



WEEK OF PRAYER AND SELF-DENIAL
GENERAL CONFERENCE METHODIST WOMEN
2023

1.6.2023

Dear Sisters,

Greetings in the matchless name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

1. a. Enclosed herewith are the materials for **THE WEEK OF PRAYER AND SELF-DENIAL 2023**. This programme is scheduled to be carried out in the last week of August, namely 20 – 26th August 2023.
b. The theme for this year's Week of Prayer and Self- Denial is "**Women in the Bible**"
c. For this year, I have again added in a **MW project** which can be carried out as a project involving all the women in the local church, young and old, namely *Operation Christmas Child*.
2. Kindly observe these days prayerfully making use of the materials enclosed. The offering taken for this year will be apportioned as follows: -
 - 1/3 would go to GCMW General Fund,
 - 1/3 to Methodist Education Foundation and
 - 1/3 balance
RM 8,000 to SIAC MW Centre and,
RM 8,000 to the En Ling Elderly Care Centre (operated by SCAC MW).
(Please refer to the pictures and brief details below of these Centres)
3. If there are any queries, please address them through your respective Annual Conference MW Presidents.

All offerings are to be channelled to GCMW.

Wishing you a meaningful and blessed Week of Prayer and Self Denial 2023!

God Bless You,

'TO KNOW CHRIST AND TO MAKE HIM KNOWN'

In His service,

Kany Jayapal
Spiritual Life Coordinator
GC Methodist Women

EN LING DAYCARE ELDERLY CENTRE, SIBU, SARAWAK (MW SCAC)



- This Centre is to provide a platform for the elderly to integrate into society, to relieve loneliness, and to rebuild their sense of self-worth. The MW SIAC are already in the process of renovation and hope to launch this programme in September 2023. It will provide a safe and engaging environment for the elderly of the area.

MW SIAC CENTRE, JALAN SUKUN, SIBU, SARAWAK (MW SIAC)



- This building in Sibu needs funds for renovation whereupon it will be used as a Multi-Purpose and MW SIAC Ministry Centre

Week of Prayer and Self-Denial 2023

MW Project for 2023

– Packing giftboxes for *Operation Christmas Child*

Each MW Society is encouraged, as we study together, to also undertake a project. This project is designed to join the women, children and menfolk in our church.

Each woman (or family, group of women etc) can work on preparing and packing giftboxes, which can then be sent to children in areas identified beforehand e.g., a nearby school, orphanage, outreach centre, children of your church, Orang Asal communities etc. It can be a time to remember and extend our blessings to them – especially for the coming Christmas season.

Parents can use this project to teach their children about giving.

Suggestions:

- i) The MW Society can decide on how to carry out the project for the year and its purpose i.e., packing giftboxes for *Operation Christmas Child* for an identified outreach, orphanage, Orang Asal community etc.
- ii) Assign a Coordinator (s) for this project. The MW members are briefed to find giftboxes (average-sized shoeboxes or even plastic containers)
- iii) Fill the boxes/containers with items like fun toys, hygiene items, and school supplies. (Good suggestions for gift items are found in <https://www.samaritanspurse.org/operation-christmas-child/what-goes-in-my-shoebox-suggestions/>)
Try to avoid items like sweets, used or damaged items; war-related items such as toy guns, knives; chocolate or food; seeds; drinks; lotions; medications or vitamins; breakable items such as snow globes or glass containers; aerosol cans etc.
- iv) You can add in a Gospel story booklet or Bible verse together with the items. Do not forget to put in a label of your organisation with the blessings of the women and your church. And wrap it up colourfully in time for Christmas.
- v) The amazing Journey of a Shoebox Gift can now begin – starting with each of us and resulting in evangelism, discipleship, and multiplication.

We would love to see your finished project so, please **TAKE A PICTURE** of your finished project of giftboxes with your ladies, and send it to your respective *Annual Conference Spiritual Coordinator* or *MW President*. If possible, include a short write-up on how these meditations have helped you personally or your society.



Colourfully wrapped giftboxes ready for distribution (for design purposes only)

Day 1: Eve

Read: Genesis 1: 26 – 31

Objective: Honouring my Father's World

Childbirth

Eve was the first woman to conceive a child, the first to harbour a fertilized egg in her womb. Did she understand the miracle taking place within her as her belly swelled and her child began to move? Did she know the wonder of love for a child yet unborn? The Bible does not give us those answers. But it does tell us that Eve recognized that life was in God's control. At Cain's birth she exclaimed, "With the help of the Lord, I have brought forth a man" (Genesis 4: 1)

God's judgement on Eve – "with pain you will give birth to children" was no doubt exactly what Eve experienced in birthing this first child. It's the process we appropriately term labour. Eve likely bore the pain and went through the entire birth with only Adam's help.

Later, Hebrew women had the help of experienced midwives, who knew remedies for common delivery difficulties. Midwives' responsibilities after the birth included cutting the umbilical cord, washing the new-born, rubbing it with salt for cleansing, and then wrapping it in swaddling cloths.

The birth-stool referred to in Exodus 1: 16 was probably a low stool on which the mother-to-be squatted, allowing the force of gravity to aid in the birth process. The midwife and possibly other close relatives held the mother's hands to give comfort as well as stability as the mother bore down.

Our Life and Times

Women throughout the centuries have borne the results of Eve's sin. Their pain in childbearing unites them in a common bond of an experience shared. The experience is an unusual combination of the earthy and at the same time the unearthly.

The pains, the breathing, the mess, the blood and the disorder connected with the birth of a child are of the earth, of Eve herself. But what is brought forth, and the bond between the mother and the child of this experience, is unearthly, something only the Creator of life could forge.

Discuss:

1. Adam and Eve produce a classic scene of passing the blame: Adam blames Eve; Eve blames the serpent (3: 12 – 13). Is any one of the three participants any more or less to blame? What do the curses God pronounces on each tell you about who is "at fault" (3: 14 – 19)?
2. What is the first thing God does for Adam and Eve after he declares what their punishment will be? (3: 20 -24)
3. Whom does Eve acknowledge as the source of life (4: 1)?
4. What does God's act tell you about Him? What do you think he is willing to do for you after you have sinned and repented?

Activity: As stewards of this earth, our love must extend to His creation too. Organise a recycling programme, or planting a tree programme for your local MW.

Day 2: Miriam

Read: Exodus 15: 19 – 20, Numbers 12: 1 – 15

Objective: Rejoicing in the Lord always

Dancing

In biblical times, people danced to celebrate happy events and to praise God. Dancing in Scripture is always linked to joy and happiness. The presence of mourning means the absence of dancing (Lamentations 5: 15), and there is a time for both (Ecclesiastes 3: 4)

The very first mention of dancing in Scripture is when Miriam led the Israelite women in a dance that celebrated God's miraculous defeat of the Egyptians at the Red Sea. Imagine if you can, the emotions of these women as they ran between the walls of water of the Red Sea, Egyptian chariots right behind them. Fearful for their lives, they breathlessly reached the eastern shore, turning around to see the waters come crashing in to drown the Egyptians and their horses – a narrow, frightening escape.

Then quickly, fear gave way to a thrill of excitement. They were free! When Miriam went by with a tambourine, singing a song of praise to God, the women's feet moved to her rhythm, their voices joined her song, and they danced!

The Hebrews danced in worship, often in praise of God for his deliverance from enemies (1 Samuel 18: 6, Psalm 149: 3). They danced to celebrate happy events, like weddings and the return of loved ones (Luke 15: 25). Hebrew men and women didn't dance together. The men usually danced alone, as David did before the ark (2 Samuel 6: 14), while the women danced together.

There is some evidence that dancing was a part of the worship of the early Christian church. But according to several early Christian writers, it soon degenerated and it was said that it no longer expressed a pure praise of the Lord. Before long it was banned.

Our Life and Times

Just as Miriam and the women couldn't help but dance with joy, so when God does a wonderful work in our lives, we sometimes respond in much the same manner: our faces break into smiles, our hands are lifted up, and our feet can't remain still! Certainly, the God who created the human body delights in the pure use of that beautiful instrument of our body to offer praise to Him.

Discuss:

1. Describe what you think Miriam and the other women of Israel were thinking and feeling as they walked through the Red Sea. After they made it safely through, why do you think they chose to dance to express their praise?
2. How do you think you would have felt in that situation? Would you have danced? Or would you have used some other form of praise to God? If so, what?
3. Contrast Numbers 12: 1-2 and what that reveals about Miriam, the dancing worshipper?
4. Why do you think Aaron and Miriam are against Moses' 'Cushite' wife? What do you think was the real problem, the real reason for their attack?
5. Miriam was punished by confinement outside the camp for seven days (12: 14 – 15). What would have gone through your mind if you were in Miriam's position?

Activity: Organise a special presentation by women (song, dance, drama, musical recital etc) which incorporates women of all ages in your church, to glorify God in church or women's meetings.

Day 3: Jezebel

Read: 1 Kings 16: 29 -33; 18: 1 – 19; 21: 1 -25; 2 Kings

Objective: Be Holy because My God is Holy

Baal Worship

Jezebel. Her name is synonymous with wickedness. In Chapter 16 of 1 Kings, Jezebel played the part of queen as the wife of king Ahab, but also took the part of religious leader by endorsing the worship of Baal. Statues of Baal showed him standing straight and tall wearing a helmet topped with bull's horns, a sign of power and fertility. In one hand he held a spear entwined with leaves, possibly symbolizing lightning and plant growth. His other hand held a club, which may have symbolized strength or thunder.

The worship of Baal held a unique attraction for the people of Israel. When they wandered from their faith in the one true God, they often wandered toward trust in the false good Baal. The Israelites worshipped Baal during the time of Barak and Balaam (Numbers 22: 41), as well as during the time of the judges (Judges 2: 13; 6: 28 – 32). Even after Elijah's triumph over Baal on Mount Carmel and the death of 850 priests of Baal that day, Baal worship continued off and on all during the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah.

Jezebel used her religious influence to the detriment of the spiritual lives of the people, who were greatly divided between support for Baal and the Lord. Elijah ordered the gathering of all the prophets of Baal and challenged them to a contest between Baal and the one true God. Jezebel planned and orchestrated the murder of the prophets of God who directly opposed the people's worship of Baal.

Additionally, Jezebel was full of rage and deceit. She was lustful in her conspiracy to have Naboth executed so Ahab could possess his vineyard.

Our Life and Times

The worship of any false god is, of course, hateful to the true God. We know that. To us, Baal worship seems like a disgusting and foolish practice. We are far too sophisticated to understand its appeal, are we not? But aren't false gods just as prevalent today as in Jezebel's day? Consider, for instance, the popularity of New Age religion or the way many worship sports heroes, movie stars, and millionaires.

Ours, unfortunately is a society that bows to gods of money, beauty, sex, and power. Anything, no matter how good, that supplants God's place in our lives can become an idol if we let it.

Discuss:

1. Compare Jezebel's (1 Kings 19: 2) and the Israelites (1 Kings 18: 39) reactions to the Mount Carmel duel. What do you think made Jezebel so dedicated to Baal?
2. How dedicated are we to the Lord? What might cause us to rethink that dedication?
3. What is significant about the fact that the Bible mentions that Jezebel 'painted her eyes' and 'arranged her hair'? (2 Kings 9: 30 – 37) What do you think Jezebel was getting ready for?
4. How do we get ready for a difficult situation or conflict?

Activity: Discuss the lives and sacrifices of many of our women missionaries in various parts of the world.

- Ideas :
- Prepare a booth about these woman missionaries for Missions Sunday.
 - Prepare a drama of some missionaries which details their sacrifices.
 - Make a collection or sponsor a missionary

Day 4: Salome, Mother of John and James**Read:** Matthew 20: 20 – 24, 27: 56, Mark 15: 40 – 41; 16: 1-2**Objective:** We are Children of God

Mothers

The mother of two disciples of Jesus, James and John and the wife of a prosperous fisherman, Salome herself was a devoted follower of Jesus. But she too shared the common misconception that the Messiah would drive out the Romans and Establish a literal kingdom In Palestine.

A mother's principal duty during biblical times was to produce a family, preferably sons. Mothers had total care of their children, both sons and daughters, until they were about six years old. The children helped their mother with household tasks, and she taught them basic lessons on living in their culture. After six years of age, most boys, became the family shepherd or began to spend the day with their father, learning the family business e.g., David, Jesus. Daughters stayed with their mothers throughout their growing-up years. Mothers taught their daughters spinning, weaving and cooking, as well as how to behave and what to expect in their future roles as wives and mothers.

Gradually the role of mothers came to include activities like those described in Proverbs 31. Throughout Scripture, the role of mothering is given dignity and significance, so much so that God describes his love for us as his children in terms of mothering. "As a mother comfort her child, so will I [the Lord] comfort you" Isaiah 66: 13. Paul describes his care for the Thessalonians as the care of a mother for her children. "We were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children" 1 Thessalonians 2: 7

Our Life and Times

When we find yourself lost in the chaos and clutter of caring for young children, remember the important part we play in keeping their world safe and happy. When we find ourselves buried in the mess and muddle of raising young children, let us remember how much they rely on us for their security.

When you find yourself struggling with the disaster and disarray of raising teenagers, remember how much you love them and how much they need you to believe in them. Never forget; If you have children, they are one of your greatest legacies.

Remember too the frustrations of caring for a sick spouse, a sick parent, or a sick adult child. Remember the important role that we play in keeping them safe and happy. When we feel at our wits' end, frustration building up, self-pity overwhelming us, let us remember how much we love them and how much they need us.

Discuss:

1. What did James' and John's mother really want in her request to Jesus? Do you think she was asking this honour for her sons, or did she also want something for herself?
2. Why were the other disciples upset with James and John instead of with James' and John's mother? Do you think James and John had some part in their mother's actions?
3. Why do you think mothers are so eager to protect and elevate their own children? Discuss

Activity: As an MW discuss an activity specially for the Sunday school children in your church – a session teaching them songs, a skit, a particular themed activity, craftwork etc.

Day 5: Lydia**Read:** Acts 16: 6 – 40**Objective:** Responding to the Lord

Fabrics and Dyes

Lydia's success as a businesswoman in the city of Philippi came from dealing in cloth that had been dyed a particular shade of purple. Originally from Thyatira, Lydia was probably privy to secret formulas for the dyes made there. Only those who belonged to the dyers' guild were allowed to work as dyers. Made from the secretions of a shellfish found in the area, these special dyes coloured the clothing of the well-to-do. The particular shades of purple ranged from a reddish scarlet to a deep purple tone.

Cloth dyed in various colours is mentioned as early as the Exodus from Egypt, when the Lord instructed Moses to receive gifts from the people of Israel in order to make the tabernacle: "These are the offerings you are to receive from them: gold, silver and bronze; blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen; gold, silver and bronze; blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen' goat hair; ram skins dyed red...." (Exodus 25: 3 – 5)

The best red or scarlet dyes were made from a grub that fed on oak as well as other plants. A less expensive form of red dye could be made from the root of the madder plant. The rind of the pomegranate formed the basis for dyes of blue shades. Yellow dyes were made from safflower and turmeric.

The most common garments in biblical times were made from wool, which came naturally in a variety of colours, from whites and yellows to tans and browns. Wool was also easily dyed other colours. Linen fabric was more difficult to dye but was used in early Egypt (Genesis 41: 42) and was used in making the tabernacle curtains (Exodus 26). Leathers for girdles, shields, sandals, purses, or pouches could also be dyed numerous colours.

Lydia's occupation, then, was an important commercial trade. She must have been at least moderately successful, for Scripture records the fact that she had her own house, as well as servants. Her unique position as a woman in business gave her opportunity to travel, to learn of the Christ, and to offer her home and hospitality to Paul and his companions as ministers of the gospel.

Our Life and Times

Lydia's mind and heart weren't consumed with her business. Her mind and heart were consumed with following God – in her business and outside of it. Lydia provides a remarkable example for today's businesswoman of one who was not only successful but also a servant.

Discuss

1. In ancient times, when there was no synagogue in a city, it was the custom of those who worshipped the true God to gather for prayer outdoors, preferably near running water.
 - a) Describe the scene created in your mind when you read verse 13.
 - b) Where do you think your community would gather for worship if you had no church building?
2. What do you think is meant by the words, "The Lord opened her heart to respond" (Acts 16" 14b)?
3. Lydia responds to the gospel message with two actions (16: 15). What are they?
4. Why do you think that Lydia was so anxious for Paul and his companions to stay with her?

Activity: Discuss the many ways we can share the Lord's message in our work places, with neighbours, with non-believing friends and family through our actions.

Day 6: Rahab

Read: Joshua 2: 1 – 21; 6: 17 – 25; Matthew 1: 5; Hebrews 11: 31; James 2: 25

Objective: Tumbling Walls around us

City Walls

After being in the desert for 40 years, it was time for the Israelites to enter the land of Canaan. Moses was not allowed to enter the promised land. He was disobedient to God when he struck the rock multiple times, out of anger (see Numbers 20:9-13). At this point in the story, Moses had died (Deuteronomy 34:5). Before he died, he commissioned Joshua as the leader of the Israelites.

Joshua was preparing the Israelites to enter the promised land, so he sent out 2 spies to go ahead of them and do a reconnaissance mission. He told them to pay special attention to Jericho - presumably because it was such a well-fortified city. Jericho is probably best known today for its enormous walls, walls that fell because of the faith of the people of Israel (Hebrews 11: 30). A wall around a city was its chief distinguishing mark. Anything without a wall was merely a village whose inhabitants would run to the nearest walled city for protection during a battle or war.

Rahab lived in a house on the wall of Jericho. She probably had a view not only of the city itself but also of the area outside of the protective walls. This view, which gave her the perfect vantage point for spotting potential customers as they entered and left Jericho, may have given her an advantage in running her prostitution business.

Jericho was heavily fortified with big walls. Rahab's house made up part of the city walls. The stronger the system of walls around a city (some cities had both an inner and an outer wall), the more defensible the city was against invaders who came across the plains.

But no stone or mortar was strong or large enough to protect the city of Jericho from the power of God through his people' no battering rams were needed to breach its walls. All that was necessary was the faith of God's people in what he said he would do. And the walls came tumbling down!

Our Life and Times

God is still in the tumbling of wall business. Whatever walls in our life that need breaking down – between ourselves and a friend or family member or between us and God – God is willing and able to take it down.

The Jericho walls can be applied as those forts and strongholds which we have built for ourselves to cause a wedge against others and most importantly, with God. The walls that have emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually stripped us from experiencing real joy, forgiveness, and healing. An impenetrable wall is like a prison cell with no door or window.

It must crumble down for the 'Son's Rays' to penetrate in and brighten our lives.

Discuss:

1. Why do you think God would choose to use someone like Rahab?
2. What does this say about the people that God might choose to use today to further His kingdom? Name a few unlikely persons/groups whom you think are unreachable for God.
3. What can we understand about the importance of witnessing for the Lord from Joshua 2: 9 – 11?
4. Paul mentions in Galatians 5:19-21 some of the 'walls' that can cause a huge distance in our relationship with God. List them down.

Activity: Pray in your groups, for the many individuals and peoples whom we sometimes overlook in our evangelism efforts. Pray for the individuals and people who have still not been reached for the Lord.

Day 7: The Queen of Sheba

Read: 1 Kings 10: 1 – 13; Matthew 12: 42

Objective: Indescribable Gift

Gift giving

Four and a half tons of gold. And that was just part of the gift the Queen of Sheba gave to Solomon when she visited him in Jerusalem. She had probably heard of his riches as well as his wisdom and knew that no small gift would do; something magnificent was in order. Imagine a caravan of camel after camel entering Jerusalem, bearing gifts for Solomon. A camel could carry about two hundred pounds when travelling through the desert (a staggering four hundred pounds plus its rider on shorter, less strenuous journeys). This would have meant forty-five camels were required to carry just the gold!

Most personal meetings in ancient cultures included gift giving. A visit to someone's house required bringing along a gift for the host or hostess. Even chance encounters in the desert included gift exchanges (Genesis 14: 18-20). Gift giving in ancient cultures was also a way of expressing who was in a more superior position, whether in government, military or religious life.

Some of the gifts mentioned in the Old Testament are pretty staggering in scope. Check out the gifts of gold, silver, and clothing that Abraham's servant gave to Rebekah and her family (Genesis 24: 53). One of Solomon's wives received an entire town from her father as a wedding gift (1 Kings 9: 16). Jacob's reconciliation gift to Esau consisted of a herd of 550 animals (Genesis 32: 13 – 15). Besides the thousands of animals, the Israelites gave as a gift to God after their victory over the Midianites, they gave gold and silver jewellery, which weighed a total of 420 pounds (Numbers 31: 51 – 52). Probably some of the most famous gifts in the Bible were those given by the Magi to the child Jesus (Matthew 2: 11).

The New Testament writers often talked about the gifts we give not to each other but to God. No gift, no matter how small, is displeasing to God if it is given with a generous and cheerful heart. In fact, Jesus praised the widow who gave only two small coins because she gave all she had out of a heart of love for God, contrasting her with the others who gave a small amount of their wealth, often grudgingly (Luke 21: 1-4). More important to God than the size of our gifts is the condition of our hearts when we give (2 Corinthians 9:7)

Our Life and Times

But greater and finer and more thrilling than any gift we can give to each other or to God are the gifts He gives to us. Solomon, in the midst of all his wealth and wisdom, thanked God for the gift of a good simple life: satisfying work to do, peaceful rest at night, a bit of happiness (Ecclesiastes 3: 13; 5:19). Matthew quotes Jesus telling his followers of God's wonderful care of us and his willingness to give us good things: 'If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to those who ask him!' (Matthew 7: 11).

But the crowning touch, the gift worth more than all the gold in the world, is the gift God so lovingly and willingly gave us of eternal life through his Son (Romans 6: 23). No thank-you note is required, just a life of gratitude to God. In the words of Paul, "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" (2 Corinthians 9: 15).

Discuss

1. What is the most extravagant gift you've ever given to another person? To God?
2. What's easier for us to give: a gift we can buy or a gift that requires us to give something of ourselves – time, effort etc.?
3. Why is Jesus an indescribable gift to yourself personally?

Activity: To undertake *Operation Christmas Child* – gifts for underprivileged children for the Christmas season (MW Project 2023)



“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’ **Matthew 25:40 (NIV)**”

