



Pictures of Us

Ephesians

Bible Study book— Term 1 2019

BIBLE STUDY PROGRAM – TERM 1 2019

Pictures of us Week commencing		Reading Plan	Page Number
<i>4th February</i>	A Masterpiece & A Temple	Ephesians 2:1-22	2
<i>11th February</i>	A Body	Ephesians 4:1-16	6
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Peacemakers Week commencing		Reading Plan	Page Number
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<i>11th March</i>	Logs and eyes	Matthew 7:3-5 Philippians 4:2-9	24
<i>18th March</i>	Specks and eyes	Galatians 6:1-6 Matthew 18:15-20	28
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Pictures of Us: Introduction

In the early 60s AD, the Apostle Paul wrote a letter 'to God's holy people in Ephesus'. Paul was the great early missionary of Jesus Christ. Along with a team of co-workers, Paul had spread the message about Jesus (the "gospel") throughout the eastern part of the Roman Empire. But when Paul wrote his letter, he was in prison in Rome. He'd been chained up because powerful people opposed his gospel.

The churches planted through Paul's missionary work faced similar struggles. Persecution was increasing. Ancient racial tensions were bubbling to the surface. False teachers preyed on these young churches in Paul's absence. For many of the people who'd heard and believed the gospel that Paul and others had proclaimed and taught, it would certainly have looked like things weren't going to plan. So Paul penned this letter from his imprisonment, to these believers in and around Ephesus (in the Roman Province of Asia, which is modern day Turkey), to encourage them.

Our studies will not cover all of the book of Ephesians. Instead, we will look at 5 "Pictures of Us". We will look at 5 metaphors Paul employs such that the Ephesian church may come to see itself clearly. These metaphors speak of how precious and important the church is in God's recreation of the world. These metaphors remind us of the necessity of unity and service as we care for the church. These metaphors remind us not to take the church for granted, but to arm it with faith and maturity against the devil's schemes.

We live in an extremely individualistic culture. It is no surprise that for many, the goal of Christ's life, death and resurrection is their own personal salvation and fulfilment. In such a culture, it is easy to take the church for granted, treat it as optional and engage with church as a consumer. Ephesians tells a very different story. We are each called from death to life that we may take our place in a new type of humanity: the church. This new humanity is precious to God and is the front line of his plans to restore the world. Let's spend 4 weeks in Ephesians, looking at the church through God's eyes.

Pictures of Us: Study 1

A Masterpiece & A Temple: Ephesians 2:1-22

Talk

1) How might the non-Christians you know answer the question, “what is the church and what is its purpose?”

How might you answer the same question?

2) Has your opinion on the church changed over time? How?

3) Have your expectations of church changed over time? How?

Over the next 4 weeks we are going to look at our church through God’s eyes, using the images he provides in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. Our hope and prayer is that in doing so, we will see St Luke’s Miranda in a new and refreshing way.

Read Ephesians 2:1-22

4) What initial thoughts, questions or insights arise from the passage?

Investigate and Apply Ephesians 2:1-10

The first picture of the church we encounter is in 2:10:

- *For we are God’s workmanship (NIV)*
- *For we are God’s handiwork (NIV 2011)*
- *For we are His creation (Holman)*
- *For we are God’s masterpiece (NLT)*

The church is the careful creation of God!

5) What sort of 'raw-material' was God working with as he created the Ephesian church (What state were the Ephesian Christians in before being 'made alive', 2:1-3)?

6) While this is objectively true of all people who are not Christians, was there a time in your life you felt this to be true of you?

7) List the ways God transforms sinful people to form his masterpiece.

8) It may feel like an exaggeration to describe the church as a masterpiece, yet take a moment to consider the following verses from Ephesians. What does each tell us about the grand role of the church in God's plans?

- **1:9-10**

- **1:22-23**

- **3:6**

- **3:10-11**

9) Throughout this passage, Paul is referring to the gathered church, rather than each individual Christian (each 'you' is plural throughout the passage). If the church is as big a deal as the passage makes it out to be, how might this change our attitude towards our Church?

Investigate and Apply Ephesians 2:11-22

10) In 2:11-22 we are introduced to a new picture of the church: 'a building'. Considering Paul's reference to Jews, Gentiles and dividing walls in 11-14, in what sort of building are we immediately thinking? How does this make sense of the 'near' and 'far' language?

11) Who does the cross unite, according to Ephesians?

12) The Temple, once the focal point of Jew/Gentile division, is now Paul's chosen metaphor for the church, where Jew and Gentile are united. What are some of the architectural features of this 'new temple', the church? Do you think these are features of St Luke's as well?

13) This image of the church is a powerful exhortation to unity. Those previously divided are joined together in peace to become a dwelling place of God by his Spirit.

- What challenges to church unity does St Luke's face?

- What practices can we each engage in to best foster unity at St Luke's?

14) Are there age groups, racial groups or economic groups you struggle to feel united with at church? Are there individuals or families with whom you struggle to feel united? How may you work towards fulfilling the vision of Ephesians 2?

Pray

Pray for Brett and Mardi, Evie, Harriet, Olivia, and Willow Middleton. Pray for Brett as Focus Pastor for 10am. Pray for Brett as he leads and serves us as Acting Senior Minister.

Pray for Matt and Lauren, Ezra and Joanna Thomas and their mission work with OMF International to an unreached people group in South East Asia.

Pray for our Church Wardens: Colin Adams, Jack Normand and Joel Garlato. Pray for our Parish Councillors: Laurie Davidson, Amanda Garlato, Angela James, Nathan Pollock, Simon Veltmeyer (also our treasurer) and Kath Telfer. Pray for our Parish Nominators: Michael Easton, David Francis, Amanda Garlato, Louise Parkes, and Lloyd Zietsch. Pray for our Synod Reps: Michael Easton and Amanda Garlato.

Pray for the wide range of outreach opportunities that we have with local schools. Pray that our scripture teachers would be diligent and loving as they teach classes. Pray that our school chaplains would effectively model Christ in the way they love and support the school community. Pray that our Kids Hope mentors would be a loving and stable relationship for children with social needs. Pray that School Lunch program leaders will be bold in their example and witness to their school communities. Pray for the volunteers running Breakfast Club at Miranda Public and Port Hacking High School. Pray for all ministries and Bible studies as they start up for the year. Pray for our upcoming Parish Council elections. Pray that people would be open to being nominated to serve.

Pictures of Us: Study 2

A Body: Ephesians 4:1-16

Talk

- 1) Spend some time sharing the different ministries you have been part of at St Luke's or at other churches. Were these good experiences or bad?

Read Ephesians 4:1-16

- 2) What initial thoughts, questions or insights arise from the passage?

Investigate and apply Ephesians 4:1-6

- 3) Last week we ended the study discussing the different practices that would contribute to church unity. Did anyone put these into practice during the week? What are Paul's suggested practices in 4:1-6? Were these included in the list you made last week?

- 4) How does the language used here remind us of the high importance God places on unity within the church body? Can you say you have made every effort to maintain unity?

Investigate and Apply Ephesians 4:7-16

While the church is united, it is not uniform. Paul now begins to speak about the diversity of gifts you must find within any church. The picture of the church used to help us understand this is 'The Body'.

5) 'Grace' is the word we usually use when speaking of the undeserved kindness God shows to us in Christ. Here it is a way of speaking about the different 'gifts' or abilities with which God blesses the church. Why is it important to recognise all abilities are from God?

6) In speaking about gifts, Paul does some Christological interpretation of Psalm 68. Have a read of Psalm 68:18. What important change does Paul make to the Psalm as he reinterprets it in light of the cross and resurrection?

7) Paul lists some of the gifts Jesus showers upon his church. What are they?

8) Note that Paul makes a distinction here between what we might call the 'leadership team' within a church (pastors and teachers) and 'God's people' (literally translated as 'the saints').

- **What are those tasked with leading the church expected to do? Is this factored in to how you assess good leadership?**

- **How does this differ from the expectations some churches place on their leaders?**

- **What should we expect to happen with each ministry appointment we make at St Luke's?**

9) How, in verses 12-13, does our diversity serve our unity?

Pray

Pray for Jennie and Don Everist. Pray for Jennie as Focus Pastor of the 8am congregation and as Pastoral Care Minister for St Luke's. Pray for Jennie's Pastoral Care ministries, especially in her work in visitation and Bible Study in our local retirement villages.

Pray for Shane and Ruth, Kye, Joel, and Finn Sparks and their mission work with Pioneers making disciples in Gijon, Spain.

Pray for our Prime Minister Scott Morrison, and his government. Pray for our state and federal members, Eleni Petinos, Mark Speakman. Pray for our Premier, Gladys Berejiklian and her government. We pray also for our local government including our Mayor, Carmelo Pesce.

Pray that the word of God we heard on Sunday might shape how we live Monday to Friday. Pray that we would be respectful of workplace boundaries, but that we'd also *"be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks [us] to give the reason for the hope that [we] have"* (1 Peter 3:15). Thank God that we have the opportunity to represent Christ in how we speak and act in the workplace.

Pictures of Us: Study 3

A Bride: Ephesians 5:22-33

Talk

1) When you hear the word 'bride', what images or feelings arise for you?

Read Ephesians 5:25-33

2) What initial thoughts, questions or insights arise from the passage?

Investigate and Apply Ephesians 5:25-33

3) Let's spend some time understanding why Paul pictures the church as a bride. Where does this image come from? Investigate:

- Isaiah 54:5-8

- Jeremiah 2:1-3 and 31:31-32

- Hosea 2:14-23

4) How would you characterise the marital relationship between God and his people Israel?

5) How does this Old Testament back-story inform our reading of the following moments in Jesus life?

- **Mark 2:18-20**

- **John 3:27-30**

6) Returning now to Ephesians 5, we usually read this text to learn about God's will for the roles of husbands and wives within marriage. However, let's look at it today as a way to see the church through God's eyes? How does the church fit into that story we traced through the Old Testament and into the gospels?

7) How does Jesus prepare his bride, the church, in 5:25-27? How is this different from our wedding customs, yet perfectly suited to the gospel message?

10) How is the church expected to respond to Christ our saviour in verses 22-24? Could you describe St Luke's as a church that submits to Christ in everything? In what areas are we being pressured to submit to popular culture rather than Christ?

Pray

Pray for Tim and Shona, Annika, Hamish, Edward and Hugo Goldsmith. Pray for Tim as Focus Pastor for the Miranda North and Church at 5 congregations. Pray for Tim as he heads up our Local Mission profile for St Luke's and focuses on outreach and evangelism.

Pray for John and Jodi, Gemma, Amber, Zoe, Jasmine, Claudia and Elias Lovell. Pray for John as Pastor of Valencia Anglican Church and his work as the Regional Director for MOCLAM in Valencia, Spain.

Pray for Miranda North; that there would be many opportunities to connect with the local community through school and other activities.

Thank God for the many and varied resources available to us as a parish. As we seek to witness to the goodness of God daily. Pray that we might make the most of opportunities to invite people we know to events at church. Pray that God would be preparing the heart of people we could invite to an upcoming event.

Pray for those who might be thinking about joining Christianity Explored, that they'd have the courage to contact the office or a Christian friend.

Pictures of Us: Study 4

A Warrior: Ephesians 6:10-20

Talk

1) What are the biggest issues St Luke's faces at the moment?

2) Who would you consider to be 'enemies of the church'?

Read Ephesians 6:10-20

3) What initial thoughts, questions or insights arise from the passage?

Investigate and Apply Ephesians 4:1-16

4) In our passage, who must the church make its stand against? Is this a reality you are aware of day to day?

5) Have you ever seen a church lose in its struggle against the devil's schemes? What did the devil use to cause that church to fall apart?

- 6) In describing the battle, Paul uses the word “*pálē*” (translated in the NIV as ‘struggle’). *Pálē*, a type of wrestling, was the most popular organised sport in ancient Greece. Naked competitors would patiently try to find a weakness in each other’s defences before seeking to throw their opponent to the ground. Why do you think Paul would use this particular competition to describe the church’s spiritual battle?
- 7) Against the devil’s schemes, Paul calls the church to put on the armour of God. Have a read of Isaiah 59. What is the OT background of this image?
- 8) Considering the background in Isaiah, is the church called to defend its territory or launch an attack? Is this the attitude of St Luke’s?
- 9) How is the armour similar and different to that of the divine warrior in Isaiah 59?
- 10) Think through the different items of armour. Which items has St Luke’s already fixed in place? Which items need to be secured? Which items might we need to put on again?
- Belt of truth
 - Breastplate of justice/righteousness
 - Feet fitted with the gospel of peace
 - Shield of faith
 - Helmet of salvation
 - Sword of the Spirit: the word of God

11) What is the first task Paul gives the newly armoured Ephesian Church (19-20)? What may St Luke's learn from this?

12) How might our church need to change its culture and practices if we are to put on the full armour of God?

Pray

Pray for Sam and Jess, Percy and Lois Morton. Pray for Sam as Focus Pastor of Night Church. Pray for Sam as he heads up Youth Ministry at St Luke's – coordinating our youth groups on Friday nights and high school Scripture in our local schools. Pray for Sam as he also heads up Young Adults ministry and Young Adults Bible Studies.

Pray for our missionaries working in Universities:

Pray for Geoff and Liz, Johanna, Will, Tom and Zoe Robson and their work with Christian Union in Canterbury University, Christchurch, New Zealand.

Pray for Rob and Jo, Lili, and Jemma Copland. Pray for Rob's work as the Anglican Chaplain at the University of Wollongong and for his work as Campus Director of the University Bible Group.

Pray for David, Kathryn and Reuben Luis. Pray for David as Campus Director of Geelong Christian Union at the Deakin University Campus in Victoria.

Pray for Peter and Katharine, Noah and Atticus Yock as they work amongst the students at the campus of Griffith University.

Pray for peace and wise leadership in our world. Pray that there would be opportunities for Christians to share the love, peace and saving grace that Jesus offers to all.

Thank God for his loving provision in drawing us to him and making us his children and heirs. Pray for members of our families and those close to us who do not know Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Pray for both wisdom and boldness in how to share the good news we have with those who are nearest and dearest to us.

Pray for Men's Breakfast on 2 March. Location TBA

Notes

A photograph of a person's hand and forearm making a peace sign (V-sign) against a clear, light blue sky. The hand is positioned in the center-left of the frame, with the index and middle fingers extended upwards and outwards. The word "PEACEMAKERS" is written in a bold, black, handwritten-style font across the middle of the hand and forearm, following the curve of the V.

PEACEMAKERS

Bible Study Book—Term 1 2019

Peacemakers: Introduction

¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ¹⁵ Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

¹⁷ But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

¹⁸ Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

James 3:13-18

The gospel is the announcement that Jesus, dying that we may live, has risen to God's right hand. All who once lived as enemies of God are invited to turn from their sins and be forgiven. This gospel, once heard and believed, provides a new pattern of life for all who call Jesus their king.

This 4-part study series, 'Peacemakers', applies the gospel pattern to arguments, disagreements and conflicts that arise within the church and beyond. We will consider why conflict arises, the opportunities provided by conflict and the gospel pattern for resolving conflict. God promises that as peacemakers sow peace, they will reap a harvest of righteousness. Let's take God at his word and begin to sow.

In writing these studies I have been greatly helped by Ken Sande's "The Peacemaker" and the free resources found at <https://peacewise.org.au/>.

I commend both the book and the website to all who would like to look deeper into the scriptures continue and be transformed into the likeness of Christ.

Peacemakers: Study 1

The potential for conflict and conflict's potential

Talk

Our natural response to conflict will often be 'flight' or 'fight':

- 'Flight' may be seen as we avoid the conflict, deny there is a problem or escape reality through various forms of self-medication.
- 'Fight' may be seen as we blame others, intimidate those we are in conflict with or engage in formal litigation.

1) Which response did you most often see modelled by parents and family members?

2) Which response comes most naturally to you?

3) What motivates us to run from conflict? What motivates us to seek to 'win' a conflict? Does either option provide a good outcome?

Read James 4:1-3 and Galatians 3:26-29

4) Consider James 4:1-3. From where do our fights and quarrels come? Do you think this is accurate?

5) Consider Galatians 3:26-29. Why might we expect conflicts to arise more often in a church community than outside a church community?

Read John 17:20-23

6) What eternal reality does peace between Christians point to? Conversely, what might Christian in-fighting suggest to a watching world?

7) What effect does peace between believers have in the world?

Read 1 John 4:7-21

8) What reality does our love and willingness to forgive point to?

9) In what ways does conflict offer us the perfect opportunity to witness to Jesus and announce the gospel?

10) Have you ever experienced conflict within a church community? Share this with the group if you feel comfortable. Did the gospel shine brightly in the midst of the conflict or not?

11) Does anyone have unresolved conflict in their life at the moment? Share with the group if you feel comfortable. How are you witnessing to the gospel in the midst of it? In what ways are you struggling to imitate Christ?

Pray

Pray for Cam, Katrina and Peyton Harte. Pray for Cam as he heads up Children's Ministry, including KOS (Kids on Sunday), Primary Scripture, Alive (lunch-time Christian group at Miranda North Public School), Homework Club, Children's Thursday night programs, Breakfast Club and Kids' Clubs.

Pray for Sarah Prabhakar and her work in India with BCTI and SIM.

Pray for our ongoing and various Children's, Youth, and Young Adults Ministries; that God would be using the leaders and volunteers to sow seeds and help people grow into mature and loving relationships with Jesus. Pray that this would be a great witness to the wider community.

Pray for our witness to families who bring their children along to Thursday Children's groups, Kids' Clubs, and Friday Youth groups. Pray that church families would be given opportunities to care for families who don't come to church, and that hearts may be softened to the gospel.

Pray for our upcoming AGM on 11 March, 7pm.

Peacemakers: Study 2

Logs and Eyes



Talk

1) Our culture has developed many hand signals for various situations (you might want to talk about the ones you most often use...). Why do you think the pointing finger has become synonymous with anger and conflict?

- Do you point the finger when you get angry?

- How does it make you feel when someone is pointing the finger at you?

Read Matthew 7:3-5

2) According to Matthew, when someone has sinned, perhaps even sinned against us, where should we begin if we wish to seek peace?

3) This is a very familiar passage. Do you think its familiarity has numbed us to its difficult implications? Is it something you remember as conflict arises?

4) How may a period of self-reflection help you '*see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye*'?

5) Having reflected on the conflict at hand, you may find you have contributed in some way and wish to confess it (Matthew 5:23-24)? What makes for a good apology.

Read Philippians 4:2-9

6) Who is in conflict in the Philippian church?

7) Reading the passage in light of the clash between these two women, what attitudes and practices does Paul encourage in the midst of conflict in verses 4-9?

8) Which of these do you think you would find most difficult when you are angry at someone or are feeling hurt?

9) Having spent some time in self-examination and attitude adjustment you may find yourself unwilling to pursue the conflict. Is it ok for a Christian to decide to overlook someone's wrongdoing and just move on?

10) Is overlooking the wrongdoing of others something you find easy or difficult? Is there a conflict you are currently involved in that could be put behind you if you overlook the wrong of someone?

11) When might overlooking someone's sin be an unwise decision?

Pray

Pray for Sharyn our Office Administrator and Eddie who is our assistant bookkeeper.

Pray for Andrew and Adele, Isaac, Lucy, and Finn Southerton and their church plant in Wellington, City on a Hill, New Zealand.

Pray for those who serve to protect our country. Pray for health and safety for the service men and women and their Chaplains both here and overseas. Pray for their families waiting at home.

Pray for our witness to our local community – especially as more units are developed and more people move into the area. Pray for opportunities to connect with our community.

Peacemakers: Study 3

Specks and Eyes

Talk

1) Can you remember a time when you rebuked someone? Can you remember a time when you challenged someone about their conduct towards you or someone else?

- How did you feel before the conversation?

- How did you feel after?

- Was it worth it?

2) Recap Matthew 7:3-6. Does this passage mean we should never evaluate the actions of others or seek to speak to them when they are acting in hurtful ways?

- 3) Does this passage offer any guidance as to when we might refrain from pointing out the 'speck in your brother's eye'?

Read Galatians 6:1-6

- 4) What guiding principles do we find in this passage to help us as we speak to others about their sin?

- 5) The passage warns us as we seek to restore others that we may find ourselves 'tempted'. What sins may we fall into as we seek to restore others?

Read Matthew 18:15-20

- 6) What practical steps does this passage offer as we seek to resolve our conflicts with each other?

7) Do you think these steps are realistic? Which steps are you tempted to skip?

8) Are there certain types of conflict we would not employ the steps in Matthew 18 to resolve?

9) How does the passage before and after Matthew 18:15-20 help us understand the spirit of Jesus teaching?

10) Consider a moment, past or present, when someone has treated you or someone you care for unfairly, unkindly or cruelly.

- **Does the person know how you feel?**

- **Does the issue continue to affect relationships?**

- **Have you spoken to them in the manner described in Galatians and Matthew?**

Why or why not?

Pray

Pray for our Student Ministers Russ Denten, Amani Kazogolo and Isaac Shumack as they join us on Sundays and studying at Moore College during the week.

Pray for John-Francis and Anup Wallace. Pray for John-Francis as Pastor of Shalom Calvary Church. Pray for the Wallace's and their local mission work in Indore, North India.

Pray for English as a Second Language classes each Friday. Give thanks for Marina and her team as they teach and encourage those who come along. Pray for the quarterly Easy English Service, that people would attend and understand the Bible and Jesus' saving grace.

Pray for the everyday outreach that the church has through ministries such as baptisms, weddings and funerals. For those who are involved and for those who attend who don't yet know Jesus as Lord. Pray that the staff would be wise in their presentation of the gospel, that they would be thoughtful in their interactions with people and that they would be eager to make the most of every opportunity to speak of Christ the King.

Pray for our Student Ministers on Moore College Mission from 24 March to 31 March.

Read Colossians 1:21-23 and 3:12-17

5) What motivates our persistence in resolving the conflict in our lives and our church?

6) “Forgive as the Lord forgave you”. Spend some time considering God’s forgiveness of you (you may also wish to look at Isaiah 43:25, Psalm 103:12, Psalm 130:3-4). How might this help us understand what true forgiveness looks like?

7) God’s forgiveness of us was costly. In what ways do you find forgiveness costly? What must be put to death in our hearts for us to forgive?

8) Considering these verses in Colossians, do you think Christians are ever permitted to treat peacemaking as optional?

Read Luke 17:3-4

9) What is the relationship between repentance and forgiveness in Luke 17?

How is this consistent with Paul's instruction to 'forgive as the Lord forgave you'?

10) What do you think real repentance looks like (2 Corinthians 7:9-11)?

11) Are you quick to forgive or slow to forgive. What are the problems with both of these positions?

12) How can the wider church help those who are in conflict? What church cultures may work against reconciliation and, instead, fan the flames of conflict (Proverbs 16:28, 22:10, 26:20-21, 30:33)?

13) Think back over the last 4 weeks of studies.

- **What have you found most challenging as we consider conflict and reconciliation?**

- **Have you put any of the practical wisdom of the bible into practice?**

- **Are there people you need to resolve issues with, or people you can help to resolve issues that you would like the group to pray for?**

Pray

Pray for Lisa and Gabby as office assistants.

Pray for Kylie Zietsch and her work at Johannesburg Bible College, South Africa.

Praise God for our Bible Study leaders and for their faithful work in teaching and ministering to us throughout the term.

Pray that St Luke's as a community would be a welcoming family to the new person who walks through our doors, as well as the person who's been walking through our doors for many years. Pray that God would help us to love the people as he first loved us. Give St Luke's a spirit of hospitality, care and inclusivity.

Pray for the lead up to Easter, particularly combined scripture in Primary schools. Pray for our Easter services and that God would give us opportunities to invite people along.

Appendix A: Peacemaking Scenarios

Think through the following scenarios as a group. How may what we cover each week in bible study help at each stage of these particular situations?

Daniel has been a faithful bible study leader for many years. This year a new group member, Luke, became less and less regular as the year went on. Daniel tried to reach out to Luke through phone calls and emails, but Luke never got back to him. Daniel felt at peace with this. You can't force anyone to come to bible study. However, he's just found out that Luke has settled into another group without telling him. Daniel feels that his pastoral care has been thrown back in his face.

Tahlia is thrilled that her best friend Megan is finally coming to Church. She thought it would never happen, but when Megan was struggling with her first baby, the church play-group was a place she began to connect. This week, Tahlia has made the next step by coming to Church. Megan was thrilled to introduce her to her friends in the parents' room and they quickly began sharing the highs and lows of the week. Everything was going perfectly until a church member Tahlia had never met interrupted Megan, *"Do you think you could save your conversations until after the service?"*. An awkward silence settles over the Parents' Room. Tahlia is furious. All her prayers and invitations are now wasted and she doubts Megan will ever come back.

John has been a member of his church for 30 years. When his marriage broke down church was his rock. As relationships with his children became strained church was his family. But this year he began to wonder if they cared for him at all. John had spent 6 weeks in hospital after a knee replacement. There were complications in his recovery and his rehab was especially difficult. Yet during this time no one from his bible study group visited and the ministry team seemed to have forgotten he was there. Though his recovery is progressing well, he is too angry to return to church.

Sally has been friends with Nicole since youth-group. However, their relationship has grown tense since their sons began attending a bible study group together. Nicole's son seems to always need to be the centre of attention. He is loud and disruptive and seems to enjoy publically embarrassing Sally's son. Sally recently requested the youth minister to remove Nicole's son from the group. Even though Sally insisted her involvement must be kept from Nicole, somehow Nicole was made aware of Sally's request and has refused to speak to Sally since.

There was a lot Zac loved about his church, but the Sunday services were not one of them. Music, service leading and preaching had not changed since he was a kid. Now, having just left school, a number of friends his age are leaving to find a more relevant church community. However, after many suggestions and requests, the minister agreed to allow him to introduce the songs he and his friends wanted to sing. The following day his minister emailed to say they wouldn't continue modernising the song list. He had received a number of emails, some from long term members and some from anonymous sources that had assured him they would leave if music continued down this path. Zac struggles to contain his frustration and begins to type a response.

Lorraine's jaw is clamped shut as the congregation around her laughs. Her church's Christmas service has gotten worse and worse over the last few years. A wonderful time of quiet reflection has been replaced by videos and loud music. The preacher may have the congregation laughing, but his jokes this Christmas Eve are all at the expense of people her age. She tries to continue listening, but her mind keeps returning to words she will say to this preacher on the way out of church.

Quinn walks into the church foyer and can't believe his eyes. The new carpet looks like it came second hand from an RSL gaming lounge. Who makes these decisions, he wondered? Whoever it was shouldn't be allowed to make any more. This is exactly why he no longer gives offertory. Quinn pulls out his phone and prepares to text the Senior Minister.

Samantha has been singing in the church band for years. She couldn't tally up how many hours she's spent in practices and rehearsals. This year she'll have the chance to sing at the annual youth outreach event. Yet when the band is announced, she realises she's been overlooked. The band leader, who she counted as a friend, has chosen someone else. The band leaders have always claimed that faithfulness and reliability are the most important values for band members. It seems to Samantha that her faithfulness and reliability count for nothing.

Mark runs a small accounting firm. This year, he made the decision to upgrade his office IT. Mark isn't great with this stuff, but feels confident asking Peter from church to take on the job. It'll be great to be able to give business to a fellow Christian. This proves to be a disastrous decision. Peter's upgrade takes far longer than it should. Months after the work is completed, Mark's company is experiencing major disruptions. Mark has asked Peter to come and fix them and Peter keeps promising he will, but never turns up. Mark feels he is losing the confidence of his staff and many of them are making comments about the need

for lawyers to step in. Every week when Mark sees Peter at church, he feels his anger rising.

Jack and Belinda have been in a bible study group together for years. Now at the same uni together they continue to cross paths at the campus Christian group. However, Jack is growing increasingly angry with Belinda. Belinda had started borrowing money from Jack. It was fine at first. Small amounts that were quickly paid back. But the last couple of loans were not paid back and Belinda seems to be avoiding him. To make matters worse, whenever their bible study group goes out socially or people are putting in for a present, Belinda always seems to be the first to throw money around.

James and Michelle love the ministry of hospitality. Some of the best memories they have are from their time in a rural area. The depth of relationships formed with other Christians as they shared meals together was amazing. It was hard when they made the decision to move to a large suburban area, yet they felt sure the local church would soon replace the friendship they had left behind. However, after 6 months of trying, they still feel they can't name a single friend. Acquaintances sure, but nothing deeper. Especially heartbreaking is the fact that though they have had a number of people to their house for dinner, none have returned the offer. They have begun avoiding these people and refusing invitations to the after service morning tea.

Joe could feel his face going red. His wife knew how to make people laugh, but lately it seemed to always be at his expense. It had happened again before church today and he felt humiliated. As Joe and his wife sit down next to each other she rests her shoulder against his. Joe moves deliberately to the side, staring straight ahead as his wife whispers, "what's wrong?"

Maddy never wants to serve on a team with Louise again. Louise puts her hand up for every new ministry the church offers. Whether its food drives, outreach events or youth ministry leadership, her confidence and enthusiasm mean she is always recruited. But she is utterly unreliable. Maddy always seems to be the one completing the tasks Louise has promised she will do.

Appendix B: The special case of abuse

The article below is taken from resources freely available at www.peacewise.org.au

If you are currently dealing with the pain of abuse, such as sexual, physical or spiritual abuse, may we begin by saying that we reject absolutely any form of abuse as sinful and grieving to God.

It is the church's responsibility to confess and address sin, not conceal it (Prov. 28:13, 1 John 1:8-9), and the church's historical tendency to deal in a defensive, unsympathetic or even dishonest way in order to protect scandals or careers is simply wrong. At the same time, many denominations have now taken very deliberate steps both to take a public stand on denouncing all forms of abuse and in providing dedicated resources to help victims and churches deal with this area, and this development is highly welcomed.

We cannot hope to adequately cover the complexity and deep sorrow of abuse situations here, however in order that our site is not simply silent on this important issue, we offer the following observations.

In most cases, it is not wise for a victim to seek to speak directly to his or her abuser, as a result of the power imbalance and the potential for further abuse to take place. Rather, generally it is best to involve others before any confrontation occurs. Where the abuse involves criminal conduct, this should be done in co-operation with the civil authorities who must deal with the abuse.

If the abuser is a Christian, the role of the church in these situations is to confront his or her sin, promote genuine repentance and confession, support counselling, and require him or her to submit to necessary legal consequences.

At the same time, the church needs to lovingly support the victim (and other affected persons like their family). This calls for compassion and understanding, an open acknowledgement of any role the church may have played in failing to properly protect the victim, providing counselling where needed.

As these situations are generally outside the capacity and experience of people within the church, we strongly recommend seeking professional assistance, from the church's denomination or specialist unit set up to deal with such areas.

In relation to the question of forgiveness for cases of abuse, the question of justice is of prime importance to God and to the victim. Therefore, quick exhortations by the church, friends or family to 'forgive and move forward' are

not helpful and more often will be harmful. Whilst it is true that God calls us to forgive (Col.3:4-5, Eph.4:32), and in time it may well be possible for a victim to come to a point of unilateral forgiveness of the abuser, this is something which may only occur over an extended period of time through the grace of God working to heal that person's heart and giving them the courage to forgive.

Sometimes, it is the victim turning to God and seeing how much God has forgiven them that becomes the basis and pathway for them extending a forgiveness to the abuser which humanly speaking they don't deserve and could never earn. Certainly, God calls on the abuser to repent of their wrongful conduct, deeply and from the heart, and often such repentance will be a vital part in helping a victim move forward towards extending forgiveness to them. Sometimes, once repentance has occurred, God works a miracle, and reconciliation occurs – however this should be seen as the miracle that it is. Sometimes, the victim just being able to move to a point of forgiveness and be free from the burden of unforgiveness is the miracle for which we give God thanks.

As the church, we often want people to 'get over it and move on' so that we may feel more comfortable (think, for example, about how uncomfortable we are with grief after a death). But deep grief and pain isn't like that, and we need the love and grace to give people time to grieve and heal, and support them in their journey towards being restored by Jesus. Ultimately, God is the only perfect healer, and our hope and help rests with him.

NOTES

BIBLE STUDY PROGRAM – TERM 1 2019

Pictures of us Week commencing		Reading Plan	Page Number
<i>4th February</i>	A Masterpiece & A Temple	Ephesians 2:1-22	2
<i>11th February</i>	A Body	Ephesians 4:1-16	6
<i>18th February</i>	A Bride	Ephesians 5:22-33	11
<i>25th February</i>	A Warrior	Ephesians 6:10-20	15

Peacemakers Week commencing		Reading Plan	Page Number
<i>4th March</i>	The potential for conflict and conflict's potential	James 4:1-3 Galatians 3:26-29 John 17:20-23 1 John 4:7-21	21
<i>11th March</i>	Logs and eyes	Matthew 7:3-5 Philippians 4:2-9	24
<i>18th March</i>	Specks and eyes	Galatians 6:1-6 Matthew 18:15-20	28
<i>25th March</i>	Reconciliation	Colossians 1:21-23 Colossians 3:12-17 Luke 17:3-4	32