that reciprocal trust speaks of a God that values relationship!

In the Amplified Bible, the next phrase goes: “love's hopes are fadeless under all circumstances”. Wow! That sound like a strong love! But, hope in what is fadeless? In Jesus, right? But, in what, in Jesus? And, to me that is where the essence of this phrase lies: in the hope or waiting for salvation with joy and confidence – derived from the Greek word *elpizo*. So, if we hope in Jesus Christ's salvation in every circumstance, then we are in fact cultivating an eternal focus, not so? We are then mindful of the fact that Jesus Christ is Jehovah-jireh, our “Deliverer and Salvation”. That is an edifying thought, don't you agree?

We definitely need that edification in our faith journeys, because it is that strengthening that helps us to endure everything without weakening (Amplified Bible). The Greek word for endure is *hupomeno*, which means “to remain, not flee, bear bravely and calmly ill treatments”. When I think of Jesus' endurance on His *via dolorosa*, I remember from Scripture how He did not flee, but remained on 'The Way', bravely, knowing His purpose and destiny. It makes me reflect on times in my life when I have shunned hardship or retaliated against being ill-treated. Let us grab faith and keep hope, while enduring like 'Love' did and forever will.

Image: <https://www.ucg.org/files/image/article/2002/04/24/seven-reasons-why-jesus-was-born.jpg>

## WEEK 7: But the greatest of these is love

1 Cor 13:13 "Right now three things remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love." (ISV)



I really treasure this verse. It's a sweeping statement – a ceremonial ending to the 'Hall of Love'. Even more so, the last sentence, '...the greatest of these is love.' To me, this is a victory lap for love! Love wins – it is the strongest, most everlasting, ever remaining! Does this make you adore love? It does for me!

If love is all that, then why is it that we only see love pop up its 'head' every now and then? Why aren't all people loving...?

One Sunday morning, I happened to walk in as the morning service began its broadcast on the radio. I was holding my two-week-old son, so my wife could freshen up after a long

night of periodic feeds, and as I went to sit on the couch in my lounge, the service had just started. The minister was preaching from Psalm 73, a song of Asaph. It is a Psalm where Asaph laments the prosperity of the wicked. He even, in verse 11, doubts if God knows about the wicked peoples' violence and arrogance. In verse 13, Asaph loses hope and says, "I kept my heart pure for nothing." He struggles in verse 16 to understand but admits that it's too difficult for him.

In verse 17 there is a turning point, where Asaph enters the "sanctuaries of God" and finds understanding. He comes to realise that the wicked won't prevail...God sets them in slippery places, destines them for desolation; they disappear like a dream when you wake up. In verses 21 and 22 Asaph realises his mistake in being bitter and reacting prematurely on what he saw in the world around him. Wow! What a realisation, all birthed from *becoming quiet in the sanctuary of God's presence!*

It is so beautiful how Asaph – in verses 23 to 28 (ISV) – praises God from a place of knowing in his heart that he is always with God and God holds his right hand (vs 23); God guides him with His wise advice (vs 24); God is his everything and he desires no earthly thing (vs 25); God is his strength and portion forever (vs 26). The climax is in verse 28 where Asaph proclaims how good it is for him that God is near. He announces that "the Lord God is my refuge", and in a prophetic way declares that he will be able to tell about all God's good deeds.

In a sense I think Asaph's story is each of ours – we tend to lose our grip on faith sometimes, and then we ask why all people aren't loving? Why is the world so broken and wicked around us? Asaph did the same. The change in his heart came when Asaph was reminded by the Holy Spirit of who God is – our Shepherd, our Guide, our wise Advisor, our Strength and Portion, our Everything! What an amazing God we serve!

The minister (on the radio) reminded his audience that we don't live in a world of puppets, where God pulls our strings and so controls our actions. God created humans with the ability and autonomy to make their own decisions. If people follow their own wicked ways and choose against what is good, the consequences testify of a world we see around us every day – broken, destructive, wicked, lost. What are we to do then? Asaph gives us the answer in verse 17 – we should seek the sanctuary of the Lord. As the author of Hebrews reminds us: "He will never leave us or abandon us" (Hebrews 13: 5 ISV). He will herd us, guide us, advise us, strengthen us. Wow, that is a promise to hold on to!

So, let us not be discouraged by what we see around us, or become fearful. God is love (1 John 4: 8, ISV) and He will never forsake us. Let us keep faith that 'Love' will endure. He is our Strength, our Portion, our Sanctuary. Let us follow God's advice in Psalm 46:10 to "be still and know that I am God."

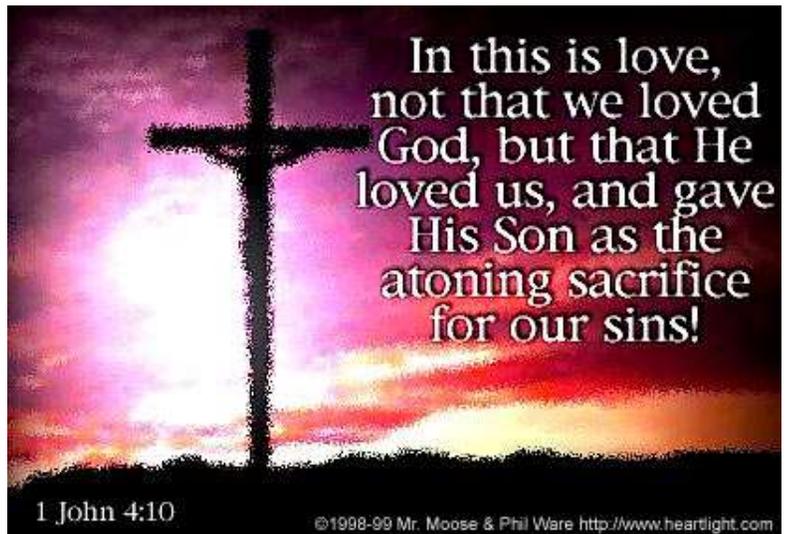
When last did you become quiet and enter the sanctuary of God's presence?

## WEEK 8: Loving one another

1 John 4:10 *"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins."* (Amp.)

I love running. I make a point of going for a run at least three times a week. The best part of a run is when I reach that point of perfect rhythm. I usually reach that point at about four kilometres into the run, it's then that I feel like I can run forever...

Have you thought about God's love? Has the thought ever crossed your mind that God is able to love perfectly, forever...? Yes, God's love is in perfect rhythm. I doubt whether my love will ever be "perfected". The good news is that it doesn't need to be, because God's love for you and me, in Jesus Christ, is perfect. Indeed, perfect love came to us first, because God loved us first. For every iniquity in our attempts to love, there is a perfect atonement in Jesus Christ. Don't you find this fact redeeming?!



In verse 11, we are encouraged to love each other, because *"God loved us so [very much]"*. I find this so significant – even though God knows that your love and my love is imperfect, He still instructs us to love each other! God is willing to take that risk in allowing us to try to love each other, because He has perfect trust in His Love, perfected in Jesus Christ as atonement for our imperfection. God knows that He gave the ultimate propitiation for our often 'sinful' attempts to love.

Pause for a moment. How does that last thought make you feel? It makes me feel quite insignificant, and my efforts to love even more so. Yet, listen to the promise in verse 12: *"...if we love one another, God abides (lives and remains) in us and His love (that love which is essentially His) is brought to completion (to its full maturity, runs its full course, is perfected) in us!"* Wow! This promise is so powerful! God trusts us to take the first step in loving others, even though we might be a bit stiff and out of rhythm at first. Still, through our loving each other, His love reaches maturity and runs the full course, is perfected!

Verse 13 introduces a reciprocity into this promise. God not only abides in us. We can also abide (live and remain) in Him, *"...because He has given (imparted) to us of His [Holy] Spirit."* It is His Spirit in us that brings His love to maturity, to perfect rhythm, to completion! Yes, God is embodied in our decision to, our attempts to, our endurance in, loving each other. Let that realisation sink in for a moment...***GOD LIVES AMONG US WHEN WE LOVE ONE ANOTHER!***

Image: [https://img.heartlight.org/cards/g/walk\\_1john4\\_10.jpg](https://img.heartlight.org/cards/g/walk_1john4_10.jpg)

## WEEK 9: Love is unity

1 Corinthians 12:12 "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ."  
(NIV)



God is Triune – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That is what we as Christians believe. Three Persons in perfect Unity – One, inseparable. Strong. Forever.

Are we as the Church one? Are we united as our God is? Paul shares his conviction with us in 1 Cor 12: 12 that the body of Christ, His Church, is one. It makes me think of the principle of "unity in diversity". This principle doesn't nullify individuality, nor does it limit collaboration. Each individual contributes to the common activity of the Church, and each member of the Body does his or her work with the help of others. It is not only collaboration, but corroboration – confirming and supporting each other. Even though we are autonomous individuals –

each busy with his or her own work – the Holy Spirit unifies us in our faith in Jesus – the Truth, the Way and the Life.

So, God – in His perfect Triune unity – leads His Church to be in union, as He is. How then do we realise this unity as church? I'm of the opinion that God created sacraments as unifying agents, so to speak, as God's grace is both mediated and experienced through the sacraments. Have you thought, for example, of the Eucharist in this way? When we share in the Eucharist, we are not only 'telling', but also 'doing', in remembrance of Christ - the Bread of Life – that unifies us as the Church.

This unity is therefore not an invisible principle, but becomes visible in the way we *are* Church daily. I believe that the Church is not a building, but a faith-sharing community. Our unity as the Body of Christ becomes tangible in the way we pray for each other, care for each other and support one another. Even though my style of prayer may be different from my neighbour's, or my neighbour's dress code is different to mine, we can still celebrate our faith in, and love for Christ, by edifying each other in word and deed.

A Scripture that comes to mind is Ecclesiastes 4: 9-12. Have you noticed that the author in this text speaks of *two* being able to care and fend for each other, but ends verse twelve with the words, "a *threefold* cord is not quickly broken?" Is the third person implied in this text not perhaps the Holy Spirit?

Is the Holy Spirit figuratively weaved into your church's proverbial "unity-cord?"

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## WEEK 10: Love knows no fear

### Daniel 3 (AMP)

Because Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego knew and loved God, they refused to worship King Nebuchadnezzar's golden image. Indeed, in the face of death threats, these three servants of God did not back down. Even when they were given a second chance to pardon themselves from their offense, they stood fast in their faith in God.

Take note, though, that they had no guarantee that they wouldn't be burnt to death in the fiery furnace. Let's look at their answer to king Nebuchadnezzar (vs 17-18): *"If our God Whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, He will deliver us out of your hand ... but if not, let it be known to you, O king, that*



*we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up!"* What stands out for me, are the words "if" and "will." They didn't simply say "our God will deliver us." Their faith wasn't in God's deliverance, but in Him. Even if God didn't deliver them, they would still honour God with their faith in Him. They made this clear to the king by saying, *"if not (if God doesn't deliver us), let it be known that we will not serve your gods..."* Wow, these guys' faith was sorted – they knew where they stood in relation to God! They were ready to die for God's glory. This is clear in their words, *"let it be known."* They were out to make a statement for God Almighty!

I don't know if you or I will ever be faced with threats of any kind for our faith in Jesus Christ. What I do know, though, is that the world will always try and persuade us to renounce our faith. What is in it for you and me if we stand firm in our faith? Paul's words in Phil 1: 21 (AMP) come to mind... *"to die is gain."* Gain for me? No! God's Kingdom shall gain, in the same way that Nebuchadnezzar honoured God when he saw what happened with the three men after being thrown into the fiery furnace. He was completely astonished that they didn't burn to death. Verse 26: *"...you servants of the Most High God, come out and come here."* What a proclamation by a man who, several minutes earlier, knew only his own grandeur! He even went further and said (in vs 28): *"Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, Who has sent His angel and delivered His servants who believed in, trusted in, and relied on Him!"* God was on a roll though and didn't stop there at glorifying His name through His servants' obedience. King Nebuchadnezzar even made a decree (vs 29) that, *"any people, nation and language that speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego shall be cut into pieces and their houses be made a dunghill, for there is no other God who can deliver in this way!"*

From reading this passage and writing this devotion, I realise this: our faith in God goes a long way, even if we pay with our lives for it. Figuratively speaking, the buck doesn't stop with me (or you). In fact, God is alive on earth in our faith, and our faith on earth guarantees life with God forever!

Love God. Keep faith. Fear not!

Image: <https://dizzyges.files.wordpress.com/2017/08/shad-mesh-az-e1502300979345.jpg>