

# One BRMC Small Group Study

## The Welcome of God's Love

### Leader's Guide

Please note that this study guide accompanies the pulpit sermon on 08 November 2020. The suggestions below are not model answers but to help guide your study.

#### Scripture Passage:

Isaiah 54:8-10

#### Context:

For several years now, all of the 21 churches in the Trinity Annual Conference (TRAC) observe Conference Sunday to remind the churches of their close family connections as part of the Methodist Church in Singapore and also to pray for the Annual Conference where important decisions will be made and key people will be appointed.



In the TRAC logo, there are 5 connected Ws (the 5Ws of God) forming a star. They stand for Word, Worship, Welcome, Witness, and Wonder. This year, the focus is on the third W – WELCOME – and the message for this Conference Sunday highlights the “welcoming love of God.”

As we embark on this study, may we be reminded of the love of God, our Father in heaven. May we truly grasp His welcoming love – a love that is steady, never-ending and tender-hearted. May we also be compelled to love others the same way and desire to be part of a church that ripples welcoming gestures of love especially in these difficult times.

#### Introductory

1. In Isaiah 54:8, how are God's anger and God's love described in terms of duration? How are they different?
  - The word “moment” was used to describe God's anger, while God's love was described as “everlasting.” (English Standard Version)
  - In context, the Scripture passage pertains to the Babylonian Exile which lasted for many years. Yahweh delivered judgement to Israelites for breaking their covenant with Him. “The Babylonian exile did not seem ‘brief’ at the time, but it was momentary in comparison to God's everlasting love, with great compassion. Lavish displays of God's eternal love more than offset his momentary discipline.” (ESV Bibles by Crossway. *ESV Global Study Bible (Kindle Locations 170674-170676). Crossway. Kindle Edition.*)
  - In his sermon, TRAC President Rev. Dr. Gordon Wong said, “God is not always a God of wrath but he is always a God of love.” God also exhibits holy or divine anger (often due to humans' destructive acts against other people or towards oneself) but in His anger, His steadfast love remains.

2. In Isaiah 54:9-10, the Lord spoke about an earlier event in biblical history. What is this particular event? How does this part of history encompass God's nature that shows holy anger but is also loving and compassionate?
- Suggestion: read Genesis 6:1-8 and Genesis 8.
  - God's covenant with Noah reveals how God does not tolerate transgressions and also gets angry, yet He is still the God who forgives and welcomes His people back with His enduring and compassionate love.
  - Being the God whose love is everlasting, Yahweh still remembered His everlasting covenant with His people, and out of compassion, he promised to renew this covenant.
  - God proclaimed judgement and hope to the people in the time of Noah. He is also the same God of the Israelites who sent them to exile but also remembered and saved them and He is still the same God of today.

## Reflection

3. In some cases, one's relationship with his/her earthly father affects how he/she views God as a Father. For example, growing up with a father who gets angry more than he shows love and compassion, may make one think, somehow, that God as our heavenly Father, is the same. In understanding the nature of God from the responses to Q1 and Q2, how would you describe God as your heavenly Father? Is He the same as our earthly fathers?
- Rev Dr Wong also said that the God in Isaiah 54 wants us to know Him as a Father who loves us – "with a steadfast love that will never end, a love everlasting and permanent. But also with a love that is passionate, tender-hearted and full of compassionate feelings."
  - This might be a sensitive question to ask as not everyone might have a good relationship with their fathers, or they might have grown up without a father. But the aim of this question is to point us to the welcoming and tender-hearted love of God that is so different from the kind of love our earthly fathers can give us. This may also help the participants to have a deeper sense of security and belongingness found in the steadfast love of God.
4. Rev Dr Gordon Wong, in his sermon, mentioned that he hopes for people to find the Methodist churches in Singapore welcoming and loving. Can we describe BRMC as a welcoming church?
- This is an opportunity to explore with your group their experience in BRMC. Perhaps some people in your group may have felt that BRMC was not a warm and welcoming place, encourage them to share why they felt this way. For others they may feel that BRMC is a welcoming place or have no opinion on whether it is or is not a welcoming place – perhaps explore with them if they have a recent opportunity to welcome someone new to the church.
  - In the discussion, perhaps it will be helpful to share this:  
In Rev Benjamin Fong's sermon on [*Ephesians 3:1-13 (Chapter 5) - God's Secret Plan Revealed, 01 November 2020*], he shared an incident which struck him about the reality of our church or many churches of today - the disparity in terms of social standing. During the preparation of church re-opening for onsite services, it was

- discussed why the non-English services must keep running, and one reason given to him was that Foreign Domestic Workers are not comfortable attending the same service as their employers and (maybe) vice versa. *Why do you think this is the case?*
- As a church, do you think there should be such a divide? How might we be more inclusive and welcoming to those who are different, linguistically, academically, socio-economically, etc? For the YAM and Youth SGLs, perhaps you can get your SGs to consider if they have been welcoming and inclusive towards people from different schools and age groups. Perhaps there are people in your SGs that are quieter or more awkward that would appreciate you having a personal conversation with them.
  - The small group is a part of the wider church. Explore with your group as to whether the members are or have been a welcoming community to newcomers or visitors. Would they welcome newcomers to the group? If they feel that they would not welcome newcomers, how would such an attitude give expression to God's love and compassion? Would the group consider reviewing their view on welcoming newcomers?
  - If there is a willingness to welcome newcomers, how would they ensure that newcomers felt welcomed? This leads to the next question ...

## Application

5. Having understood the welcoming, Father-like love of God from the previous questions, how might you extend this kind of love to other people in practical terms, today? A love that, as Rev Dr Gordon Wong says, is "not just sweet love, but strong, steady love, a love that is permanent and compassionate."
  - With our prayers, we can ask God to reveal to us ways in which we can be an extension of His love and compassion to the people around us. We can seek guidance and conviction on how to be a warm and welcoming community to the stranger in our midst.
    - (a) within BRMC or TRAC churches?
      - One suggestion would be to follow-up on the given answers to Q4, (e.g., fully welcome the brothers and sisters in Christ regardless of their race and social status.)
    - (b) within small groups in BRMC?
      - One suggestion would be to spend some time and effort in welcoming and getting to know newcomers in your small group, perhaps meeting up with them before small group sessions, to take a position of interest and curiosity about their lives.
    - (c) outside the church, in the society?
      - You may ask the participants to ponder on these words from Rev. Dr. Gordon Wong:  
 "Do you know someone who wants to know, who needs to know this kind of welcoming, Father-like love of God? We all need help during this COVID-19 pandemic. It is especially needed for families whose bread-winners are or were in the kind of work that cannot be modified or saved through ZOOM or any conferencing technology. Many people have lost their jobs and their sources of income. Many have been cut off from visiting families and friends. So there are many, many of us who would welcome some gestures of loving welcome. We give thanks for the different ways that our churches have been able to offer welcome to

workers without adequate food or beds to sleep in. May we continue to look for ways to offer the welcoming, Father-like love of God during this increasingly difficult time for the world. What the world needs now is love..."

## Prayer

6. Write out a prayer for yourself based on what you have heard and learned from this session.

(a) What is in your heart for yourself?

- Perhaps you need God's help to understand deeper His welcoming, Father-like love.

"Almighty Father, grant me the grace to fully realize how I can come to You as my heavenly Father. Remove from my heart any tinge of doubt that may hinder me from enjoying Your great and tender-hearted love. Teach me to walk in Your ways, that I may love as You have loved me, that I may show compassion just as how You have shown Your compassion towards me. In Jesus' name, Amen."

(b) What is in your heart for others?

- Perhaps you feel led to pray for Trinity Annual Conference:

Suggested prayer pointers:

- Pray for the leaders
- Pray for its ministries
- Pray for the 21 churches, that all will be found exhibiting God's welcoming love
- Pray also for the TRAC Conference, 23-26 Nov, as they meet to elect a new President, and to also appoint pastors to the churches for 2021.

It is always useful to collate these prayers and to refer to them for thanksgiving and sharing next week.