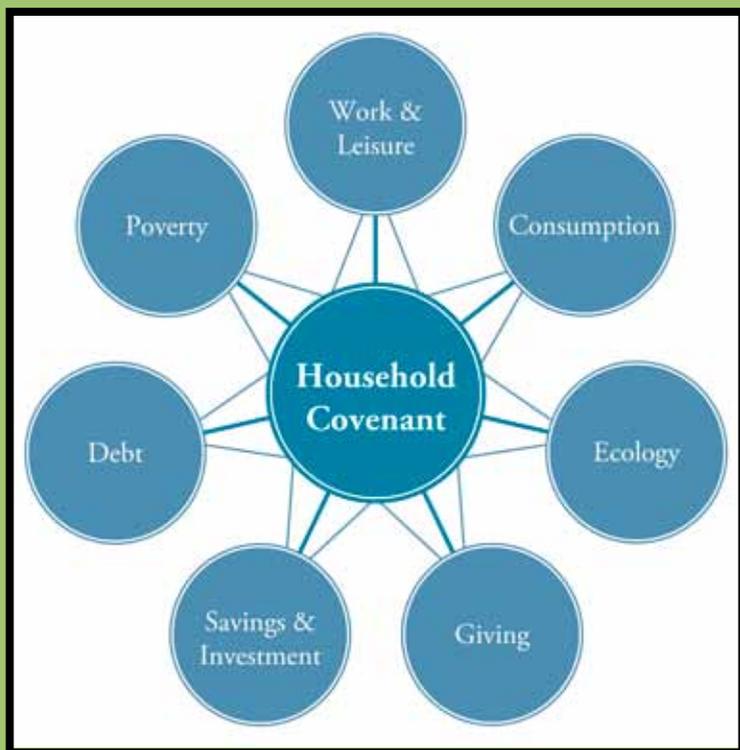


# LIVING BY THE HOUSEHOLD COVENANT



BIBLE STUDY RESOURCE

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Published by Manna Gum, January 2015

Bendigo, Australia

[www.mannagum.org.au](http://www.mannagum.org.au)

Author: Jonathan Cornford

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# INTRODUCTION



The Household Covenant is an ‘experiment in faith.’ It is based upon the premise that one of the most urgent challenges for Western Christians today is to reject the destructiveness and soullessness of our consumer culture. In the words of the Apostle Paul, it is an attempt to ‘conform no longer to the present pattern of the world’ (Romans 12:2). This Covenant seeks to help those who live by it to live more responsibly, taking care for the impact that our lives have upon others, upon God’s creation and upon our connection to God. In this way, it is really just one reminder of what it means to live well.

The seven-fold covenant focuses on household economics — from the realm of personal and family finances to day-to-day practices. The Covenant invites you to think of at least one specific commitment you can make in each of these seven areas. Its purpose is to help you take creative, realistic and appropriate “next steps” in your household. It doesn’t matter where you are starting from – everyone can take a step. It is the direction that is important. Nevertheless, this covenant will challenge you.

The Household Covenant is founded upon the understanding that we are called to follow Jesus with our whole lives, and that this requires, among other things, the rediscovery of the centrality of teaching about our material life within the Bible. Not only does the Bible have something to say in each of the seven areas of the Covenant, its message cuts to the core of our modern predicament and offers an alternative vision that is still good news to our world. It is the job of Christians to take this Word and make it flesh, for our own sakes, and for the sake of the world.

It is important to point out that the Household Covenant has no value in-and-of-itself; it is merely a tool to help our discipleship in complicated times. At its most basic, it is simply a point of conversation and reflection for opening up parts of our life to God, from which he is generally excluded. At its best, it is a way of intentionally seeking positive change in our lives and sharing in that process with others. The Covenant is only ever worthwhile in as much as it is aiding those purposes. Should it ever become, however subtly, a way of trying to live up to the perceived expectations of God, or of other people, then it must be abandoned.

The beauty of the Covenant is its flexibility to a diverse range of life circumstances and capacities, because it is based around the self-identification of goals – there are no pre-determined steps. However, there can be tensions here too. Most of us need, and are helped by the concrete examples of others – we struggle with a completely blank slate – and gaining some ideas and inspiration of what is possible is surely good for us. Yet there is always a danger that we can feel pressured by, or even discouraged, by what some others do, and yet we ourselves feel incapable of. There is no simple resolution to this tension – it is one of the constant spiritual struggles of discipleship – however it is something that requires us to be spiritually alert.

Finally, and similar to this last point, it is critical to acknowledge that there is always a tension created by opening up a Biblical lens on life, and then seeing just how far our lives are from what we are called to. This is a painful realisation and the size of this gap can instinctively lead us to want to put away the Biblical lens; but it is fundamentally this pain that God wants to open up in our lives, because it is the pain of reality. This is the place we must all come to, because it is only from here that God's healing and God's new possibilities begin:

*Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for they shall inherit the kingdom of God.*

This is the beginning of hope and abundant life; the beginning of exciting new challenge and creative purpose to life.

*The Household Covenant is based upon the Seven-fold Sabbath Economics Covenant developed by Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries in the USA. It has been adapted and circulated by Manna Gum in an Australian context with the aim of developing further resources for households and groups hoping to use the covenant.*



# HOW TO USE THE HOUSEHOLD COVENANT (AND THIS BOOKLET)

The Household Covenant is simply a tool for making choices towards a more responsible way of living; it is not an end in itself. It should be emphasized that there is no 'right' way of using the covenant, no goals you must meet, and no particular targets to achieve. At its most basic level, it simply provides a process for helping us to think about various areas of our lives, and bringing God and the Bible into that thinking.

However, the Household Covenant also brings the opportunity to try to make some practical changes which better reflect the life that we are called to in Christ. The challenge is to name one goal in each area which you can work towards over the next year.

The process of the Covenant is a process of thinking Biblically, and it involves three steps:

1. Attempting to see the world clearly. In each area of the Covenant we begin by asking, 'What's the problem here?'
2. Hearing God's voice through the Bible. What principles does the Bible teach in each area of the Covenant?
3. Translating the Biblical message into our contexts. What practical changes can we begin to make?

The Bible Study component of this booklet follows this three-fold process. It is probably best followed with a group, as much value comes out of different peoples' perspectives, ideas and knowledge; however, it can certainly be used individually as well.

The Household Covenant can be used at any time, however, we commend using the Covenant annually, during the season of Lent (the forty days leading up to Easter). This provides a natural annual rhythm to the Household Covenant process within the Christian calendar, and the themes of Lent and the process of the Household Covenant strongly complement one another.



## THE HOUSEHOLD COVENANT IN A NUTSHELL.

1. Write down at least one goal for a change your household will seek to make in each of the seven areas, over the next twelve months.
2. At the end of the twelve months re-visit your goals and see how you went.
3. Set new goals (or renew old ones) for the next twelve months.

## MAKING AND RENEWING HOUSEHOLD COVENANT GOALS

The challenge of the Household Covenant is to name one goal in each area which you can work towards over the next year. Household Covenant goals might be modest baby steps or big, hairy ambitious goals, and you might have a mix of both. The key is to try to name goals that are actually attainable. Every household's circumstances, capacities and life seasons are different, and these will shape what goals are possible for each – what might seem easy to some, might be completely unattainable for others. The challenge is for everyone to try to name something. We recommend you write your goals down and date them. (You can use the Household Covenant Goals sheet at the back of this booklet.)

The idea is that after a year, you return to your goals and see how you went. If you felt you achieved your goals, then set yourself some new goals for the next year. If you felt you didn't do so well, then ask yourself why that was so. Perhaps your goals were unrealistic, did not suit your context, or your life circumstances just changed ... or perhaps you were just a bit slack. Whatever the case, you have a chance to reformulate your goals – either new ones or the same ones again – for the coming year.

Try to be specific rather than vague – Eg. rather than “Goal: use less water” do something like “Goal: reduce household water consumption from 400 litres/person/day to 300 litres/person/day. Making a goal measurable lets you know how you are going towards it.

Many people will find that there is at least one area of the Covenant where they just don't know what to do, either because it seems too hard, or it is just

not relevant (eg. if you don't have any debt). In these cases, a goal might be just as simple as deciding to read a book, article or find out some information on the subject. You never know, in future years your circumstances or perspective may change and this area might become more relevant or more attainable.

In some areas you might feel that you can accomplish more than one goal over a year. Nothing wrong with that.

For those renewing goals, it may seem appropriate in one or two areas to keep the same goal as last year ongoing. Nothing wrong with that.

If you later decide that the goal you have set is not going to work for some reason, than just re-evaluate and change it. Nothing wrong with that either. Remember, the Covenant is only a tool.

### **A note on the 'Ideas for Household Covenant Goals'**

In the third section of each week's study – 'What changes can we make?' – there are a bunch of ideas given of possible Household Covenant Goals in that area. It must be emphasised that these are just examples; they are merely included to stimulate your thinking. They should not be seen as something you need to do and you should not feel pressured by them! To be of any use, Household Covenant goals need to be self-identified, and suitable and relevant to your own life context and circumstances. There are no 'right' or 'wrong' goals, only steps on a journey.



# DOING THE HOUSEHOLD COVENANT IN GROUPS

Choose a leader/facilitator. They should have read through the study for the week beforehand. The job of the leader/facilitator is not to have all the answers, but simply to have a picture of where the study is going and to keep it flowing in that direction, ensuring there is plenty of space to discuss the things that need to be discussed.

It must be stressed that the purpose of Bible study is not to supply neat answers to our questions, but, like Jacob, to wrestle with God. There are texts used here which are difficult, or sometimes even downright confounding (and which texts those are will vary for different people!). We need to be able to be honest about our confusion over some things, and yet still able to keep our eyes firmly on Jesus: 'I have set you an example: you are to do as I have done for you' (John 13:15). At the very core, the purpose of this process should simply be to open up parts of our life to God which may hitherto have been closed off. This is a vulnerable process and it requires trusting that God's purposes for us are good.

When it comes to formulating Household Covenant goals, it is important that each household present comes to their own goals without outside pressure. Certainly no one should be telling anyone else what they should do. That said, most people find it helpful for groups to brainstorm ideas for goals and also to share examples of what things have already been attempted, what things worked, and what things didn't. One of the great by-products of this process is that it provides a place for Christians to talk about the practicalities of our lives – money, shopping etc – within the context of our Christian calling, something we too rarely do.



# THREE WAYS OF FOLLOWING A HOUSEHOLD COVENANT PROCESS

## 1. Household Covenant Lite

- 7 meetings, 45min – 1 hour
- Getting straight to the point – setting Household Covenant goals for the next twelve months.

This is for people who have already been through the Bible Study process and don't feel the need to revisit it, and for those with limited time to meet. Skip straight to the third section of the study for each week: 'What changes can we make?'

## 2. Household Covenant Mains

- 7 meetings, 1½ - 2 hours
- Bible study (pp. 9-41)
- Setting Household Covenant goals

For those who are keen to engage (or re-engage) with the Bible on the seven areas of the covenant. This is the full Bible Study process for each of the seven areas, outlined in this booklet.

## 3. Household Covenant Full Lenten Banquet

- 7 meetings, 2 hours
- Lenten reflections (see pp.45-48)
- Bible Study (pp. 9-41)
- Setting Household Covenant goals

For those who want to enter into the depths of the Lenten journey towards Easter. Begin each study first with a Lenten reflection; you may also wish to take up some other Lenten practises (see p.43).



# WEEK 1: WORK & LEISURE



## WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

We spend most of our waking lives in either work or leisure, broadly defined. Essentially, this area of the Household Covenant examines how we spend our Time – the most precious thing we have. How we spend our time is how we live our lives.

### *TIME POVERTY*

Time poverty seems to be a condition endemic to modern life. Its ramifications are many and varied:

1. *relational*: families and relationships are under more stress than ever before
2. *communal*: widespread stress and tiredness have led to a collapse in voluntarism in churches, welfare groups, sports clubs etc
3. *ecological*: our time poverty is enabled and fed by a convenience economy which supplies all the things we need or want with less effort, but at an ever-growing cost to the earth
4. *spiritual*: if we hear God's voice in the 'sheer silence' (1 Kings 19:11-13), how will we ever hear God when our lives are so full of noise?

### *WORK*

We live in a society where both over-work and generational unemployment (households where no member has ever worked) are common. Meanwhile, much of the work which upholds society – running households, caring for children, the sick and elderly – is not thought of as work at all, and is often stigmatised. Although things have certainly improved, women still bear a disproportionate burden of this work.

We work out of necessity, out of a desire to contribute and be productive, and

out of a desire to employ our skills and talents. But our work choices can also be driven by less healthy motivations: the need to be 'successful', pursuit of a certain standard of living, trying to live up to other people's expectations, avoiding life, or trying to fill a vacuum of meaning. Often the motivations which shape our choices about work are mixed and complex, however the deep reasons why we do what we do are fundamental to determining how healthy or unhealthy a place work has in our lives. This can affect what work we choose, how we work, and how much we work.

### *DISCUSS*

*What are the dominant attitudes and narratives about work which surround you, either in your peer group, work place or media? How much are you influenced or pressured by this?*

### *LEISURE*

This is the time outside of the dictates of work that we get to make choices about how to invest our time and energy. Currently, for the average Australian, over half of this time is now captured by a screen of some sort. The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that while average overall leisure time decreased between 1997 and 2006, time given to screens increased dramatically. Leisure has become an increasingly commodified experience, and it is the simple but profoundly important acts of talking, walking, playing, reading, thinking and praying which are being squeezed.

### *DISCUSS*

*What are the effects of this culture on our relationships, our perceptions of reality, our broader health and wellbeing, and our connection to God?*



# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## **Good work: Read Gen 2:15 and Eph 2:8-10**

These two texts locate the place of meaningful work at the centre of humanity's created purpose. The call to good work is part of our DNA.

### *DISCUSS*

1. *What does this mean for all those who never have the opportunity for meaningful work, or who are compelled to accept degrading and demeaning work?*
2. *Does the idea of 'good work' resonate or jar with your experience of work?*

## **Bad work: Read Genesis 3:17-19**

Just as the Bible presents a vision of good work, it also lifts the veil on bad work. One of the very first consequences of human sin is the transformation of good work into meaningless toil. The Biblical picture of bad work is further filled out:

- slavery: work in the absence of a willing heart, for bad purposes under bad conditions. This is the condition from the which the Israelites were first liberated (Ex 6:2-9).
- futility: all-consuming work which at the end of a life can be counted of little worth (eg. Ecclesiastes 2:9-11)
- idolatry: when our own work and accomplishment can become the thing we worship (Eg. the Tower of Babel, Gen 11, or the consistent prophetic critique of 'worshipping the work of your own hands')

### *DISCUSS*

*Do any of these themes resonate in our world of work today?*

## **God's work: Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-20**

This text is perhaps one of the most concise and powerful statements of an idea that pervades the whole New Testament: that God is calling us to participate in his work of reconciling a broken world (the Greek word here is *kosmos*, which includes both humanity and the created world). Paul is trenchant in insisting that everyone, whatever your capability or social position, has a place in this work (see 1 Cor 12) – there is no unemployment

and no redundancy in the Kingdom of God!

*DISCUSS*

*Have you ever thought of your work, whether paid or unpaid, as having the potential to contribute to God's work? How might this idea influence the choices you make, and the attitudes you have about work?*

**Rest & re-creation: Read Exodus 23:9-13 and Mark 2:23-28**

One of the most oft recited commands of the Old Testament is the command to 'observe the Sabbath'. Even good work must have limits placed upon it. As Jesus is at pains to remind his questioners, the purpose of this command is not to create religious hoops for us to jump through, but for our own benefit. In Exodus 31 it is explained that the Sabbath is given 'in order that you may know that I, the Lord, am making you holy' (v.13) – that is, the purpose of Sabbath is to restore health and wholeness to us. This idea is even extended to the earth itself in the ecological Sabbath decrees of Leviticus 25: 1-7.

*DISCUSS*

*Does our current use of 'leisure' time help to re-create us and restore us, does it strengthen the bonds of relationships, or does it merely serve to further alienate, anaesthetise and distract us?*



# WHAT CHANGES CAN WE MAKE?

This area of the Household Covenant has an almost limitless range of possibilities for changes we might consider, from big changes in life direction to small adjustments in our weekly schedule. Perhaps more than any other area of the covenant, this part of our lives warrants continual revisiting. But beware of trying to change too much at once – one thing at a time is often enough!

## IDEAS FOR HOUSEHOLD COVENANT GOALS

### *Easier*

- Undertake an audit of the work of your household and discuss as a household. Who does what? What doesn't get done? How could the work of household economy be better shared and owned together?
- Undertake a time audit. Find out exactly how you are spending your time (you might be shocked) and use this as a tool for reflection about how you would like to spend your time.
- Nominate a screen-free time or times during your week (1 night, 2 nights, a whole day, or more!)
- Institute some basic spiritual disciplines, setting aside a regular time to pray and read the Bible. Try to include some way in which this is shared with some others.
- Commit to a retreat once a year of at least 3 days.

### *Harder*

- Cut back your paid work hours in some way.
- Institute an economic Sabbath day – one day a week when you do not engage in paid work or go to the shops, and commit to spending time with people and/or in creation, and turning your attention to God (fun should most definitely be allowed!).
- Ask a friend or mentor to help you think critically about the work you do and the way you do it. What would it mean to follow Jesus' way in your workplace rather than conforming to the norm? What will be the cost of walking to the beat of another drum in your workplace?

### *Hardest*

- Take a year off your regular work to give your time to doing something completely different.

- Re-think your paid work or career – Why do you do what you do? Is this really what you want to give your precious time here on earth to? What is the cost to other things? Can you imagine your time being spent differently? What will it cost to make a change?



# WEEK 2: CONSUMPTION



## WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

### STUFF

There is more stuff in the world than ever before.



Stuff has become a major threat to freedom and happiness. It destroys nature and peace. It steals time and space. It fouls beauty.



Stuff you can touch.  
Stuff you can think.  
Stuff you can use and consume. Stuff you can know with all of your senses.



It is relentless, virulent, invasive and addictive. Stuff makes us exhausted and mad. There is too much stuff



The growth of stuff is out of control. It is now being created by means of an unstoppable, exponential CHAIN REACTION.



The following common statements can be taken VERY seriously:—

"I'm stuffed."  
and,

"The world is stuffed."



## DISCUSS

*Look at the Leunig cartoon. How conscious are we of the effects of our consumption upon:*

- *ourselves*
- *the global poor*
- *the planet*
- *our connection to God?*



# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

The Bible insists that the material world is profoundly good, indeed, very good, and it unashamedly affirms that the material pleasures that humans can derive from good food, comfortable abodes and beautiful things are indeed pleasures that we are made to enjoy. However, it also powerfully contends that at a certain point, these same things can begin to be bad for us. From beginning to end, a fundamental concern of the Biblical message is to establish a right relationship to things.

## **Read Proverbs 25:16 and Proverbs 30:7-9**

There are so many stories and teachings in the Old Testament which discuss a right relationship to things, however these two short proverbs perhaps capture the Old Testament attitude most concisely. No one wants to have too little, but do we fully understand that having too much can make us sick? (If you are keen, contrast the story of the manna in Exodus 16, about an economy precisely calibrated around the idea of ‘enough, and the story of the quails in Numbers 11, where people gorge themselves day and night on meat, and then die in droves at Kibroth-hattaavah, ‘the graves of craving’.)

### *DISCUSS*

*Have you ever had a point of awareness in your life where ‘too much’ was becoming unhealthy for you?*

## **Read Ezekiel 34:17-22**

Already in the ancient world, the prophets could see clearly that the consumption of some people caused hardship and suffering for others, and even led to the despoiling of the earth. A central and consistent theme of the whole prophetic corpus is that God holds us accountable, not just for our individual actions, but for the systems we participate in and accept.

### *DISCUSS*

*A radical critique such as this quite naturally makes those of us in the privileged world feel a bit uncomfortable. How do we let this remain a healthy discomfort rather than become a truth we would rather avoid?*

## Read Matthew 6:25-34

The gospels make clear that Jesus saw establishing a right relation to things as central to his good news – next to the kingdom of God, Jesus talks about money and possessions more than other subject. In this collection of teachings from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes some seemingly simple, but ultimately profound and troubling, statements about where we need to get to:

- in the teaching on ‘treasure’ (vv.19-21) Jesus outlines a law of the human condition: that our material state of being affects our spiritual state of being;
- in the teaching on ‘eyes as the lamp of the body’ (vv.22-23), he further points out that what we desire and give our time and attention to (give our eyes to), also affects our spiritual state;
- the teaching on ‘do not worry on what you will eat or what you will wear’ (vv.25-34) is perhaps the hardest of all, because on the face of it, it seems so contrary to our nature, and it has often been piously misused. But Jesus is not saying that these things are not important – ‘your heavenly father knows that you need all these things’ – but that preoccupation with them is a mark of not knowing and trusting God. Instead, he calls for a concern first for the kingdom of God – the right ordering of all relationships – in which our material needs will then find their proper place.

### DISCUSS

1. *How conscious are we of what we are ‘giving our eyes to’? Does it bring us darkness or light?*
2. *How much are we conscious of major life decisions, or even daily habits, being shaped by insecurity about material things?*



# WHAT CHANGES CAN WE MAKE?

As with work & leisure, this area of the household covenant offers an almost limitless field of action, especially when combined with good information and creative ideas.

## IDEAS FOR HOUSEHOLD COVENANT GOALS

- Purchase and begin using the Guide to Ethical Supermarket Shopping.
- Organise with a group of friends or church group to do the Ethical Consumer Group's 'Shopping with a Conscience' workshop.
- Commit to buying only Fair Trade tea, coffee, chocolate and cocoa.
- Say 'no' to the next technology upgrade for no other reason than asserting your ability to say 'no' (there are many more good reasons you may like to find out about too).
- Set a goal of buying a certain percentage of meat, fruit and vegetables from organic and/or local sources.
- Undertake a food miles audit of your pantry to build a picture of where your food is coming from. Begin to think of ways in which you could reduce your food miles.
- Undertake a packaging audit of your pantry – how could you reduce packaging through either alternate purchases or by buying in bulk?
- Try living by the 100 Mile Diet for one week.
- Try the Zero Waste Challenge for one week.
- Begin to grow some of your own fruit and vegetables.
- Learn how to manufacture at home one or two food items that you use regularly – eg. bread, pasta, bottled tomatoes, jams and marmalades, cordials, beer.
- Commit to trying to buy what you need second hand before making a new purchase. Apply this to one, two or all of the following areas:
  - clothing
  - kitchen goods
  - household goods and furniture
  - vehicles
  - garden tools
  - electronic devices

# WEEK 3:

# ENVIRONMENT



## WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

'The fate of biological diversity for the next 10 million years will almost certainly be determined during the next 50–100 years by the activities of a single species.'

- *Paul Ehrlich and Robert Pringle, 2008*

We are all familiar with gloomy news reports about the state of the planet. Whether it be climate change, species extinction, habitat loss, pollution or resource extraction, there is a common trend: we are making this earth less habitable for the manifold creatures with whom we share it, and thus we are making it less habitable for ourselves. We all know this, and we have known it for some time, so why does it continue to go on?

### DISCUSS

1. *Spend some time reflecting on/discussing the deep roots of humanity's destructive behaviour. Why do we do what we do?*
2. *How well do you understand the chain that connects your day-to-day activities with the earth and the creatures who share it? Reflect on:*
  - *Consumption*
  - *Energy use*
  - *Water use*
  - *Waste & e-waste*
  - *Greenhouse gases*

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## Read Genesis 1:26-31

This short excerpt describes the creation of human beings at the end of the amazing hymn in celebration of creation which begins the Biblical story (read the whole chapter if you have time). It is far too rich to comment on properly here, suffice to make a couple of brief observations. The first and most obvious is that creation in its entirety is described (in refrain) as good, indeed very good. God enjoys his creation.

The second thing to note is that humanity is given a special place within this creation – “let them have dominion over ...” (“rule over”, “reign over” in other translations). Some have interpreted this to mean a license to despoil, however nothing could be further from the truth. Biblical scholar, Ellen Davis, describes the best translation of this passage is that humanity is “to have mastery among ...” the creatures.

Our current global predicament demonstrates that of all creatures on this earth, humans indeed have a special power and capability. But it also demonstrates that we have in no way attained mastery over this power – we have not yet properly understood that it also means special responsibility.

### *DISCUSS*

*Reflect on how much you actually know and understand about the patch of earth you occupy. Think about:*

- *the soil and what it requires to raise food;*
- *the watershed you live in, with its different ecological communities – how healthy are they?*

## Read Leviticus 25:1-7 and Deuteronomy 11:13-17

In the first reading we have one of numerous examples within the Hebrew Law where humans are called to restrict their production for the sake of the land and the wild creatures. The assurance is that there will be enough for all. In the second reading this idea is developed: if we follow God’s way then the earth will be abundantly fruitful for our needs, but if we worship other gods – such as greed or our own power – then the earth will become ecologically barren and the rain will not fall. In the twenty-first century we can now see that this is not merely ancient superstition – it is scientists who are trying to wake us up to the truth of it!

*DISCUSS*

*Who do we really worship? If our way of life betrays our deepest beliefs, what does that say about what we really believe?*

**Read Romans 8:18-25**

The Apostle Paul here unpacks an awesome story: creation is suffering, and its redemption is bound up with our own redemption. But of course! If our failure to attain mastery over the gifts we have been given has led the world into this predicament, it is the healing/completion/wholeness/holiness of humans that will enable restoration of creation. Who are the 'children of God' that creation is waiting to be revealed (v.19)? In the New Testament, the 'children of God' are those who do what their heavenly Father does. This passage is basically saying the same thing as the passage from 2 Cor 5 we read in week 1.

*DISCUSS*

*Can you think of a time in your life when personal healing or spiritual renewal was connected to a greater and more profound awareness of creation?*



# WHAT CHANGES CAN WE MAKE?

Once again, there is a huge scope for action within this area of the Household Covenant. It may help to think of a number of possible fields for taking action:

1. *consciousness of creation*: how much are we aware of creation and our dependence upon it? What things can we do to increase our awareness, beyond mere intellectual 'knowledge'?
2. *understanding our impact*: how much do we understand about where the things that we consume come from, and what they cost to the earth?
3. *reducing our impact*: what practical measure can we take to begin to reduce the impact of our way of lives upon creation?
4. *working for healing*: how can we become involved in work to actively restore the health of creation?

## IDEAS FOR HOUSEHOLD COVENANT GOALS

- Begin a household compost system.
- Switch to Green Power
- Do an energy efficiency audit of your home? What measures can you take to reduce electricity consumption?
- Use your past water bills to set your household a realistic target to reduce water consumption.
- Next time you replace white goods in your house (washing machine, fridge, freezer), spend more money for greater water and energy efficiency. Top range products also have more recyclable components.
- Do some research on the environmental impacts of everyday household consumption:
  - plastic: production of plastic and where it ends up; find out about the Great Pacific Garbage Patch;
  - e-waste: find out what happens to e-waste and its effects;
  - pollution: find out about what things contaminate a local waterway and where they come from.
- Find out how to responsibly dispose of e-waste (electronic goods, batteries, light bulbs) and institute household systems to regularise this.

- Find out about 5-10 plant species that are indigenous to your watershed. Try to grow one.
- Join a local 'Friends' group which is seeking to care for and restore local bushland.
- Go on a tour of an organic farm and learn about ecologically sensitive agriculture.
- Use a carbon calculator to calculate your household's collective emissions. Where can you reduce your emissions? Explore off-setting those emissions you can't reduce.
- Reduce your meat and dairy consumption.
- Reduce your use of a car.



# WEEK 4: GIVING



## WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

*[The next three weeks of this series – giving, savings & investment, and debt – are all essentially about money. Obviously money is a matter that is central to our home economies, however, it is also a matter of central concern to the Bible.]*

We live in a time when people are wealthier than ever before, but when generosity in financial giving is declining. The National Church Life Survey estimates that, on average, Christians give only around 2% of their income. Central to this decline in generosity is changing perceptions about what people 'really need' for an adequate standard of living, and therefore how much they feel they can spare to give away. In 2002 a survey by the Australia Institute found that 62% of Australians felt they did not have enough for 'what they really need'!

At this same time, people are faced with unprecedented competition for the charity dollar, characterised by increasingly aggressive and sophisticated marketing by a bewildering array of charities.

### *DISCUSS*

*How much do you think your giving habits are pressured either by 'a tight household budget' or aggressive marketing by charities, or both?*

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## Read Matthew 6:24

Before we can think about giving (or savings and investment and debt in the coming weeks) we need first to consider Jesus' teaching on money. In this short text, Jesus names succinctly the fundamental issue which virtually all his other teachings on money (and there are many) address: that is, money is more than a simple tool for existing in the world, it is a spiritual force that competes with God! The word used here (translated as 'wealth' or 'money' in most versions) is actually Mammon – a pagan god associated with death. One way of reading Jesus' hard teachings on money, especially those calling for renunciation of some form, is that part of their concern is to break the power of Mammon in our lives.

## Read Deuteronomy 26:12-15

The Hebrew tithe (which simply means 'tenth') was a structured form of giving based on some profound theological convictions. Firstly, it rested on the conviction that everything we have ultimately comes from God, and it is therefore an act of remembrance and thankfulness. Secondly, it served a function to ensure a community of enough for those without means: 'the Levite, the alien, the orphan and the widow'. Thirdly, the context of the tithe was one of communal sharing and celebration, as opposed to what we would call 'hand-outs'; that is, it sought to bring together a community rather than create distinctions.

### DISCUSS

*Is the concept of a tithe – that is, a decision to give away a set percentage of your income in a structured way – something you find worrying or liberating?*

## Read Matthew 5:42 and 6:1-4

These two short texts capture the challenging call of Jesus, which goes well beyond the idea of tithing (structured giving). Here Jesus exhorts radical generosity to the needy which is uncalculated and risky. In 6:2 the key word derives from the Greek word *eleos* (translated 'alms' in some Bibles), which means a response of mercy. However, while Jesus clearly commends such generosity, he also gives a strong warning against the ulterior motives which can creep in to giving, particularly self-justification and social recognition.

Like in so many things, Jesus' teaching about giving concerns both heart and action.

*DISCUSS*

*How do we cultivate habits of spontaneous generosity?*

**Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-15**

The Apostle Paul here exhorts the Corinthians to generous giving by drawing on the example of Jesus' self-giving and the story of the manna in the wilderness, where the object is that none should have too little and none should have too much. For Paul, the object of giving is the constant circulation of abundance towards need, so that there will be 'equality' (or 'a fair balance' in some translations).

*DISCUSS*

*Do we perceive our material and financial situation to be one of abundance or scarcity? When we think about this question, who or what is our reference point for answering?*



# WHAT CHANGES CAN WE MAKE?

When thinking about giving, there are three basic questions to work through:

1. how much do we give?
2. who do we give to?
3. how do we give (what is the place of structured giving and spontaneous generosity)?

## IDEAS FOR HOUSEHOLD COVENANT GOALS

- Commit to give away a specific percentage of your annual income, and develop a giving plan of how you will give and who to.
- Explore the idea of a graduated tithe: determine a base income at which you will give away a base percentage of your income (eg. 10%). If your income rises (faster than inflation) then increase the percentage you give (eg. for the first \$10,000 income rise, increase giving to 15%; for the next \$10,000 income rise, increase giving to 20%).
- Decide to make one generous gift in the year, beyond any giving plan, to an organisation or person who you feel is doing good work in the world, yet is little recognised, and in need of encouragement.
- Consider adding one new dimension to your giving this year (whether by redistributing what you already give, or increasing your giving). Possibilities might include giving to: a faith community; overseas development and humanitarian work; work amongst the disadvantaged in Australia; Christian mission work; ecological conservation and restoration; a campaign for justice.
- Explore pooling your giving (or a portion of your giving) with others, to fund some innovative work in your local area or within your faith community.
- Commit to keeping your eyes open for a situation in which a spontaneous financial gift (even a small one) might be a help or an encouragement. Think about how you could make such a gift anonymously.



# WEEK 5: SAVINGS & INVESTMENT



## WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

When thinking about savings and investment we are thinking about:

- interest-bearing accounts (savings and term deposits)
- superannuation
- share portfolios
- property investment

Consider the ‘mind-map’ below. It demonstrates that when thinking about savings and investments there is indeed a lot to consider, and much of it is complex and dependent on getting good information.

From a Christian perspective, the fundamental two questions are:

1. why seek to save money or invest for a return?
2. if I receive a return on my money, where did the increase come from?  
What was done in the world to produce that profit, and does that sit comfortably with the teaching of Jesus?

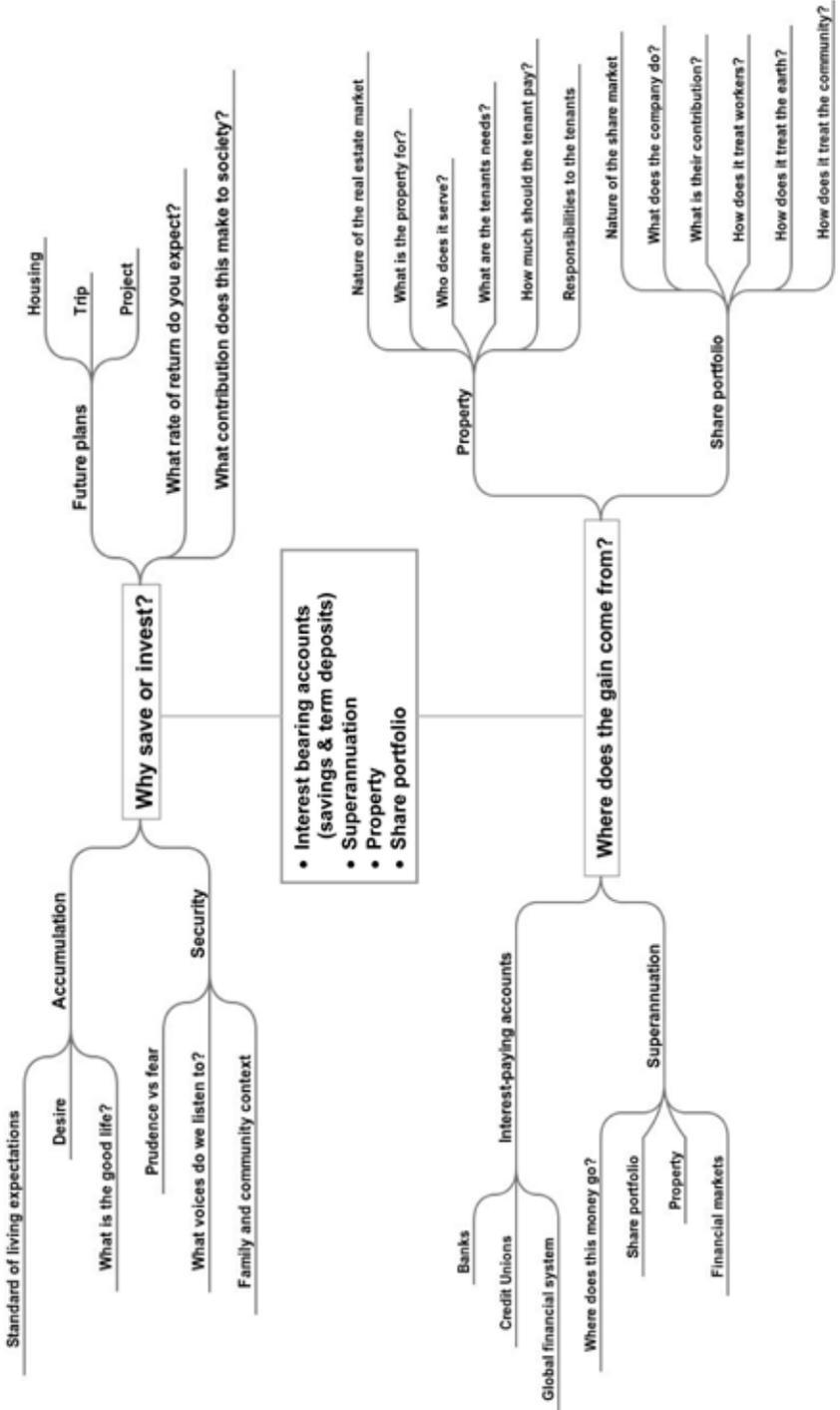
We live in a world economy where ensuring a return on capital is the primary law, and a society where ‘making your money work for you’ is not only the norm, it is seen as good citizenship. We are schooled to demand security and high returns from our use of money, but we are rarely encouraged to ask any questions about what our money ends up doing in the world.

## DISCUSS

1. *What are the main voices that have shaped your attitude to money and the 'responsible' use of money, and what do they say?*
2. *What do you know about:*
  - *where your superannuation is invested?*
  - *the relationship between return on shares and company behaviour?*
  - *the relationship between property investment and the housing affordability crisis?*



# SAVINGS & INVESTMENT



# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## Read Leviticus 25:35-38

This is one of a number of commandments prohibiting the charging of interest from a fellow Israelite. In Deuteronomy, interest-taking is seen with such repugnance that it is listed amongst commandments about faeces, prostitution, and oppressing slaves (23: 9-25). The context of lending envisaged here is not commercial finance, but providing loans to people who have suffered hardship, such as the loss of a crop. This is not some superstitious suspicion of making a return, but rather an in-principle objection to making profit from someone else's need.

### DISCUSS

*Can you think of any modern day equivalents, where return on an investment is in fact profiting from someone's need?*

## Read Luke 6:32-36 and Luke 12:16-34

Jesus is so unreasonable! There is no doubt that all the hardest things said about money in the Bible are all said by Jesus. How we try and live by the ethic taught by Jesus is an incredibly difficult task – it is much more than can be addressed here, and is perhaps the work of our whole lives. But this much is obvious: Jesus consistently warns against centring your life around the accumulation of wealth and the shoring-up of financial security. Indeed, these goals (or pressures) are seen as a type of bondage which stifles life.

### DISCUSS

- 1. If, first and foremost we are called to 'seek first the kingdom of God', how might our use of surplus money (money we are not just giving away) serve good work and good things in the world?*
- 2. When we say, 'I really invested in that person (or church or group etc)', we are saying that we gave something of ourselves for its growth and nurture. Might not our financial investments be thought of in the same way?*



# WHAT CHANGES CAN WE MAKE?

Depending on your life stage or circumstances, this area of the Household Covenant may be of either pressing concern, or hardly relevant. Whatever the case, it is worth giving some thought to – almost everybody these days has some superannuation, and you never know when your circumstances might change.

Three questions to think through with regards to savings and investments:

1. What return do I think is actually reasonable (as opposed to possible)?
2. Can I ensure (as much as is possible) that my money does no harm in the world?
3. Is it possible for an investment to actually contribute to something good?

## IDEAS FOR HOUSEHOLD COVENANT GOALS

- Simply seek to educate yourself on ‘ethical’, ‘responsible’ and ‘community’ investing.
- Move all your superannuation into an ‘ethical super’ fund. To research ethical super, see <http://www.responsibleinvestment.org>
- Switch any savings or term deposits from one of the Big 4 Banks (Westpac, Commonwealth, NAB, ANZ) into a credit union or a community bank (eg. Bendigo and MECU).
- Do you have money in investment funds or share portfolios? Explore moving this money into ethical funds or out of the share market altogether.
- Do you own an investment property? What would it take to transform this investment into a service meeting a human need (especially for people in need of housing) rather than just an investment maximized for financial benefit? Consider:
  - what rent is fair (rather than what the market allows you to charge)?
  - what relationship or connection do you have with the tenants?
  - can you dispense with using a real-estate agent to ‘manage’ the tenancy of your property?
  - Consider direct person-to-person loans. Are there any in your church or community who could benefit from a no-interest or low-interest loan?

# WEEK 6:

# DEBT



## WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

This week we are thinking about the reverse position of last week – instead of asking what it means to invest (essentially to lend) money, we are asking what it means to borrow money.

It is no exaggeration to say that the whole global economy is built on debt. Of the total global money supply, only around 3% actually takes the form of what we think of when we think of money – currency created by governments. The rest of it is credit created in a hypothetical universe.

Australian society in recent times has undergone a revolution of consumer credit. It is no secret that we have been actively encouraged to borrow. In 1986, the average household debt/income ratio was 43%; by 2006 this had grown to 152%, and this was at a time when disposable incomes rose substantially. Over the last decade, credit card debt increased by 400%; in 2012, the average debt per cardholder was \$4757.

However, rising debt levels are not just the result of frivolous expenditure. For most people in Australia, buying a home is an impossibility without a mortgage. Even here, though, our expectations about what standard and size of housing is 'good enough' have risen dramatically.

### DISCUSS

1. *What is driving the trend to borrow increasingly larger amounts of money?*
2. *What is the impact of debt on our lives? Think about:*
  - *work choices*
  - *use of time*
  - *relationships*
  - *our mental, emotional and spiritual states*

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## Read Deuteronomy 15:1-17

In this, the great Biblical manifesto on debt, a number of important statements are being made. Firstly, there is a clear recognition of the necessity for people to borrow at certain times of their life, and to this end, there is even a commendation to lend to them (vv.7-11). However, there is also a recognition that the position of indebtedness, if it is too deep or too widespread, leads to an invidious social & economic predicament for the debtor, and too much power for the creditor. More than that though, debt is fundamentally associated with the condition of slavery, the condition from which God has liberated the Israelites. The heart of this objection is that a slave, or a person bound by debt to someone else, is not fully free to follow God. For this reason the Hebrew law insists on periodic remission of debts – wiping the slate clean and starting again.

### DISCUSS

*Has there ever been a time in your life when you felt that your life circumstances were pulling in another direction from the way you felt God was leading you?*

## Read Matthew 5:42 and 6:12

In these two texts from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus renews the Deuteronomy debt tradition. He both commends lending (and therefore the necessity of debt), but at the heart of the Lord's Prayer, he also includes the call for debt remission: 'forgive us our debts, as we forgive those in debt to us'. In the version of the Lord's Prayer that many of us say in church, we pray 'forgive us our sins' (see also Luke 11:4). This mixing of the two concepts is not because debt is a sin, but because to the Hebrew mind, debt and sin are similar states of being (in Aramaic, they are the same word): they are both a reality of life, but something which God desires and intends our release from; they are both states in which we are not fully free.

### DISCUSS

*On a continuum between 'healthy' and 'constraining', where do you feel your financial circumstances sit? Is debt a part of this picture?*

# WHAT CHANGES CAN WE MAKE?

As with 'savings & investment', this area of the Household Covenant may be of either pressing concern, or hardly relevant, depending on your life stage or circumstances. However, most people will have to think about debt at some stage of their life.

When thinking about debt, it is important not to be hamstrung by unrealistic ideals, but to try to discern the role of debt in your life – what is its true cost? Some things to consider:

1. What is the debt for? Is it for something necessary (such as housing) or merely funding excessive consumption?
2. What percentage of your weekly income is devoted to servicing your (cumulative) debt? Is this sustainable, or does it impact your life in the form of stress, making you do things you don't want to do (such as unwanted work), or preventing you from doing things you would like to do (such as giving or alternate uses of your time). Is the debt worth the cost?
3. How long is the period of indebtedness? Are you happy with this?
4. What things can I change and what things are beyond my power to change?

## IDEAS FOR HOUSEHOLD COVENANT GOALS

- This is perhaps the area of the Household Covenant which probably has the most limited scope for creative action. Don't worry if you feel there is really not much for you to do – maybe just seek to read something useful on the subject.
- Limit yourself to one credit card (and its limit), or change your credit card to a debit card.
- Begin using a “credit card condom,” (a sleeve on your credit card reminding you to think about whether you really need to use the card, whether you really need the article, etc.)
- If you have multiple debts, look into the option of consolidating (refinancing) your debts in to a single debt that reduces your interest burden and repayment stress.
- If you have no debt, educate yourself on the effect on how debt is working in people's lives and the economy – seek to read a book or some articles on debt.

# WEEK 7: POVERTY



## WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

It might seem silly to ask ‘What’s the problem with poverty?’, but this is precisely the question we need to be asking. Very much harm has been done through the ages by simplistic assumptions about the causes of poverty, its solutions and what constitutes the actual experience of poverty.

The question of poverty and how our lives impact or benefit ‘the poor’ cuts across all areas of the Household Covenant. However, in this area we focus specifically on what we understand of poverty in its many guises, and whether there is any place in our lives for direct human connection with those who exist on the margins of society.

Dorothy Day, the founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, once wrote:

*Poverty is a strange and elusive thing. I have tried to write about it, its joys and its sorrows, for thirty years now; and I could probably write about it for another thirty without conveying what I feel about it as well as I would like. I condemn poverty and I advocate it; poverty is simple and complex at once; it is a social phenomenon and a personal matter. Poverty is an elusive thing, and a paradoxical one.*

Once we scratch the surface, we find that even defining poverty and who is ‘poor’ is an immensely fraught task. The experience of ‘the poor’ in the housing commission high-rises of Australia’s cities is clearly radically different from that of ‘the poor’ in the mountains of Pakistan.

## DISCUSS

*Think about your local area:*

- *What groups of people would you describe as poor, marginalised or excluded?*
- *What do you know of their experience of hardship? What are the actual things that create difficulty in their life?*



# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## Read Matthew 26:6-13

Why will the poor always be with us? Here Jesus is clearly not rationalising the existence of poverty so we can do nothing about it – the teaching immediately preceding this in chapter 25 is the parable of the sheep and goats: ‘What you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me!’. Rather, Jesus is drawing on the long Biblical tradition that recognises that poverty is one of the primary conditions of human fallenness (see Deut. 15:11).

### DISCUSS

*Reflect/discuss/brainstorm all the different reasons why some people end up ‘poor’.*

## Read Luke 6:20 and Mark 2:15-17

Not only does Jesus not say ‘make poverty history’, in this first reading Jesus here states that poverty is the very gateway by which we enter into God’s reality! In Luke, Jesus is definitely referring to the socio-economic condition of poverty; in Matthew’s version (5:3), the concept is deepened to ‘the poor in spirit’, or as JB Phillips translates it: ‘Blessed are those who know their need of God.’ In the reading from Mark, Jesus warns those who assume they have got it all together, that he has not come to reach out to them, but only to those who know that everything is not alright.

### DISCUSS

*It is common for people from more privileged backgrounds who begin working amongst the poor, to imagine that they have ‘answers’ to make the life of the poor better. What do these texts mean for the distinctions we would like to make between ourselves and ‘the poor’?*

## Read Luke 14: 12-14

The revolutionary practice that characterised the early Christian church was the almost unique way in which it not only provided hospitality without social distinction, but indeed actively sought out the excluded and the marginalised – ‘do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly’ (Rom 12:16). The healing ministry of the church was primarily social in character; where,

through the communion of love, both 'rich' and 'poor' learned more deeply about themselves and their fundamental solidarity as people who need God.

*DISCUSS*

*What are the barriers in your community or church to this sort of mixing of people across different social backgrounds?*



# WHAT CHANGES CAN WE MAKE?

For many, this is the hardest area of the Household Covenant because it is the one that most threatens our comfort zones. The challenge of the Covenant is, no matter how hard one particular area may seem, to try and think of something, no matter how small, that we can do.

It may help to think of different sorts of things to consider when trying to formulate household covenant goals around poverty:

1. What do we understand of the experience of poverty/marginality?
2. Where in our lives do we meet and mix with the marginalised?
3. Where in our lives, if we pay attention, are we already in contact with the forgotten, the excluded, the lonely and the struggling?
4. How can we offer some sort of welcome and hospitality to the poor?

## IDEAS FOR HOUSEHOLD COVENANT GOALS

- Commit to reading and discussing one or two of the works of Dorothy Day (eg. *Loaves & Fishes* or *The Long Loneliness*) or Henri Nouwen (eg. *Compassion* or *The Wounded Healer*). This could be done as a couple or with others.
- Identify one person or family who is lonely or on the margins of your church/community? Invite them over for a meal and begin to get to know each other.
- Find out about what local services or groups work with the aged or disabled. Can you help in any way?
- Volunteer at a local soup kitchen, shelter or clinic to find out what local needs are.
- What are the needs of local refugee or migrant communities? Can you help?
- Undertake an “exposure” type program, or sponsor a friend or family member to join one.



# APPENDIX

# UNDERTAKING THE COVENANT OVER LENT

Lent is the season in the Christian calendar when we prepare for Easter. It is traditionally a time of reflection, stripping back and simplifying the clutter of life in order to more fully approach the awesome truths of the Easter story. What better time than Lent to begin, or return, to reflecting on how our whole lives can better reflect our faith in Jesus?

Beginning on Ash Wednesday, Lent is the period of forty ordinary days (Sundays are not counted) before Easter Sunday, recalling Jesus' forty days and Israel's forty years in the wilderness. Lent is therefore a 'wilderness' time of deep reflection on who we really are, how we live, and how we are going to seek to follow God in the world. It finishes with resurrection and new life!

Using the Household Covenant over Lent provides an annual process to reflect on how our faith is reflected in our material lives – that is, those aspects of our lives to which we devote the bulk of our time, energy and preoccupation.

## OBSERVING LENT

Observing Lent is not necessarily part of the Household Covenant process, but you may find doing some simple things to be mindful of the season adds a new dimension to the things you are thinking about, and a richer awareness to the drama and power of the Easter story.

Lent is the least marketable season in the Christian calendar. If there is one word to encapsulate the theme of the season it is 'repentance'. We think of repentance (in the Greek: *metanoia*) as feeling guilty, but it actually means

*to take on a new mind, a new way of seeing the world.* Lent is therefore a time to cultivate vulnerability to the truth about ourselves and the world, and especially about our need for God.

To cultivate this vulnerability, Lent has traditionally been a season of giving up the luxuries of life, something which is an anathema to our present consumer culture. The purpose of giving things up is not to punish ourselves, but to create in our material lives daily absences and longings which draw our attention to the absences and longings that are present in our spiritual lives.

This lent you might like to have a go at abstaining from some thing/s. You might like to try one of the following examples (I recommend AGAINST trying all!) or come up with your own:

- Go vegetarian for Lent.
- Give up caffeine: tea, coffee and chocolate
- Give up sweet things.
- Give up alcohol.
- Abstain from using your car x days a week.
- Abstain from TV/Facebook/surfing the web x days a week, or completely!
- Take up TEAR Australia's 40 Day Carbon Fast

The idea is that each time you are aware of your desire for, or the inconvenience of not having, the thing you have given up, it becomes an inbuilt reminder to turn to God (Eg. "Geez I feel like a coffee right now ... Do I ever really want God this much?")

# LENTEN REFLECTIONS

You may like to use the simple Lenten reflections below at the beginning of your study. If you are interested, there are many other Lenten resources that can be found on the internet.

## WEEK1: ASH WEDNESDAY

Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent, a season of repentance, of fasting, of sackcloth and ashes. This is not a popular mood these days and modern Christianity has expended much energy in getting away from it. But the purpose of this solemn introspection is not self-flagellation, but to allow ourselves to confront the truth about ourselves and the world that we live in. It is about getting in touch with Reality as seen by God, which means coming to terms with the depths of human fallenness and suffering. It is only then that we can fully appreciate the significance, the joy and the hope of what is to come on Easter Sunday.

### **Read Psalm 51**

This psalm expresses an uncomfortable level of honesty about oneself, but it is founded on ultimate trust in God's grace and love.

*Light a candle and spend some time in silence examining how much you are prepared to open yourself to God.*

*(The traditional blessing for Ash Wednesday involves marking the sign of the cross in ash on one's forehead, accompanied by the statement: "From dust you came, to dust you will return. Turn to God and live." It expresses both the stark reality of the human condition and the incredible hope to which we are called. You may like to try this.)*

# WEEK 2

## Read Matthew 4:1-11

Before beginning his ministry, Jesus must spend time in the wilderness, clarifying and refining his purpose, his vocation and his Way. At the heart of this process is the struggle over what he must reject.

*Light a candle and spend some time reflecting on whether there are things in your life – things which you want – yet which you feel God may be calling you to say ‘No’ to?*

# WEEK 3

## Read John 3:1-10

In this passage, Nicodemus, a man who has given his life to religious learning and understanding, struggles to come to terms with a basic spiritual truth: that participation in the kingdom of God requires a radical reconstruction of self – something like a second birth. Moreover, this cannot be achieved through his own exertion, but only by surrender to the spirit of God.

*Light a candle and spend some time reflecting: how much of our engagement with God do we try to keep within our own terms?*

# WEEK 4

## Read Exodus 17:1-7

Central to Israel’s wilderness experience, is the experience of thirst – that is, an all-pervading consciousness of the absence of something we need. Their reflex reaction is to want to return to the place they know and understand, even though it is the place of their enslavement. But at the time of crisis, God provides water. Later, Jesus will describe himself as living water (John 4:13; John 7:37-38).

*Light a candle and spend some time reflecting: in times of crisis, when we thirst for resolution, where do we turn? Do we believe that God can quench our thirst?*

# WEEK 5

## Read Ephesians 5:8-11

The struggle between darkness and light is a central motif of the Bible. This is not just some cosmic struggle, but a struggle that runs right down the centre of our lives. But we all know that trying to discern darkness and light in the mix of our lives is not as easy as it sounds. Here, the Apostle Paul calls us to the hard work of looking for 'all that is good and right and true', and thinking about 'what is pleasing to God'.

Light a candle and spend some time thinking about your last couple of days. What things bring a shadow to your life and what things bring some light, and what lies behind them?

# WEEK 6

## Read Psalm 130

The Lenten journey is drawing closer to the shadow of the cross and closer to the true reality of the human predicament. This psalm comes from the darkest place of that predicament, but it also expresses the only starting point to salvation and redemption: a cry from the depths, the resolve to wait for God, and hope in the goodness of God.

*Light a candle and spend some time dwelling on the stanza of this psalm that most speaks to you at the moment. Offer it to God.*



# PALM SUNDAY REFLECTION

Read Matthew 21:1-11

The wilderness time of Lent is coming to a culmination with Jesus seemingly triumphant. But he is not fooled or diverted. We cannot meaningfully arrive at Easter Sunday unless we fully confront the crisis that still awaits: conflict and controversy, betrayal and abandonment, the cross of Friday, and the deep meaningless abyss of Saturday. This is the way of Jesus. Can we follow him in it? What does that mean anyway? What could possibly be worth all this?

*Give some thought to how you will spend 'Passion Week'. Is there some small way, you can mark or give some reflection to the key days: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Saturday Vigil & Easter Sunday?*

# EASTER REFLECTION

The wilderness journey of Lent is finished. The cross lies behind us and the tomb is empty. From what seemed like utter defeat and despair, life has risen and everything has been made new. This is the heart of the whole great Biblical story of salvation: to a humanity trapped in a world of death, God shows us the way to new life. It is the way of Jesus, the way of love. From this point, the church waits fifty days until Pentecost, when we revisit the giving of the Holy Spirit and the bursting forth of a new community, the Body of Christ, that bears witness to a new way of living in this world. After that, the church enters the great long season called 'Ordinary Time', when, day by day, we begin to work out the implications of this epic journey for our life here and now.

Peter turned around and saw behind them the disciple Jesus loved ... Peter asked Jesus, "What about him, Lord?" Jesus replied, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? *As for you, follow me.*" John 21:20-22

# ABOUT MANNA GUM

Manna Gum is an independent, non-profit Christian ministry that is motivated by a vision of renewal of the Church in Australia as an alternative community that witnesses to the Kingdom of God. Manna Gum seeks to:

1. provide resources for Christian groups to understand and practise the social, economic and political implications of the Gospel of Christ; and
2. to promote deeper understanding of the ways in which our lifestyle impacts upon our neighbours (locally and globally) and upon the earth, and to stimulate critical thinking on issues of aid, development, poverty and wealth.

**VISIT THE MANNA GUM WEBSITE: [WWW.MANNAGUM.ORG.AU](http://WWW.MANNAGUM.ORG.AU)**

This site contains a host of resources discussing economics in the Bible, the impact of our economic lives in the world, and examples of people trying to enact Christian alternatives. The website contains sections on:

- Economics in the Bible
- Home Economics
- Poverty & Overseas Aid
- Climate Change
- Responsible Consumption
- Indigenous Communities

# FURTHER READING

## BOOKS

Wendell Berry, *What Matters?: Economics of a renewed Commonwealth*, Counterpoint.

Ched Myers, *The Biblical Vision of Sabbath Economics*, Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries

Arthur Simon, *How Much is Enough?: Hungering for God in an affluent world*, Baker Books.

Matthew Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet: A Christian Call to Action*, Zondervan.

Michael Shut (ed), *Simpler Living, Compassionate Life: A Christian Perspective*, Church Publishing Inc.

Michael Shut (ed), *Food & Faith: Justice, joy and daily bread*, Living the Good News.

## GROUP STUDY RESOURCES

**The End of Greed: Consuming as if God, People & the Planet Matter**  
*Baptist World Aid, Scott Higgins*

The *End of Greed* is a five part book, small group bible study and preaching series that will help you grapple with what it means to be a follower of Jesus in a consumer culture.

## **Just Faith: Following Jesus in an Unequal World**

*TEAR Australia*

Just Faith consists of a small group study guide, an accompanying DVD and a daily devotional booklet to assist Christians to explore the connections between their faith and the big issues of the world today.

## **Mammon to Manna: Sabbath Economics and Community Investing**

*Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries*

This series is for adult study groups interested in exploring biblical faith and economic practice. The two-disc set and group facilitation guide features theologian Ched Myers and investment advisor Andy Loving.

## **Economy of Love**

*Relational Tithes/Shane Claiborne.*

In this five-week study (book and DVD), unpack what the patterns of God's kingdom look like compared to the patterns of our world. What is the value of enough, and how do we become more like the God who is close to the poor, the hungry, the meek, and the merciful?

## **Carbon Fast**

*TEAR Australia*

The Carbon Fast is a 40 day challenge and 7 part study series that enables you to learn, live, give, pray and advocate for justice in a changing climate.



# HOUSEHOLD COVENANT GOALS SHEET

AREA	GOAL	DATE
1. WORK & LEISURE		
2. CONSUMPTION		
3. ENVIRONMENT		
4. GIVING		
5. SAVINGS & INVESTMENT		
6. DEBT		
7. POVERTY		

*Hint: You may find it useful to write your goals in pencil so you can continue to use this sheet each year.*

