

January to March 2013

**“The Love of God as Revealed
in the New Testament”**

by
Rev Dennis Kwok

About the Author



Rev Dennis Kwok serves in Singapore as the Pastor of Truth Bible-Presbyterian Church. A graduate of Far Eastern Bible College (Singapore) with a Bachelor's Degree in Theology (2001), Rev Kwok is presently upgrading himself in the same college in the Master of Divinity programme. He was ordained as a Minister of the Gospel on 6 May 2007. Married to Goh Yee Min, they have two sons, Ernest and Caius.

GOD KEEPS HIS WORD

The time between the prophecy given in Isaiah 7:14 and its fulfilment in Matthew 1:25 is about 700 years. At least fourteen generations have passed, yet God remembers to keep His Word. We are living in an age where vows made are not kept, and promises given are not made good. Forgetfulness is the excuse one uses a little too often. How long can we hide behind the sin of forgetfulness? It is a sin because there is little or no deliberate effort made to remember to keep one's word. We conveniently forget. Why do we not make the effort to remember as much as we make the effort to say the vow or promise? We have much to learn to keep our words, for our God keeps His Word.

Right from Genesis, the first book in the Bible, God has given man the promise of the Messiah after the Fall of man. God remembered and reminded His people of His promise again and again through Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and all the prophets. It was the people who kept forgetting and went after other gods. But God was longsuffering towards them. Even though they had forgotten Him, He never forgot the promise He made to them.

The Messianic promise was finally fulfilled in 5 BC when Jesus was born in a manger in Bethlehem. It took about 4,000 years from the time of the first prophecy of the birth of the Messiah made in the Garden of Eden to the actual birth of Christ. God kept His Word! What about the promise of the second coming of Christ? Today, more than 2,000 years have passed since the birth of Christ. Will that promise come to pass? No doubt it will come to pass, for God keeps His Word.

What a comfort it is to our hearts to know that God means what He says, and says what He truly means. May God help our unbelief.

THOUGHT: To remember is one thing, to keep is another. What would happen if God decides not to keep His Word even though He remembers His promise of a Saviour?

PRAYER: O heavenly Father, I thank Thee for remembering and keeping Thy Word. Help my unbelief.

GOD TAKES CARE OF US

We used to divide clearly between our needs and wants. But today, it seems that our needs and wants have been merged. It is no more “I want a car,” but “I need a car.” It is no more “I need to eat,” but “I want to eat.” Our attitudes are changing. Our lifestyle is changing too. However, our God is the same yesterday, today and forever; and He does one thing that is consistent with His love towards us: He still takes care of us. In fact, He takes better care of us than we do ourselves.

Very often, we indulge in things that are not expedient or edifying. When we see new products being rolled out into the market, and many are grabbing them, we begin to seriously think and worry that we really need those things too. Actually we are just looking for “reasons” to justify our acquisition of what others have and to ensure we do not lose out on the latest technology or gadgets. One may ask with all sincerity, “Is there anything wrong as long as one can afford it?” This, however, may not be a relevant question. It is not a question of whether the thing we like is good or bad. It is also not a question of affordability either. The right question we ought to ask ourselves is: “Have we sought first the kingdom of God and His righteousness according to Matthew 6:33?” For example, have we taken steps to ensure that we keep our QT meaningfully, instead of just praying for a consistent or quality QT? Have we also considered how we may use our spiritual gift(s) to bless others even more on top of what we are already doing? Perhaps, we have been guilty of not putting God first, even though we say we love Him!

We need not worry at all that we will lag behind others or lose out in terms of the latest technology or fashion. To us who claim to love God, what can be more important than seeking God’s kingdom and His righteousness? So, don’t worry. Trust God. He is taking very good care of us. And we can be assured that He will do it in His perfect way and for our best interest, far better than we do ourselves. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Is there any area in my life that God is not taking care of me?

PRAYER: O Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for watching over me.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 3

MATTHEW 9:35-38

PSALM 86:15

*“But thou, O Lord, art a,
God full of compassion...”*

GOD IS COMPASSIONATE

In the market place, we can easily see people everywhere. But we need to see what the Lord saw in the multitude. And so what did Jesus see in the multitude before Him? The answer is given in Matthew 9:36: “... *because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.*” Jesus saw that the people needed the Lord. And that was why He had compassion for them.

St Augustine of Hippo prayed, “Our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee.” Our Lord saw that the people fainted and were scattered abroad. They were restless. They were as sheep having no shepherd. They had no one to lead them to green pastures and still waters. Surrounding them were many dangers and wild beasts waiting to devour them. They had no peace and comfort in their hearts. They were living in doubt and fear. No wonder Jesus looked upon them with compassion.

The Lord looks on us with the same compassion today. We were restless because of sin. We were like sheep without a shepherd. We needed Someone to lead us to green pastures and still waters. We needed Someone to protect us from dangers and “wild beasts.” We needed true peace and comfort in the midst of troubles and persecution. But who could be this Someone to us?

Thanks be to God that He had compassion upon us and led us to Him by the Holy Spirit. We are not lost anymore. We are not on our own anymore. All because God is compassionate towards us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Is God compassionate towards those who continue to reject Him?

PRAYER: O Lord, I thank Thee for Thy compassion towards me.

GOD GIVES REST TO THE WEARY

When we reflect upon those days before we came to the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we will remember that it was a life of heavy burdens and worries. Now as we look at our new life in Christ, although the problems and troubles we used to face are still there, we know we are not bearing them alone. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is walking by our side. We no longer walk alone. He gives us strength when we are tired. He gives us rest when we are burnt out and have no more strength to go further. God gives rest to the weary.

In Matthew 11:25-26, Jesus was in the midst of the multitude. He was looking up to heaven, and thanking God, His heavenly Father. His thanksgiving prayer was also His answer to the multitude. Then in verses 27 to 30, Jesus focused His attention upon the multitude and invited them to come to Him: *"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"* (v 28). How did Jesus know they were weary? What caused their weariness? Let us not forget that Jesus is God and He knows all things. He knew that the multitude had been carrying the great burden of keeping the Mosaic Law that includes the moral laws, the judicial laws and the ceremonial laws of purification and cleansing. Now that Christ has come to fulfil these laws, man only need to look to Him and rest from all their laborious keeping of these laws. There is only one thing that they are required to carry, and that is their faith in Christ. Jesus says, *"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light"* (vv 29-30).

Rest for the soul is needful for the weary. What comfort and rest we can have for our soul when we constantly sit at the feet of Jesus. May we enjoy the powerful working of His Word upon our life till we see Him face to face. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Can a Christian not have rest for his soul?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to come to the Lord Jesus and receive the rest for my soul.

“BE OF GOOD CHEER: IT IS I; BE NOT AFRAID”

What was it that made the disciples fearful in the boat? Was it the storm that was rocking their boat? Or was it Jesus? Although the disciples were struggling to keep the boat on its course, they were not afraid. They became afraid only after they saw someone walking on the water. Mark 6:49 reads: *“But when they saw him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out.”* What was their problem? They witnessed a supernatural thing before their very eyes: How can a man walk on water, even more so in the midst of a storm? How can it be? Was it a ghost? It was as if they were watching a “live” horror movie! No wonder Jesus had to assure them in verse 50: *“Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.”*

There are many things that can make us afraid. Some of us are afraid of heights, the sight of blood, pests like lizards or cockroaches, etc. Others are afraid of the dark, loneliness, failures, etc. Whatever your fears are, our Lord Jesus speaks to you, *“Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.”* Jesus is not using psychological tactics to trick you. He is offering you genuine help. Whatever your fears are, you can be assured that Jesus is with you, protecting you. Even if Jesus allows any of these to harm your body, He will never allow them to harm your soul. I believe this is why the Christian martyrs were willing to go through suffering and death for their faith. They could have denied Christ and saved their bodies. Who is not afraid of the painful physical tortures that might eventually lead to death? Yet the comforting words of Jesus remind us that we are absolutely safe in His arms.

We can be of good cheer because of this. It is the Lord Jesus who is here with us. He has promised that He will never leave us nor forsake us. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: The more I know Christ and trust in Him, the greater my cheer will be.

PRAYER: O Heavenly Father, let me find comfort, peace and rest in Thee.

JESUS LOVES THE LITTLE CHILDREN

It seems that nowadays we have little tolerance for children, especially those who are more irritating and mischievous. Some can really get on our nerves and test our patience, and we wish their parents could have disciplined them more. Perhaps we have forgotten how we were once like these children too.

The Lord Jesus had been teaching in the open space where adults were crowding around Him. Then, parents with children began to get closer to Jesus. Immediately, the disciples got up into action to stop them. "Leave your children where they belong. They should be in school, on the playground, or at home. Do not bother the Lord with your naughty kids!" But the Lord Jesus has a different attitude towards the little children. He loves them and He wants them to come to Him, regardless of their behaviour or condition. Mark 10:16 records for us that Jesus even took them up in His arms, put His hands upon them, and blessed them. What loving acts!

What is so special about children that Jesus should include them in His kingdom? Children are young, immature and vulnerable. They need help, guidance and protection. They are totally dependent upon the adults to feed and protect them. They are helpless and weak. How can anyone neglect them? How Jesus loves them and He wants to help, guide and protect them. Children, just like adults, need spiritual guidance and nourishment too. Parents should start teaching their children to know Jesus and His love. They are never too young for spiritual things.

Jesus loves the little children. Let the Spirit of God work in their hearts and you will be amazed at how the mighty hand of God can move in the lives of these little ones. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: If my child refuses to go to church on Sunday, should I let him be or should I insist that he goes?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help every Christian parent to be patient in bringing up his child in the fear of the Lord.

CHRIST CAME TO SERVE

If given a choice between being a master or a servant, which will you choose? The answer is obvious, isn't it? To be a master is to take up an honourable position that empowers you to give orders rather than to take orders. No one likes to be in the humble position of a servant, to be at the beck and call of another. There is no freedom or right to speak or do as one wishes. Choosing to be a servant would be the last thing on our minds. Yet of all vocations, Christ chose to come and serve as a lowly servant. He is rightly the Master, the King of all kings and the Lord of all lords. Yet He surrendered that royal and highest position and took upon Him the form of a servant, the lowliest of all mankind for our sakes (Phil 2:7). If this is not love, what is?

Christ came to serve men because He loves them. He knew His service was not going to be appreciated. He knew that despite the sacrifices He made for them, they would continue to reject Him. Yet, He still healed them of their sickness. He still spoke wonderful words of life to them when they were lost. He still prayed for them, sacrificing His sleep in the night. In the end, they still wanted Him dead. In the end, they still cried out, "*Crucify Him! Crucify Him!*" In the end, they still preferred a notorious robber Barabbas over Him. Yet in all these, He still loved them. He uttered no complaint nor did He murmur as He was led to the cross. That is a true servant!

In our service for God, we seldom need to suffer. Yet, we are ever ready to give up. "This ministry is taking up too much of my time." "Why is it so inconvenient?" "I am tired." "I am not good at this, others are better." These are just some of the common excuses we give for not serving. Have we forgotten who we really are and who God is to us? We are always servants and He is always the Master. May we learn from the example of Christ in His servanthood: submission, humility and obedience to His heavenly Father as a true servant who truly serves. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Am I worthy to call myself a servant of God?

PRAYER: O Heavenly Father, help me to be a humble servant.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 8

MARK 12:41-44

MALACHI 3:8-10

*"Wherein have we robbed thee?
In tithes and offerings."*

GOD TAKES SPECIAL NOTE OF THE "INSIGNIFICANT"

How prepared are you to give of your tithes and offerings every Lord's Day? We know that God does not need our money at all. Giving to Him reveals our obedience and thankfulness for His provision and supply that He has so richly blessed us with. A tithe is one tenth of what we have received and we cheerfully return it to the Lord who has blessed us so abundantly. When we give more than a tithe, it is called an offering. The Lord is pleased not so much with the amount of tithes and offerings collected each Lord's Day, but that His children give cheerfully out of a grateful heart.

In Mark 12:41-44, Jesus took a short break from His public teaching and sat down to observe the multitudes that were busy dropping their offerings into the treasury box. From a distance, it was nearly impossible to know how much each was giving. But Jesus, being God, knows all things. He knew exactly how much the people have dropped into the box. And He knew if they had given out of a cheerful heart or not.

While sitting down, Jesus continued to teach His disciples. He chose to compare the wealthy with the poor widow. His comment on the wealthy was that their giving was out of their abundance, while the poor widow gave all that she had. Jesus was not implying that the wealthy had done something wrong. They merely gave the minimum, and it was no sacrifice to them since they gave out of their abundance. The Lord took special notice of the poor widow, and He commended her for her sacrificial act. She had only two farthings left, yet she kept none for herself but gave all to God! What can God do with her two farthings? Yet we see that God honoured her gift. Though small in value, it was given out of a great love. Her sacrificial giving surpassed the offerings of the wealthy. God takes note of the "insignificant." May this encourage our hearts to give our all and best for Him. Amen.

THOUGHT: What are the tithes and offerings used for?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to give cheerfully, not just in my tithing, but my whole life.

GOD CAME TO CALL SINNERS

At his tax-collector table, Levi was called personally by Jesus to follow Him. Without hesitation, he left everything and followed Jesus. Levi must have been very wealthy since he was able to organize a great banquet in Jesus' honour. The guests were his ex-colleagues (his fellow tax-collectors) and the other disciples of Christ. Jesus was the VIP. Outside were some angry people criticizing the actions of Jesus and His disciples. They were the high and mighty religious leaders. What was their accusation? They accused Jesus of eating and drinking with publicans and sinners. They had singled out publicans because to them, they were a bunch of dishonest and money-hungry traitors under the Roman powers. To be called a publican is worse than being called a sinner.

What was Jesus' response to their accusation? He, probably walking out, answered them, *“They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”* To the Pharisees and scribes, this banquet was all about eating and drinking. But to Jesus, this banquet went beyond that. It was a golden opportunity for Him to call sinners to repentance. The publicans were a condemned lot of people, hopeless and rejected by the religious leaders. But Jesus brought hope to them, desiring that they may repent and turn to God for salvation.

Jesus' eyes of love and compassion are always upon sinners. He is always looking out for them. He is also looking out for you. Will you turn to Him, repent of your sins and follow Him? May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: The Pharisees and the scribes are *“sick.”* Why did they not see their need for the Physician who was right before them?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for healing me of my sickness of sin.

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES (I)

Love our enemies? Am I really supposed to love my enemies? The biblical answer to the question is YES. But how can that be? How in the world can I love someone who does not love me? How can I love someone who wants only to harm me or to tear me down? It is more logical (and easier) for me to love only those who love me.

Our normal (sinful) instinct is to make our enemies hurt as much as they hurt us. This is the devil's solution to those who are hurt. But Jesus teaches otherwise. He tells us to love our enemies. This is a very hard teaching. It is so difficult to love our enemies. To love our neighbour who loves us does not require any supernatural power or effort. Jesus said in verse 32: *"For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them."*

When Jesus instructs us to love those who hate us, He wants us to do something that is completely contrary to our flesh. Our flesh tells us to get even; take revenge! Our flesh tells us that when someone messes with us, we are to bring the hammer down on them. If we get back at them, they will not mess with us again. Moreover, some of us think that revenge is sweet, and that it is going to make us feel better. But this is completely unbiblical and therefore wrong. To bear that hatred for our enemies will only destroy us! It actually does great harm to us.

Scientific studies done have shown the kind of damage hatred can bring to oneself. Fuming anger causes blood pressure and breathing rate to increase thus causing a strain on the heart, making one more susceptible to heart attacks and strokes. It also can trigger headaches and lead to abusive behaviors, causing nervous breakdowns or some mental distress. The results of these studies about the effects of hatred are indeed thought-provoking.

THOUGHT: "I do not want to be a hypocrite by forcing myself to love my enemies. As long as I do not hate them or do anything bad to them, God will understand." What do you think?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, give me a loving heart to love my enemies.

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES (II)

We are told throughout the Bible that the essence of God is love. And God's command to us is to love one another. So, if we harbour hatred in our hearts, we are living contrary to God's command.

Have you ever noticed that whenever you are angry with someone, he becomes the focus of your life? It does not matter anymore what is going on around you. Your thoughts and focus are totally on the person who has wronged you and you become trapped in that hatred. You are unable to think soberly, and all you want to do is to find ways and means to hit back at him to make yourself feel better. This is so unChristlike, and yet we can hide it so well. But the Lord Jesus knows, and the only way for us to get out of it is to obey His command, *"Love your enemies."* It is not good enough to just stop hating our enemies and abandoning all our schemes of evil to get back at them. It is not good enough to remain indifferent and avoid any contact with them. This is NOT loving our enemies!

Jesus says, *"... do good to them which hate you"* (Luke 6:27). This is what we ought to do if we love our enemies. To do good is to take that first step to show our concern and to look for ways to meet the needs of our enemies. It may require time, effort and even sacrifice from us to do good. Are we willing to do it for Jesus' sake? This first step is certainly not easy because we do not want to be hypocrites. However, we must understand that we are no hypocrites if we are convicted by God's Word and His Spirit that this is the right thing to do and we want to be obedient to Him by trying to overcome our unloving spirit. This is a spiritual exercise. We are not pretending to love. We are exercising the love that God has showered upon us through His only begotten Son Jesus Christ. *"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"* (Rom 5:8).

THOUGHT: David says, *"I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies"* (Ps 139:22). Was David being unloving?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to love my enemies.

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES (III)

Jesus says, *"Bless them that curse you..."* (Luke 6:28). This is the second thing we are to do if we love our enemies. The words that come out of our mouths can be very powerful, and they can kill. Words can destroy a person's reputation and honour. All forms of destructive criticism or sarcasm must be avoided at all costs. Never add salt to the wound to inflict more pain. Instead, always bring a kind, relieving and encouraging word all the time. Again, this is a spiritual exercise. Is it difficult to say, "I am sorry"? We must put aside our pride and ego if we are to love our enemies. We must be sorry for the unhappiness that we have brought them. We must be sorry for the bad attitude we have shown as Christians. Are we willing to say sorry for Jesus' sake?

Jesus says, *"... pray for them which despitefully use you"* (Luke 6:28). Behind closed doors or in our private moment, what do we pray for as we cry out to God for the hurt we are experiencing? Do we pray that God will punish those who hurt us? If so, this is not praying for them. What does Jesus mean when He says we are to pray for them? How should we pray for them? In light of loving our enemies, it must be a prayer we plead before God that will work towards their good. Are we willing to do that? To those who have taken advantage of us, we pray that God will have mercy upon them and bring them to repentance so that they will not do it again. We pray that God will forgive them for their wickedness towards us. Remember one of the prayers the Lord Jesus uttered on the cross? He said, *"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do"* (Luke 23:34). In the same spirit, Deacon Stephen, the first recorded martyr of the Christian faith, said as he was being stoned, *"Lord, lay not this sin to their charge"* (Acts 7:60). Let us pray for our enemies for Jesus' sake.

Loving our enemies is to do good to them, to bless them and to pray for them. Let us be happy to love our enemies for Jesus' sake.

THOUGHT: If I have forgiven my enemies, should I still count them as enemies?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, may Thou forgive my enemies.

PUT YOUR PRIORITIES RIGHT!

There seems to be so many things to do each day that sometimes we do not even know what to do first. One of the methods we employ is to categorize our tasks into four different levels. The first level is for those which are urgent and important. The second level is for those which are urgent but not important. The third level is for those which are important but not urgent. And the last is for those which are not important and not urgent. This method may seem like a good method. However, it has its weaknesses. It depends on us to decide what are important and urgent, and which are not. Oftentimes, we are confused as to which is what, especially in spiritual things. In the case of Martha and Mary (re: Luke 10:39-42), we learn how to set our priorities.

The Lord Jesus came to the home of two sisters: Martha and Mary. Martha was very hospitable and prepared many things for Jesus while her sister Mary simply sat at Jesus' feet listening attentively to Him. There is certainly nothing wrong with preparing refreshments for our guests. Jesus was not against Martha's hospitality. He said to busy Martha, *“Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her”* (Luke 10:41-42). In this visit, the priority is to spend time with the guest and not in the preparation of refreshments. Refreshments can come later. The more needful thing to do is to receive the spiritual blessings of instruction and teaching from the Lord Jesus Christ. Mary has got her priority right and the Lord commended her for it.

What about us? Before we enter into the busyness of each day, have we spent a quiet moment with the Lord in prayer and in reading of His Holy Word? That should be the priority of our life now and to the end of our life on earth. Will you? May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: God is never too busy to hear us. Why are we always too busy to hear Him?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me get my priorities right.

GOD GIVES US HIS BEST

In response to one of His disciples' request asking Him to teach them how to pray, Jesus taught them the Lord's Prayer and how to persist in prayer. Then, Jesus proceeded to teach them that God is a good Father who gives good things to His children. God gives His children His best. Many a time, we give God a list of things that we want, believing that these things are good for us. It is as if we know better than God as to what is best for us. We fail to realize that God's will is the best and that He will always give His best to us.

Why would Jesus want His disciples to learn this when teaching them how to pray? When the disciples saw that John the Baptizer had taught his own disciples how to pray, they wanted Jesus to do the same. Jesus did not question their motive. Instead Jesus answered their request by not only giving them the divine blueprint for prayer, but He also taught them the manner in which they ought to pray. They were to earnestly and persistently seek God in prayer. They were not to give up easily. They were also not to pray as if they were talking to the wall or into thin air, but to know that God is at the other end of the line. He is always available. His line is never busy. He is contactable anywhere and anytime.

And Jesus revealed that God is the good God who will always give us His best. In Luke 11:13, it was specifically mentioned that God the Father shall give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. What is the significance of this? When we do not pray according to God's will, He will definitely not answer us. God's will is revealed to us in His Word. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned (1 Cor 2:14). There is no way we can understand God's will without the Holy Spirit. When God causes His Spirit to indwell us and fill us, we are empowered to understand God's will and thereby able to pray according to His will. His will for us is His best for us. May we always trust that God will give us His best. Amen.

THOUGHT: Why pray when I can do nothing against God's will?

PRAYER: Thy will, not mine, be done, O Lord!

THE JOY OF THE LORD (I)

Jesus came to save that which was lost. This was the mission which God the Father had given God the Son. Jesus had to go where the lost were. That was why Jesus was often found together with publicans and sinners. But the Pharisees and scribes heavily criticized His actions. In response to their criticism, Jesus gave three parables which have one thing in common: the joy when the lost is found.

In the parable of the lost sheep, the shepherd rejoiced when he found it. *“And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing”* (v 5). *“Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost”* (v 6). *“...likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth...”* (v 7). In the parable of the lost coin, the woman rejoiced when she found it. *“Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost”* (v 9). *“... there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth”* (v 10). In the parable of the lost son, the father rejoiced when he saw his prodigal son returning home. *“... let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry”* (vv 23-24). *“It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found”* (v 32).

There is the joy of the Lord when a sinner repents of his sin and receives the gift of salvation. That is why the Lord is willing to be patient with us, desiring that we come back to Him at the earliest opportune time. *“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”* (2 Pet 3:9). Let us not take His grace and mercy for granted.

THOUGHT: Since the salvation of sinners is the joy of the Lord, why does He not choose to save all of them?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for Thou hast been gracious and merciful to me.

THE JOY OF THE LORD (II)

All of us believers can identify ourselves with the parable of the lost son. We remember how we were once in the bondage of our sin but now we are free forevermore after being brought to the light of salvation. Sin has brought us nothing but misery and pain. Those who sought after sin may enjoy a moment of comfort and pleasure. The ultimate end for those who are condemned in sin would be sufferings in the fiery heat of the burning furnace of hell fire forever. But the joy of the Lord is not found in the death or suffering of the wicked. Rather, the joy of the Lord is found in them who truly repent of their sin and trust in Him.

The Pharisees and the scribes were angry with Jesus for being friendly with the publicans and sinners. They failed to see how Jesus ministered the truth of the gospel to them. They were too concerned about the outward keeping of the law and bent on separating themselves from all uncleanness and corruption. While there is a place for biblical separation, we are not to live as a hermit and refuse any contact at all with unbelievers. The joy of the Lord is not in the eating and drinking together with publicans and sinners. The joy of the Lord is in the saving of souls when they hear the faithful proclamation of the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

We really have nothing good to offer to the world as far as eternity is concerned except the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. You and I are called to be little lights in this dark world so that those in darkness may be led to the Light. The work of conversion and the removal of spiritual blindness and deafness is not ours but the Holy Spirit's. Only God has the power to save and transform lives, not us. We are only responsible for bearing that true Light and being a blessing wherever we may be. Let us be thankful for this privilege to be His light. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: If we are not responsible for the conversion of souls, why is it that we are to be accountable if we are a stumbling block?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be a blessing to all those around me.

PRAYER IS A SPIRITUAL WEAPON

The purpose of this parable of the woman and the judge is given in Luke 18:1: "... *men ought always to pray, and not to faint.*" Jesus, the Son of God, always believes in prayer. He often excuses Himself in order to pray. Despite His busyness, He always managed to find time to pray to His heavenly Father. He has set for us an example which is very lacking today. It is easy for us to "*faint*" because we are easily distracted by our equipments of modern technology: handphone, computer, television, etc. It is time for us to put aside all these things, get down on our knees, and start praying again.

Why do we pray? We pray because we need God. Without Him, we can do nothing (John 15:5). But why do we need Him? Surely we can depend on our strength, wisdom and ability to make decisions in our everyday life. Of course we can do that, but we must also realize that on our own, we are limited. We cannot go beyond our strength and power. Moreover, this world is hostile towards Christ and His people. We are not able to fight against the rulers of the darkness of this world and the spiritual wickedness in high places using our human strength and wisdom. The spiritual war must be fought spiritually with spiritual weapons.

Prayer is one such spiritual weapon. When we pray, we are trusting in the Lord to help us fight the spiritual battle for us. Our communication line with our Commander-in-Chief Jesus Christ must be connected all the time. The enemy will always try to break this communication line to make us weaker and more vulnerable to his fiery attack. Do not let him succeed. We must be firm and keep our focus on the Lord Jesus Christ. He will help and He will deliver us to safety. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: The Lord's Prayer is a prayer made towards God the Father. Can we pray to God the Son and God the Holy Spirit?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee that I can always call upon Thee anytime and anywhere.

JESUS PRAYED EARNESTLY FOR OUR REDEMPTION

Do you know of anyone who had prayed earnestly for you? If you do not know, then it is time for you to know now. It is our Lord Jesus Christ. He prayed earnestly for our redemption. He was in the garden of Gethsemane with His disciples the same night He was betrayed (Luke 22:39-44). In that garden, He was with Peter, James and John, having left the others at a distance to pray. Then He also left these three disciples and urged them to pray as well while He Himself spent time alone praying to His heavenly Father.

It was a simple and yet powerful prayer. Jesus prayed, *“Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done”* (Luke 22:42). What is this “cup”? Hebrews 5:7 reveals to us the answer, *“Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared.”* It was a cup of suffering and death that Jesus was praying to His heavenly Father to deliver Him from.

However, did the “cup” refer to the present agony that Jesus was going through? Or was it the approaching cross of shame and crucifixion? According to Hebrews 5:7, the prayer of Jesus was heard. God sent an angel to strengthen Jesus as He was at the point of breaking down and could have died before reaching the cross. His agony was so intense that His sweat drops were as great drops of blood dripping to the ground. Who could bear such a great burden? No wonder Jesus had to pray, and He prayed all the more earnestly. And it was for our redemption. If He had died in the garden without going to the cross, He could not save us at all. He must go to the cross to be crucified. Both His human will and divine will desired our redemption. What great love He has for us! Amen.

THOUGHT: Did Jesus’ human will try to prevent Him from going to the cross?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, in all things, Thy will be done, not mine.

JESUS SAVED A THIEF ON THE CROSS

It is the greatest injustice that was ever recorded in biblical history that a reputable Roman judicial court would sentence an innocent man to death without a just cause. Jesus was crucified together with two thieves. The thieves deserved the death penalty because of the crimes they had committed. They were crucified justly. But Jesus was not! We know this is the higher and sovereign plan of God for our redemption. A sinless Lamb must be led to the slaughter in order that we can be saved!

One of the thieves, we do not know which one, either the one on Jesus' left or right, believed in the Lord Jesus for his salvation. And Jesus graciously assured him of his place in heaven by saying to him, *"Today shalt thou be with me in paradise."* That was it! This thief was saved on the cross! There was no good works that the believing thief could boast of as he was on the cross. It was purely by faith that he believed in Jesus as his Lord and Saviour, and immediately he was born again by the Holy Spirit. Even though he had to suffer the consequences of his own wrongdoings, his sin burden had been removed from him. He was a "free" man at last! He was free forever from the clutches and the power of sin. What a great redemption!

Truly Jesus kept to His mission to the very end. He came to save that which was lost (Matt 18:11). One thief was saved that day. But the other was not. He was given the opportunity to believe and receive salvation. But he chose to follow the crowd in mocking and condemning Jesus on the cross. What foolishness! He was so close to heaven and yet he missed it! But thank God the other was saved! Are you saved too? Or are you still harbouring unbelief? Do you feel that you are somewhat not saved? Be comforted, my dear friend, Jesus' promise is sure and He will not reject you if you repent of your sins and come to Him for salvation. Come to Him. Do not delay anymore. Amen.

THOUGHT: How did the thief that was saved know Jesus had done nothing wrong to deserve death?

PRAYER: O heavenly Father, I thank Thee for Thy great salvation.

A HEART-BURNING EXPERIENCE (I)

The events of the first Good Friday were still fresh in the memories of both Cleopas and his fellow disciple as they walked down the road to Emmaus. If we put ourselves in their shoes, we can imagine the emotional turmoil and uncertainties within them. The Master whom they had been following and He whom they had greatly loved had been horribly put to death. It was the most cruel and painful death of the most degrading and shameful kind. In those days, death by crucifixion was looked upon as the most shameful of all deaths. The convict was made a public spectacle, and exposed to the jeers of all as he was nailed to the cross.

But only a week earlier, on Palm Sunday, the disciples' hopes had risen to the height where the excited crowds shouted, "*Hosanna in the highest*" (Matt 21:9). They had high hopes that their Master would become the promised Deliverer to bring them out of the tyranny of the Roman power. But when they saw nothing of this sort happening and what they had was a dead body in a sealed tomb, their hopes were completely dashed! It was all over!

Jesus' disciples went back to their normal lives. Two of them were on their way home. The reports that Christ's tomb was empty did nothing to comfort their hearts. The two disappointed disciples summed up the situation in verse 21: "*...we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel.*" Hope can escape us easily. When we see that hope is gone, despair immediately sets in. It becomes almost impossible to hope for recovery, and sometimes we are even afraid to hope again because of the fear of facing another disappointment. But hope is to be sustained by the amount of trust that you have. The more you trust, the stronger your hope is. A heart-burning experience will bring your hope alive again. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: With Christ we have an endless hope; without Christ we have a hopeless end.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to hope in Christ at all times.

A HEART-BURNING EXPERIENCE (II)

The two disciples on the road to Emmaus were filled with sadness and hopelessness. As they made their way to Emmaus, a "stranger" joined them and walked along with them. The distance from Jerusalem to Emmaus, according to verse 13, is about threescore furlongs. Sixty furlongs is about twelve km. Depending on the condition of the road and at a normal walking speed, it will take about two hours to complete the twelve-km walk. It was going to be one of the most wonderful walks in biblical history! The "stranger" was none other than the risen Jesus Christ, but the two disciples did not recognize Him. *"But their eyes were holden that they should not know him"* (Luke 24:16). Their eyes have been purposely shut that they did not recognize their own Master. Jesus asked them, *"What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?"* And so they poured out their sorrow to Him who seemed so willing to listen. The way that Jesus dealt with the situation is a lesson to all who are in a position to help those who have lost hope. They need a listening ear.

Cleopas was surprised with Jesus' question and he replied, *"Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?"* Indeed, how can anyone miss the happenings? It was such an overwhelming event, and probably the whole Jerusalem was present at Calvary. But the all-knowing Christ Jesus continued patiently and asked with meekness, *"What things?"* Jesus was showing interest in them, and He wanted them to confess to Him their concern and disappointment.

A heart-burning experience is about to begin as the sorrow and burden of these two disciples were laid before the Lord. Are you willing and ready to bring your burden to the Lord? You must do it if you desire a heart-burning experience. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Does God bother about the formality of my prayers before Him?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for hearing our prayers.

A HEART-BURNING EXPERIENCE (III)

In verse 19, the two disciples replied the stranger’s question, *“Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people.”* Is there anything wrong with this reply? They were theologically correct about what Jesus has done. But, using the past tense, they said, *“which was...”* In other words, they actually meant that Jesus was a prophet, mighty in deed and word before God and all the people but it was all in the past. Now, He is no more, for He is dead. To them Jesus was only relevant in the past but not in the present. Their experience with Jesus was all over. The cross had taken Him from them.

The gospel accounts recorded what Jesus had done when He was on earth, His teachings and His wonderful works of healing and miracles. These were all done in the past. What about the present? The question is: Is Jesus still mighty in deed and word to you and me today? The answer is: Absolutely yes! Jesus is still walking with us. If only we are willing to hear His still small voice, we will be greatly comforted.

As the two disciples spoke of the cross, Jesus comforted them and gave them a heart-burning experience. How did He do it? He pointed them to God’s special revelation in the Scriptures. *“And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself”* (Luke 24:27). Jesus must have given them the greatest Old Testament exposition in biblical history. The two disciples could not have expected that by sharing their problem with a total stranger on the Emmaus road they would be given great spiritual insight into all that had happened. Knowing God’s Word is one thing, but understanding it is another. True understanding will “burn” our hearts. Are you experiencing it now?

THOUGHT: Is it possible for unbelievers to know and understand God’s Word?

PRAYER: O heavenly Father, open my eyes to see the spiritual truth of Thy Word.

A HEART-BURNING EXPERIENCE (IV)

To the disciples, the cross was nothing but shame. But Jesus showed that the cross was more than that. It was also the cross of redemption! Jesus said in verse 26, *"Ought not Christ to have suffered these things..."* The cross itself was the redemptive act of God. The cross of shame and suffering had become the cross of redemption for all who would come to Jesus in repentance and faith. The eyes of the disciples were opened and this changed the way they looked at the cross on which Jesus was crucified.

When Jesus enters our lives, the way we look at Him and our journey on earth take on a new meaning and perspective altogether. It will not be the same anymore. Sometimes the things He reveals to us may be ugly and unpleasant, especially when our consciences are pricked due to our sin, and the darkness of our personal lives is exposed.

Cleopas and his companion received a gentle rebuke from Jesus in verse 25, *"O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken."* Perhaps the key word is *"all."* It was not because they did not read the whole of the Old Testament. It could be that they have not truly believed all the words that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

The hearts of the disciples were burning now. Their two-hour journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus passed by quickly. It seemed so short. They were unquestionably enjoying every single second of the Bible study under the Lord whom they have yet to recognize. Verse 28 says, *"And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and he made as though he would have gone further."*

When your heart is burning, you will not want it to stop burning. You just want more. Are you hungering and thirsting for God's Word now?

THOUGHT: Can believers not understand God's Word?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee that I can now see spiritually.

A HEART-BURNING EXPERIENCE (V)

The response of the two disciples put us to shame. For verse 29 says, *“But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us...”* It is not hospitality that is the focus here. It is the great hunger and thirst for the Word. How often we become impatient when the sermon lasts more than thirty minutes, fuming mad when it lasts forty-five minutes, and full of wrath when it lasts more than one hour. We must not invite that preacher again! But these two disciples showed us a different attitude. They wanted more, so they said to the stranger, *“Abide with us.”* Do we hunger for a spiritual feast and hope it will never end?

A simple meal was quickly prepared. The bread was on the table. The moment for Jesus to reveal Himself has come. Verse 30 says, *“...he took bread, blessed it, and brake, and gave to them.”* It was by this action of the breaking of bread that their eyes were finally opened. Probably they had seen it before, or had heard the other disciples mentioning it. In an instant, they knew it was Jesus. However, in that same instant, He also disappeared from before them.

We can imagine Cleopas and his fellow disciple, both in great amazement, say with great joy to each other, *“Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?”* (v 32). It was an amazing experience which they would never forget.

That heart-burning experience is something that you and I need today. We need it in times like these to help us realize that we need Jesus to help us love Him as we ought. We need Him to help us apply the truths of Scripture in our daily walk with Him. Let us pray for a heart-burning experience with Jesus today. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Is there something wrong with me if I do not have any heart-burning experience?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, how I thank Thee for Thy Word. May it never stop encouraging and ministering to my heart.

JOHN 3:16

John 3:16 is the world's most famous Bible verse. It is stated so perfectly and beautifully in the King James version that any attempt to rephrase it would dampen its impact. The object of God's love is the world. This world “*kosmos*” (Greek) refers to all the people in the world without any distinction. The Jews believe God only loves the pious and religious ones (the true Jews) and hates sinners (the Gentiles). It is this same thought that is held by the hyper-Calvinists that God only loves the elect and hates the non-elect. Nothing can be further from the truth. God is love (1 John 4:8, 16), and because of His love for the whole world, He desires all to find salvation and not perish (1 Tim 2:4; 2 Pet 3:9).

God demonstrated His love (Greek: “*agape*”) for the whole world perfectly. His love is the highest form of love. It is a love that sacrifices. He gave His only begotten Son. The word “*gave*” in this context is rich in its meaning. It is a sacrificial giving that cost God a high price. It cost God dearly to give His Son up to the world: His Son had to put on human flesh and die on the cross (1 Tim 3:16). Such an act required God the Son to become the Son of Man, put aside His heavenly glory and become sin on our behalf (2 Cor 5:21). What a great sacrifice!

God gave His Son so that man can be forgiven and saved. Man did not seek Him. It was God who sought to save man. If this is not love, what is? The purpose of God's love for men is that they may be saved. This purpose is threefold. Firstly, it is that they may be saved from perishing. Secondly, it is that they may be saved unto everlasting life. Thirdly, it is that they may be saved through faith (ie believing). Will you come and believe in God's love for you through His only begotten Son Jesus Christ who died and saved you from your sin? May we thank God for the truth in John 3:16. “Amazing love! How can it be, that Thou, my God shouldst die for me?” (Charles Wesley). Amen.

THOUGHT: Can I think of any other way how God could have loved the world?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for saving my soul. I praise Thee for Thy great salvation so rich and free.

ABUNDANT LIFE AT LAST! (I)

Depression is an emotional wreckage of one's mind. A man can suddenly break down over anything, everything or even nothing. Most people do not realize they have depression until their condition has become serious.

How can you overcome your brokenness? Where can you find help when you simply cannot take the pressure and emotional turmoil inside you anymore? How can we make good sense of Jesus' promise when He said, *"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly"* (John 10:10). God makes no mistake. Jesus' promise is sure and He will deliver. The problem does not lie with Him. It lies with us. Are we still holding on to our burden, refusing to let go? Have we taken that step of faith to enter into an abundant life with Christ? He is waiting for us to come out of our depression and to live the abundant life that He has prepared for us. It is time to come out of that place which is full of darkness, gloom and doom where you can hear all the sounds of complaint, murmuring, sadness, unhappiness, and with all the "I can't take it anymore" attitude! Come out! Let this place be far away from us. Jesus wants us to go to a better place, a beautiful and green pasture called the "Abundant Life in Christ." It is a place of great joy and thanksgiving surrounded by God's grace and mercy, overflowing with love, truth, light and abundance of every kind.

We are reminded of what Jesus says, *"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls"* (Matt 11:28-29). Will you come? The decision is yours to make if you would come out of depression and enter into an abundant life with Christ. Will you?

THOUGHT: Abundant life with Christ begins now and lasts for ever.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me live an abundant life in Christ.

ABUNDANT LIFE AT LAST! (II)

The world offers many solutions for depression. It says, "Stop thinking you cannot do it. Start thinking you can! Stop dwelling on the negatives; think positive! Stop dwelling on past failures; think of those victories and successes you have already obtained and tell yourself you can do it again!" All these words can be very motivational, inspiring and powerful. And people will pay big money just to feel good and be motivated. The problem caused by this type of solution is very serious. You begin to trust more in self to lift up yourself rather than to look up to God and trust in Him. This type of worldly motivation guarantees only temporal relief and success. You will be depressed again. And again you will need more of such motivation to make you feel "high," like the effect of drugs.

Do not be deceived any more! It is time to be honest with yourself. It is time for you to stop believing in your own wisdom and capabilities. It is time to look up instead of looking down, left or right, front or back, or inside you. You have looked everywhere for answers. Why not look up? Are you not tired of living a life that is tossed about by every wind of circumstance that comes along your way? Jesus says, *"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly"* (John 10:10). This abundant life is promised to you right now! Jesus wants you to live it out right now! Will you?

Dear friends, Jesus said that we can have life more abundantly. That settles it. He will not give us something that is not realistic. Does Jesus give us the abundant life only to take it away when we want to receive it? Will He torment us like that? Of course not! Let us come to Him now and enjoy the abundant life. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Positive thinking is a powerful tool that the world uses. Should Christians use it too?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me trust in Thee, and Thee alone.

WITHOUT HIM WE CAN DO NOTHING (I)

People everywhere attempt to live a life that is worth living. They try every means available in the hope of producing a quality of life which will bring them joy and fulfilment. But Jesus tells us that we can only find that kind of life in Him. It is only possible when Jesus is our *"vine"* and we are His *"branches."* He says, *"... for without me ye can do nothing."* What are those things that we cannot do without Him? Those are things that please God, things that glorify Him and promote Him. Is our life pleasing to God? Without Him we can do nothing to please Him!

Some people have made themselves their own *"husbandman"* or the *"vine."* They try to find joy and fulfilment in life according to their human wisdom and philosophy. Perhaps they look to their own success in studies, career, material wealth and possession. Some may even look to their physical fitness. Will they find joy in these things?

Dear friends, we must realize that we are the *"branches."* We are neither the *"husbandman"* nor the *"vine."* We must know our place. Our place in Christian living is to stay connected to the true Vine and allow Him to give us the necessary nutrients we need so that we may bear fruit for Him. This is what we are as God's children. We are completely and utterly dependent upon Him in everything.

Without Him we can do nothing to please Him. Our place is to be the *"branches."* We are the servants, not the Master. We are slaves, not the Lord. We are the creatures, not the Creator. God is the Master. He is the Lord. He is the Creator. He alone owns this right. And so if we know our place in Christian living, God is going to bless us because Jesus is our true Vine. There is no way we can enjoy a greater sense of joy and fulfilment until we connect to Christ, our only Vine. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Will I bear any bad fruit when Jesus is my Vine?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee that I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 29

JOHN 15:1-11

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-9

*Pray and keep on praying,
and the God of peace
shall be with you.*

WITHOUT HIM WE CAN DO NOTHING (II)

We must realize that as “*branches*” there is pruning work to be done on us. The word Jesus used is “*purgeth*.” It means to purify, to remove impurities, to clear away the harmful or useless. Sin is still very much active in our life, though we have been wonderfully saved once and for all by the grace of God. There is the work of purging to be done in our life.

As branches to the true Vine, we have no other function than to bear fruit. In order to bear fruit and more fruits, we must submit to the purging and pruning work of God. This is crucial if we want joy and fulfilment in life. If there are still sins in our life, we will not experience true joy. We must let God do the pruning work to remove whatever there are that are preventing us from bearing fruit for Him. Sometimes, when God does His pruning work on us, it can be very painful for us. In order to bear a good testimony, many a time, we may have to stand alone and be pruned, while others have a good time in places of sin and temptation. But the painful pruning is always worth it, because there is joy waiting for us.

Knowing our place as “*branches*” and that God is pruning us, we must abide in Christ. To abide means to remain, to continue, to stay and to dwell. But how do we abide in Christ? Verse 7 tells us that we are to abide in His words. We must get into reading, memorizing, studying and meditating God’s Word daily if we say we are abiding in Him. We need to allow His words to get into our lives and influence everything that we think, say and do. God’s Word is a perfect filter, clearing off all the unclean thoughts, words and actions of our life.

The same verse says: “*ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.*” Abiding in Christ also means engaging in the only helpline with God through Christ. We need to keep that line busy all the time if we say we abide in Christ. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Prayer is the hotline connected directly to the divine powerhouse.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to abide in Christ and His Word.

WITHOUT HIM WE CAN DO NOTHING (III)

We have learnt four precious truths from John 15:1-11 about abiding in Christ: (1) Believers are dependent upon Christ. (2) Believers need to be pruned to be more Christlike. (3) Believers must abide in the Word. (4) Believers must pray.

Without Christ, we can do nothing. We will not bear fruit if we choose to ignore the abovementioned. Those who fail to bear fruit will be cut off as they are useless to Christ. This is most unfortunate for a believer.

Therefore, all of us who profess to bear the name of Christ must keep abiding in Christ and His Word. We must keep that hotline of prayer busy all the time. Otherwise, there will be no true and complete joy for us. His joy will be taken away from us all because we bear no fruit for Him.

Are you still procrastinating to do that which is right in the eyes of God? Do it now if you want your joy to grow and to be full. That is God's desire for you, for He said, *“These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full”* (John 15:11).

God gives us His Word for a good purpose: that His joy may remain in us and that our joy may be full always. And remember: we are not to do it without Christ. For without Him we can do nothing. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Why is it that when I become a Christian I cannot do certain things like drinking and gambling?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for giving me the joy in my heart.

BE OF GOOD CHEER (I)

It is very easy for us to be pessimistic about life. It can be about anything and everything under the sun. Actually, there is every reason for us to be down because of who we are, and what is happening in the world around us. Some of us may be struggling in our own little corner at work with difficult colleagues, or in church with difficult brethren in Christ, or even at home with family members who do not show love or understanding towards us.

Very often we see our situation getting from bad to worse. That was the case when Jesus was talking to His disciples in John 16. Times were not getting better although they had been following Jesus. Never before did anyone dare to talk back to a Pharisee or a religious leader. But Jesus did; not just once but many times. It is truly amazing that the disciples continued to follow Jesus. They had found hope and safety in Him whom they believed is the eternal Son of God.

Jesus could have continued to remain with them forever. No matter how bad the situation, it could never be so bad because Jesus was with them physically. So long as Jesus was with them, they had nothing to fear. Jesus would take care of all their problems. They could be of good cheer all day long. But, was that what Jesus wanted for His disciples? The answer is no! Therefore, Jesus gave them John 16:33. They have to learn to cope even without His physical presence. Only then will their faith abound and grow in the Lord, even in the world of tribulation. They can be of good cheer because Jesus has overcome the world. His conquest and victory over sin and death is that which gives God's people peace in their heart. Because of this, we can have good reason to be of good cheer. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: How can I smile at the storm?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to rejoice in Thee always.

BE OF GOOD CHEER (II)

If Jesus was going to be with His disciples physically forever, He would not have to tell them *"these things"* (John 16:1) at all. But Jesus had told them that He must go away: He must go to the cross, die, be buried and rise from the dead on the third day. And He must ascend into heaven to sit at the right hand of God the Father.

Prior to John 16, Jesus had spoken to them about the heavenly home. He had spoken about another Comforter. He had spoken about true peace. He had spoken about having the fullness of joy. He had spoken about His love for them. He had spoken about the persecution they would face in the world. He had spoken about His death and His resurrection. Jesus had spoken to them all these things for two reasons: One is found in verse 1: *"... that ye should not be offended."* The other in verse 33: *"... that in me ye might have peace."* Jesus was about to leave them. The things that were going to happen may be too much for His disciples to bear. But they were given two great promises: that no matter what happened they should not be offended and that in Christ they might have peace in their heart.

In a world of trouble and tribulation, there was every reason for them to be down and out. But there was also reason to be of good cheer: Jesus has overcome the world. Unbelievers will never experience this. They may cheer up because the Nike motto tells them to "Just do it." They may cheer up because someone promises them a reward. They may cheer up even for no good reason but just to prove that they are better and stronger. But can they remain cheerful with no true peace in their hearts? They have no peace because they have no Christ in them. Do you have Christ? Be of good cheer if you have received the wonderful grace of Jesus. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: How can I cheer up when I see only hopelessness and despair around me?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to be of good cheer because of Christ.

THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE

Before Jesus was led to the cross, Pontius Pilate asked Jesus if He was indeed a king. Jesus replied, *“Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice”* (John 18:37). Then Pilate asked, *“What is truth?”* This is a question we may also ask. What exactly is *“truth”*?

We live in an era where some claim that there are no absolute truths. To them, truth is all in the mind and what is right in their own eyes. Each has his own definition of truth and lives with his own truths. There are no absolutes but varieties of truth which say, *“All truth is God’s truth.”* Is that what you are thinking? This may sound very *“sound,”* but unfortunately it is the devil’s blatant lie. All truth is NOT necessarily God’s truth! It should be the other way round and can only be that way: God’s truth is all truth!

Dear friends, in a world that is searching for the truth, the truth is nearer than we think. Jesus stands with us today as the glorious King of kings and Lord of lords. He says, *“I am the way, the TRUTH, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”* (John 14:6). Many are still trapped by the bondage of ignorance and sin today. What about you? Let the Truth set you free today. You may be trapped in a life of sin, but are you willing to let it go and let Jesus free you from that bondage? Will you receive the Truth today? Jesus means what He says: *“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”* (John 8:32). Will you be free? Come to Jesus and know His Truth, and His Truth will make you free indeed. Amen.

THOUGHT: When I come to Jesus and His Truth makes me free, does it mean that I am free to sin all I want?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee that through Jesus and His Truth, I am free forevermore

"WHY PERSECUTEST THOU ME?"

Saul was on a Christian-killing spree. He was bent on making them extinct from the face of the earth. While on his way to fulfil his evil mission near Damascus, a bright heavenly light stopped him and he was never the same again. Not only was his evil plot abandoned, he became the greatest apostle and preacher of the Lord Jesus Christ whom he had persecuted.

At this juncture, let us ponder over what Jesus said to Saul, "*Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*" (v 4). Was not Saul persecuting Christians? Why did Jesus say Saul was persecuting Him? When one persecutes Christians, one is persecuting the Christ of the Christians. No wonder vengeance belongs to the Lord (Rom 12:19). When Christians stand for the faith and are attacked for their faith, God will honour them. Those who attack Christians will not go unpunished. This is because attacks against Christians for their faith are also attacks against Christ.

Are you discouraged because you are discriminated by your loved ones or peers due to your faith in Christ? Take heart! Know that it is Christ they are persecuting, and God will vindicate you. Instead of getting angry with them who persecute us, let us pray for them that God may change them. You may never know how the Lord can transform them just as He did to evil Saul who became the great Apostle Paul.

Press on, Christian! Let the love of God and the light of Jesus shine through you. Always be a blessing even in the midst of persecution! May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: What should I do when others hurl insults and mock at Christ?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to look to Thee and not be easily discouraged because of persecution.

BE NOT AFRAID ... FOR I AM WITH THEE

The Apostle Paul was on his second missionary journey. He came to Corinth, a vibrant and prosperous city where morality was low and idolatry was rampant. As usual, Apostle Paul would head toward the synagogue where the Jews congregated and share the gospel of Jesus Christ with them. But the Jews in Corinth rejected the gospel. As such, Apostle Paul turned to the Gentiles in Corinth. Many Gentile Corinthians believed the gospel which he brought to them. This is the Lord's calling and open door for Paul in Corinth. There was great hunger and thirst for the Word of God. Apostle Paul felt the burden and he knew it was not going to be easy. As such, the Lord came to him in a vision to encourage him. With this encouragement, Paul spent the next one-and-a-half years with them to teach them the Word of God. That is the power of the Lord's encouragement: *"Be not afraid... For I am with thee..."* (Acts 18:9-10).

We do not expect the Lord to speak to us through such visions and dreams today since He has given us His all-sufficient Word to encourage and strengthen us in the work of His ministry. Jesus said to Paul, *"Be not afraid..."* because He knew strong persecutions would come upon him in his ministry that could easily make him fearful. And the reason why Paul needed not to be afraid was because the Lord was with him. He said, *"For I am with thee..."* Apostle Paul was to remember this always. This is the same promise found in the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20). Jesus truly lived up to His name *"Immanuel"* (meaning "God with us"). Jesus knows His spiritual presence is necessary for us as we serve and live unto Him. He truly means what He said, and He keeps His promises to all who believe in Him. What a great comfort this promise brings to our hearts to know that God is with us! Let us not be afraid but continue to look unto Jesus always. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Why do I sometimes feel that God is far away from me?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee that I need not be afraid any more because Thou hast promised to be with me all the time.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 5

ROMANS 5:6-8

ISAIAH 53:4-10

“... with his stripes
we are healed.”

LOVE OF GOD

Could God have loved us in any way other than through His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ? He could because He is the all-powerful God. But He did not. I can only humble myself to receive His way of love, a way so sacrificial and great that its fullness is beyond description by human words.

Who are we that we can be recipients of such great love? In Romans 5:6-8, Apostle Paul referred to us as people without strength, ungodly and sinners. “*Without strength*” (v 6) means we have no ability at all to save ourselves. We have fallen short of God’s glory. All men are “*without strength*.” The “*ungodly*” (v 6) refer to those who do evil and do not worship the one living and true God. They are idolatrous and bent on breaking all the ten commandments. “*Sinners*” (v 8) refer to all who are born into this world with a human father and mother. We commit sins because we are already sinners. The good that we do is still no good because of our sins. That is how seriously sin has affected us. What do we who are without strength, ungodly and sinners deserve? Is it not God’s wrath instead of God’s love? Is it not punishment for sins instead of forgiveness of sins? Yet He did one thing that is most unthinkable and most “illogical” – Christ died for us!

This is His way of loving us. And this is love in the highest degree. No love is greater than this. If there is, God will definitely use it, we can be sure of that because He loves us so much. What is our response? Do we love Him? If we need to give our lives for Him, are we willing to do so? That would be a true test of our love for Him. If we hold on tightly to our lives and are willing to deny Him in order to save our lives, it just shows how weak our love for Him is. Perhaps we have not really been convicted and touched by His great love towards us. If we have been, I believe we will be willing to give our lives for Him. God deserves it because He is God. Moreover, because of what He has done to love us, He deserves even more. Will you learn to love Him more and more? May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Does God expect me to give up my life for Him?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to love Thee more.

WHO SHALL SEPARATE US FROM GOD'S LOVE?

Is there really nothing that can separate us from God's love? The answer is "YES, absolutely!" If there is something that can stand between us and God's love, even just one, then His love is not that great after all.

What is the significance of God giving us such a blessed assurance of His great love? It shows us that when God loves, He really and truly loves to the end. There is no holding back. His love is completely perfect. God is unlike us. When we love, we often hold back our love for fear of being hurt. And we often expect to be loved as much in return, if not more. But God loves us despite who we are and what we do. Even though we continue to rebel against Him and hurt Him by our thoughts, words and actions, He continues to love us perfectly and completely.

Our love is very often a conditional love. We expect something in return when we love. If our love is not going to be reciprocated, we will have second thoughts as to whether to continue to love or not. But God loves us unconditionally. And He loves us by giving us His most precious and beloved Son, Jesus Christ, so that through Him we might be saved forevermore. God gave His Son to us that Jesus might be our sinless sacrifice to die for our sins on the cross. Truly nothing can stop God from loving us this way. Jesus Himself has said, "*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends*" (John 15:13). Jesus considers us His friends. And He laid down His life to save us. Indeed, "What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!" (Joseph Scriven).

Perhaps the question we should ask ourselves is: "Will there be anything that is able to stop us from loving God?" I pray and hope the answer is "No." May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: With God's love, why are sinners still going to hell?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for Thy great love.

RUNNING WITH CERTAINTY

The Christian race is a tough, enduring, and long distance one. It requires every ounce of energy and discipline, and perseverance to be exercised and utilized until the race is completed and we stand perfect before the presence of our Lord. We run with this certainty that we will complete the race with victory. Our Saviour Jesus Christ guarantees that.

How are you running the race today? Running with certainty is to run by faith. True faith is a call to action with total dependence upon the Lord. This call involves laying aside anything that hinders our Christian race. No one can lay aside for you the weights and sins that hinder your Christian race. You yourself must do it by faith.

Dear brethren, it is time to run! We are running to obtain an incorruptible crown, not a corruptible one. And so we have good reason to start running now. You may have been idling or sleeping at the side of the racetrack. Wake up! It is time to run! You may be complaining about the condition of the course. Stop complaining! It is time to run! You may be out of shape spiritually, and you have endless excuses for your inadequacy. Buck up! It is time to run!

When you are running for Christ, you are not as one “*that beateth the air*” (v 26), ie your effort will not be in vain. God takes note of all the effort you put in to run faithfully for His sake. Be careful not to cut corners! It is important to be faithful and run with integrity and a clear conscience. The focus of the Christian race is not about speed but faithfulness. Even if you complete the race in the shortest time but have been unfaithful, you will still lose your reward.

Therefore, let us run with certainty for Jesus’ sake. May God help us.

THOUGHT: Did the thief on the cross who was saved ever run the Christian race?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to run the Christian race with certainty.

GOD IS FAITHFUL

Faithfulness is a unique virtue. Oftentimes, the word faithful can only be used to describe a person at the end of his life. For example, I cannot be truly considered a faithful husband until the end of my life, ie I must never have cheated on my wife at any time in my whole married life. If I have committed adultery even just once, the word faithful cannot be used to describe me. Faithfulness is so precious and valuable. Lose it once and you lose it forever.

However, when this word faithfulness is used on God, there is no need to wait till the end. God is faithful, period. He is faithful in the past, He is still faithful today and He will be faithful forever. In what sense is God faithful? Apostle Paul wrote in verse 13, *“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”* There are many trials and testings in the life of a Christian. God has never promised His children that their lives will be trouble-free. Instead God has promised that He will be with them to the very end. And this means that God will not forsake or leave them at any time.

When the storms of life seem to overpower and overwhelm us, God’s strength will be made perfect in our weakness. Even though it may look as if we have fallen, the invisible hand of the Almighty God is still upholding us. This is true of all Christian martyrs of the faith. Did not all of them suffer and die in the end? Yes, but that kind of suffering and death are only temporal. They are now in the glorious presence of the great God, being comforted and resting in His bosom, for eternity. All because God is faithful. God is faithful and He will forever be. Will you trust in Him and be faithful to Him even unto death? May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Isn’t it enough that God is faithful? Why must I be faithful too?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to be faithful.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 9

2 CORINTHIANS 5:11-16

DEUTERONOMY 6:1-8

*“And thou shalt love the LORD thy God
with all thine heart...”*

THE LOVE OF CHRIST CONSTRAINETH US

To “constrain” means to hold together. To be constrained by the love of Christ means the love of Christ holds us together. It compels us, makes us excited to share the same love with others who are ignorant of this sacrificial love of God.

Jesus has chosen to demonstrate His love for us by sacrificing His sinless life for us on the cross of Calvary, so that we may be saved from sin and judgment in eternal hell fire. This love He has revealed to us. This same love fires and compels us to share with those who are still outside God’s kingdom.

From 1976 to 1979, Pol Pot ruled Cambodia with an iron fist. Between 800,000 and three million Cambodians were believed to have been massacred under his three-year premiership. Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge government decided that Cambodia only needed two million people, out of the original population of seven million. Execution was carried out daily to get rid of those not needed. The people were brought to a place where they dug their own graves. This place later became the well-known “killing fields.” Only a handful of the population was considered “saved for use,” ie to make up the two million people. These were the ones whose lives were spared. They were saved because they were still of use to Pol Pot. But once they were no longer useful, they had to die. In a way, we too have been “saved for use.” We could have been left to go our own way, but God saved us. Pol Pot was evil, but God is good. Pol Pot saved some because of his own evil agenda. But God saved us because He loves us. And He saves us forever.

May the love of Christ constrain us to love Him more and more. We have been saved for His use. Let us serve Him while we still have the time and energy. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: If I say I love God, must I serve Him?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, may the love of Christ constrain me to love and serve Thee more and more.

GOD LOVES EVERY CHEERFUL GIVER

The topic "Money" can be a very touchy one, especially when it concerns taking money out of our own pocket! However it is an important part of our Christian obligation to God and His ministry. Money issues must be addressed since God is the Provider and it is His expectation of us to be good and faithful stewards (1 Cor 4:2). We must understand that God is pleased to bless us when we work hard. However, do not turn money into an idol by slogging your life for it, and not for God. God blesses us with money not for us to turn it into our god.

We follow the principle of tithing given in the Old Testament (Gen 28:20-22; Lev 27:30; Mal 3:8) where God specifically instructed His people to return a tithe (one tenth) to Him. This is not to say that God needs a tithe from us in order to survive or work. God is self-sufficient. He needs no provider. He is the Provider Himself. The tithes are used to support the church's full-time workers (pastor, preachers, ministerial staff, administrative staff, accountant, etc), the cost of maintaining the place of worship, missions work and the various ministries in the church, etc. The biblical principle is given in Numbers 18:21. God's servants and His ministry must be supported by His people. We do not accept public donations or encourage the church to solicit funds from the public. God's work must be supported by God's people. This is the principle that must never be compromised.

It is always a blessing to give. If we withhold our hand from giving to God, He might also withhold His hand from showering on us His great blessings. Each time we come before God to give our tithes and offerings, let us give to Him cheerfully and be thankful for all that He has provided for us. Let us as true Christians resolve by faith to show our love through tithes and offerings to our Lord, who though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich (2 Cor 8:9). May God bless every cheerful giver. Amen.

THOUGHT: If I do not have any income, do I still have to tithe?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to be a cheerful giver.

MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR THEE (I)

The Corinthian church was no easy church to minister to. Apostle Paul faced many challenges. Even his own health was a *"thorn."* Yet in all these, Jesus assured and comforted him with these words: *"My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness"* (v 9). From this we see that even though serving the Lord is no easy task, He can empower us to do so.

It is so easy to give up when the going gets tough. Satan wants you to give up. But should you? Are you thinking of moving on to a better, more comfortable place? Dear friends, this is a spiritual warfare. The adversary, the roaring lion, is on the prowl, seeking to tear you apart! Even if you run away, he will go after you. Why don't you face and resist him, relying on God's grace? The Lord has promised you: *"My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness."*

There is every reason for us to rejoice and glory in the Lord because we are called to be servants in the Lord's ministry. However, we may continue to have a *"thorn"* in our flesh like the Apostle Paul. It was so terrible that he prayed three times for the Lord to remove it. Instead of removing the *"thorn,"* the Lord chose to grant him His all-sufficient grace to bear with the *"thorn."* What was Paul's response? Was he disappointed? Hear what he said: *"Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong"* (vv 9-10). What great faith and joy came into his heart! Truly God's grace was working in him. Have you also prayed for a *"thorn"* to be removed from your life? Take heart! Even if it remains, God's sufficient grace is yours to have. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: God's grace is sufficient for me. But if I cannot bear the *"thorn"* anymore, is God calling me to another place?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee that Thy grace is always sufficient for me.

MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR THEE (II)

What happens when God does not remove the “*thorn*” in your flesh? Do you then decide that you should stop serving Him? Paul did not. What was his attitude? He said, “... *Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong*” (vv 9-10).

Paul was not deceiving himself, or trying to pretend to be more godly or spiritual. Neither was he paying lip service or making sweeping statements to make himself feel better. He did not pretend that there was no problem, nor laugh the problem away. This is all because he knew the Master whom he served.

Unkind words from men did not matter to him. People may doubt his apostleship; people may attack his integrity and character. If Paul took to heart what people said or did to him, he would have given up the ministry long ago. But he cared only what his Master would say to him. “*My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.*” These few words were enough! Need God say more? The words of Jesus are enough for us to press on in the ministry, no matter how difficult it may be; no matter how frustrated and disappointed we may get.

Remember: God’s grace is sufficient for us in every problem and in every situation that we may be in. May the Lord help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Who sends the “*thorns*”? Is it God or Satan?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for Thy all-sufficient grace for every problem and situation I may face.

CALLED BY HIS GRACE

Apostle Paul was a miracle of God. God turned him from a killer of Christians into a Christian preacher. What an amazing transformation! It can only come from God. No one is capable of that, even Paul cannot control it! Why did God do it? His grace is the answer. By His grace, God called Paul, and us.

God's call is mysterious because it can come in so many different ways. God's calling of Paul was one way. We know of Moses who was called out of a burning bush (Exod 3) or young Samuel who heard a voice calling him at least three times in his sleep (1 Sam 3). And there were countless others who were each called by God through a different experience. All callings of God are by His grace. We have no part in Him, be it salvation or ministry, until He calls us. It is His call that counts. God does the calling, not man. It is also not based on anything we have done, but entirely by His grace. He chooses whomsoever He will to be saved and to serve in His ministry.

By His grace, God's call to salvation and ministry involves the revealing of His Son Jesus Christ (Gal 1:16). Although Apostle Paul was already a “master” of the Old Testament scripture, he could not truly understand it until God opened his eyes to see Jesus in it. And he was not able to preach Jesus until that happened. By His grace, we knew Christ. And by His same grace, we can know Him more and more through His Word and Spirit.

Are you called by His grace? If you are, praise the Lord! No one can take that away from you. But if you are not, could it be that you have been running away from Him who may have been calling you by His grace? Do not run away any more. Come and receive His call by grace. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Am I responding negatively to God's call?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for calling me by Thy grace.

CHRIST WAS MADE A CURSE

I cannot imagine someone being made a curse because of me. Yet it is true as the Scripture testifies, *“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us”* (Gal 3:13a). We were cursed because of Adam’s sin. In theological terms, this is called original sin. And this curse did not stop there. Out of original sin came forth all kinds of actual sins which we have committed, eg: lies, evil thoughts, wickedness, greed, etc. Are we not cursed? Even our so-called righteousness is cursed! The Bible concludes: *“... all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags...”* (Isa 64:6). No matter how we may try to be careful with our words, thoughts and actions, we can never be good nor be found acceptable to God in ourselves. It is all because we are cursed, and *“...all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”* (Rom 3:23).

The truth that Christ was made a curse for us implies that He was not cursed in the first place. Because He was born of a virgin (Isa 7:14), He did not inherit the original sin from Adam and remains sinless. Not only that, He subjected Himself to the law, and He passed! As man, He obeyed the Law perfectly to the jot and tittle from birth to death. Therefore, only He is qualified to be our curse. No sinner can be another person’s curse because he himself is already cursed. Only Christ who is sinless is able to be our curse. What a sacrifice! To be made our curse, He bore our humiliation, our suffering, and even our death on the cross for us! The curse is rightfully ours, but He took it from us and became the curse.

O, how can I bear the thought? How can I take it lightly when He actually died for me on the cross in my place? O Lord, I thank Thee for what Thou hast done to save me, a sinner, so undeserving of such love, grace and mercy. My life is Thine, O Lord. Take it and let it bring glory and honour to Thy great name. Amen.

THOUGHT: When Jesus became a curse for me, does it mean I have caused Him to become sinful?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for removing the curse from me.

KNOWN BY GOD

Apostle Paul was giving the Galatian Christians a dressing down for trying to return to their old ways and beliefs which were contrary to their new-found Christian faith. How could they return to spiritual darkness now that they were in the light of Jesus? Their eyes had been opened to know the living and true God, and God knew them. But what is this knowledge? Of course, we know that God is omniscient and He knows all things. He knows what we are thinking in our mind and what we are feeling in our hearts, even without us verbalizing it. He knows us even before we are born, and He knows our future. He knows everything about us. Is this the kind of knowledge that Apostle Paul was talking about?

This is not what Apostle Paul was talking about when he said, "*But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God*" (Gal 4:9a). Apostle Paul was referring to a personal knowledge that was based on a close relationship that had been built. In other words, God knows us as our Father and we, His children. The reverse is true. If God does not know us, it means that we do not belong to Him. This is what Christ meant when He said, "*I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity*" (Matt 7:23b). If we belong to God, we will be known of Him. And if we truly belong to God, we will seek His will and obey Him.

Are you known of Him? Let us go beyond merely professing to be Christians. Let us be doers of His Word, and not hearers only (James 1:22). Let us seek His will for our lives and keep obeying Him. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Is it possible for one to do God's will sometimes, and yet in the end He still says "*I never knew you*"?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to do Thy will faithfully and obediently.

COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS

It is easy for us to focus on the problems in our lives and on what we lack. Very often we forget the blessings. There are basically two types of blessings in life: general blessings (enjoyed by everyone including unbelievers) and spiritual blessings (enjoyed only by genuine believers). General blessings usually include health, food, home, apparel, and also natural resources such as sun, rain, etc.

As believers, we have a double blessing because we also have spiritual blessings in addition to general blessings. Ephesians 1:3 says, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."* The intimate, personal relationship we have with Jesus is a blessing beyond description.

There is also the wonderful blessing of fellowship with likeminded brethren in Christ within the household of faith. *"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"* (Rom 10:17). The Bible is God's eternal blessing to us. It is also our ever-present and dependable Guide. It contains the foundational principles upon which we can build a happy and successful life on earth that is glorifying to God.

If we want our lives to be happy, and pleasing to God, we must learn to count our blessings, not our troubles. We must show our gratitude to God for His many blessings by being obedient to Him.

If you are not yet a Christian, let me urge you to become one at the earliest opportunity, and thereby show your gratitude to God, the Giver of all good gifts, for the many blessings He has bestowed on you to enrich and bless your life. Amen.

THOUGHT: I must not take God's blessings for granted. If God can shower His blessings on me, He can also remove them from me.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I want to count all my blessings and may Thou make me a blessing too.

WALK IN LOVE AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT

How can we walk without tripping over in the dark? We need light. Even a small light can shine brightly in a big dark room. That is how important light is. This world is full of spiritual darkness. It is dark because of sin. Since the day sin entered into the world, the whole of mankind has plunged into spiritual darkness. Without light, no one can see the way to life and heaven. Because of darkness, all are perishing and heading towards final condemnation in hell fire. Sinful men are lost without the light. Where can the light be found? The gospel first preached by God in Genesis 3:15 provides that glimpse of light. Adam and Eve believed God and His promise. Immediately, they became ambassadors of that light to those who would come after them.

Are you a child of God's light? If you are, how are you walking in this dark world? We are told to walk in love. This is because Christ hath loved us and given His life for us. By walking in love, we show that we are the children of light. The light of God that shines in our hearts is that light of knowledge of God's glory. This is a great mystery. Only those who truly have this light in them would understand this great mystery. The Bible says that spiritual things are spiritually discerned (1 Cor 2:14). It is that easy, yet so difficult for many, to accept Christ simply by faith.

Once the light of God shines and lights our hearts, it will never be taken away. It is true that sometimes this light may become dim, but it is still there and will never go off. Dearly beloved, let us keep looking to God, going to Him in prayer; and the light in us will shine brighter. Let us walk in love as children of light. Will you?

THOUGHT: If Christians are called to walk in love as children of light, why are there so many conflicts and problems among them?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I want to walk in love as a child of Thy light today.

CHRIST LOVES THE CHURCH IN THREE WAYS

A husband's love for his wife has been beautifully compared with Christ's love for His Church. The husband-and-wife relationship is the most unique and special relationship of all relationships in the whole world. It is one that is joined by God and bound by a covenant made before Him as the divine Witness, and only death can break it. It is important that the husband loves his wife. His love is not based upon circumstances or anything else. It is to be a sacrificial love as Apostle Paul wrote, "...even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Eph 5:25). This love is a selfless love. It is a love that gives all, even his own life. And so if any man is not prepared to love his wife in such a sacrificial manner, it is better for him not to marry. How many marriages have been broken because of extra-marital affairs? The perfect way to save a marriage from being broken is to learn from the way Christ loves the Church. There are three ways as taught in Ephesians 5:25-32.

Firstly, Christ's love for the Church is expressed in His giving of His life for her (v 25). If there is any other way He could love her more, He will do it. He wants the best for her. He gave His life in exchange for her life. He died that she might live.

Secondly, Christ's love for the Church is expressed in His desire for her to be sanctified and cleansed to be His perfect bride (v 26). He does so by using His Word that is powerful to make her the most beautiful bride. The most beautiful bride is the glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, but holy and without blemish (v 27).

Thirdly, Christ's love for the church is expressed in His care for her. He nourishes and cherishes her (v 29). He wants her to grow well under His care. He wants to be by her side forever.

Let us thank God for the three ways that Christ loves us. Amen.

THOUGHT: If God's love is unconditional, why is it that I must believe in order to be saved? Is not belief a condition?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for Thy love for me.

GOD’S GOOD WORK (I)

Apostle Paul wrote, *“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ”* (Phil 1:6). Our salvation is the good work of the triune God. We are chosen by God the Father unto salvation. We are purchased by the redeeming work of God the Son in His life, blood and death, and resurrection. We are sealed by God the Holy Spirit of promise, securing our salvation to the very end.

Why is it a good work? The first reason is that this work DOES us good. It is a work that is good, and not harmful, for us. Without this work of grace in us, the power and chain of sin will still be present and will eventually weigh us down to hell. We must be born again, says our Lord, if we are to enter into the kingdom of God.

The second reason is that this work MAKES us good. It not only does us good, it actually makes us good. It turns us from a wretched and vile sinner, into a holy and Christ-like saint. God could have let us continue in our ignorance and perish in our sins. He could have kept us ignorant of the wonderful life in Christ, but He did not. He chose to save us and to make us good.

Have you considered what a great sinner you once were, before God did His good work in you? And do you realize that each and every one of those Christian graces which you now possess and exhibit in some measure (eg: love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, etc) is solely the result of God’s good work in you? Indeed this is a good work because it does us good and makes us good.

THOUGHT: At our justification, God only looks at Christ’s good works. At our sanctification, God looks at Christ’s good works and ours.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for the good work Thou hast done in me.

GOD’S GOOD WORK (II)

What is the purpose of God’s good work? The answer is twofold – it is primarily for the glory of God and secondarily for the glory of the saved in eternity. God does all things for His own glory. And the good work which God has begun in us is ultimately and primarily for His own glory. God, who began it, must also perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. Now God is working in us not just for our benefit in this life, but especially to fit us for the life to come.

Thomas Vincent said, “God gives grace here to prepare for glory hereafter.” How do we apply this?

Firstly, we are to take a careful look at ourselves to see if God has indeed begun a good work in us. Have I really experienced a real change in my life? My friends, without this good work, nothing good awaits you at the end of your life.

Secondly, we are to be very thankful to God whenever we remember His good work in us. When was the last time you reflected on God’s good work in you and gave thanks and praise to Him?

We know that God will continue to perfect His work in us until the day of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we need to examine ourselves all the time to see where we have fallen short of His glory. And then we must repent of our sins.

Let us also take stock of God’s blessings on us that we may thank Him. The day is coming when we shall give an account of what we have done for God. May God help us to be thankful for His good work in us! Amen.

THOUGHT: I thought all my sins were forgiven when I believe in Jesus. How is it that I still have to account for the wrongs I have done?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for Thy good work done within me.

THE HUMILITY OF CHRIST

Most of us struggle much with pride. Pride makes our heads swell. Pride makes us fall harder. Humility seems so far away. When will we ever learn humility? Let us look at Christ. He is the supreme example of humility. No one is greater than God. Yet God the Son humbled Himself, forsaking all His glory and took upon Him the form of a man. Not only that, He came not to be served but to serve as a servant, and to be mocked and rejected by sinful men. He willingly went through this humiliation in obedience to God and for our sakes.

Jesus knew that if He did not suffer and die for us, we would die in our sins. *“The soul that sinneth, it shall die”* (Ezek 18:20a). If Jesus did not think of us, we would perish. But He thought of us. So He humbled Himself, and went through mockery and shame, so that we can be restored to God for eternity.

This is the lesson of humility we need to learn. It is to esteem others better than ourselves. It is to *“look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others”* (Phil 2:4). It is easy to love those who love us. But God loved us when we hated Him. *“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”* (Rom 5:8).

God loves us. And He desires us to love Him too. And when we truly love Him, we will also learn to love one another. This is the effort required of us. And even if we can do it, it is not we who do it, but Christ who lives in us that enables us to do it. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Is it better for God to humble me or for me to humble myself?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me learn the lesson of humility and be more and more like Thy Son Jesus Christ.

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

What would be your natural reaction if you see your own beloved son being brutally punished for something that he has not done? When Jesus was crucified on the cross, the first recorded words He uttered were a prayer to God: *"Father, forgive them..."* Did God answer His prayer? We know He did. No angel was sent to destroy the mob. No earthquake came to swallow them up. No fire rained down from heaven to consume them. It was as if Jesus said, "Hold back the wrath, Father! Give the Roman soldiers who drove all those nails into my hands a chance to repent. Give the angry crowds a chance to get right with Thee. Give all of the sinning and evil people a chance to be redeemed. I am paying the price, O Father. Give them the chance to repent, to be cleansed, and be redeemed."

Today this prayer is still being honoured. We are here today because the prayer that Jesus prayed 2,000 years ago is still being honoured by God in heaven. That is why the sun shines on the good and the bad. That is why the rain falls on the just and the unjust. That is why I am able to write what you are able to read when we do not even deserve at all to be found in the loving presence of the Lord, to have His face shining upon us. What we truly deserved is judgment and wrath from the Lord.

The message on the forgiveness of sins has been spreading and proclaimed by Christ's disciples for these 2,000 years. Many have received His forgiveness and many have also rejected it. Right now, the forgiveness of sins is still being offered. It is still available, and it is yours for the taking. But it will not be available and offered for long. One day, it shall not be found and it will be too late by then. Will you not receive His forgiveness now?

THOUGHT: Is it logical and possible to be forgiven without receiving forgiveness?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for forgiving me of my sins.

RECONCILED TO GOD

The relationship between God and man has been broken ever since Adam took that first bite of the forbidden fruit. Since then, sin entered into the world and man is condemned forever, reserved for the final judgment. Whether we like it or not, Adam is our representative head. We are already sinners when we were born into this world because of Adam's sin. This is a fact and truth we cannot deny.

If we do not make peace with God, we will remain separated from Him forever. It means eternal punishment in the hell fire of intense torment where *“their worms dieth not, and the fire is not quenched”* (Mark 9:44). In order to bridge this gap with God and be reconciled to Him, we need a Mediator who can sufficiently mediate our dispute, and it is for this purpose that God sent His only begotten Son into the world and gave Him to us.

As long as we stand guilty of sin, God cannot let us stand in His holy presence. Jesus died on the cross to take away our guilt, and thus the barrier has been effectively removed by Christ for all who believe in Him. He has made peace through His blood on the cross. By His death, we are reconciled to God.

Jesus was able to die for us because of His life. As much as His death is important to our salvation, we cannot forget His life and the fact that He lived for more than thirty years for us. His blood is pure and sinless. He lived a perfect life to be our perfect sacrifice on the cross so that we might be perfectly reconciled to God. Are you reconciled to God?

THOUGHT: It takes one sacrifice to do all the healing and reconciling of man to God. This sacrifice is Jesus.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for Jesus who has reconciled me to Thee.

LET THE PEACE OF GOD RULE IN YOUR HEART

In the Straits Times published in Singapore dated 23 December 2006, there was a special report with the heading "World with no Peace? World with no Joy?" According to the report, there were 3.6 million people killed in wars since 1990; 1.1 billion people living on less than \$1.50 a day; 8.4 million children worked as sex workers; 1 billion women have been abused, either beaten or sexually assaulted; and 39.5 million people were infected with HIV. What do you think of this world based on these figures? It is a terrible world, is it not? The world believes that if you can get rid of all the nuclear weapons, all the terrorists, all the religious disharmony, all the killers, all the robbers, all the sex and drug abusers, all the speedsters, all the cheaters, and whatever evils you can think of, then there will be peace in the world. While the world is trying to make peace, there will be no true peace until there is peace with God. And only the Prince of peace can make that possible. Through Jesus, we can have peace with God. We were once His enemies, but now His friends. We have the peace of God ruling in our hearts.

Sometimes the worst enemy is not found in the world but in the church or even in our homes. Apostle Paul likes to use the human body to illustrate our relationship with God and our relationship with one another. All believers in the Lord Jesus Christ belong to the same body. And we must remember it is God's will and purpose that we are different. Some are the hands. Some are the legs. Some are the ears or the mouths. We may be different, yet we belong to the same body. For this, we must be thankful. We must let the peace of God rule in our hearts.

THOUGHT: No Jesus, no peace. Know Jesus, know peace.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, may Thy peace rule in my heart now and forever.

THE COMFORT OF CHRIST’S RETURN

The Thessalonian church was going through some great persecution and suffering. Some of its members might have died because of their faith. This brought much grief and pain to the believers. We understand this grief and loss when our loved ones are called home to glory. We feel a sense of loss and are sad and sorrowful because they are no longer with us. Very often, we let sorrow overwhelm us so much that we forget that they are now in a better land. We should be rejoicing for them. The glory land over there is certainly more wonderful and is the perfect place of everlasting peace and rest.

The Thessalonian Christians were so sorrowful that Paul said that they were behaving like those who had no hope. Those who died in their faith are in heaven right now. Is there any cause to be sorrowful? No. We should great mourn for those who die without Jesus, and are therefore without hope. For those in the Christian faith, there is hope. What hope? Paul says in verse 14, *“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.”* This is our hope in Christ. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is an essential doctrine in our salvation. If Jesus did not rise from the dead and is still in the grave, my Saviour is still dead, then I am still not saved! But thank God I have a living Saviour. I live because my Saviour lives. Likewise all who die in their faith will also be raised bodily from the dead one day, just as Christ has risen from the dead.

The Apostle Paul comforts our hearts and strengthens our faith with this wonderful doctrine of the blessed hope of the church: the power of resurrection. Those who have died in Christ will surely be raised up to glory one day. Death has lost its sting, and grave has lost its victory. May we be comforted by Christ’s imminent return. Amen.

THOUGHT: The souls of the departed saints are in heaven while their bodies are still on earth. When the day of the resurrection comes, soul and body will be united again. And this time, it will be a glorified body.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to find comfort in Christ’s return.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 26

1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-11

LUKE 16:19-31

*"And in hell he lift up his eyes,
being in torments..."*

GOD HATH NOT APPOINTED US TO WRATH

Hell is the final place where God's wrath is rested and it is eternal. Hell is a real place. Its address will never be known, yet no one will ever be lost getting there. It is a place with only an entrance and no exit. Generally, people do not like to talk about this place because they just do not like it. They consider it taboo and bad luck even to mention it. Even from church pulpits, there seems to be a hesitancy to talk about it. How can we shy away from the fact that hell is a real place and there are still many who are heading toward it? Moreover this truth on hell has been taught by the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, He taught on this subject of hell more than the subject of heaven!

A preacher was once questioned after he preached a sermon on hell. A man at the door said to him: "Why don't you preach to us about the gentle and peaceful Jesus, meek and mild, rather than all this hell stuff?" The preacher replied, "Oh, that's interesting. All my information on hell came from Jesus!" God does not want us to be ignorant of this terrible place. But who believes in hell these days? Dear friend, Jesus believes in hell, and He taught about hell. Those who do not have faith in Him are going to that place. It is a reality, not fiction.

Hell is a place where God's wrath is burning forever. Whether we like the idea or not is irrelevant. Consider how irrational and unreasonable it is for you to just obliterate the concept from your mind just because you don't like it! We don't like cancer, but it is real. We cannot just ignore these things. Hell is as real as death. We do not ignore death, do we? If you have been touched by God's love for you, praise the Lord, for He has not appointed you to wrath but to obtain salvation through Jesus Christ. May God be merciful. Amen.

THOUGHT: While those in heaven will be worshipping God forever, what will those in hell be doing?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for Thy mercy upon me.

FAITHFUL IS HE THAT CALLETH YOU

“Once saved always saved” summarises the fifth point of Calvinism on the Perseverance of the Saints. The Arminians accused the Calvinists of being proud and arrogant for believing in this doctrine. We must examine ourselves carefully. If we have abused this doctrine and kept sinning without making the least effort to repent, then we have become proud and have no salvation in the first place. *“Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it”* (1 Thess 5:24). The work of salvation is completely of God. There is no part in which man ever played in obtaining salvation. Salvation is the testimony of God’s faithfulness. No man or angel or any creature is able to take that away from God. *“Salvation is of the LORD”* (Jon 2:9b). All glory and honour be unto Him now and forever.

As we continue to struggle with the flesh in this sin-plagued world, there will be moments when we feel God has left us and forsaken us. We may even doubt our salvation. This lack of assurance does not mean you are not saved. If God has saved you, you are saved and will be saved to the end no matter how you feel. But we do have the assurance of salvation, and it gives us joy to overcome the trials and difficulties of life. It helps us to press on for another day for Jesus’ sake.

Only God’s children will continue to press on to the end. If you are not, you will go back to the world in no time. The saved will definitely be preserved by God till the end. It is time for us to examine ourselves if we really love Jesus in our hearts. No one can answer on our behalf. Only we ourselves can answer for ourselves. If we can say we truly love Jesus in our hearts, then “Once saved, always saved” belongs to us forever. Remember this: the work which God has begun in you will, by His grace, be thoroughly and fully done according to His sovereign will. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Is going back to God the same as going back to church?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for saving me to the end.

REST FROM SUFFERING AND TROUBLE

Have you heard of the story of the moth's struggle? The cocoon of the moth is oval in shape. In order for the insect to be formed perfectly, it must force its way through the neck of the cocoon, struggling intensely. It is believed that the pressure which the moth's body is subjected to is a provision of nature to force the juices into the vessels of the wings. A person witnessed this struggle and, out of pity, took a pair of scissors and cut a larger hole to give the moth a helping hand. As a result, the moth's wings could not develop, and it spent its brief span of life crawling instead of flying through the air.

Going through struggles, trials and suffering is part and parcel of our Christian life. Sometimes we wonder why God allows us to go through struggles and pain like the moth who tries to struggle its way out of the cocoon. We often give up and ask God to intervene and remove our difficulties so that we need not have to suffer anymore. But does that help us? Look at what happened to the moth.

There are three types of situations which we as Christians may be in: (1) going through trials, (2) coming out of trials, and (3) going into trials. Whether we are in trials, or coming out of trials, or are heading towards trials, God desires us to know how to deal with every trial. He has given us the solution in His Word. Even then, it does not mean that troubles will stop and not come anymore. We continue to face troubles and sufferings in this life. We will rest from our troubles and sufferings eventually when we see our Saviour face to face. We will then rest in the bosom of our Saviour forever. All those who have troubled us and persecuted us will receive their just punishment. God will hold them accountable for every evil deed that they have done against Him and His people. Meanwhile, let us endure and press on, my dear friends, for Jesus' sake! May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: How will God punish disobedient Christians?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I look forward to the eternal rest in heaven from all my troubles and sufferings.

FRIDAY, MARCH 1

2 THESSALONIANS 2

EPHESIANS 1:4-6

*“...he hath chosen us in him before
the foundation of the world...”*

CHOSEN TO SALVATION

The Arminian view tells us that God’s choice of certain individuals for salvation before the foundation of the world was based upon His foreknowledge or foreseeing that they would respond to His call. He is believed to foreknow those who are capable of doing good, and so He gives them salvation. Those who chose to believe in God are believed to have based their decision on their own will and were not under any obligation. And God foresaw all this and therefore chose them into salvation. Thus, it is the sinner’s choice of salvation through Christ, and not God’s choice of the sinner from the very beginning.

However, the Calvinist view is that God’s choice of certain individuals for salvation was made before the foundation of the world and rested solely upon His own sovereign will. He did not choose certain individuals because He foresaw that they will believe in Him. Man plays no part in earning the favour of God or to deserve His divine election and calling. Election therefore was not determined by or conditioned upon any goodness foreseen in man (Eph 2:5, 8-10; Rom 9:11, 11:6; 2 Tim 1:9; Titus 3:5). Those whom God sovereignly elected, He brings through the power of the Holy Spirit to a willing acceptance of Christ. Thus, it is God’s choice of the sinner, not the sinner’s choice of salvation through Christ in the very beginning.

If God chooses us because we chose Him in the first place, then what is the use of God choosing us before the foundation of the world, since ultimately it is we who will choose Him? It will then make no difference whether He chose us or not. Is man greater than God? Therefore, we reject the view held by the Arminians. The Calvinist view exalts God’s sovereignty over man. It is He who has chosen us to salvation by His love, mercy and grace. Let us bow down before Him and give thanks for what He has done to save us from our sins. We did not choose Him first but He has chosen us unto salvation even before the foundation of the world. Amen.

THOUGHT: Did God elect me before Adam sinned or after he sinned?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for electing me to salvation.

THE LORD DIRECTS YOU TO HIS LOVE

The Christian faith goes beyond the religious obligation in a believer's life. It speaks of a relationship likened to that of a father and his child. There is a natural love between them. The father directs his child to his love. He does not push his child to other fathers. The father's love will show his child that he is irreplaceable. He will show him how much he loves him. And the child will understand that all that the father does for him is because he loves him. God is doing the same to His children. Are you aware that He is directing you to His love?

God knows we need His direction. We are unable to love rightly until He shows us how. God has given us His commandments in His Word. We are expected to keep all of them faithfully and to the best of our ability. The way to go about it is not to obey for the sake of obeying without the heart. We must obey because we love Him. This is what God desires from us. He does not want us to behave and respond like a robot or dummy that simply follows instruction without any emotion or feeling. God directs us to His love in order that we will love Him and obey Him with our hearts.

When we obey God with our hearts, we begin to see and understand His purpose for our life. We may be in difficult situations or terrible circumstances, but we will be directed by God into His love and we will rise above our difficulties. With Him, there is no mountain too high that we cannot climb, and there is no storm too rough that we cannot overcome. When God directs us, we can overcome, for He will ensure that we grow stronger in Him.

Let us be glad and thankful that the Lord is willing to direct us into His love. May we learn to love Him more and more, and enjoy His love now and forevermore. Amen.

THOUGHT: Is there any reason why I should not be directed by God into His love?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for directing me into Thy love.

SAVED IN CHILDBEARING

Apostle Paul exhorted Pastor Timothy to deal with the role of women in the home and church. Apparently some women in his church had become too vocal and had usurped the authority that rightfully belonged to the men. When God's blueprint for leadership in the home and church is not obeyed faithfully, there will be problems. God's blueprint is that the man is to lead, and the woman to submit. This is not because women are inferior. In God's eyes, both man and woman are equal. God's blueprint is about the administrative responsibilities and functional purposes on how a family and a church are to operate.

To submit to another person's authority is always a humbling thing to do. The role of the woman is a humble one. However, she holds an honourable position which man can never possess: motherhood. No man can be a mother, only women can be mothers. That in itself is an honour for women. That is why Apostle Paul wrote, *"Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety"* (1 Tim 2:15). By *"she"* Apostle Paul meant Eve and *"they"* he meant all Christian women who come after Eve. As much as women take the humble position of submission in the home and in church, God exalts them to take pride of position as mothers.

This shows that God loves women as much as He loves men. When God called men to lead and women to submit, it does not mean He loves the men more. He loves them equally. To all women, especially mothers, your role is important. Be encouraged and thank God for this honourable calling because He loves you. May the Lord strengthen your faith and help you as you seek to fulfil your God-given role as mother and bring up your children in the Lord. Amen.

THOUGHT: How does 1 Timothy 2:15 apply to single women or wives without children?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help all mothers to be encouraged to persevere in their role as mothers.

WORTHY OF DOUBLE HONOUR

Do you thank your pastor each Lord's Day after he has preached his sermon? I am not referring to the handshake you give him as you leave the sanctuary. Did you truly appreciate the effort that he has taken to teach you the whole counsel of God and to watch over your soul? The Bible says that he is worthy of double honour because of his faithfulness and diligence in church governance and the word ministry (1 Tim 5:17). The pastor is not at the pulpit to entertain you or to enable you to satisfy your "religious" obligation every Lord's Day. The pastor serves as God's messenger to guide you with God's Word.

How should you thank and appreciate your pastor? Apostle Paul quoted a verse from the Old Testament and also from Jesus. *"Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn"* (Deut 25:4). And *"...the labourer is worthy of his hire"* (Luke 10:7b). This means you are to show concern towards your pastor's needs. Your pastor has his basic needs and also the need to support his family, especially if he is the only breadwinner in his family. If you neglect him, it is equivalent to muzzling the ox that is treading out the corn, ie starving the ox which is working hard for you. While you seek to meet your pastor's needs as the Lord enables you, do not swing to the extreme of making him the richest man in town. The principle is: Let the church provide for her pastor's physical needs so that he may fully focus on providing for her spiritual needs.

Let us continue to pray for those who rule well, and who labour in the word and doctrine that the Lord may continue to bless them and strengthen them for the ministry. Truly they are worthy of double honour. May God's name be glorified. Amen.

THOUGHT: Is it alright for a pastor to hold a secular job so that he will not burden the church?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for faithful ministers to watch over my soul. Help me to love and care for them.

TUESDAY, MARCH 5

1 TIMOTHY 6:17-19

MATTHEW 6:21

*“For where your treasure is,
there will your heart be also.”*

GOD GIVETH US RICHLY ALL THINGS TO ENJOY

God’s desire for His own children is always centred on the spiritual life that requires them to build their treasures in heaven rather than on earth. That is why we are against the health-and-wealth or prosperity gospel that promotes the laying up of treasures on this earth. It measures blessings from God in terms of your health condition and the amount of your wealth. They believe that if you are poor in health and wealth, you have fallen out of God’s grace. Nothing can be further from the truth! How many faithful saints have died young due to sickness or martyrdom? And how many of them are rich in their lifetime?

By the way, it is not a sin to be rich materially. Abraham, David, Solomon, and many others were rich because God blessed them. It is also not a sin to seek for good health. However, it is a sin if our concern in this life is all about seeking a better physical life on this earth. We are not to trust in these things for comfort and security. We are to look to God who gives us richly all things to enjoy. We are to seek God first and His righteousness. We are to trust in Him for all our provision. All that the Lord blesses us with, whether in little or abundance, we are to use them for His glory.

As the song goes, “This world is not my home, I’m just a passing through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckon me from heaven’s open door, and I can’t feel at home in this world anymore” (Albert E. Brumley, 1905-1977). Our heavenly home must be our desire and longing. Right now while we are on this earth, let us live with the heavenly perspective in view knowing that whatever we have on earth is only temporal. One day, it will all pass away. With God, we have no lack. He is our everything, and He is our all. But if we have no God in our lives, we really have nothing even if we are the richest people in terms of material goods and health in this life. It all boils down to where your treasure is. There your heart will be. Amen.

THOUGHT: God certainly deserves the best from us. But why are our churches not built using gold, silver or precious stones?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for providing for all my needs.

GOD HATH NOT GIVEN US THE SPIRIT OF FEAR

It is easy to fear and be shaken by man. That is what Satan wants you to feel. He does not want you to look to God. He uses fear to control you so that you will seek man's approval, rather than God's. Pastor Timothy continued to face great challenges in his pastoral ministry in Ephesus. Apostle Paul wrote this second letter to him to encourage him. He wrote, *“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind”* (2 Tim 1:7). The spirit of fear causes the child of God to waver and be unstable in all that he does. This spirit of fear is a dangerous spirit. It destroys his trust and testimony which he is to bear for the Lord. This is not the spirit that God wants His children to have. What He has given us is the spirit of power, love and sound mind.

1) The spirit of power. It is no more you who do it but Christ who enables. Many a time, we find it difficult to stand up for the truth simply because we are in the minority. We would rather keep quiet and let it be. We forget that when we stand with God, we are the majority, even if we stand alone. This is the power God gives us for His sake. **2) The spirit of love.** Love is the greatest (1 Cor 13). It appeals to the heart more than the mind. Love is the driving force that seeks the truth and addresses sin in a God-honouring manner. Love forgives, restores and covers a multitude of sins. God is love. We are empowered to love, and we must love. **3) The spirit of a sound mind.** King Solomon asked nothing from God but wisdom and discernment to rule the country. This is also what we must seek after. We have only one life to live and we cannot afford to make bad decisions. We need a sound mind, a discerning spirit, to act wisely in this evil and cunning world. We must protect ourselves and our loved ones from the fiery attacks that come from the evil one.

Let us thank God for giving us the spirit of power, love and a sound mind.

THOUGHT: If I have the spirit of fear, am I possessed by the evil spirit?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to fear Thee, and not man.

THURSDAY, MARCH 7

2 TIMOTHY 2:6-13

1 PETER 4:19

*“Wherefore let them that suffer...,
as unto a faithful Creator.”*

HE ABIDETH FAITHFUL

The existence of God does not depend on whether sinful man acknowledges His existence or not. God continues to exist. He abideth faithful. God's faithfulness means that He will do everything He says He will do. He is absolutely reliable and true to His Word. He will not fail. He will not forget. He will not change. He will not disappoint. He says what He means and means what He says, and therefore whatever He says, He will definitely do. We can trust Him absolutely. God's faithfulness is at the core of His very nature.

Faithfulness is that thing that binds all of God's attributes together. What does it mean? God's faithfulness makes sure that each of God's attributes is working at full capacity at all times. Does God's love fail? Never. Faithfulness will make sure God's love is at its best. Does His justice flop? No. Faithfulness will maintain His perfect judgment. Does His wisdom fall by the wayside? Absolutely not. God will always be wise.

To say that God is faithful is to say that God is committed to you. He is steadfastly devoted to you. He is with you even when you are under the rubble of your life. Because He is faithful, all of us who believe in Him are under His care and protection.

God has been faithful to us in so many ways, even when we do not see it. You may not know what trouble is ahead of you. But you know who will go through it with you. Is that your hope? Where is your hope? You have no hope at all if Jesus is not your Saviour and Lord. Only when you confess your sin, repent and believe in Him who has died on the cross of Calvary and rose again from the dead some 2,000 years ago, will you have hope of everlasting life. Will you believe in Him today? Our God is a faithful God. You can trust in Him absolutely for He abideth faithful. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: If God is faithful, why does He allow His children to suffer?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me always to believe that Thou art faithful.

FRIDAY, MARCH 8

2 TIMOTHY 3:14-17

MATTHEW 7:24-27

*“... I will liken him unto a wise man,
which built his house upon a rock.”*

WISE UNTO SALVATION

What is one thing that is vital to make one wise? It is the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. Timothy's mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois, personally taught Timothy from his suckling days to know the Holy Scriptures (2 Tim 1:5, 3:15). What a privilege for Timothy to be born into a Christian family!

Can we say that of our children? Are our children growing up in the grace and knowledge of our risen Saviour Jesus Christ? Are we teaching our own children the way of the Lord so that they may not depart from it as they grow? Every parent desires that his child will grow up to be a successful person in society, not one who will spend his life behind bars or a good-for-nothing who wastes his life away idling, and brings nothing but grief and pain to the family. Yes, it is absolutely true that we may not be able to control what our children will eventually become in the future, whether good or bad. But we can do something now as they are growing up under our care. We can do our part by teaching them, educating them, and nurturing them in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. Let us ensure that from a young age, they will know the Holy Scriptures which is able to make them wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I pray and hope that you are convinced that parents have an important role to play in nurturing their children. So many have, to their own pain and regrets, carelessly neglected their children. In order to teach our children, we must be taught first. How can we teach our children well if we ourselves have not learnt them first? Have we known the Holy Scriptures ourselves that will make us wise unto salvation? Are you growing in true wisdom? It is high time to get down to serious reading and studying of God's Word. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Since God's Word can make me wise unto salvation, why do I still act foolishly at times?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for giving me Thy Word that will make me wise unto salvation

GOD CANNOT LIE

God cannot lie simply because He is God. It goes against His nature and all that He is. God is no liar, but Satan is! Jesus says that the devil is the father of lies (John 8:44). He is a liar and there is no truth in him. As all of us are born in sin, we are by nature children of the devil. Naturally we know how to tell lies because we are the children of the father of lies. This world is ruled by him and obviously what we see is a world of lies. Husbands cheat on their wives by having extra-marital affairs. Businessmen cheat their customers by giving them fake goods. Students cheat in their examination in order to get good grades. Athletes cheat by taking steroids in order to win. How many have been caught? Yet, the number of such cases keeps increasing. In this world of lies, we need to learn to tell the truth.

We need to learn God’s truth. We live in an era when some claim that there are no absolute truths. To them, truth is that which is right in their own eyes. Everyone lives with his own truth. There is no absolute, but varieties of truth which teach “All truth is God’s truth.” This sounds very “sound,” but unfortunately it is the devil’s blatant lie. All truth is not God’s truth! God’s truth is all truth. Think about that! In a world searching for the truth, dear friends, the truth is closer than we think. Jesus stands with us today as the glorious King of kings and Lord of lords. He says, *“I am the way, the TRUTH and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”* (John 14:6).

Many are still trapped under the bondage of ignorance and sin today. Are you? Today, let the Truth set you free. You may be trapped in a life of sin, but are you willing to let go and let God free you from the bondage of ignorance and the bondage of sin? Remember, God cannot lie! Amen.

THOUGHT: Can God lie if He wants to?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to learn Thy truth.

THE BLESSED HOPE

How do we look at hope? How do we understand hope? Often, we measure hope by the things we can see. For example, a student after taking an extremely difficult examination, believes he will surely fail; there is no hope. But when the result is released, everyone passed. There is hope after all. A couple, who was married for more than ten years, had no children. They wanted one but could not, and so they gave up. They decided to adopt a child. All of a sudden, the wife conceived and gave birth to their first child. There is hope after all. There was a doctor who told his cancer-stricken patient that he had only six months to live. But six months have come and gone. Two years have since passed and today he is still undergoing treatment. There is still hope after all. Hope according to man depends heavily upon the things he can see. But hope according to God is that which we cannot see. Someone said, "It is only when everything is hopeless, then hope begins to be a strength." Think about this. When everything seems to be hopeless, then HOPE begins to be a strength. Have you ever felt that way?

Many are mindful of all that are in this life. If I guarantee you that you would retire at age fifty in good health and wealth, and live in a wonderful house with a successful marriage and children, and live to a ripe old age, will you believe me? I know you will not. Anyway, no man will ever give you that kind of a guarantee! As much as we desire all of that, no one can promise it! God did not promise us that we will die rich without any health problems. If so, He would have had that written down in His Word for us. No, God promises us more than this life on earth. For this reason, Jesus rose again from the dead. More than this earthly life, it is eternal life that He wants to impart to us. This promise is worth more than all your years of retirement combined and all the riches of this world gathered together. When Jesus comes in His glory, we shall also be received into His glory. This is our blessed hope. Amen.

THOUGHT: Why is hope called blessed, lively and living?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for the blessed hope of the glorious coming of Jesus Christ for me.

MONDAY, MARCH 11

PHILEMON 1:8-16

LUKE 17:1-4

“... if he repent, forgive him.”

FOR LOVE’S SAKE

Serving as a peacemaker for two conflicting parties in the church is part and parcel of the pastoral ministry. In the Epistle to Philemon, Apostle Paul encouraged the master to receive his repentant servant in love again. Is Christian brotherly love really able to cover a multitude of sins? Yes, for love’s sake, Apostle Paul said in Philemon 1:9. He had no doubt that brotherly love and forgiveness will prevail.

“Philemon” means “the affectionate one.” He lived up to his name and brought joy and encouragement to the people around him. It is believed that he died a martyr for his faith at the hands of Emperor Nero. Onesimus was Philemon’s lowly, runaway slave who was saved under the ministry of Apostle Paul by the grace of God. Not only was he converted to the faith, he became a trusted and profitable helper to Paul. Paul could have kept Onesimus with him as a trusted servant of the gospel. But he knew he had to send Onesimus back to Philemon, the rightful owner of Onesimus. Apostle Paul wanted Philemon to know that he was sending Onesimus back as a transformed man. Onesimus was not just Philemon’s slave, he was also his brother in the same faith. And Paul wanted Philemon to forgive Onesimus and treat him as a fellow brother in Christ for love’s sake.

Forgiveness is a beautiful, loving expression upon the one who is graciously restored and received back into fellowship though he may not deserve it. The one who forgives shows his large heart of love, compassion and mercy. Is there anyone who is in need of your forgiveness? If you withhold your forgiveness, it is likely that you have not truly understood the extent of the forgiveness that God has graciously given you. Will you forgive others for the sake of God’s love? Consider how God has forgiven you because He loves you and gave Jesus Christ for you. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Is forgiveness complete if the sinful act is not forgotten?

PRAYER: O Heavenly Father, help me forgive others even as Thou hast forgiven me.

HE WAS IN ALL POINTS TEMPTED LIKE AS WE ARE

In the Old Testament, the high priest was someone whom God had specially called to represent His people to come before Him to offer sacrifices on their behalf. There was only one high priest at any one time. The high priest entered the Most Holy Place once a year to make atonement both for himself and for the people he represented. He would do this year after year. He would first offer a sacrifice for his own sins and then another for the sins of the people. The reason the high priest offered a sacrifice for his own sins is that he himself was also a sinner. He had to keep himself pure and holy from beginning to end. When he went into the Most Holy Place, a rope would be tied around his waist. The other end of the rope would be held by the people outside the Temple of God. Should the high priest be struck dead inside the Most Holy Place by God for his sin, the people would pull his dead body out of the Most Holy place. It is indeed *“a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”* (Heb 10:31).

Jesus, in the flesh, is fully man like us. He knows what it means to be hungry, to be tired, to feel pain, etc. He faced temptations daily just like us. He *“was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin”* (Heb 4:15). For thirty-three years on this sinful earth, Jesus kept all the commandments of God perfectly. The truth and fact that He has done it is good news for us. All other high priests that came in the line of Aaron (and Aaron himself) had to atone for their own sins first and then for the sins of others. But Jesus is the only Great High Priest who needs no sacrifice to cleanse His own sin, for He has no sin at all. He offered Himself as the sinless sacrifice to God to atone for our sins. Only Jesus saves! He became that sinless, unblemished, and perfect sacrifice to be offered once and for all, with no need to be repeated. Indeed we testify with John the Baptizer who said, *“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world”* (John 1:29). Have you received Jesus as your sinless sacrifice? If you have, you are saved forever. Thanks be to God for saving us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Jesus' physical death saved me from spiritual death.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for Jesus Christ for being my sinless sacrifice.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13

HEBREWS 6:10-12

1 CORINTHIANS 10:31

*“... whatsoever ye do, do all
to the glory of God.”*

GOD REMEMBERS YOUR WORK AND LABOUR OF LOVE

It is not wrong to receive the reward and appreciation that others may show us for the work we have done. When they remember us, we thank God. But what if they did not? Should we get upset and be angry? Man being sinful and imperfect may neglect or forget to show his appreciation. We, too, on many occasions have forgotten or neglected to show our appreciation to others. The only One who will never forget is God. *“For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister”* (Heb 6:10).

The work and labour of love we are to do can be anything as long as they bring glory to God, and our fellow believers are blessed and ministered to. Such work is not confined to the four walls of the church. Wherever we may be (in church, home, school, workplace, etc), we must still bear the name of Christ and be a blessing to others. We are not here to establish our own name or reputation. What name is more important than God’s name? It is a name that is *“...above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth”* (Phil 2:9b-10).

We are not here to be served but to serve God and one another. When Jesus came down from heaven to dwell among sinful men, He did not come as a king but as a lowly servant. *“For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many”* (Mark 10:45). This is the attitude and purpose that all Christians must have. The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Let us bear this in mind so that we will not seek to be man-pleasers. May God help us to give ourselves fully and be committed to glorifying Him in all our work and labour of love. Amen.

THOUGHT: What is my purpose or motive for serving in church?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, may Thy name be glorified in all that I do.

GOD NEVER CHANGES!

Hebrews 13:8 is a verse that stands out in our ever-changing world. How can our ever-changing mind be able to fully comprehend and understand the God who remains unchanged for eternity? We know how fickle-minded and unstable man can be. We may make a certain decision now, but later we change our mind. The situation has become such that we need to bind one another's words with vows, contracts or some form of agreement that should there be any breach of trust or promise by any party, a penalty can be imposed.

The truth is stated clearly that our Saviour never changes. What a comfort this is to our soul! This truth strengthens and assures us all that what God has promised in His precious Word, He will surely fulfil. If God is not the same; if God could possibly change what He has said in His Word, then our faith in Him would be greatly shaken and He would not be that SOLID Rock upon which we can build our lives. His unchanging nature should cause us to rejoice in the greatness of our unchanging God!

God needs no change because He is already perfect. As for us, we need to change and we must change because we are imperfect. We are called to be perfect even as God is perfect (Matt 5:48). Our change must be for the better. This is only possible because we are in Christ. The world that is ruled by Satan is in darkness. And that is why the world is changing not for the better but for the worse.

Do not look to man because he is imperfect. Look to God because He is perfect. When man fails you and forsakes you, thank God that He has not and will never leave you nor forsake you! When you sin and fall short of what God wants you to be; when your life is in a total mess, thank God that you can still count on His faithfulness and everlasting love to bring you back to Himself again. May the immutable Lord, the same yesterday, today, and forever be with us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Jesus changes His physical form. Is that not a change?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to be perfect as Thou art perfect.

FRIDAY, MARCH 15

JAMES 1:2-12

1 PETER 1:6-9

*“Blessed is the man that
endureth temptation...”*

COUNT IT ALL JOY

Our life is not a bed of roses. God did not promise us a trouble-free life. But He has promised in His Word to be with us through every trial we face in life. Everyone who belongs to Christ must be prepared to face trials and suffering.

As long as we live in this fallen and sinful world, in our mortal bodies that corrupt, we will always have to fight against changes, illnesses, disappointments, and difficulties of life. Some of us may have experienced the sorrow of losing a loved one to cancer or some other illnesses. Others may have experienced the bitterness of a failed relationship. And perhaps many have faced countless failures or disappointments, or the agony of being retrenched and not being able to find a job for a period of time.

All these are part and parcel of life. Sometimes, we could be so badly affected that we thought we almost could not hold on any longer. But still we have to hang on. How can we learn to cope better? Our children in Sunday school sing: “With Christ in the vessel, we can smile at the storm...” It is an action song that our children love to sing and certainly we can see the smile and the joy on their little faces. But when the storm of our lives comes, will we really be able to smile? Apostle James says, “*My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations*” (James 1:2). God would not have given us this verse if it is impossible for a believer to count it all joy to face trials on earth. Surely God’s Word is true and powerful.

If only we trust God’s Word, how much anxiety and many heartaches we could have avoided! Let us learn to count it all joy even in the midst of trials and difficulties. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Isn’t it easier if God just removes all my troubles?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to rejoice in the midst of troubles.

SATURDAY, MARCH 16

JAMES 2:1-13

1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-31

"But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise..."

GOD HATH ALSO CHOSEN THE POOR OF THIS WORLD

In this physical world, it is the rich, the educated, and the powerful who are given positions of good standing in society. They are recognized, heard and given the honour, especially because of their contribution and achievement. What about the poor, the uneducated, and the outcasts of society? They are rejected, and are under the mercy of those above them simply because they have less or no achievement to their names.

This is to be expected from our physical world. In the spiritual realm, however, it is completely different. God looks upon His creation from a totally different perspective. In the spiritual realm, true faith removes all discrimination. Whether male or female, young or old, rich or poor, all are equal in the eyes of God. The fact that God has also included the poor of this world to be heirs of His kingdom reveals to us God's completely different perspective. What can the poor do? According to the world, there is little or nothing that they can do for them to be recognized. But to God, He is looking for those who are rich in faith (James 2:5), and these can include both the materially rich as well as the materially poor. You cannot buy faith with money or exchange anything for it. This richness in faith is promised to them who love God. It is that simple! Yet we know that there are many (including ourselves) who have often loved the world and ourselves more than we love God.

Just as God did not despise the poor for who they are but also included them in His kingdom, let us do the same. Let us welcome with open arms all whom the world despises. They may not come with expensive clothing on their backs or with a big offering in their hands. What does it matter? God loves them and we are to show our love to them too. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: If God rewards those who are richer in faith, is this not also a form of partiality?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for loving me even though I am materially poor.

HE GIVETH MORE GRACE TO THE HUMBLE

Which are you: proud or humble? If you admit you are proud, then you must repent immediately. But if you think you are humble, make sure you pray that you will remain humble. The moment you open your mouth and declare you are humble, you are no longer humble. Is this not ironical? Yet it is true. It is a virtue we cannot call ourselves but by others. Otherwise we are disqualified immediately.

"God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (James 4:6, Prov 3:34). Grace is God's gift of blessing. It is the grace in Christ that is to be found in God's children, eg: love, joy, peace, patience, hope, knowledge, etc. God's children are supposed to be dependent upon God to provide for them. Should they become proud, the blessings of God will be withheld. The love, joy, peace and other blessings that they had will not be enjoyed in its fullness. If they are truly God's children, they will surely not lose their salvation but certainly God will resist them because they have become proud. And surely, God will humble them so that they may realize His power and their own weaknesses.

However, God will give more grace to the humble. He will cause them to grow in grace, that they are able to love God and one another even more, and experience the joy of salvation and the peace of God in their hearts. The proud cannot enjoy these blessings because they have rejected them. The *"proud"* literally refer to those who show themselves higher than others. This may be due to their wealth, career, status, strength, appearance, fame, etc. We can be proud of anything. Do we want God to humble us by making us go through great failures and embarrassment? Let us learn now to be humble before Him and the world. And remember He giveth more grace to the humble. Amen.

THOUGHT: Should I pray that God humble me? Or should I rather humble myself?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for reminding me that I am to be humble and not proud.

THINGS THE ANGELS DESIRE TO LOOK INTO

Angels are spirits which God has created in the beginning to serve Him in heaven. They witnessed the fall of man and how God graciously provided a way of salvation for fallen man. In fact, on several occasions God used the angels as His messengers to bring messages of salvation, love, grace, judgment, wrath, ministry, etc to His people.

However, God treated angels differently from man. When Lucifer fell and one-third of the heavenly angels chose to follow him, they all fell with no hope of restoration. God has no message of redemption for them. For angels who chose to serve God, they remain in that position forever. For angels who chose to follow Lucifer and become demons, they are condemned and reserved for the fire of hell forever. Therefore, their destiny is fixed and nothing can change that.

For angels who have never sinned, they do not have the experiential knowledge of what it means to be separated from God. And they will also not know entirely what it means to have a broken relationship restored. But we know. We experience the joy of salvation; the joy of receiving forgiveness, the joy of being adopted into the family of God. And we also know what it is like to turn away from idols to worshipping God, and from the world's darkness into God's light of salvation. We know all these by experiential knowledge. But not the angels. To them, they can only watch. They can only be the audience. They desire to see what this joy of salvation is all about that we experience. O what a great and everlasting love God has for us! Even the angels desire to see the unfolding of God's great redemption plan for this sinful world. What about us? Have we taken God for granted? Let us thank God for His great and marvellous love. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Satan and his host of demons are spiritual beings. How will they experience torment and pain without a physical body?

PRAYER: O Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for the great salvation in Jesus Christ.

TUESDAY, MARCH 19

1 PETER 2:21-25

ISAIAH 53

"... with his stripes we are healed."

CHRIST SUFFERED FOR US

It must be understood that it was the second person of the Holy Trinity who suffered for us. Two thousand years ago, He left His heavenly throne of glory to dwell among sinful men in this dark world. While remaining fully God, He put on human flesh in order to be subjected to its limitation and weaknesses. He willingly took upon Himself this form of humiliation in obedience to His Father's will.

As a disciple of Jesus, Peter can testify personally to the suffering of Jesus. He was present in the courtyard of the high priest when Jesus was tried by the Sanhedrin. Peter was also fully acquainted with the trial before Pontius Pilate. The chief priests and elders accused Jesus of many things but He made no reply. And when Jesus hanged on the cross, He suffered without complaint. All the scourging Jesus received before He was crucified and the wounds inflicted on Him when He was crucified were the penalty Jesus paid for the redemption of the believer. *"... with his stripes we are healed."* Every suffering that ultimately led to His death works to save us from our sins. What a sacrificial love He has for us!

Jesus is the supreme example of unselfish submission to suffering. God desires the Christian who suffers unjustly to look to Jesus from whom he can receive new strength for body and soul. Therefore, the Christian is able to sing the words of Charles H. Gabriel:

*More like the Master I would ever be,
More of His meekness, more humility;
More zeal to labour, more courage to be true,
More consecration for work He bids me do.*

Christ left behind an example which we ought to follow. Let us be willing to suffer for Christ's sake, and even to die for Him. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Is there anything wrong if I do not suffer for Christ?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to be willing to suffer for Christ.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20

1 PETER 5:6-9

PSALM 55:22

*“Cast thy burden upon the LORD,
and he shall sustain thee...”*

GOD CARES FOR YOU

Do you sometimes feel like no one cares for you? No one seems to be bothered about how you are doing. No one seems to observe or notice that you are troubled or suffering. David, a man after God's own heart, was not spared from such thoughts. He cried in Psalm 142:4, *“I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul.”* But we know God cares. In fact, we know that David enjoyed the best care from God when he was in the wilderness, pursued by his enemies. In the same way, God cares for you. Whatever worries or burdens you may have, give them to Jesus. He has promised to take care of you, and surely He will keep His word. Join me to sing the great hymn by Joseph Scriven:

*What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer!*

*Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer.*

*Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge, take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer;
In His arms He'll take and shield thee; thou wilt find a solace there.*

*Blessed Savior, Thou hast promised Thou wilt all our burdens bear;
May we ever, Lord, be bringing all to Thee in earnest prayer.
Soon in glory bright unclouded there will be no need for prayer.
Rapture, praise and endless worship will be our sweet portion there.*

THOUGHT: If my friends care for me, will God still care for me?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for caring for me.

YE SHALL NEVER FALL

The word *"never"* is translated from two Greek negatives, making it a strong double negative. Literally, it could be translated as "Ye shall no not (*never*) fall." Can this be true? Or is it simply an ideal? Did God really promise us that we will never fall? How do we understand this when we know that we do sometimes fall? The meaning of the word *"fall"* is crucial to our understanding. The aorist tense of *"fall"* used here reveals that such a *"fall"* is one that offers no hope of restoration. This means that once a believer is saved, he will never *"fall"* and lose his salvation.

However, this does not negate the fact that there are believers who do not have the assurance of salvation. Having no assurance of salvation does not mean that they are not saved. This verse in 2 Peter stands. Salvation does not depend on man, but on God.

Although divine election does not depend on us, there is human responsibility to make sure of this election. This is why Apostle Peter called the believers to *"give diligence to make your calling and election sure."* He who is sure of his salvation will prove that he is indeed a child of God. There is no pretense or hypocrisy but humility and gratitude to God for the great salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you continue to sin and not live your life in sincerity and in truth, you will doubt your salvation. If you take no step to correct your life according to God's will, it is highly possible that you are not saved in the first place. If you are not saved, how will there be love for God in your heart? You may have come to God with selfish motives and you are just deceiving yourself. No one can make your calling and election sure for you. Only you can do it. If you are truly saved, you will be serious and deal with the sins in your life immediately. But if you take it lightly, God's judgment against you is sure and you will stand before Him condemned and unsaved. While there is still hope and opportunity now, repent and make sure of your salvation, before it is too late. Amen.

THOUGHT: How can I have the assurance of salvation?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee that I will never fall out of Thy grace and mercy.

THE LORD KNOWETH HOW TO DELIVER THE GODLY

Apostle Peter used the examples of Noah and Lot to illustrate that the Lord knew how to deliver the godly. The word "*know*" refers to the absolute knowledge that is without any doubt. It is in the perfect tense, emphasizing the permanent state of God's absolute knowledge. There is no need for us to tell God what to do or how to deliver us from our troubles. God is in total control and He knows absolutely. This is the confidence that we must have in order to live victoriously in whatever circumstances we may be in. God Himself will deliver us and go through our difficulties with us.

The godly will be delivered by God, and not by chance or accident. The godly are those whom God has made godly. They are those who have been wonderfully called out of darkness into His marvellous light, whose sins have been washed by the blood of the Lamb of God. Are your sins washed by the blood of Christ? If so, you can be assured that God will also deliver you out of temptations. He will give you His sufficient grace and strength to go through difficulties. If you have indeed suffered greatly and painfully for Jesus' sake, rest assured that God is with you. He is going through your pain with you. Justice will prevail eventually and He will vindicate you accordingly.

The day of judgment is coming. Whose side will you be on? Will you be found on the Lord's side? The world continues to reject Christ and continues in her unbelief. The end is near. Christ is coming to judge the world. No one will be able to escape. In Jesus' first coming, He came as a Lamb, meek and lowly to bring God's peace to sinful man. In His second coming, He will come as a King to bring God's judgment upon all His enemies. No one can escape, except the godly who shall be delivered. The godly shall be protected and will rest in their Saviour's bosom forever. Come to the Lord now, and be saved.

THOUGHT: There are many Christian martyrs in church history. Why did God not deliver them?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, may Thy grace be sufficient for me that I may stand firm against the fiery darts of the evil one.

SATURDAY, MARCH 23

2 PETER 3:8-18

HEBREWS 11:24-29

*“By faith he forsook Egypt, ... for he endured,
as seeing Him who is invisible.”*

THE LONGSUFFERING OF THE LORD IS SALVATION

It is time to think. This is what Apostle Peter is calling his readers to do by the word “*account*.” It is a word which means that we must consider carefully and come to a decision. This same Greek word in Hebrews 11:26, translated “*esteemed*,” was used to describe Moses considering carefully before he made the decision to follow the Jehovah God. After Moses had considered carefully, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to suffer affliction with God’s people rather than enjoy palace life. It was no hasty decision, but one that was made after careful thought. And God blessed him.

Have you also thought carefully about the salvation that God has brought to you? God’s door of salvation is open now. Are you sure you have entered? Or are you still standing at the door? God could have closed His door of salvation yesterday. But it is still open today. Let us not take for granted that it will still be opened tomorrow. Have you been rejecting Him and hardening your heart against Him? If so, it is time to stop. You must repent of your sins, and believe in Him today. The longsuffering of the Lord is salvation. Today is the day of salvation. Now is the opportune time to come and taste of God’s goodness. For all you know, tomorrow may not come for you. It will be too late then.

God is waiting for you to respond. He will be your heavenly Father now if you acknowledge Him and trust in His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, as your Lord and Saviour. Like Moses, we must forsake our “Egypt” and esteem “*the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt*.” Moses has considered carefully and he never turned back. What about you?

THOUGHT: Since God is the One who has chosen me, why am I still given a choice to choose?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for choosing me to salvation.

BEHOLD WHAT MANNER OF LOVE!

Consider for a moment who we really are. What is so good about us that God should love us? Why should He give us His Son to die on our behalf in order that we may become His adopted children? It is already a high privilege to be taken note of by God. But for God to declare and express His unconditional and sacrificial love (the highest form of love) to us specially, can we really fully describe His love? Can we fill a piece of A4 paper explaining why God should love us and give us the privilege of sonship? And if we are to write down why God should not love us but should let us perish in everlasting fire, will a ream of paper be enough?

We are absolutely unworthy of God to save, yet He did. All the reasons and evidences that condemn us to perish in the torment of hell are ready against us, yet He sent Jesus to pay the penalty of our sins for us. How can our hearts not be filled with thanksgiving and gratitude that God should love us this way?

God has given His only begotten Son to the world, but not many want to receive Him. This is because they love darkness more than light. That is why they have chosen to reject Him. What about you? Do you know that when you receive His Son as your Lord and Saviour, your status changes immediately and completely? You will no longer be a child of the devil. You will be a child of the most high God. You will have a relationship with God to count on. It will be a relationship that links you to God in heaven. This relationship used to be broken because of sin. Now it will no longer be broken but can be completely restored because of what Jesus has done on the cross of Calvary for you. May we sing this beautiful verse over and over again: *"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God..."* Amen.

THOUGHT: Can I still say I am unworthy when God has counted me worthy to receive His salvation?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast counted me worthy to be part of Thy family.

MONDAY, MARCH 25

1 JOHN 4:7-21

DEUTERONOMY 7:7-10

“... because the LORD loved you...”

GOD FIRST LOVED US

Does it really matter who loves first? Sometimes, couples in relationship quarrel over who loves the other more. This should hardly be an issue at all. Now back to the question. Does it really matter who loves first, God or us? I must submit to you that it matters and this is important to us. This is because there is no way we are able to love God unless He has made that first move to love us.

On our own, we do not know what true love is. The kind of love we do know is a self-centered, selfish and evil one. We love ourselves more than any other thing, including God. Can we love God with this kind of love? Since we do not know what true love is, how can we love God? The logical solution is but one. We must know this true love and experience it first. God has made that first move to love us. And He has never stopped loving us. That changes us completely.

God is love. To know Him is to know love, and to know how to love. Love is always giving. And God has demonstrated that love by giving to us His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. He first loved us and He gave His all for us. That is sacrificial love, and unconditional too. Are we lovable? Are we, who are born sinners, on good terms with Him? No, He first loved us, when we were still His enemies, and He still loves us. That is unconditional love! We cannot buy His love. He paid for our sins with His own blood. If this is not love, what is?

O how great and everlasting the love of God is towards us! Let us echo the words of Frederick M. Lehman:

*The love of God is greater far than tongue or pen can ever tell;
It goes beyond the highest star, And reaches to the lowest hell;
The guilty pair, bowed down with care, God gave His Son to win;
His erring child He reconciled, And pardoned from his sin.*

*O love of God, how rich and pure! How measureless and strong!
It shall forevermore endure, The saints' and angels' song.*

THOUGHT: Does God the Father love me more than His Son?

PRAYER: O Heavenly Father, help me to love Thee more.

TUESDAY, MARCH 26

1 JOHN 5:1-5

PSALM 40:8

*"I delight to do thy will, O my God:
yea, thy law is within my heart."*

HIS COMMANDMENTS ARE NOT GRIEVOUS

Oftentimes we struggle with trying to obey the commandments of God. How can anyone keep them? The standard of God is perfect but we are imperfect. How can I forgive and love my enemies? Why should I stay married when there is no more love? Must I be different from others and not go drinking, smoking or gambling and be labeled anti-social? Apostle John wrote, *"His commandments are not grievous."* How can we understand this profound statement? Are God's commandments really not burdensome at all?

The answer is yes, for many reasons. The greatest reason is because God loves us. And because He loves us, He wants to be good to us. He wants to be fair to us. He wants the best for us. He wants us to be happy. If that is so, why is it that His commandments are so difficult to obey? It is difficult and burdensome only when we do not love Him enough. If God is not placed number one in our hearts, it will always be burdensome for us to obey and follow Him. It is important who possesses that first and only position in our hearts. We will always follow that number one in our hearts. Is it money, friends or us? If we place God first in our hearts, all His commandments will not be grievous to us at all. Instead we will find them a great delight. We will love to obey Him and we will also hate to disobey Him. And we will not allow anyone or anything to come between us and God. And whatever we do, we will consider Him first.

If God is first in your heart, I thank and praise God for that! Indeed His commandments will not be grievous to you simply because you are His child. If not, you will find even the easiest of God's commandments most grievous and burdensome. Will you make sure that you are His child?

THOUGHT: Will my salvation be questionable if I do not give God first place in my heart?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, may I find Thy commandments a delight and not grievous.

FOR THE TRUTH’S SAKE

By now, we know what the truth is. The problem with us is that many a time we do not obey the truth which we claim to know. We know it is wrong to lie, yet we continue to tell lies. We know it is a sin to covet that which do not belong to us, yet we still do it. We know we must obey God at all times, yet sometimes we deliberately sin against Him.

Knowledge of the truth should and must affect our lives, otherwise it will only make us puffed up. The more we know the truth, the wiser we ought to be. All the truth that God wants us to know is found in His Word. With the Holy Spirit as our Guide, we shall know the truth and the truth shall make us free indeed (John 8:32).

The Bible principally teaches what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man. If you are an engineer, you will acquire all possible knowledge in this field and excel in it. If you are an administrator, you will seek to learn every skill that is needed in the office environment. What about a Christian? A Christian is one who is born again, saved, having his sins all forgiven and redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. He is now a child of God and belong to Christ forever. How can a child of God not seek to know God and perform that which God has required of him? Unfortunately, many of us are guilty of this. We allow ourselves to be easily influenced by the world and be drawn away by the lust of our eyes, the lust of our flesh and the pride of life. As a result, we are not enjoying God and we often pierce ourselves with many sorrows.

If we say we know the truth, for the truth’s sake let our lives show it. May God help us to always seek Him to know the truth that will make us free. Amen.

THOUGHT: Is all truth God’s truth?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, open my eyes to see Thy Truth.

NO GREATER JOY

Apostle John revealed to us his pastoral heart in 3 John 4: *“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.”* His joy is not in his position and authority. His joy is not in a building made of mortar and bricks. His joy is not in the church treasury. Instead, his joy is found in the spiritual growth of God’s people. I can safely say that this is also the heart of our God: *“There is no greater joy than to hear that My children walk in truth.”*

In this short book of only fourteen verses, Apostle John mentioned three different personalities. First is Gaius, the recipient of this epistle. John rejoiced when he heard of Gaius’ consistent and faithful walk in God’s truth. He especially mentioned his generosity and love to the church and even to strangers. Gaius showed a strong and powerful testimony of his faith. In contrast to Gaius’ example, John mentioned a second person, Diotrephes. He was a bad egg who did not walk according to the truth. He loved the upper seats which indicated high position and authority. Jesus had condemned the Pharisees and scribes of His time for such an attitude. Diotrephes refused to accept the word of the Apostle or his spiritual authority. Certainly this brought no joy to the Apostle. He warned others not to follow Diotrephes’ bad example. The third person mentioned was Demetrius. Not much detail was given except that he had obtained a good report which many testified. Like Gaius, Demetrius walked in God’s truth faithfully. And God’s people were encouraged to follow his good example.

How is your walk today? Are you walking faithfully in God’s truth? If you are, know that there is no greater joy in the heart of God. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Why should my walk in truth bring joy to the Lord?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to walk in Thy truth always.

KEEP YOURSELF IN THE LOVE OF GOD

What if we do not keep ourselves in the love of God? Will anything bad happen? Jude was warning his readers against the false and apostate teachers in their midst. It was easy to be distracted and get carried away by the sweet words of these cunning fellows (Jude 1:16). If they do not keep themselves in the love of God, they will be lured to other kinds of love around them. The love of this world, the love of self and material things, etc are a few which can shipwreck our Christian faith. The word “*keep*” means to guard and secure. Believers are to guard themselves in God’s agape love. Even though salvation for believers is firmly secured and guarded by God’s love from beginning to end, it does not mean that they can abuse God’s love and live any way they like. True salvation brings a child of God to choose godly living and obedience to God. When you are called to keep yourself in God’s love, it simply means that you are to do only those things that please the God who loves you. If you are not careful, you may be led to behave foolishly and destroy your own Christian testimony. Our minds and hearts are prone to wander into sin. There is always a great need to guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, doing only those things that please and glorify Him.

Robert Robinson spent years wandering in disillusionment, and gradually defected from the God he once loved. That love for God, once so fiery and passionate, had died within him, leaving him dark and cold inside. One Sunday morning, a lady offered him a ride to church in her carriage. She mentioned a poem he had written many years ago. When they came to the third line of the last stanza, tears began to flood his eyes. He confessed, “I wrote these words, and I have been living these words. ‘Prone to wander...prone to leave the God I love.’” The lady then said to him, “But sir, you also wrote, ‘Here’s my heart, O take and seal it.’ You can offer your heart again to God, Mr Robinson. It’s not too late.” Indeed it was not too late for Robert Robinson to give his heart to God again. From that moment he came back to God and walked with Him for the rest of his life.

THOUGHT: Will a child of God backslide and not come back again?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, keep me in Thy love always.

AS MANY AS I LOVE, I REBUKE AND CHASTEN

The Laodicean Church had become lukewarm in their faith and missions. It had become so bad that Christ was ready to spue them out of His mouth. Actually, this rebuke was an evidence of His love. For He said, *“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten”* (Rev 3:19a). Experiencing divine discipline is one of the marks of a child of God. God disciplines His own children when they become disobedient.

There is only a fine line between one who has backslided and one who is totally lost. What is that fine line? It is divine discipline. All who have backslided will be disciplined by God until they return to the right path. To the lost, there is no divine discipline for them at all. But that is not good news because what is reserved for them at the end is worse than divine discipline. It is eternal damnation and judgment in the lake of fire that will burn forever and never be quenched!

D. L. Moody said of God’s discipline, “When I was a boy, my mother used to send me outdoors to get a stick to whip me when I had to be punished. At first I used to stand off from the rod as far as I could. But I soon found that the whipping hurt more that way. So I went as near to my mother as I could, and found she could not strike me as hard. And so when God chastens us, let us kiss the rod and draw as near to Him as we can.”

There will always be something in us that needs God’s correction because we are imperfect. When God chastises us, He is shaping us into a perfect man. Divine discipline is the solution that chases away the grief and sorrow occupying our hearts and allows us to experience joy and peace. Let us trust God that His discipline will bring the peaceable fruit of righteousness. Trust and obey. Repent and stop sinning. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: How can I prevent myself from being lukewarm?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me learn from Thy divine discipline.

GOD SHALL WIPE AWAY ALL TEARS

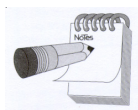
What are all these tears? Tears of joy, or tears of sorrow? If these are tears of joy, there is no need for God to wipe them away. These must be tears of sorrow which the saints had endured for their precious faith on the earth. The first time God said He will wipe away all tears was to the tribulation saints who endured and came out of the Great Tribulation (Rev 7:17). What is the significance of God wiping away those tears of sorrow? It shows that the saints who suffered were receiving their comfort and rest. All that they had gone through had not been in vain. The Lord remembers and He will comfort them. *“Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted”* (Matt 5:4).

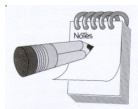
Interestingly the same compound Greek word for “wipe away” is also translated as “blot out” in Revelation 3:5. There will be those whose names are blotted out of the Book of Life. These are the ones who will cry night and day in the tormenting fiery furnace of hell. Their tears will remain and not be wiped away. They shall not find any comfort or rest. The fire will keep burning. And they shall remain in agony and great pain forever and ever. Hell is real. In fact Jesus speaks more about hell than about heaven. Throughout His ministry on earth, He warned people of the coming judgment in hell. It is a place that has an entrance but no exit. The pain will be so severe and intense that those who end up there will rather die. But death will not be found. They will want to die. Yet, they cannot. Not only are they physically tortured, they will also suffer spiritually, mentally and emotionally. It is a terrible place for anyone to end up in. That is why we must persuade our loved ones who are still outside God’s kingdom to come and believe in Jesus now.

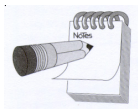
God’s judgment is coming soon. Only those who have trusted in Jesus will be saved. God shall wipe away all their tears. Are you one of the saved?

THOUGHT: Did God create this terrible place called Hell?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for being my comfort.







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