

“Shine like stars ... ”

We are offering a series of reflections for individuals and churches who may be finding it difficult to provide midweek prayer and shared learning from Scripture. You can use these by watching the YouTube video, reading the relevant Bible passage and then reflecting on the questions below. To help make this a shared activity, you are encouraged to reflect on this together with friends using an online conference package, or simply arrange with a friend for them to watch it too. Then ring each other up, share your thoughts and responses and then pray for one another, and pray together for our world.

Read Philippians 2:6-16b

If you can, watch the YouTube video: <https://youtu.be/QCgm3z10I-U>

Many big companies spend a great deal of time making sure that we regularly see and recognise their “corporate logo”. But if we stop and think about it, one of the oldest examples of a corporate logo is the cross – it is a universal symbol of Christianity all over the world. But symbols gain their meaning from how people reflect and respond to their message – so if people are to recognise and understand the message and meaning of the cross, we need to reflect this in our lives and attitudes. This is echoed in the words of St Paul to the church in Philippi. Paul more than anyone else understood some of the deep meanings of the cross, but he never lost sight of the fact that it is also intended to be our example. “Your attitude” he says “should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.” And he goes on to remind us of Jesus’ obedience to death – even death on a cross!

You are invited to reflect on the cross, and although it is a familiar symbol, to take time to ponder its meaning anew. Three questions you might consider:

What did it mean for Jesus to allow himself to be taken to the cross? Why was he prepared to do that? Think about the love and selflessness that Jesus expresses towards us. Let that all too familiar symbol of the cross speak to you again about Jesus.

How can my attitude be the same as that of Jesus? Recognise that Paul goes on to invite us to “work out your faith with fear and trembling” and to “hold firmly to the word of life.” In different ways, each of these phrases express the fact that this requires effort and commitment. But we are not left alone in that; “it is God who works in you” we are reminded in v13, “in order to fulfil his good purpose.” Might your prayer for this week be for God to help you have that attitude? Pray that God might work within you to help you live a life that is a shining example of the attitude of the cross. This is not about feeling guilty or wretched – but being invited to be open to God’s Spirit to equip and shape us according to God’s purposes.

How can we be a community that is defined by the cross? We might remember that this is a letter that is addressed to a community of believers. We are all affected by our interactions with others and the nature and the tone of those interactions. In our current circumstances, there is much that might cause us to grumble and complain. Times are tough, and human nature often expresses itself in such frustrations. These negativities can be contagious – as we recognise this, it might cause us to pray that we will not simply join in with the negatives, but express the meaning we see in the cross through the way that we function as a community of believers. Perhaps this is what Paul means when we are invited to “shine like stars” – be those who stand out as a contrast – to be marked out as different by the way we reflect the message of the cross.

PRAYER

Help me to see again that familiar symbol of your cross, but to recognise in new and deeper ways the extent of your love and the cost of your sacrifice. So may I be inspired, along with all who share this journey of faith with me, to display that same attitude of Jesus, that the world might see and understand its profound message of love and hope and salvation. AMEN