

A Suitcase of Stories, Dreams and Prayers

August 2021 (1 - 28 August)



To live is to unpack a suitcase of eternal stories, dreams and prayers...

Our lives can be compared to a traveling suitcase moving through time. One full of stories, dreams and prayers. 'Time' has been described as stories we tell each other in order that we give our lives meaning. Phrases, snippets of conversations overheard, that give our understanding fresh insight, they all find their way into the suitcase along with dreams to be explored that speak of purpose for the future and prayers to be prayed to hold us in time and root us into eternity.

Amidst all the mystery of time from the first cosmic dawn 13.5 billion years ago when God spoke and said 'Let there be light' to this moment in time – we have a suitcase full of experience to unpack and share with others. In 2nd Timothy 3:16 Paul reminds Timothy that, "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realise what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right." Scripture helps us see ourselves in our stories of faith and hope. As we unpack these stories, phrases, dreams and struggles, may we do so in order to learn and grow as individuals, to help us start to build bridges across time into eternity which is our ultimate destination.

During the next four weeks we continue to follow the lectionary using each week's readings to focus on a story, a throw away phrase, a dream, or a prayer in order to help us understand how God speaks to us and guides us in our lives.

- One man's story may well open up a door into a greater understanding of ourselves and others.
- Our dreams may well be God using our subconscious mind to reflect on the importance of a decision.
- There are often more truths expressed in a throwaway line than in a theological treatise.
- And prayer often opens us up to new horizons and the wideness of God's mercy and compassion.

We each have a cosmic suitcase that fills with our own stories, dreams, throwaway lines and prayers as we travel through time learning what it means to be God's – on into eternity!

Let's get packing!

Each week of the four week theme runs Sunday-Saturday and has its own subtheme, which contains daily Bible readings and thought triggers.

The Power of a Story — Nathan and the Lamb (1 Aug)

This week we are highlighting the power of stories to speak to our conscience, enabling us to find and give forgiveness. Use are invited to use the image of the cosmic suitcase and the time travel context to open up new understandings of how God speaks into our lives. Nothing is ever wasted from the past in God's economy.

1. 2 Samuel 12: 1-14

Key Reading

2. Psalm 51: 1-12

3. Exodus 16: 2-4, 9-15

4. Psalm 78: 23-29

5. Ephesians 4: 1-16

6. John 6: 24-35

7. Your choice...

1. **You ARE the man.** The story that Nathan tells relates to lifestyle. It highlights that what preoccupies our mind can shape our actions — what we look at, what we secretly desire, shapes our attitude and our spiritual appetite. Using the story as a key shaper for the week's reflections allow the response of David to his actions to be explored more fully in the following supplementary texts.
2. **Broken by shame and guilt.** David's repentance — face smarting with guilt, found out, called out, knocked out... fall out.
3. **A community of complacency.** Ungrateful hearts lead to ungrateful attitudes. Yet God God repays their ingratitude with more grace. Perhaps if David had been more grateful for what he had he would never have gone in search of that which was not his. Our hearts determine our response to life.
4. **An unbelievable gracious God.** God is not out to spoil our lives. We cannot live on what we see, bread alone, we need the bread of life. Bread of heaven can be expressed in the wealth of our creative imaginations, beauty, poetry, song, dance. Love, joy and peace are all part of the food from heaven.
5. **Unity and harmony require to be worked at...** Communities can either live in harmony and unity or become sources of canker and division. This reading emphasises the importance of unity - we are called to become worthy of our name and inheritance. We are called to seek the unity of the community in the bond of peace. One body, one spirit and one baptism. The wonderful picture of Christ the victory making the captives into citizens and giving them the gifts of his victory. The vision is no longer guilty rebels but treasured co-workers in Christ.
6. **Looking for Jesus for personal gain.** Looking for Jesus in the right place for the wrong reasons. The food Jesus gives is not to make you materially wealthy but to sustain you in times of temptation and struggle.
7. **Our Daily Worship writer is invited to choose a scripture reading and unpack the power of a story that summarises the week's message.** If you are using this material for personal reflection we invite you to likewise choose your own passage to conclude the week.

A Word Overheard — The Rebellious Son (8 August)

This week we are highlighting the power of a word overheard to shape the way we might understand another person. Use the image of the cosmic suitcase from this month's theme and the time travel context to open up new understandings of how God speaks into our lives. Throwaway lines are often lifelines for throwaway lives. If only Absalom had listened and Joab obeyed.

1. 2 Samuel 18: 5-9, 15, 31-33

Key Reading

2. Psalm 130

3. Psalm 34: 1-8

4. Ephesians 4:25-5:2

5. John 6: 35, 41-51

6. Psalm 23: 5

7. Your choice...

1. **"Deal gently with Absalom"** What history is packed into that short phrase overheard and remembered for posterity. It didn't end well for Absalom or David. Our selfish actions eventually have to be paid for by someone. This week we reflect on this phrase and the journey of sorrow and restoration that David had to go through. Our throwaway lines have a story to tell. When we learn to listen to one another we may discover much in a phrase overheard.
2. **Out of the depth.** Sorrow in its bucketfuls follows the life of King David. Despite his wilfulness and selfishness David realises that it is God alone who can give him the longing of his heart. It is to God alone that he can truly unburden himself. David calls to God out of the depth of self pity, anger and shame and a deep self loathing. David sees in himself the reflection of the nation of Israel deceiving God.
3. **Taste and see that the Lord is Good.** God is not against us. We don't live in a hate filled creation. We live in a creation capable of harmony, a creation where the lion and the lamb can lie together. We need to return to see the blessings of God. Living a life of gratitude enables us to see the blessings.
4. **Start tilling the Kingdom soil.** We are called to build each other up through acts of kindness. 'Tender-hearted' is a particularly beautiful underused word. God is the tender-hearted father. Pick up this idea in the psalms (see Psalm 103: 13). Forgiveness is like a fragrant offering of love. What about the overheard kindnesses you've heard?
5. **Kingdom Bread.** If you eat Kingdom bread, you will begin to live out Kingdom values. Let the life of Jesus fill your soul — in doing so heaven is touching earth.
6. **Feasting in the battle.** What an amazing picture. All hell is breaking around you and God stops the battle. He freezes the action. Then he sets out a banquet and says restore your energy. Take a moment let me anoint your head with oil, refresh yourself. Let the joy of this moment overflow. Goodness and mercy will follow you. The battle may feel important to you — but God says I have already won the war. Goodness and mercy have prevailed.
7. **Our Daily Worship writer is invited to choose a scripture reading and unpack the power of perhaps a particular phrase that summarises the week's message.** If you are using this material for personal reflection we invite you to likewise choose your own passage to conclude the week. come.

Another King — Another Story and Another Dream (15 Aug)

This week we are highlighting the power of a dream to help us find and discover guidance in a time of turmoil and uncertainty. The first reading features a dream, but think about how other dreams of fear, longing and contentment weave in to the other readings in subtle ways. Use the image of the cosmic suitcase and the time travel context from the theme to open up new understandings of how God speaks into our lives.

1. 1 Kings 3: 3-15

Key Reading

2. Psalm 111

3. Proverbs 9: 1-6

4. Psalm 34: 9-14

5. Ephesians 5: 15-20

6. John 6: 51-58

7. Your choice...

1. **Wisdom over ego.** Solomon's dream and request for wisdom over ego and power perhaps gives us an insight into the place dreams might have in shaping our actions and reactions. How much significance should we place on dreams?

2. **'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom'** What does it mean to fear God? Perhaps it is a phrase that invites us to realise how little we know, but how much we owe to God. Putting things into perspective — he controls the nations. Perhaps it's a call to respect God — when we do that many other things are added into our lives.

3. **Wisdom is to be admired.** Wisdom is personified as a generous hostess. She leaves room at the table for all, great and small alike. The simple in heart are welcomed. Linking food with wisdom — Jesus the bread of life.

4. **Giving God his rightful place has its rewards.** Doing good things, and thinking good — the result is that you will never be overcome with evil. Goodness affects every part of our physical and spiritual attitudes.

5. **You can't overindulge in the joy of the Lord.** Paul endorses this idea of being careful how we live. It is the Holy Spirit who brings wisdom into our lives. He opens our eyes to see who Jesus really is: the *Logos* that John speaks of in his prologue. Paul then encourages us to enjoy the things of God in our lives. Making music and creating melodies of praise to God in our hearts and our lives.

6. **The offer of eternal life.** What an amazing offer! To live forever, is to have the bread of life at work in our spiritual digestive system. Jesus as part of our daily food. It is to abide in Christ. Jesus is what every human longs for. The Communion service is a reminder to us that Jesus is our brother who walks with us out of time into eternity.

7. **Our Daily Worship writer is invited to choose a scripture reading (that perhaps features a dream) to further explore this week's theme.** If you are using this material for personal reflection we invite you to likewise choose your own passage to conclude the week.

God Cannot be Contained in a Building — the Prayer of Everyman (22 August)

This week we are highlighting the power of a prayer to help us find and discover guidance in a time of turmoil and uncertainty. Use the image of the cosmic suitcase and the time travel context from the overall theme to open up new understandings of how God speaks into our lives through the prayers of others and the prayers we make ourselves.

1. 1 Kings 8: 22-30, 41-43

Key Reading

2. Psalm 84

3. Joshua 24: 1-2a, 14-21

4. Psalm 34: 15-22

5. Ephesians 6: 10-20

6. John 6: 56-69

7. Your choice...

1. **God of all the nations.** In this prayer that Solomon prays a great deal is covered. It concludes with the understanding that God listens to the prayers of all the nations. In this prayer we get an insight into Solomon's understanding of inclusive prayer.

2. **The intimate God.** Here is a psalm that highlights the intimacy and the love that God seeks to have with his creation. It is also an insight into the longing of the heart of human beings to know God, not simply as a concept but as a heartfelt tingling of the soul. There is room for all to encounter the love of the creator. Even the smallest of animals can find a home. One day with God is better than a lifetime of riches and wealth. Faith is full of joy, emotion and love. We are called to encounter this in worship.

3. **A time to choose.** In all of life there comes a time when we have to make a choice that will set the course for the rest of our lives. Joshua confronts the people to make their choice. As for Joshua there was no turning back to the old ways. He and his household had made their choice to serve the Lord. There is a power that comes from a prayer of commitment. A moment of choice that becomes a signpost for the rest of life.

4. **God's hand protects the crushed spirit.** God's nature is to look out for those who want to do the right thing. God will never abandon the poor. This psalm reminds us that God is a rescuing God. We may feel abandoned but he reaches out and brings justice. Prayer is never overlooked by God.

5. **Stand firm.** Someone once thought that Paul got his inspiration to write this section of the epistle from the soldiers guarding him under house arrest. Paul is saying when you have covered all the bases. When you have done what you can — stand firm because God has your back.

6. **Many turned away.** In this passage Jesus opens up his heart but also invites his larger group of followers to go further with him. He invites them to encounter the things of the Spirit. The call to follow Jesus always leaves men and women with a choice. Do we grow deeper and taller or do we go shallow and grow wide.

7. **Our Daily Worship writer is invited to choose a scripture reading (that perhaps features a prayer) to further explore this week's theme.** If you are using this material for personal reflection we invite you to likewise choose your own passage to conclude the week.