

Series -

Date/s - 12 August 2018

Topic - Partnering God, Blessing The Nations

Speaker/s - Pastor William Lee

Welcome [15 min]

You may want to look up the following websites for *icebreakers* suitable for your cell.

www.thesource4ym.com/games/

www.christianitytoday.com/smallgroups/articles/icebreakersbeyond.html < go to LEAD, click on ICEBREAKERS >

Worship [15 min]

You may select songs like "This Is Amazing Grace", "Glorious One", "All Hail King Jesus", "O Praise The Name", "Be Enthroned" or "Tremble".

Spiritual Objectives

At the end of the cell discussion, members will commit to be instruments of God's blessings wherever God has placed us or will call us to.

Word [45 min]

Pastor William Lee challenges us to "Go! This man is My chosen instrument to proclaim My name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel." (Acts 9:15). Although this call in Scripture was specifically for Paul, it is no less a call for all Christians for all times.

Likewise in 1 Timothy 2:1-7, Paul himself urges us to pray and intercede for all people, including "kings and all those in authority" because God "wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." God wants to bless the world with the Good News of Jesus Christ, and the instrument He chooses for this purpose is none other than the disciple of Christ. Every one of us is that instrument of God's blessings.

Just as He did with Abraham, God is calling us out to partner with Him to bless the nations (Acts 17:26). Whichever city He calls us to, He wants us to be a blessing to its people (Jeremiah 29:7). And when we obey Him, all nations on earth will be blessed through us (Genesis 22:18).

Like Israel in the midst of Middle Eastern nations, Singapore sits in the sea of unreached nations in Southeast Asia. 300 million people are in Indonesia and Malaysia where 270 million are pre-believers. But unlike Israel, we want to be a house of prayer, not a house of tourism (Matthew 21:13). The harvest is indeed plentiful, but the workers are few. Let us ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest field (Luke 10:2). *We* are the workers!

As with the unnamed saints in Hebrews 11:36-38, God is calling us to encounter Him and participate in His work, and even suffer for His glory. One such man today is Mohamed Abdul whom God is using mightily to bless his people. Another is Dr Andrew Ng, with his wife Belinda, who gave up everything to carry the Gospel to the furthest end of Africa.

What then are the Kingdom values of such God's instruments?

1. We are to be **praying instead of pillorying** our leaders. (1 Timothy 2:1-3)
2. We are to **serve God out of devotion instead of duty**. (Luke 7:38, Luke 21:3)
3. We are to **take up the Cross instead of only talking about the Cross**. (Luke 9:23)
4. We are to be **laying down our life instead of living it up**. (Philippians 1:21)

Before we can be of any use to God as instruments of His blessing, we need to be “broken” like the alabaster jar of expensive perfume used to anoint Jesus in Matthew 26:7-10. Examples of “broken” instruments greatly used by God in the Bible include King David (Psalm 51), Isaiah (Isaiah 6:7-13), Peter (Luke 22:54-62 and John 21:15-17) and Paul (Acts 9:1-9). Like the perfume in the alabaster jar, we have **the treasure** in earthen vessels – the all-surpassing love of Christ in us (2 Corinthians 4:7).

“For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that One died for all, and therefore all died. And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again.” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)

May our prayer be, “Break my heart for what breaks Yours. Everything I am for Your kingdom’s cause. As I walk from earth into eternity.”

Discussion Questions

1. **As Singapore celebrated our 53rd birthday as an independent nation, what are the things that you can give thanks to God for as you look back over the years?** [10 min]

Leader’s Notes: *This is an ice-breaker for us to reflect on the blessings we have received as individuals, as a church, and as a nation. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 tells us, “Give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” We are to count our blessings all the time. God’s grace abounds everywhere. But are there good things in our lives or in our nation that we may have taken for granted while we get distracted by the not-so-good things around us? What about also giving thanks for those times of our deepest struggles and pain? The Word of God says we can even be grateful for these. James 1:2-4 tells us to “count it all joy when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” Be gentle if anyone in the cell finds it difficult to give thanks for a specific situation in their life. Promptly gather around them and pray God’s love and kindness over them. “My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.” (Psalm 51:17)*

2. **Read 1 Timothy 2:1-7. In this scripture, Paul urges Timothy (and by extension, all of us) to pray and intercede for those in authority, i.e. our government (or church leaders), so that we may live in peace and godliness. Have you been guilty of pillorying our leaders instead of praying for them? Are you one of those who is quick to criticise and spread ridicule about our leaders on social media, instead of going on our knees in petition for them? How should our response be as Christians to governing authorities whom we disagree with?** [10 min]

Leader's Notes: A reflection question to help us search our hearts. The Bible commands Christians to "submit ... to the governing authorities" (Romans 13:1) and to pray "for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence" (1 Timothy 2:2). These words are even more striking when we realise that Paul wrote them during the reigns of the Roman emperors Nero and Caligula, two of the worst tyrants known to history. The point is clear. As long as we can do so without denying Christ or compromising our faith, we must always strive to cooperate with the ruling powers. That does not necessarily mean that we will endorse all of their policies or approve of every specific action they take. This is especially true in a democratic society, where it is the duty of responsible citizens to examine public servants with a discerning and critical eye. Nevertheless, Christians are responsible to uphold biblical righteousness in a hostile culture while also expressing respect for its leadership.

The crux of the matter is that God is always in charge regardless of who is in power. We may not trust the governing authorities, but we have to trust God. For no one can become a king, emperor, governor, president, or prime minister apart from God's will. However, this does not mean that having political power amounts to a stamp of approval from God. Under normal circumstances, we can demonstrate that trust by cooperating with the state, paying our taxes, participating in the system, staying out of trouble, and praying for them. But this does not mean that we should be blind. We must not forget that the power of human rulers is subject to a higher power, whether they believe in God or not. Should a situation arise in which these two authorities come into clear conflict with one another, Christians have to "obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). But we can pray that situations of this nature will be few and far between in Singapore.

- 3. Read Luke 9:23 together. "And he said to all, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.'" What comes to your mind when you read this familiar verse? Is your first reaction like, "It's too hard. I don't want to think about it." Or, "It's too hard. I don't know if I can do what He says but I will obey because He commands it." Or even, "Can I follow without denying myself and taking up my cross daily?"**

What does Jesus mean by 'deny yourself' and 'take up your cross daily'? Relate this to your personal situation and share. [10 min]

Leader's Notes: This is a relate question. The Christian life is a journey to the greatest joy that exists. But "the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few" (Matthew 7:14) Why is that? Because, paradoxically, in order to pursue our greatest joy, we must deny ourselves and take up our cross. But what do these words really mean?

When Jesus spoke those words to His disciples, He was teaching them to intentionally move toward death. Physical death, yes. All present that day who heard those words would die, some as martyrs. But all his followers would also have to die to themselves. Die to the desire for self-glory, die to the desire for worldly respect and the fear of man, die to the desire for an easy life, die to the desire for earthly wealth, and a thousand other deaths. Finally, they must die to their desire to save their earthly lives (Matthew 16:26).

To "deny" yourself means to say "No" to yourself and "Yes" to God. Paul is not talking about asceticism – forgoing earthly possessions, not eating certain foods, ignoring the world, etc. To say it differently, the process of denial is "to humbly submit my will to God." It is to go through life repeating the words that Jesus said the night before he died. When he was praying in the garden, he said to God his Father, "Not my will but yours be done." It is what millions of Christians have prayed for centuries when they repeat what we call the "Lord's Prayer." "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

What does it look like to live out this prayer? Someone hurts you. Your natural reaction is to lash back, to get angry. But the path of discipleship is “not my will but yours.” It is humbly submitting my will to God’s will. Instead of getting angry, we realise that God is calling us to forgive even our enemies. When I am hurt, I am called to submit my will to God’s will and follow his example. This is what it means to “deny” yourself.

What does it mean to “daily take up your cross”? The cross was a horrid symbol of pain, shame, and death. A person hung on it, naked, until his skeletal structure collapsed and he suffocated to death, without air and with his body drowning itself in its own fluids. Every day we are to live in such a way that it is apparent to everyone that we have died to ourselves, to our selfish ways and ambitions, and live for God. Something unfair happens and instinctively we want to get even. But we have died to that “right,” we have prayed “not my will but Yours be done.” Hopefully we humbly submit our will to God’s will, and we respond in kindness and humility. Will we always do this right? Of course not, and that is, in a sense, okay. Life is a journey. God understands that over the years we have created habits of our heart that are not easily broken, and He is patient with us as we learn to walk the new path. Nevertheless, we are called daily to humbly submit our will to His.

The Christian life is hard, sometimes agonizing, and we should not be surprised (1 Peter 4:12). It is hard because denying our fallen selves is hard. Any death is hard, some much more than others. But it is designed to be that way. Our life is our most precious earthly possession. Nothing displays the worth of Jesus more than our willingness to give away our life (in small and large ways) for His sake. The only things that Jesus asks us to deny ourselves of are what will rob us of eternal joy. Like Moses in Hebrews 11:25-26, we are called to deny ourselves the passing pleasures of sin and consider the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the world’s treasures.

[Adapted from Jon Bloom/Desiring God and Bill Mounce/Western Seminary]

4. What specific steps will you take in the coming days to be an instrument of God’s blessings: i. to my family, ii. to my neighbours and colleagues, iii. to the community, and iv. to the nations? [15 min]

Leader’s Notes: *This is a response question. Anyone who is a Christian has two primary callings, i.e. the Great Commandment (Mark 12:28-34) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20). We have been looking at the Great Commission – specifically the Antioch Mandate – as a nation to be a blessing to other nations. But not all of us will be called to the nations like Andrew and Belinda Ng or Mohamed Abdul, although we do earnestly pray for such passionate sons and daughters to rise in our midst!*

*Most of us will begin our “blessing the nations” at home, at work, in school, in the neighbourhood, and in the community at large. **But begin we must. Today.** Share your testimony. Share the Gospel. Share your meals. We do not want to just be a “come and see” church – come and hear the music, come listen to the teaching, come profit from the programmes. Let us go from “come and see” to “go and share.”*

Here are some suggestions of the kind of ‘lay ministry’ we want to be doing:

- 1. Let others know of your Christian faith and activities in natural ways (e.g. talking casually about how you spend your Sundays).*
- 2. Ask questions about other people’s beliefs and experiences with faith and church, and simply listen appreciatively and sympathetically.*
- 3. Describe briefly and naturally how you process some difficult personal problems – some misfortune or some mistreatment – by using your faith to help you get strength or grant forgiveness.*
- 4. Offer to pray regularly for a friend, neighbour, or colleague who is facing a challenging situation.*

5. *Share your spiritual 'narrative' – your testimony of Christian experience.*
6. *Offer books or recordings about Christian issues and discuss them.*
7. *Initiate a discussion about a friend's biggest problem or objection to Christianity.*
8. *Invite friends to venues where they meet believers but don't listen to gospel communication.*
9. *Offer and then read a part of the Bible together – preferably one of the gospels – to discuss the character of Jesus.*
10. *Invite friends to venues where they hear the gospel communicated. (#8 may be more intense/demanding for the Christian than #9, but for many non-believers, #8 is less intense/demanding than #9 – going to some Christian event.)*
11. *Share the basics of the Christian faith with your friend, lay out how to become a Christian, or invite them to the Alpha Course.*
12. *Get to know more people from different walks of life by joining the outreach programmes of RiverLife Community Services.*

[Adapted from Tim Keller/The Lay Ministry Dynamic]

Works [10 min]

Let's pray:

1. RiverLifers will deny themselves, follow Jesus passionately and love others tangibly.

Announcements

1. Alpha Course

Sundays, 2 Sep – 25 Nov | 2pm – 4pm | Faith Chapel

Register online at <http://bit.ly/rlalpha>

For enquiries, please contact Moses Sho at 65114146, email him at mosessho@riverlife.org.sg or visit our Guest Welcome Lounge on Sundays.

2. Marriage Preparation Course

Sundays, 30 Sep, 7, 14, 21 & 28 Oct | 1.45pm-5pm and Sat, 10 Nov | 9am-5pm

\$260 Per Couple | Classrooms 214/215 | RiverLife Church

There will be a celebratory dinner from 6-9pm on Sun, 28 Oct.

Register at the Information Counter by Sun, 16 Sep. For enquiries, please contact Christine Tan at christinetan@riverlife.org.sg or 65114141.

3. Equipping for Parents by RiverLife's Family Life Ministry

Child Dedication

Class Dates:

- Sat, 22 Sep | 2-4pm | Grace Chapel or
- Sun, 30 Sep | 2-4pm | Grace Chapel

Please register for one session only. Both parents are required to attend the class.

Register at the Information Counter by Sun, 16 Sep.

For more information, please contact Christine Tan at 65114141, or email her at christinetan@riverlife.org.sg.