



**Reflections
for Lent 2012**

BEING A GUARDIAN ANGEL IS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

With one child every three days hospitalised* from child abuse, the Family Works Guardian Angel initiative is all about raising funds so these Kiwi children and their families can get help.

Family Works spokesperson Jude Halberg says the statistics around child abuse in New Zealand are something we should be ashamed of.

“Family violence is not a single outburst,” says Jude, “It’s an escalating pressure that gets more damaging every day until it finally explodes. Family Works hopes to help more families before they reach that point.”

Becoming a Family Works Guardian Angel helps us meet the needs of the many families on our waiting lists.

Kiwis wanting to assist at risk families and children in their community can do this by donating around a dollar a day. The \$30 donated each month will be used within the donor’s own region to help families reach their potential.

Family Works services include counselling, parenting programmes, social work and child therapy; all ways that families can work through their issues and change their behaviours.

“When home is no longer safe, where there’s poverty, family breakdown or children in trouble, we begin by helping a family identify their issues and their strengths,” says Jude. “We help them find solutions, set goals and create a plan. Then together we work towards achieving those goals with as much support as possible.”

Family Works is part of Presbyterian Support, one of New Zealand’s largest providers of social services outside Government.

For more information on the Guardian Angel campaign see www.angel.org.nz

*Source: The Children’s Social Health Monitor’s 2009 report on Injuries Arising from the Assault, Neglect or Maltreatment of Children.





WELCOME,

It's my pleasure to introduce reflections for Lent 2012.

Last year when leaders from the Church and Presbyterian Support met together to express their shared concern about the wellbeing of families in all their diversity, they set out to seek ways to support efforts to care for children and young people, especially those who are the victims of family violence.

This year, the focus on the wellbeing of children and their families continues through the PresCare partnership. Our belief is that peace, justice, and the care of the most vulnerable in our society are central to our Christian faith. As such, these concerns lead us to prayer and to practical action as well as supporting a prophetic voice that might speak to the underlying causes.

Through Lent 2012, we have a unique opportunity to consider and pray about these concerns as well as our response to Jesus' message for us about loving others, all within the same period. Let's use this time to seek out the heart of God together and follow in the footsteps of Jesus in a world that so needs the transformation made possible through the Cross.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Cheyne".

Peter Cheyne
Moderator,
Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

ABOUT LENTEN REFLECTIONS 2012

This booklet contains daily reflections for your personal study or small group use during the 40 days of Lent and the six days of Holy Week.

Many verses (marked with a *) are sourced directly from the current Lectionary or formal Bible Reading calendar for the year, which some Presbyterian and Union parishes follow closely. Studies are focused around weekly themes that progress along a path to the final days before Easter Sunday. They have been developed in partnership between the Church and Presbyterian Support (Family Works in particular), so contain a mix of practical advice for day-to-day living along with topics that are likely to prompt a more spiritual response.

While the purpose of these reflections is primarily to reflect on your relationship with God in the lead up to Easter, there are questions within it which are likely to prompt you to consider how you might become an agent of peace and reconciliation in your community.

We encourage you to support the work of Presbyterian Support in your region. Such support will be used to provide counselling, training and services for children and families who are affected by violence, debt, neglect and other issues of disadvantage.

Finally, a note on structure. As Sundays are normally not part of Lent, we have used this space to include weekly devotions created specifically for families and children by the team at Kids Friendly. Lent may be an old tradition but it doesn't have to be boring. We hope you enjoy the journey.

2. READ

Back in Bible times, when people had done the wrong thing or grown far away from God, they returned to God with fasting, weeping and mourning to show that they were sorry. Sometimes they even ripped their clothes and made them sooty.

But God says, "Rend your heart and not your clothes. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love..."

Joel 2:13

1. SHARE

Prepare: Place an unlit candle on a dish under a cloth. Set aside a stone for each person.

Sometimes the things that happen to us, or the things we do, can make us feel angry or sad.

It can feel like we are far from God, and everything is dark and black.

Darken the room.

But where is God when we feel angry or sad?



Reveal and light the candle.

Say, "God is right with us, a light in the darkness."



God wants us to change on the inside not just the outside.

When we open our hearts God's love can shine in.

Give each person a stone.

Have you ever had a stone in your shoe? How did it feel?

Hold your stone and think of something that you've done or that happened to you that made you feel angry or sad. Share what happened.

How are angry feelings a bit like a stone in your shoe?

Imagine your stone holds your hurt or angry feelings. One at a time, place your stone next to the candle as you say the prayer below.

3. TALK

Dear God,

We give You...
[this situation]

As we open our hearts
shine in Your love.

Bring healing and forgiveness.

Amen

4. PRAY

5. BLESS

After you have finished, take time to bless each other.

- One at a time, place your hand on the head of the person to your left and bless them saying,
- "[Name...], God loves you. His light shines for you."



WEDNESDAY 22 FEBRUARY † *Your place in the story*

Ash Wednesday

› Joel 2:12–17*

› FOCUS

"...Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity..."

ADVENTURE STORIES typically begin with an action sequence.

James Bond crawls out along the wing of a plane mid-flight; Indiana Jones grabs a priceless gem from an ancient ruin rigged with booby traps; Xena the Warrior Princess defeats a cohort of sword-wielding villains. The early action in these stories is simply a taster for the big action that lies ahead.

The Bible starts much the same way with betrayal, banishment, murder and massive flood.

- What sort of role do you think God has given you in an adventure that started with so much action so long ago?
- What hopes and expectations would you like to take to Jesus?
- What regrets can you leave at the foot of the Cross as you relate to God this Lent?

THURSDAY 23 FEBRUARY † *Going without*

› Isaiah 58:1–12

› FOCUS

"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?"

FASTING is frequently associated with the Lenten period.

"What will you give up for Lent?" is a question that many ask, even those who don't attend a church.

Some give up certain foods or alcohol. Others forego their use of selected electronic devices or shake off old habits for a time. Others give up buying their daily coffee or muffin during Lent and give the money they save to a good cause.

- How might fasting in this way help you understand the sacrifice Jesus made on the Cross?
- In what ways can fasting loose the chains of injustice?



FRIDAY 24 FEBRUARY † *Just not Kiwi?*

› Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21*

IN SOME COUNTRIES Lent is a much bigger deal than it is in New Zealand. In Rio de Janeiro and New Orleans, Carnival and Mardi Gras are famous precursors to the fasting and restraint typically imposed in the lead up to Easter. In Germany, it is common for families to light a Funken bonfire on the first Sunday of Lent to “burn off the winter”. These are very public events and well-steeped in cultural traditions going back many centuries.

- How might public or corporate fasting, giving, prayer and reflection around Lent still have merit as a way to introduce Christian beliefs in New Zealand society?
- When do you spend the most time alone with God?

SATURDAY 25 FEBRUARY † *Changing day-by-day*

› Romans 12:1–2

› FOCUS

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

WE KNOW THE DRILL.

Each day begins the same. The sun comes up, we rise, eat, wash, get dressed, start the day’s activities... then we come home, eat, rest, prepare for bed and finally, sleep.

To paraphrase today’s reading, the Bible tells us that, “we should not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds”. Why? “Then we will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—God’s good, pleasing and perfect will.”

So if God wants us to interrupt the pattern of this world, perhaps we can use the opportunity of Lent to make space for God in our lives and find out how.

- When could you introduce something new to your daily schedule like a period of reflection about God?
- How might this time help you to make changes in your life?

2. READ

When Noah came out of the Ark, God said to him, "I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth" Gen 9:11

God put the rainbow in the sky as a sign of the new covenant, saying, "Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind..."

Gen 9:14-15a

1. SHARE

Prepare: a large sheet of card/paper to be a Treaty. Permanent marker, scrap paper, coloured pens/pencils.

A covenant is an agreement or written promise between two or more people.

God makes a covenant with us through Jesus: He will take away all the wrong things we have done, so we can become God's friends and live with Him forever. This is what Easter is about.



How do you feel when you know that God wants to be your friend?



In permanent marker at the top of your card write, "[NAME...] FAMILY TREATY"

Explain: "Today we are going to make a Family Treaty on how we want to be as a family during the next 6 weeks of Lent leading to Easter. A family treaty is a bit like a covenant, where we make promises to each other about what we will agree to do."

Using the scrap piece of paper, brainstorm all possible ideas for your family treaty. Write down every idea.

Discuss and choose the top 5 ideas you all agree to as a family. Write these in permanent marker on the Family Treaty, and decorate it as a family. What will be the "sign" of your treaty?

5. BLESS

- One at a time, place your hand on the head of the person to your left and bless them saying,
- "[Name...], you are important to this family."
- Join your hands in a stack. All say together, "We choose to live in peace." Then raise your hands into the air as you shout "A...men!"

3 TALK

Dear God,

We thank you for our family. Help us to love each other and live in peace together.

Help us to keep this covenant we have made as a family, just like you keep your covenant with Noah and his descendants.

Amen

PRAY



MONDAY 27 FEBRUARY † *A new deal*

› Genesis 9:8–17*

› FOCUS

"Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth."

"THE DAYS ARE COMING," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them..."

Jeremiah 31:31–32

God knows all our shortcomings so created a new covenant to overcome the block that sin creates between us. God did this through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and that is why Lent and Easter are important times for us to look at our relationship, and the bonds we have made together. (For more see **Hebrews 8:1-13**).

- How do you resolve differences of opinion in your family?
- How do the deals you make compare to the relationship bonds that God offers us?

TUESDAY 28 FEBRUARY † *We all start somewhere*

› 1 Peter 3:18–22*

› FOCUS

"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God."

"A wonderful Saviour is Jesus my Lord,
He taketh my burden away;
He holdeth me up and I shall not be moved,
He giveth me strength as my day."

From "*He Hideth My Soul*" by WJ Kirkpatrick and FJ Crosby"

Christ suffered for you in order to forge a new bond that will be foundational to the rest of your life. There may be aspects of your former life that you still need to address and give over to God but through Jesus you can now claim the salvation bought through the cross of Calvary.

- What helps your heart to remain faithful to that first promise you made with God?
- Where do you see God's peace and forgiveness in your life?

WEDNESDAY 29 FEBRUARY † *Leap of faith*

› Esther 8:28–34

› FOCUS

“For how can I bear to see disaster fall on my people? How can I bear to see the destruction of my family?”

TAKE A LOOK at one of the courageous heroes of the Bible who risked death for the sake of the greater good.

In the Old Testament story, Queen Esther puts her life on the line to save her people from the evil fate that Haman has planned for them.

- What would it take to make you take a similar leap of faith in the face of danger?
- How could an act like this lead to you having a deeper bond with God?



THURSDAY 1 MARCH † *Broken but not forgotten*

› Matthew 5:43–48

› FOCUS

"...God causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."

CHRISTCHURCH HAS BEEN IN OUR MINDS over the last year. A year on, we continue to mourn the loss of lives, livelihoods and cherished locations due to the events of February 22nd, 2011. Yet from the rubble, we have seen new bonds form.

Our nation quickly mobilised and worked together in an incredible way that spoke of our love, concern and shared purpose.

People of all creeds prayed for the people of Christchurch, welcomed refugees into their homes, and reached out to those in need.

We all worked together as agents of transformation in a time of great pain and suffering.

- How did you respond in the aftermath of the earthquake?
- When have you seen God use something broken in your life to make something new?

FRIDAY 2 MARCH † *My word is my bond*

› Matthew 5:33–37

› FOCUS

"All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."

AGREEMENTS KEEP US SAFE, don't they?

A handshake, a kiss, an exchange of money... they are all good ways to seal a deal. When you buy a house, you sign a document backed by a legal system and years of Real Estate best practice.

- In what ways do our arrangements for 'big deals' differ from more 'day-to-day' transactions?
- How does God view our earthly oaths and commitments?



SATURDAY 3 MARCH † *Be consistently consistent*

› Psalm 25:1–10*

› FOCUS

“Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you, LORD, are good.”

“THE POWER OF AGREEMENTS, contracts, rules, boundaries and discipline is in consistency. It is about you being true to your word and agreement.”

W. Pudney & É. Whitehouse (“Adolescent Volcanoes” 2001)

- How does consistent behaviour establish trust when you are making an agreement?
- How is God consistent in dealing with us?

2. READ

The Bible reminds us that God is always listening to us, even when things are going wrong.

"[God] does not ignore those who need help... He does not turn away from them. He listens when they cry for help."

Psalm 22:24

1. SHARE

Prepare: Put a balloon under a cloth. Keep a second balloon aside.

When something exciting happens to you, who do you want to tell?

Sometimes when we are struggling we don't want to tell anyone what we've done or what is happening to us. Or we can feel like no one listens or cares.

But when we bottle things up inside us it can cause problems.

Reveal the first balloon.



What things make you upset? Blow those things into the balloon. What will happen if we keep blowing bad feelings inside the balloon? (Let it pop!)



God always hears when we are upset or in trouble. We can tell Him anything. What is the special name for when we talk to God?

Blow up the second balloon.

What happens when we pray and share our troubles with God?

Pass the balloon to one of the children and tell them to let it go...

When we share our troubles with God they get smaller, and instead of exploding we can feel at peace in our spirits again.

Blow up the balloon and let each of the children have a turn at letting it go.

3. TALK

Dear God,

Thank you that you always hear us whenever we talk to you.

Help us to remember to talk to you when we have troubles, and to be good listeners to others.

Amen

5. BLESS

- One at a time, take the hand of the person to your right, look into their eyes and bless them saying,
- "[Name...], God hears you, and cares for you."

4. PRAY



MONDAY 5 MARCH † *Living under a cloud*

› Psalm 22:23–31*

› FOCUS

*“For God has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one;
God has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.”*

FINDING A CLOUD on the horizon can be a blessing for a sailor looking for land and a safe harbour. Living under a cloud, on the other hand, can mean a life of confusion, unhappiness, and desperation.

Whether you’re looking for a cloud or struggling to stay on track while living underneath one, the good news is that God is with us. We are never alone with our troubles, no matter how big or small they may seem. And as we see in David’s **Psalm 22:23–31**, God listens when we cry out for help.

- What concerns could you take to God right now?
- How can worry get in the way of your relationship with God?

TUESDAY 6 MARCH † *From the mouth of a volcano*

› Proverbs 29:11,22

› FOCUS

“An angry person stirs up conflict, and a hot-tempered person commits many sins”

A FOOL GIVES FULL VENT to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control. This proverb recognises the importance of self-control – one of the ‘Fruits of the Spirit’ later promoted by Paul in his letter to the Galatians (**5:22–23**).

- How do you control your anger?
- What are the consequences when anger boils over?



WEDNESDAY 7 MARCH † *Stay calm & keep your shirt on*

› Matthew 5:38–42

› FOCUS

“...If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also...”

FAMILY VIOLENCE CONTINUES TO DRAW HEADLINES in the media. It’s a serious issue in a country so often cited as a great place to raise children.

Cheryl Edwards, a counsellor from Presbyterian Support’s Family Works, sees many families affected by this violence and says it is important for people to seek help to deal with the attitudes and beliefs that contribute to this. Teaching children strategies to manage their anger is very helpful. This includes:

- Taking some timeout, counting to ten, breathing deeply, re-focusing.
- Expressing anger only when calm, doing so assertively but not aggressively.
- Getting some exercise through physical activity like going for a walk or a run because this stimulates various brain chemicals that can leave people feeling
- happier and more relaxed.
- What strategies help you to deal with your raw emotions?
- How can you nurture non-violence in your family?

THURSDAY 8 MARCH † *Guilty as charged*

› Matthew 8:28–34

› FOCUS

“But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

IMAGINE YOU ARE Peter on the day described in today’s verses from Matthew 8. Jesus is teaching his followers that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He is very clear, but as Peter, you believe he is also very wrong. So you do the right thing, don’t you? As his friend, you take Jesus aside and tell him off for misleading people.

But rather than seeing your point, or at least discreetly agreeing to disagree, Jesus publicly tells you off.

“Get behind me, Satan!” he says “You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

- How would a rebuke like this make you feel?
- How or when could a public rebuke help someone to stop behaving badly?

FRIDAY 9 MARCH † *Talking up a storm*

› Ephesians 4:29

› FOCUS

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”

Self-talk is an important factor in coping with life. Sometimes it is just a case that you are letting off steam or sorting your emotions. However, it can also be a way to blow things out of proportion with the situation.

Interrupting thinking or self-talk that is unhelpful and hurtful can make a real difference to the way you manage your emotions.

- In what situations do you talk to yourself?
- How is this self-talk helpful or unhelpful to the way you behave?

SATURDAY 10 MARCH † *It's not just you struggling*

› Proverbs 11:14

› FOCUS

“For lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisers.”

TALENT SHOWS seem to be on television every night. Cooking, dancing, singing, doing business... whatever the activity, there seems to be a competition in prime time. Week by week, the contestants are voted off and we marvel as the remaining few continue to develop from raw entrants to deserving professionals.

Behind the scenes, many advisers have worked miracles transforming and teaching their protégés how to make it on the big stage.

- What times in your life have you benefited from the advice of others?
- How might you react as an adviser for a friend or neighbour in a time of crisis?

2. READ

God gave some special rules called the Ten Commandments to the Israelites, when they were in the desert:

1. God alone is your god
2. Worship only God
3. Don't misuse God's name
4. Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy
5. Respect your parents
6. Don't murder
7. Be faithful in marriage
8. Don't steal
9. Don't lie
10. Don't envy

From Exodus 20:1-17

1. SHARE

Prepare: Set aside a board game your family enjoys under a cloth.

Today we are thinking about rules.

Why do we need them?

Reveal the board game.

What are some of the rules of this game?

How do you feel if someone breaks the rules?



What would happen if the game didn't have any rules?

Put the game aside to play at the end.

Jesus said God's commandments could be divided into two big rules (Mathew 22:37-40):

Love God with all your heart, soul and mind and Love others as you love yourself.

From the 10 commandments, which are about loving God? Which are about loving other people?

What happens when we break God's rules?

How does it feel when other people break God's rules and it affects us?

Can we forgive those people?

Does God forgive us?

3. TALK

Dear God,

Thank you that you love us.

We love you too. Forgive us when we break your rules, and help us to forgive others when they do. We want to shine your love to the world.

Amen

5. BLESS

- One at a time, give the person on your left a high-five and bless them saying,
- "[Name...], God loves you. You're on His team."
- Play the board game together and have some family fun!

4. PRAY



MONDAY 12 MARCH † *What's your tolerance level?*

› Exodus 20:1–17*

› **FOCUS**

"...for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me..."

BAD SERVICE AT A RESTAURANT may not be enough for you to walk away without paying the bill but it is probably likely that you won't return or recommend the place to your friends.

Your tolerance levels for service and product performance are often a guide to your future buying behaviour and entertainment choices.

- If this is the case for more day-to-day actions, what or who shapes our tolerance on more ethical issues?
- Where does God set boundaries or expectations for our behaviour?
- How should standards of behaviour in our society be established and maintained?



TUESDAY 13 MARCH † *Tipping point*

› John 2:13–22*

› FOCUS

“To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!”

PUT YOURSELF IN THE CHAOS of the scene described in today’s verses.

- You are trading in the temple when a man upsets your sales table, chases away your doves, and shouts at you to get out.
- You have travelled many miles to make a sacrifice to God at the temple when a man causes a disturbance and you are forced to leave.
- You have been following Jesus and have seen many miracles. But now he’s enraged, and a stranger tugs your sleeve to ask... *“Why is your master so angry?”*
- How do you respond to God’s righteous anger?

WEDNESDAY 14 MARCH † *Over-ruled?*

› Leviticus 25:18

› FOCUS

“Follow my decrees and be careful to obey my laws and you will live safely in the land.”

CHRISTIANS ARE OFTEN CRITICISED for being too legalistic and uptight. The Ten Commandments are claimed by some opponents to be the *“Ten Do Nots”* rather than God’s guidelines for healthy living.

- How do you view the commands God gives us in the Bible?
- What do you think upsets God most when we break these instructions?

THURSDAY 15 MARCH † *Running from justice*

› **Matthew 8:28–34**

› **FOCUS**

“The whole town went out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region.”

WHEN THE DEMON-POSSESSED PIGS drowned in the lake while Jesus was in the region of Gadarenes, the news quickly spread and many people in the area rushed out to see what had happened.

The amazing thing is that when they heard that two demon-possessed and dangerous men had been healed, they didn't worship Jesus or even thank him. Instead they pleaded with Him to leave their region.

- Why are the people afraid of Jesus in this story?
- What happens when God challenges the 'status quo' in your life?

FRIDAY 16 MARCH † *Peace at all costs?*

› **Matthew 26:47–56**

› **FOCUS**

“...for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.”

“AS CHURCHES, OUR FOCUS SHOULD BE not on legitimizing actions of war, but on how non-violent actions can replace the use of military force, how we can build peace from below and from within, and how we can give political leaders moral support and standards to protect their own citizens without using violence.”

General Secretary to the World Council of Churches, Rev Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, 2011

- Where do you think Christians can play a role as peacemakers in New Zealand and beyond?
- What values help transform societies from war to peace?

SATURDAY 17 MARCH † *He'll be back*

› **Romans 12:19**

› **FOCUS**

“Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord.”

JUSTICE IS A COMMON THREAD in popular movies, computer games and even sports commentaries.

In some films and games, all the violence that goes before is somehow justified when the 'bad guy' gets their come-uppance. In sports matches, justice appears to be served when a 'dirty player' is crunched in a big tackle or knocked down in a bit of on-field "biff"? We justify these scuffles by saying, "The opposition deserved it"

In real life justice isn't so clear cut. People are mistreated without cause. Children "get theirs" without provocation.

- What is your view of natural justice?
- How do the heroes you follow shape your view of justice?
- What is God's view on injustice, especially where it affects children?



2. READ

"Everyone who does evil... will not come to the light, because the light will show all the bad things they have done. But anyone who follows the true way comes to the light. Then the light will show that whatever they have done was done through God."

John 3:20-21

1. SHARE

Prepare: Lemon juice/vinegar, a slip of paper and cotton bud stick for each person, access to a light bulb (or iron).

Slugs are animals that don't like light. They hide away amongst the dark leafy places, coming out to eat at night.

Baby turtles are drawn to light. When they hatch they push up through the sand from their nest and follow the moonlight to the sea.

What else likes the light?

What hides from light?



Hand out the paper and cotton buds. Using "invisible ink" (lemon/vinegar) write or draw a nice word or message. Let it dry.

Most of us are happy to share the good things we do with others, but we prefer to keep quiet about the bad things.

God gives us each a conscience, to help us know right from wrong. Have you ever felt God's Holy Spirit in your conscience telling you it's best not to do something?

Exchange your invisible messages and bring them "into the light" next to a hot light bulb (or use an iron for heat).

How did you feel when your good message was revealed?
What if you had written something bad?

Why is it important to live in the light?

3. TALK

Dear God,
Please help us to make wise choices and know right from wrong.

We want to live in the light of Your love, and shine it so others can know You too.

Amen

5. BLESS

- All hold hands in a circle.
- Then one at a time, in a chain, squeeze the hand of the person to your right saying,
"[Name...], you are living in God's light."

4. PRAY



MONDAY 19 MARCH † *Under the microscope*

› John 3:14–21*

› FOCUS

"This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil."

EXAMINATION is a word that sends a chill down the spine. Young and old, we all must submit to the scrutiny of exams at some time or another.

Whether they be school or university exams, or regular medical check-ups later in life, there is nothing quite like the cold, hard scrutiny of an examination and waiting for the results to make the best of us lose our cool.

- How do you feel about God examining the contents of your life?
- Why is it important for God to establish right from wrong in your life?
- How can you prepare for God's scrutiny?



TUESDAY 20 MARCH † *Renewal*

› Ephesians 4:17–32

› FOCUS

"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

FOR MORE THAN 45 YEARS Mother Teresa ministered to the poor, sick, orphaned, and dying in Calcutta, modelling the forgiveness, kindness and compassion that Jesus demonstrated.

She said "If you want a love message to be heard, it has got to be sent out. To keep a lamp burning, we have to keep putting oil in it."

- What motivated Mother Teresa to give her life to serving others in this way?
- How does your transformation in Christ affect others around you?
- What role does serving others have in establishing God's kingdom values in our world?

WEDNESDAY 21 MARCH † *Arm twisters*

› **Psalm 19***

› **FOCUS**

"The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple."

We can't always pick who our children will choose as their heroes. Try as we might to show them that they can have heroes with less violent tendencies, many will continue gravitate to wrestlers, gunslingers and Kung Fu fighters.

- How can we shape the values of children in our society?
- How can we be better role models for children and young people in our lives and churches?



THURSDAY 22 MARCH † *Are we there yet?*

› Numbers 21: 4–9*

› FOCUS

"...But the people grew impatient on the way; they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!"

YOU PACKED THE CAR. You paid for the accommodation. You drove all the way to the holiday destination. And now, despite your own preferences for a nice meal at a fancy restaurant with linen table cloths and a wine list, you agree to eat fatty fast food on plastic trays because the kids all want burgers.

That night, your kids tell you they are already bored with the holiday and would rather be home again. Talk about ungrateful.

Look at today's verse in light of this example. God took the Israelites out of slavery but it wasn't long before they voiced their complaints in the desert. God was outraged and a number died as a result. Moses and the Israelites needed to beg for forgiveness before God relented.

- At what times is your outrage justified?
- How do you channel your outrage to create a good final result?

FRIDAY 23 MARCH † *Totally hated it*

› Ephesians 6:1–9

› FOCUS

"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."

LIFE IS ESPECIALLY INTENSE when you're a teenager. New experiences, new emotions, new possibilities and choices, a cocktail of powerful hormones, and peer pressure.

When things don't quite go to plan, it's easy to see how young people who haven't been shown a better way or don't care about the consequences often let go of their frustration and stress through anti-social behaviour.

- How can we as individuals and churches create a space where youth feel valued, heard, and understood?
- What boundaries, if any, should we set for them?

SATURDAY 24 MARCH † *Our children are hurting*

› Psalm 82.3

› FOCUS

"Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed."

SOME THINGS JUST AREN'T RIGHT.

Despite its status as a wonderful place to live, New Zealand maintains alarming statistics for crimes committed against children. Here are just a few for 2010 to 2011:

- 70,000 plus children – were present at police call-outs regarding family violence in 2010 to 2011.*
- 150,747 children – were reported to Child, Youth and Family services for follow up. Presbyterian Support followed up 58 000 of these.*
- 57,949 children – needed further action from CYF services with 22,087 cases of abuse substantiated.*
 - How can you play a part in "defending the weak and fatherless" in our society?
 - Who are the poor and oppressed in your community and how can you uphold their cause?

2. READ

Remember the 10 Commandments? The people had trouble keeping them. So God said He would make a new covenant with people:

"...I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people... I will forgive their wickedness, and will remember their sins no more."

Jeremiah 31:33-34

1. SHARE

Prepare: Foil covered chocolate heart for each person (hidden aside), plus one extra heart on a dish under a cloth, a rolling pin and small plastic bag.

Have you ever had a pair of jeans that wore out at the knees?

How did you feel when you first noticed the hole?

Did you try to fix it?

Even if you could patch the jeans - would they ever be as good as new?



Some-times our hearts get a bit broken and torn too by things that happen to us. *Reveal single heart. Place in bag and smash with the rolling pin.*

When we do the wrong thing and get angry, how is it like having a hole torn in your jeans?

Point to the crushed heart.

It is like our heart starts to get broken, raggedy and torn.

Is there any way we can fix it?

God has the best way. He promises, through what Jesus did at Easter time, to forgive all our sins and make our hearts new again.

Bring out the plate of new chocolate hearts - but don't give them out yet.

Compare the two sorts of hearts. Which heart would you rather have?

3. TALK

Dear God,
Thank you that
You made a way
for us to be new
and put right with You.

You are our God
and we are your people.
Help us to know You
in our hearts.

Amen

5. BLESS

- One at a time take one of the hearts and give it to the person on your left saying,
- "[Name...], God's love makes you shiny and new."
- *Eat your chocolate hearts together.*

4. PRAY



MONDAY 26 MARCH † *Start your engines*

› **Jeremiah 31:31–34***

› **FOCUS**

“For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

TIME TO TAKE STOCK. Through these reflections you have looked a little at the traditions of Lent, the impact of past hurts and brokenness, how new bonds are established, staying on track as a Christian, where your tolerance levels may differ from God’s, and the importance of establishing right from wrong in shaping the values of society.

This week, the focus is on fixing wear and tear. Just as it can be good to take your car to the garage regularly, it can be beneficial to check your spiritual health from time to time. Lent provides an ideal, annual opportunity to set aside time with God to reflect on your calling and pray for transformation.

- Think about your walk with God this past year. Where could you make improvements?
- What gifts and blessings has God given you this year? How have you used them and could you make better use of them?



TUESDAY 27 MARCH † *Keen knitters needed*

› Hebrews 5:5–10*

› FOCUS

“During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.”

“IF YOU ARE NEUTRAL in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.”

Desmond Tutu

When Jesus came to earth he consistently offered up prayers and petitions to God on behalf of those around him. In his final hours he continued to pray for others despite their actions against him. “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34)

- Where do we stand as followers of Christ in situations where there is injustice?
- How proactive are we in helping to knit or mend relationships that have been broken?

WEDNESDAY 28 MARCH † *It doesn't happen overnight*

› Proverbs 17:22

› FOCUS

“A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.”

CONSIDER THE ONGOING benefits of being cheerful. A cheerful person is more likely to receive a warm welcome, to make friends, and to enjoy new experiences. A cheerful person greets adversity with a smile and often leaves a legacy of happiness. Cheerfulness also means less relationship wear and tear to be fixed and mended.

Family Works Otago counsellor Lana Morrison likes to describe the process of becoming more positive in the same way as the old Pantene shampoo ad... “It doesn’t happen overnight, but it will happen.”

“It’s about expressing passion in a positive way,” she says. “Most people who get angry are just good people in a bad space. It can take time to change our primary responses but it is possible. Being able to laugh at the right time is part of it. And saying sorry when required is also important, even when it takes 5, 10, 20 times or more to get it right.”

- What helps your heart be cheerful?
- How can you build more genuine cheerfulness into your attitudes over the coming year?

THURSDAY 29 MARCH † *When the inevitable happens*

› Psalm 51:1–12*

› FOCUS

“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place.”

KING DAVID wrote today’s verses from Psalm 51 after the prophet Nathan confronted him about the adultery he had committed with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12).

We may not have sinned in the same way as David but we all sin nevertheless and fall well short of our own expectations as well as the glory of God.

- What is your response to God when you sin?
- How might you address the triggers of habitual sin in your life to avoid the same level of wear and tear this year?

FRIDAY 30 MARCH † *Inside out*

› Luke 6:45

› FOCUS

“A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.”

“WATCH OUT FOR FALSE PROPHETS. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognise them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognise them.”

Jesus (**Matthew 15:17–20**)

There are two verses to look at today, both with a strong message from Jesus about the importance of the heart to the way we present ourselves to others.

- How does the attitude of your heart affect what you say?
- Where could you ask the Holy Spirit to help mend specific attitudes, worn down over time?





SATURDAY 31 MARCH † *Changing the channel*

› Romans 12:1–3

› FOCUS

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

EASTER SUNDAY is just over a week away. There comes a point for us to practice the forgiveness that we have been given by God through the Cross. This will allow God to heal our own brokenness as well as reaching out in love to those around us, acting as agents of God’s transformation in our community.

If we continue to revisit our sins and wallow in our unworthiness, or that of others, then we are rejecting the very forgiveness that Jesus offers through his death and resurrection. It’s time to forgive and begin the renewal of our minds.

- What does God’s complete forgiveness and new covenant mean to you?
- How might offering your body as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, help you to find peace and lasting transformation?



TEXT follow kiwieaster to 8987

Follow the dramatic last week of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection with a series of messages delivered by text, facebook or twitter, free (except your first text).

2. READ

"The attitude you should have is the one Christ Jesus had"

Philippians 2:5

1. SHARE

Prepare: Set aside a bowl and towel (things you will need for foot washing) under a cloth.

Have you ever wanted to be the most important person at your school or in your church or family?

What do you think things would be like for you if you were the most important person in the COUNTRY, such as the Prime Minister, or the King or Queen?

Jesus taught a new way.



What was the attitude that Jesus had?

Do you think it is surprising that He chose to serve people when He was God's Son – the most important person who has ever lived?

How did it make you feel when you had your feet washed?

After He washed the disciples' feet, Jesus said, **"I have done this as an example for you. You should serve each other just as I have served you"** John 13:15

What can you do to show you have the same attitude as Jesus?

Allow the children to wash the adults' feet and each other's feet.

3. TALK

Dear God,

Thank You that You give us an example of how we should be.

Help us to always look for ways to love and serve other people. We want to be just like You.

Amen

5. BLESS

- One at a time, make the sign of the cross on the forehead of the person on your right saying,
- "[Name...], you are important to God. Go and be just like Him."

4. PRAY



SUNDAY 1 APRIL † *From crown to cross*

› **Phillipians 2:5–11**

› **FOCUS**

“And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross!”

PUTTING ON A PARADE is a great way for New Zealander’s from all backgrounds to celebrate. We’ve done it for our victorious Olympians, America’s Cup crews and Rugby World Cup teams. We even put on a regular parade for that guy with a red suit from the North Pole who appears around Christmas.

Imagine for a moment that you are alive at the time of Jesus and live in Jerusalem. On Palm Sunday, he arrives outside the city and is welcomed triumphantly by crowds with palms branches and cries of Hosanna! **(John 12:12–14)**

Then there’s an incredible turn around. Not long after Jesus is paraded before a crowd by Pilate and they call for his crucifixion. **(John 19:15)**

- What are your reactions like when God creates or allows significant reversals in your life for better or worse?
- How might you mark these moments in a way that is both honest and honouring to God when your plans change for the worse?



MONDAY 2 APRIL † *Deserving justice*

› **Isaiah 49:1–7**

› **FOCUS**

“In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching the islands will put their hope.”

"WHAT IS THE ONE ASPECT OF THIS BROKEN WORLD that, when you see it, touch it, get near it, you just can't stand? Very likely, that firestorm of frustration reflects your holy discontent, a reality so troubling that you are thrust off the couch and into the game. It's during these defining times when your eyes open to the needs surrounding you and your heart hungers to respond that you hear God say, "I feel the same way about this problem. Now, let's go solve it together!"

Bill Hybels ("Holy Discontent", 2007)

- How do you react to injustice in society?
- How does the emotion behind your reaction shape your response?
- How can you offer hope to others?

TUESDAY 3 APRIL † *Plans set in motion*

› Psalm 71:1–14*

› FOCUS

"For you have been my hope, Sovereign LORD, my confidence since my youth."

"A NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION is something that goes in one year and out the other."

Anonymous

Good intentions, we've all had them. "This year I'll quit smoking and take up cycling." "This year, I'm going to travel and see more of New Zealand." "This year I'm going to be more focused, more tolerant and more sensible with my money." Well that's the plan. What happens can be quite another matter.

- What major goals did you plan for this year and what steps are you taking to make sure you achieve them?
- How much room have you left for God's plans?
- How can offering up your hopes and dreams to God help you to find peace?

WEDNESDAY 4 APRIL † *Best face forward*

› Isaiah 50:4–9a*

› FOCUS

"Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame."

LAST YEAR was an emotional roller coaster ride.

There were earthquakes, floods and tsunamis, shipwrecks, the revolts of the 'Arab Spring', Occupy protests, a Rugby World Cup won by 1 point, and a General Election for good measure. There were plenty of challenges. Some we coped with admirably and some we didn't.

- How can knowing God is with you really help you meet the challenges of 2012?
- How can you share your confidence and inner peace with your friends and family when they are troubled?

THURSDAY 5 APRIL † *Maundy Thursday*

› John 13:1–17*

› FOCUS

"As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

TODAY IS KNOWN AS Maundy Thursday in the Christian Calendar.

Most scholars agree that the English word "Maundy" comes originally from the Latin word "mandatum", and is the first part of the phrase "Mandatum novum do vobis ut diligatis invicem sicut dilexi vos" ("A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you").

This is the statement that Jesus makes when he explains to the apostles why he is washing their feet.

- What could you do for someone else this week as an act of service?
- How might serving your neighbour work as a catalyst for deeper relationship with them?
- Why might a "servant heart" help you to reach forgiveness, break cycles of injustice, and allow you to conquer pride?

FRIDAY 6 APRIL † *Good Friday – Alone in agony*

› **Psalm 22***

› **FOCUS**

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?”

CONSIDER THE STRENGTH of Jesus’ love for us extended so powerfully through his humble birth in a manger, a life among the poor and outcast, and death in the company of thieves.

His final, sorrowful words “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” (Mark 15:34) echo those in Psalm 22 and show the anguish and loneliness of his final moments on the Cross.

- How might knowing about Jesus’ suffering help you to understand God’s love for you?
- What elements of the Easter story mean the most to you?



SATURDAY 7 APRIL † *Holy Saturday – What the future holds*

› **Psalm 31:1–4, 15–16**

› **FOCUS**

“Keep me free from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge.”

IS YOUR MASK SLIPPING? Are there times when you sense that you aren’t in control? Is there an illness in your family, a financial commitment, or a job that has you trapped? Are you a newcomer to a community or a country where you don’t know the little social rules that make it easy to get along with others?

- What emotions do you encounter when events seem to control you?
- How did Jesus react when he was arrested, mocked, beaten, and forced to wear a crown of thorns?
- How might the actions and attitudes of Jesus in the days leading up to his death help you react when events in your life are beyond your control?

SUNDAY 8 APRIL † *Easter Sunday – What next?*

› **1 Peter 4:1–8***

› **FOCUS**

“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”

WE HAVE AN ADVANTAGE.

When Jesus was taken to the cross that first Good Friday, his disciples only knew what he had told them. Even though they had seen many miracles, it wouldn't have been easy to believe Jesus could conquer death and return to life.

We have the advantage of knowing about what follows. We also have the Holy Spirit who can work within, helping our understanding.

- How is the resurrection of Jesus still relevant to you all these years after the event?
- What changes might lie on the other side of the Cross for you?
- Where has God put love to work in your life and how might you share it with others?



HOPE FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN NEED

As you use these Lenten Reflections, you may feel prompted to add your support to Presbyterian Support's Family Works Services.

Family Works provides help for New Zealand's children and families in need, and the skills for lasting change in their lives. From 34 sites throughout New Zealand, we offer a range of professional counselling and social work services, including educative and therapeutic programmes on parenting and how to build healthy relationships. We help families build on their strengths because we believe the best way to help children, is to help their families.

You can find out more about what Family Works does by visiting our website www.familyworks.org.nz. You can donate to our services through this website if you like, or alternatively you may be interested in becoming a Family Works Guardian Angel. Money raised through the Guardian Angel initiative particularly helps us with situations of violence and abuse in homes, especially where it affects the most vulnerable members in families, children.

Please help Family Works to give hope to those in desperate need, by completing the form below:

Name:

Postal Address:

Contact Phone:

Email:

Please tick the appropriate boxes below. I would like to help by:

- Becoming a regular Guardian Angel donor
- Making a one off donation (attached)
- Doing some volunteer work
- Receiving more information about Family Works
- Joining the Family Works mailing list
- Other (Please state)

Send to: Family Works Services, PO Box 19222, Wellington 6149
(All donations will be used in the region where you live) Thank you!



**When home no longer
feels safe for a child like Alex...**

Have you ever wanted to help? Now you can.

Help the young victims of domestic violence, abuse and anger.
Become a Family Works Guardian Angel & help children like Alex today.

**CALL 0800 20 50 80
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